

JewishLife

WESTCHESTER COUNTY'S ONLY MONTHLY JEWISH NEWSPAPER

Westchester Business and Professional Leaders Celebrate with the Point Community

Business and professional leaders from all around Westchester County came together to celebrate Hanukkah and learn about the work of UJA-Federation of New York. The Westchester Business and Professional Division's Hanukkah Reception took place on Thursday, December 8, 2016, at the Renaissance Westchester Hotel in West Harrison.

As part of its ongoing relationship with the POINT (Pursuing Our Independence Together) community, the Division invited POINT members to celebrate the holiday and to join them in providing gifts for kids in need who might otherwise go without. The POINT Program, an initiative of Westchester Jewish Community Services (WJCS) and the Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA), two UJA-Federation beneficiary agencies, serves young adults with developmental and learning disabilities who live independently in the downtown White Plains area.

Members of the Business and Professional Division are working with these young people as mentors and as conduits to find employment. The POINT Program started in 2008 with 15 families who had a vision of their adult children living their own lives as independently as possible, explained Barbara Greene, director of the POINT program for WJCS. Today, there are 57 participants, with 32 in competitive employment.

"Our mission is to help each participant be as independent as possible and a productive member of his or her



POINT members Nora Katz and Melissa Miller with Valerie Rosen, director of the JCCA's Compass Project.

community, while providing the supports to keep each person healthy and safe," Greene said. "We help the family and participant through the transition process of separation."

"When I first came to POINT, I was very shy and didn't leave my apartment. But then I started doing some of the POINT activities and met people. I joined the theater group and became less shy," said Merrie Romer, a member of the program.

POINT professionals helped Romer find an internship at a nursery school, which turned into employment as an assistant teacher. "It's more than a job. It's work I really love," she said. "Now, I am taking college courses and pursuing a certificate program in

teaching at Westchester Community College."

Working with nearly 100 beneficiary agencies, synagogues, and other Jewish organizations, UJA-Federation is the world's largest local philanthropy, with a reach spanning from New York to Israel to more than 70 other countries around the world. The Westchester Business and Professional Division is deeply committed to sustaining UJA-Federation's network of life-altering nonprofits by bringing together like-minded individuals with shared interests, values, and purpose. Susan Taxin Baer of Scarsdale and Ben Blumberg of Larchmont serve as Division co-chairs. Bonnie Hagen of White Plains served as event chair.