

Interest-free loans help South Florida Jewish students



From left, attending a Jewish Educational Loan Fund cocktail reception in Boca Raton are Josh Schaier, Marianne Garber, Stan Lowenstein and Jenna Shulman. (JEWISH EDUCATIONAL LOAN FUND/COURTESY)



By **Sergio Carmona**

JELF has made loans to students from South Florida for 55 years

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Jewish Educational Loan Fund has made an impact on South Florida.

JELF provides interest-free loans for higher education (college, graduate school and vocational programs) to Jewish students from Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. It has made loans to students from South Florida for 55 years and to date has more than \$1 million invested in the hands of local students.

A few past loan recipients who live in South Florida commented on the help they received.

Marisa Gottesman of **Lake Worth**, who received her loan for her senior year at the **University of Florida**, said, "For me, the loan was just peace of mind knowing it was a little extra cushion for things I might have needed for class or just even for living."

Gottesman said the loan processing is very simple.

"They're very easy to work with and paying the loan back was super simple. Everything was really user-friendly, easy to work with, and I recommend it to anybody who is in need."

Chelsea Koff of **Fort Lauderdale**, who received her loan to attend the University of Florida law school from 2009-12, "absolutely" recommends JELF to other Jewish students.

"I think it is one of those organizations that is truly trying to help people and help them build the kind of future that they want. The interesting part of the organization is that they're there to help you not just when you're in school, but also as you transition out of school and into the real world. If you can't make your loan payment that month or you need help or something is going on in your life or you're in between jobs, even if you're five years out of school, you can still contact them. They have compassion for you and they're going to work with you."

Eitan Ovadia of **Boca Raton** felt the loan helped him greatly during college.

"It bridged the gap and enabled me to breathe easier and not have to stress about finances. I was able to focus on my school work."

Although Ovadia feels he would've found a way to go to college without the loan, he realizes that there are other people who have no other options.

"I know that there are other people who don't have family or friends or whoever that they can turn to for help and that this [JELF loan] is potentially their only option."

Laurie Turner, Jewish Community Services of South Florida's employment and career counselor and JELF loan coordinator for Miami-Dade County, noted that that there were 25 loan applications from Miami-Dade County in 2017 and that there are approximately 20 per year from the county.

"The impact these loans have had on recipients and their families is transformational," Turner noted. "Many times it is the difference between their being able to pursue a higher education or not. Since obtaining an advanced degree opens many doors and fosters many relationships and experiences, we are participating in enhancing the students' self-sufficiency."

JELF recently hosted a cocktail reception at Farmer's Table in Boca Raton with the purpose of educating the community about the fund's mission of providing interest-free, last dollar loans to Jewish students in need for higher education. At this reception, guests were able to learn first-hand about the fund's value in the life of a

student and his or her family through stories from several guests. In 2017 alone, JELF made loans totaling \$90,166 to 19 students from [Palm Beach County](#).

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