

## Former AJC President Sam Frieder Reflects on AJC/JFS Merger of Twenty-Plus Years Ago

He was a young businessman when Samuel L. Frieder began his long commitment to working with children. “I was looking for a way to give back to the community, a concept I learned from my own parents,” says Frieder. “And reaching out to Jewish children seemed a wonderful and worthy cause.”

That dedication spanned decades. Frieder was deeply involved when the agency which he chose to serve in many capacities was known as AJC – the Association for Jewish Children.

He remembers those earlier days, when volunteers would cook meals for children and see to their daily needs – when life was simpler, and the needs of the young were often met by neighbors.

As the world grew more complex and children’s problems more daunting, AJC recognized that it was in the best interests of the children and families it served to merge with its sister agency, Jewish Family Service. Sam Frieder became co-president in 1983 when the merger took place.

“It was a wise and right move,” says

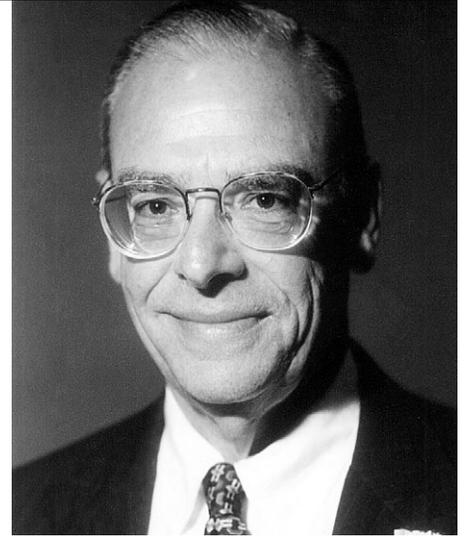
Frieder, who was one of the key players in facilitating the merger into Jewish Family and Children’s Service of Greater Philadelphia.

“One of the major things we observed, all those years ago, was that we could get a lot more accomplished if we could work with children in their own homes and keep them with their families,” he recalls. “Back then, this was a new notion. Youngsters were often placed in foster care or in special group homes, but it was time to rethink that approach.”

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Jewish Family Service had worked with children largely as an adjunct to dealing with families. The Association for Jewish Children put the emphasis on kids. So the subsequent marriage seemed made in heaven, and approaching those families with unified services seemed a win-win situation.

“The good news was that a close friend, Ivan Gabel, was as involved with JFS as I was with AJC,” recounts Sam Frieder. “We co-chaired the effort, and



*Samuel L. Frieder*

worked in complete harmony as co-presidents of the new entity. We learned that tact and diplomacy were the key ingredients in this process.”

Frieder, a father of four and grandfather of eight, adds, “The challenges continue. Drugs, the Internet, the general state of the world – all make life far more complicated for the young.”

Sam Frieder is grateful that the agency continues to serve the community wisely and well. “Dedicated professionals are doing what volunteers used to do, and they do a magnificent job,” says Frieder. “JFCS is where it needs to be, doing what it does best: making the lives of children and families better!” ●

## Adoption Sabbath Spotlights Plight of “Waiting Children”

Faith Partners for Adoption sponsored the fourth annual Adoption Sabbath November 14-16, calling on Philadelphia area churches and synagogues to use the power of the pulpit to raise awareness of the plight of children in the foster care system who are in need of permanent homes. A kick-off event was held on November 13, honoring adoptive parents who have changed the lives of children by offering them a brighter future in a forever family.

Faith Partners for Adoption is a new initiative of The Faith-Based Partnership for Adoption – a coalition of seven

of the region’s faith-based social service agencies, including JFCS, and One Church, One Child of Pa., Inc., in cooperation with the Philadelphia Department of Human Services and the Statewide Adoption Network (SWAN). The goal of this initiative is to recruit and certify 70 new adoptive homes within two years.

Funding support for the Faith Partners for Adoption initiative is provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.

*For more information, call Irma Graham at (215) 698-9950, ext. 162. ●*



*Adoption Sabbath keynote speaker, Father George Clements, national founder of One Church, One Child, Inc., with Irma Graham, JFCS program coordinator for Faith Partners for Adoption.*

## Helping Strangers in a Strange Land

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because he was a Jew. “Even as a teenager, I already understood that there was no future for me there.”

The Krug family ran into some Herculean challenges, including being forced to denounce “American Imperialism” and “Zionism” in the early 1980s. Immigration was extremely difficult. But when Andre Krug was staring in the face of military service, which invariably meant great prejudice and a terrible ordeal for Jews, the family’s determination to leave increased exponentially. At last, they succeeded.

### A new and better life

Arriving in the United States, and in the Philadelphia area, is still a vivid memory for Andre Krug. “What shocked me is how open this country is. This is truly the land of opportunities.”

During their early years, JFCS played a critical role in the lives of the Krug family. Caseworkers helped pave the way for their transition to a completely new way of living. “Their help was both tangible and intangible,” says Krug. “When you come to a new country, you have no clue about what you are doing – even things like getting phone service and electricity, and Social Security cards. JFCS social workers helped us to navigate this and they provided us with moral support and good will as well.”

With the agency’s help, Andre landed at Temple University. His sister found her way to public school, and life took on manageable contours. “JFCS became for us a sort of island of sanity in the craziness that surrounded us. I don’t know what we would have done if this help was not available,” Krug says now.

Today, Andre Krug has a master’s degree in business administration. He began as an accounting intern for the Jewish Federation’s Russian Resettlement program and now is director of Services for New Americans at the Jew-

ish Community Centers of Philadelphia. “On Yom Kippur,” notes Krug proudly, “over 1,500 Jews from the Former Soviet Union attend our services.”

Krug, his wife Alla (an émigré from Kiev), and their young daughter Abigail are living the American dream. “I am grateful every day for all I have. Here, my life is wonderful!”

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### Another success story

Today, Irma Simuni is the highly-regarded, articulate volunteer coordinator for JFCS. But back in 1990, Simuni was a weary, dispirited 52-year-old woman who had been a refusenik for 10 years, and was finally realizing her dream of coming to America.

“I came in both pain and hope,” says Simuni, who spoke of living a “double life” back in the Former Soviet Union. “In our subconscious was the idea that the future would come when we could leave, but meanwhile, we were existing in a very dreary present,” remembers Simuni, whose children preceded her

in emigrating while she herself stayed behind for two long years to care for her aging parents.

When she finally arrived in 1990, what greeted her here was a joyful shock. “I was instantly in an atmosphere of love and acceptance,” says Simuni. “For the first time, people were treating me with kindness. They looked at me and saw a human being.”

Simuni likens her period of transformation to a “...path put down by some divine providence. Every step was blessed.”

### A crucial support network

Within 10 days of her arrival, Simuni became part of a group of 10 Russian women and 10 American women who formed a kind of sisterly bond that’s easier felt than explained. “They were prominent women from Federation, although of course we didn’t know it at the time. They gave us the gift of themselves, of their presence in our lives – friendship, guidance, advice, and a link to the Judaism we had been missing for so long. All contact to Judaism was negative before this, and always, there was



*Andre Krug (far right), along with Yury Gopsteyn and Victoria Faykin, receives a JCC Program of the Year Award for the Children’s Theater and Concert Series presented by the New American Outreach Program at the JCC Klein Branch. The award was presented at the JCC’s 37th Annual Meeting this past June.*