



**jewish  
vocational  
service**

**JVS**

*85 years  
of impact*

## A History Of JVS

1939-2024

*The first 85 years*



Special thanks to our friends at the Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest, Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest, the Jewish Historical Society of New Jersey, and New Jersey Jewish News for your help in developing the content.

As we look back on 85 years of history, we are struck by two things: the first is the way our organization has evolved, adapting services over the years to meet the needs of the people who need help the most; the second is the way, at our very core, we have remained the same. Our mission is based on the Jewish teaching that helping people help themselves is the highest form of *tzedakah*, or social justice.

JVS was founded in 1939 to help Jewish immigrants coming to America on the cusp of World War II. Our goal was to help them overcome the barrier of pervasive antisemitism and find financial stability through employment. Eighty-five years later, the goal of helping people find financial stability has remained the same, but we now help *all* people, regardless of race or ethnicity. We help them overcome barriers they are encountering due to age, ability, education, immigrant status, job skills training, language, or the effects of generational poverty.

In the last five years, JVS has been strategically transitioning from a social service to a workforce development organization that unites all our programs under one goal – to help people along a path to employment. There may be many steps along the path, such as learning English, earning a GED, or training for a new career. Each completed step is an accomplishment. With each step, we are helping people help themselves.

**Enjoy this glimpse into our history.**



Our roots go back to 1939, when a growing Nazi presence in Europe was threatening Jewish communities. Through the years, the people we help has evolved as we reach out to those in greatest need. Then, as now, our mission is based on the Jewish teaching that helping people help themselves is the highest form of *tzedakah*, or social justice. In the spirit of *tikkun olam*, it's our way of repairing the world.



## 1939

Two months after Germany invaded Poland, the Community Employment Service opens its doors at 24 Branford Place, Newark. The new organization has a budget of \$7,500 and staff of three: an executive director, employment counselor, and secretary. The mission? To help Jewish refugees overcome antisemitism and find work in America.

## 1940

The Community Employment Service settles into 682 High Street, a space shared by Jewish Social Service, Jewish Child Guidance Bureau, and the Jewish Education Association. Located between two major synagogues – Temple B'nai Jeshurun and Oheb Shalom – 682 High Street is in the heart of Newark's robust Jewish community. In the first year, the agency gives vocational guidance to 80 people and places 649 people including 90 refugees.



## 1941

The Community Employment Service works with employers to help Jewish immigrants find jobs.

## 1946

After the war, the agency turns its attention to returning soldiers, offering JobSeekers classes and job placement. The demand is so great, on March 26, we officially “close intake” temporarily.



In 1947, the organization adopts a new name, **Jewish Vocational Service**, to reflect a new focus -- to help “vocationally handicapped Jewish individuals who are able use the services constructively.”



**1947**

Harold E. Yuker, who has cerebral palsy, writes to JVS expressing his gratitude for our help and informing JVS that he had become a psychology professor at Hofstra University. His research focuses on attitudes toward and perceptions of individuals with disabilities. His many publications include a book titled *Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities*, published in 1988. Hofstra named a reference library in his honor in 1995, two years before his death.

**1952**

The “Opportunity Workshop” opens. Designed for immigrants and older adults (defined as age 40+!), it’s for people “who by reason of their disabilities are unable to find or keep regular employment.” Clients work four days a week and are paid 50 cents an hour for light tasks such as packing, labeling, and stuffing. When JVS successfully places someone in community employment, a new client joins the Opportunity Workshop.



**1957**

JVS enters into a “unique cooperative agreement” with the NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. This relationship requires a change in intake policy – JVS begins to help all people, regardless of religious background.







## 1959

In response to a nationwide trend to deinstitutionalize people with mental health conditions including schizophrenia, JVS receives a multi-year grant for a pioneer study exploring rehabilitation techniques for people recently discharged from Essex County Overbrook Hospital.



## 1964

In addition to working with older adults, JVS recognizes young adults need vocational help, too. JVS begins cosponsoring annual college and career conferences with the YM-YWHA. Today, JVS continues that support through the Perlmutter Student Loan and Shapiro Grant programs.

## 1969

JVS begins providing vocational and psychological testing to veterans, their widows and children, principally related to the Vietnam War.



## 1970

JVS launches "Project Eve," a comprehensive six-seminar program for women entering the workforce.

## 1980

By the 1980s, JVS's transition to an organization that serves any and all people is complete. A new home at 111 Prospect Street affords room to grow.



As *New Jersey Jewish News* reports, "With its new building, the agency is even better prepared to serve its constantly growing clientele of young people seeking educational advice and job and career counseling, women entering and re-entering the job market, the disabled seeking special training and guidance, the elderly who require sheltered workshop services, and the immigrants fleeing oppression for the opportunities of freedom." JVS remains at 111 Prospect Street for several years before moving its operations into two buildings in East Orange and Montclair to continue serving Essex County.

