

JELF: Educational Aid Helps Connect Dots

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BY [MARIANNE DANIELS GARBER](#) September 15, 2017, 1:44 pm

Photo from the Simon Scher Family Papers, Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, Breman Museum Residents of the Hebrew Orphans' Home take an outing to Loew's Theater in Five Points around 1920.



[Marianne Daniels Garber](#) Marianne Daniels Garber is the board president for JELF.

[JELF](#) (Jewish Educational Loan Fund) has been around for a very long time — 141 years, in fact.

Because we have had several name changes, however, our longevity is not always recognized. This year, the dots are finally connected with a new exhibit at the [Breman Museum](#), “The Legacy of the Hebrew Orphans’ Home,” a joint effort of JELF, [Kennesaw State University](#), the Breman and [The Temple](#).

Curated by Dr. Catherine Lewis, the exhibit unveils the history of the Hebrew Orphans’ Home, Jewish Children’s Service (JCS) and JELF. This long and vibrant history is told through the stories of the children, whose files have been carefully maintained in the Cuba Family Archives at the Breman.

To bring this history together, the JELF staff and board members poured over the files, piecing together facts that exemplify the longstanding goals of the organization: to provide Jewish youths in need the knowledge and skills to step into their futures with confidence and lead successful lives.

From 1889 through the 1920s, the Hebrew Orphans’ Home stood at 478 Washington St. until progressive reforms in the United States discouraged the continuation of orphanages. The home subsequently transitioned to providing foster care and adoption services, changing its name in 1961 to Jewish Children’s Service to better describe itself.

Over time, as other organizations began to duplicate the services of JCS, the organization transitioned once again, with a focus on helping Jewish students attend college or graduate or vocational school by offering interest-free loans. In 1989 the organization’s name was changed to the Jewish Education Loan Fund to better reflect this mission.

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Today JELF’s mission is more relevant than ever. No one can deny the importance of higher education or its crushing expense. JELF has recently completed nine loan review sessions in six cities, awarding a total of \$907,826 to 242 students. By the end of the year, JELF will have awarded nearly \$1 million in interest-free loans — more money to more students than ever before!

While the stories of our applicants are sometimes tragic, they are also the stories of middle-class families struggling to find the resources to pay for the increased cost of higher education.

Handwritten letters displayed on the exhibit’s “Wall of Thanks” show how much our students recognize the importance of these last-dollar loans that ensure they can go to school. JELF’s 99 percent repayment rate reflects how aware our students are that a dollar repaid is a dollar that helps another student.

I am so grateful for JELF's incredible and growing base of donors, who also recognize that a dollar given to JELF is one that begins its own history of helping students the moment it is awarded the first time.

JELF's mission remains rooted in its twin objectives of helping Jewish children, the future of the Jewish people, and ensuring their education. As Bea Feiman, a past president of JELF, relates in a video that was created in the late-1990s, "My parents said, 'You can lose many things, but an education once gained can never be lost.' "

As we head into the High Holidays, I am so proud to serve as board president of this unique, historical and deeply personal organization. JELF's exhibit will be featured in the Blonder Gallery at the Breman through the end of 2017. I hope you will make the time to discover our history as well.

L'shana tova.

Marianne Daniels Garber is the board president for JELF (jelf.org).