

Building Community

How PJ Library's All-Access Community connects families in far-flung parts of the US and Canada to Jewish life – and to each other.

BY NAAMA KRAUZ, ENGAGEMENT ASSOCIATE

PJ Library's All-Access Community is similar to many other PJ Library communities around the country but with one major difference. As in other communities, families share the experience of receiving PJ Library books every month, and parents lean on one another for questions, tips, and resources. But unlike other groups, the All-Access Community is comprised of a constellation of families raising



Erin Maidan Paige, Ezra, Shai, and Chawne Paige. Waterloo, Iowa.

PHOTO BY CHAWNE PAIGE

● **In Waterloo, Iowa, Erin Maidan Paige's family** is thankful for the community they have found through the PJ Library Families Facebook group. Erin loves that she can ask questions, discuss Jewish topics, and brainstorm with people all over the US and Canada. It has been a safe and fulfilling space to have Jewish conversations that are hard to come by in her Iowa neighborhood – and it has even allowed her to bond with others over a shared love of Jewish comics. "It's such a supportive Jewish community, regardless of topic," Erin says. "As an isolated Jew, that means the world to me."

The tenor of conversations in the PJ Library Families Facebook group is respectful and encouraging. Although the All-Access Community is large – comprising more than 13,000 families in the US and over 1,100 in Canada – many families have forged deep connections online.



Willow, Sawyer, Lola Kostrzewski, Cadden, Iyam, Eli, and Teddy. Minnesota State Fair.

PHOTO COURTESY OF IOLA KOSTRZEWSKI

● **Iola Kostrzewski lives in Rochester, Minnesota,** in a rural area that is home to few other Jewish families. Iola's family was able to build their *sukkah* this past year with assistance from those in the Facebook group who shared suggestions for materials to use. Group members even offered problem-solving ideas when building a *sukkah* with a newborn baby in tow seemed too daunting. As Iola shares, "There's a grace that's given in the group, that if you don't quite get it right, it's OK – we'll figure it out [together]."

Many All-Access Community families are not able to easily find Jewish ritual items that are readily available in stores in large cities. In the Facebook group, parents are quick to provide links to items they've found online and happily share accommodations they've made that satisfy the needs of observing a holiday or ritual.

Jewish children all across the US and Canada who don't live in places with large Jewish populations or who live in towns just beyond our local partner's service area. Those eagerly anticipated PJ Library envelopes find mailboxes on every corner of the continent — and sometimes in remote locales. Regardless of where All-Access Community families live, one way that they find support, connection, and programming is via the PJ Library Families Facebook group. Open to anyone but uniquely special to families without a Jewish community

The All-Access Community has become a shining example of how the virtual world can promote learning, laughter, and love.

nearby, the group allows parents to ask for advice, share experiences, post pictures of their kids, and inspire one another with Jewish cooking and crafts. Facebook has turned the All-Access Community into one that is close-knit, and it has become a shining example of how the virtual world can promote learning, laughter, and love. 📖

Join the conversation in our PJ Library Families Facebook group: facebook.com/pjlfamilies.

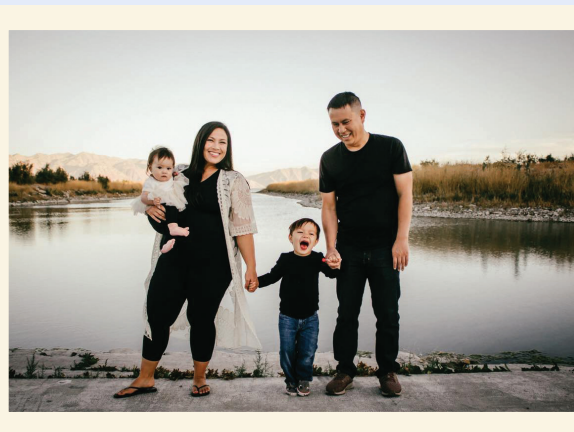


Mara and Tahal. Anchorage, Alaska.

PHOTO BY DANIELLE MOREL

● **Shaina Seidner and her two children in Anchorage, Alaska**, love the communal Jewish experience brought to them via PJ Library's Virtual Tot Shabbat with the New York-based Leffell School. "My older daughter, age 3, really enjoys hearing the music, singing the songs, and seeing the other kids singing and dancing too," Shaina shares. Though Anchorage has a small Jewish population, the Seidner family relies on the virtual programs offered by PJ Library's All-Access Community to bring a sense of *kehillah* (community) into their home.

The Facebook group offers live and recorded virtual events for families, ranging from musical Tot Shabbat programs to holiday cooking experiences. Registration is easy!



Evee, Sylvia Lam, Ashton, and Vinh Nguyen. Utah Lake, Utah.

PHOTO BY KATIE WILSON

● **In Saratoga Springs, Utah, Sylvia Lam** loves how her children are able to explore Jewish holidays through art via the All-Access Community holiday-card exchanges for Rosh Hashanah and Hanukkah. The homemade-card exchange has allowed Sylvia to get to know other families and has even helped her connect with a few in her area. Every year, families eagerly share the cards they receive in the Facebook group, marveling at one another's artistic talent and creativity.

Families can register for card exchanges through the Facebook group. PJ Library professionals try to match families with children of similar ages or interests to help make more meaningful connections among families.

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