As immigrants and refugees come to America seeking a better life, JVS is there to help. Regardless of the country of origin, we help them find their way by assisting with benefits applications, English classes, Citizenship classes, and earning their GED.



## 1964 | CUBA

The rise of Fidel Castro leads to a wave of Jewish immigrants fleeing an authoritarian regime in Cuba. Like the European Jewish immigrants who came to America during WWII, many make their way to JVS for help.

## 1973 | SOVIET UNION



JVS counselors see an increase in the number of Jewish immigrants coming from the Soviet Union – a trend that lasts for more than a decade. As one JVS brochure notes, “Accustomed to a regulated existence, the agency’s Soviet Jewish clients initially have difficulty understanding our competitive, private enterprise society ... Intensive efforts are required in the areas of vocational assessment; job counseling; job development and placement.”



## 2010 | HAITI

After a massive earthquake in Haiti, JVS sees an increase in Haitian refugees. As violence and political unrest continue to escalate in Haiti today, our work with this population has grown exponentially. In recent years, we saw an average of 150 Haitian refugees. Last year, we saw nearly 800.

## 2012 | DARFUR, SUDAN



JVS helps Darfur refugees fleeing the genocide in their home country settle in America and find work. Says one refugee: “We had no idea about America before we came here. New York is very crowded, not like our village.”



## 2023 | UKRAINE

Ukrainians, escaping war in their home country, come to JVS for English classes and help finding a job.

From our very beginning, JVS stays on top of world issues that impact employment, new technology, and changes in employers' needs.

1941

The Community Employment Service takes on an advocacy role, successfully pressuring the State Employment Service to stop the discriminatory practice of asking nationality and religion on job applications.

1967

JVS addresses employment needs of people and businesses affected by the unrest in Newark.

1959

JVS addresses the needs of people with mental health conditions as the country moves away from an institutional model.

2000

With about 50% of all households having a computer, JVS offers a course in personal computing.

2008

JVS receives a grant to test special-needs high school students before they graduate, leading to a smooth transition to employment.

JVS introduces the Center for Economic Opportunity, a job skills training program designed with a two-fold value proposition: 1) train unemployed and under-employed individuals in fields with career pathways; and 2) help employers fill in-demand jobs with skilled workers through customized training programs.

1996

JVS works with the state to overhaul the welfare system through an initiative known as Work First New Jersey.

2001

After September 11, JVS works to retrain individuals impacted by the economic downturn resulting from the terrorist attack.

2021

Today, 85 years after our founding, our programs work together to help people overcome barriers to employment related to age, ability, education, immigration status, job skills training, and language.

With the addition of the **Center for Economic Opportunity** to JVS's line-up of programs and services, we are helping more people achieve workplace equality and financial stability.



*Destiny: A recent Pharmacy Technician graduate*

**Center for Economic Opportunity**

JVS offers customized job skills training programs for pharmacy technicians, home health aides, and apartment maintenance technicians. These programs help employers fill in-demand jobs with qualified employees.

*Marley: A ShopRite employee since 2011*

**Disability Services**

JVS helps people with disabilities fulfill their employment potential, beginning with evaluations and continuing through job placement and beyond.



*Silvie: Newly arrived in America with her husband and 4-year old daughter*

**Refugee Services**

Our multilingual staff helps the newest – and often most vulnerable – people gain stability in their new homeland.

*Pauline: Received her GED, then graduated from our Pharmacy Technician program*

**Education and Literacy Classes**

JVS offers classes to prepare people to take the high school equivalency exam, learn English, and pass the U.S. Citizenship interview and exam.



*Matthew: Landed a job working with a NJ state assemblywoman*

**Career Services**

Many people who come to JVS begin in our Career Services department, working with Employment Specialists to plot out a plan for their future. JVS also offers virtual JobSeekers programs on job-related topics.

*Family Connections: Leadership training strengthens organization as a whole*

**Corporate Training**

JVS helps employers train incumbent workers, improving employee skills and the company's productivity, culture, and bottom line.



*Garrett E. Reisman: Student loan recipient, astronaut*

**Student Loans and Grants**

JVS offers interest-free student loans to Jewish students in the MetroWest community and grants to graduate students pursuing careers in medicine, nursing, and rabbinical studies.





Jewish Federation  
of Greater MetroWest NJ

**Our Locations** JVS operates out of two locations:

**Career Services • Workforce Development • Refugee and Immigrant Services • Education and Literacy Classes**

7 Glenwood Avenue, Lower Level  
East Orange, NJ 07017

**Disability Services/Vocational Rehabilitation**

83 Walnut Street  
Montclair, NJ 07042

**973-674-6330** Follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.

[www.jvsnj.org](http://www.jvsnj.org)