



COMMUNITY CONNECTION:

## CALGARY, ALBERTA

In Calgary, PJ Library has served as an extraordinarily successful engagement tool. The program currently reaches more than half of all eligible families, and a new initiative supported by the PJ Library Alliance\* has taken the program's impact to an even higher level.

**PJ Library Get Together Grants**—awarding families up to \$150—empowered PJ Library parents in Calgary to create Jewish experiences for themselves and their Jewish friends, from Hanukkah parties to Havdallah services and beyond. “It was a pleasure to see how enthusiastic and creative Calgarians were in applying for the grants,” Kathie Wainer, PJ Library and Shalom Baby coordinator, said. “The Get Together Grants succeeded in encouraging young Jewish families to ‘do Jewish’ in their own way.”

In Calgary, PJ Library Get Together Grants were successful on many fronts:

- The grants engaged families who are minimally connected to the Jewish community—some of whom have since come to other PJ Library events.
- They appealed to intermarried families in a non-threatening, inclusive way.
- The opportunity motivated families who wanted to be more involved to step into leadership roles as community organizers.
- They encouraged already engaged families to think differently about “doing Jewish.”

The process also confirmed what PJ Library in Calgary knew about their community:

- The community is spread out and diverse. A cross-section of the community participated, including intermarried families, Israelis, Russians, native Calgarians, and immigrants.
- People who live outside of the Jewish epicenter do want opportunities to engage.
- Families love opportunities to involve the whole family, including parents and grandparents.
- Parents are looking for meaningful social interactions that lead to deeper friendships for themselves and their children.



"Hanukkah has always been one of our favorite holidays. We lived in Israel for 12 years, and every year we would decorate our house and host a party. We moved to Canada a year and a half ago, but times have been tough, and we didn't think we'd be able to afford to have a party this year. Then I heard about the PJ Library Get Together Grant. We were so excited! It was *bashert* [Yiddish for destiny]; we would get to have our party.

We decorated the house; made dreidels from marshmallows, chocolate Kisses, and pretzel sticks; fried up some latkes (with sour cream, apple sauce, and sugar, so each could do as they do in their own home); and picked up some Timbits (doughnut holes). We even set up a little PJ Library section in my son's room for kids who needed a little bit of quiet time from the more than 30 people who celebrated with us.

As we crowded into our living room to

## IN THEIR WORDS

play dreidel, light the candles, and sing Hanukkah songs, I looked around the room at all our wonderful new friends. I watched my son laughing and playing with his new friends and I thought how lucky we are to be Jewish.

This kind of community initiative does not exist in many ethnic communities. The generosity of Harold Grinspoon and others like him makes the Jewish community so special. Standing in my living room celebrating thanks to the generosity of PJ Library enhanced my Jewish pride even more. It's a pride that I feel whenever my son says the blessing on the challah or when we settle down together to read our newest PJ Library book. Thank you PJ Library for helping us pass Judaism and Jewish pride on to our son."

SHIRA KOGUT, PJ LIBRARY PARENT

"My husband Terry, our son Nate, and I moved to Calgary from Toronto about a year ago. We knew that, because we were moving to a smaller Jewish community, we would have to more actively seek out Jewish opportunities and connections. When I heard about the opportunity to host a mini-gathering sponsored by PJ Library, I immediately thought of Havdalah.

Nate is 2 years old. Friday nights are always a little rushed for any kind of Shabbat celebrations, and on Saturdays we are always looking for something for both adults and kids to enjoy. Days are short in the Calgary winter, so what better way to bring a little light into our home than with Havdallah?

We invited three other families. Each had a baby and a toddler and were equally as happy to have something kid-friendly to do on a Saturday evening. We ordered in a meal, printed off kid and adult versions

of a Havdalah service, dusted off the Havdalah set (courtesy of my bat mitzvah), and enjoyed an evening of song, play, conversation, warmth, and light.

The next day, the emails flew around as we congratulated ourselves on an evening well-enjoyed, and someone suggested we make it a monthly tradition. Since then, we have had a Purim-themed Havdalah hosted at one of the other family's homes, where a bumble bee and a giraffe were amongst those wishing everyone a *shavua tov* [Hebrew for good week]. Our next gathering is scheduled and much anticipated by the kids who now see the braided candle come out and start a round of "lai lai lai lai" to say good-bye to Shabbat and usher in a new week. Thanks PJ Library for helping us build our community!"

JANA ZALMANOWITZ, PJ LIBRARY PARENT

### GET TOGETHER GRANT PILOT RESULTS

MORE THAN 3,000 PARTICIPANTS

285 APPROVED FAMILIES

10 PJ LIBRARY COMMUNITIES

across the United States and Canada

\*The PJ Library Alliance is a partnership of funders who invest \$1 million or more in PJ Library. Please contact Will Schneider, will@hgf.org, for details.