

CONNECTIONS

Newsletter for Friends of JFS Akron



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Your Generosity Changes Lives

By Buffy Ramos LSW, Director of Older Adult Services

I'm always amazed by people's generosity. Just this week, an older adult who is a friend of JFS stopped by my office to personally drop off a donation for our programs. As we talked, he shared that his gift was motivated by gratitude. Despite the challenges he has faced in life, he feels thankful—and that gratitude inspired him to give back so others can have the support they need to overcome their own difficulties and enjoy a better quality of life. He also shared something that meant a lot to hear: he trusts JFS to use his gift wisely and make the greatest possible impact.

As our annual Friends Campaign comes to a close, I want to personally thank all of our JFS Friends and supporters who have contributed. Your generosity truly makes a difference. I also want to thank our volunteers who give their time and talents to strengthen our agency. Our staff could never do this work alone. Every week, volunteers deliver meals to homebound clients, create handmade cards and care packages that bring comfort and hope, and spend time visiting people in facilities who have come to cherish the friendships formed through those visits.

If you are connected to JFS in any way, please know how grateful we are. To our clients, thank you for trusting us to be part of your lives—it is an honor to serve you. To our donors, thank you for looking beyond your own needs to help those who are more vulnerable. And to our volunteers, thank you for sharing your time, compassion, and friendship with others. JFS Akron is a special place because of all of you.

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Living in assisted care can sometimes feel isolating, with limited opportunities for meaningful conversation. The Friendly Visitor program helps bridge that gap—offering not just presence, but genuine engagement. Ed describes Steve as “a great listener” who asks thoughtful questions and brings positivity into each visit.

Soon, Randy Katz (no relation), began joining as well, turning one connection into a small circle of friendship. Together, they bring energy, curiosity, and companionship—something Ed deeply appreciates.

For Ed, the visits mean even more. “I feel honored that Steve and Randy come to see me,” he said. “It’s a very positive experience... their visits help me connect to the rest of the world.”

The impact extends beyond the visits themselves. Ed’s son, Marc, who lives out of state, says the program brings him peace of mind. Knowing that his father has regular social interaction—and people who genuinely care—makes a meaningful difference.

“Living out of state, I’m grateful for Steve’s visits,” he shared. “Regular social interaction is so important.” Through the Friendly Visitor program, these moments of connection ripple outward—touching not just the individual receiving visits, but their families as well.

For volunteers like Steve, the experience is equally rewarding. “The best thing about the visits,” he said, “is that the clients are very appreciative and very much enjoy the conversations.”

What begins as a simple visit often becomes something deeper: shared stories, mutual learning, and unexpected friendships.

At its heart, the Friendly Visitor program is about more than companionship. It’s about creating space for people to be seen, heard, and valued—and discovering that sometimes, the person who shows up to give support walks away with just as much in return.



Left to right: Randy Katz, Ed Weisman and Steve Katz.



Ed Weisman (left) and Steve Katz (right) discuss the stamp collecting hobby

A Visit That Goes Both Ways

At Jewish Family Service, connection is often where care begins. Through the Friendly Visitor program, volunteers from the community are matched

with older adults for regular visits—bringing conversation, companionship, and a sense of belonging into their homes.

But sometimes, something even more meaningful unfolds.

When Steve Katz began volunteering in late 2025, he was simply looking for a way to give back. Newly retired, he had extra time and a growing interest in stamp collecting—a hobby he had only just begun to explore. Not long after,

he was matched with Ed Weisman, an older adult living in assisted living.

What neither of them knew at the time was how perfectly their lives would intersect.

Ed had spent more than 30 years running a stamp shop in Stow, Ohio. A lifelong philatelist, he had built a career—and a deep well of knowledge—around the very subject Steve was just beginning to learn. From their very first visits, the connection was clear.

Now, the two meet about once a week, often spending an hour together talking about Ed’s life, his family, and, of course, stamp collecting. For Steve, the visits have become more than volunteer work.

“He is an interesting conversationalist,” Steve shared. “We both enjoy the visits. It also gives me a worthwhile activity in my spare time.”

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Meet Kathryn "Kate" Vajda, MSW, LSW

JFS welcomed its newest social worker, Kathryn "Kate" Vajda, in November 2025. As an Older Adult Care Navigator, Kate helps older adults plan for independence, stability, and good health as they age. She conducts in-home assessments, connects seniors with needed services, and consults with older adults and their families to build strong support systems. Kate is excited to be part of the JFS Akron team and took a moment to answer a few questions so you can get to know her better.

Why you became a social worker?

I became a social worker because I needed a career that was purposeful to make a positive impact. It fulfills me both mentally and emotionally.

What do you enjoy about working with older adults?

I love working with older adults because of their life experiences and wisdom. I learn so much through spending time with them, and I especially enjoy listening to their stories. They are amazing people!

What are some of your favorite things?

My favorite color is coral. I love sweets, muffins, banana cream pie, and anything with chocolate.

What is something people would be surprised to learn about you?

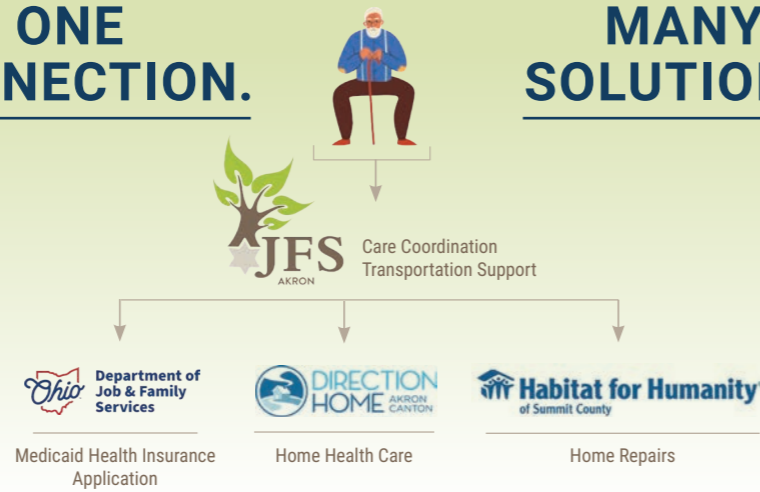
I am a licensed cosmetologist.

Tell us about your family.

I am married, have a daughter who is currently in college, and have two rescue dogs named Finley and Fletcher.

ONE CONNECTION.

MANY SOLUTIONS.



FACING COMPLEX NEEDS ALONE

Randy is a 76 year old older adult who moved to the Akron area in 2024 to be closer to the Cleveland Clinic/Akron General Hospital due to severe health challenges (both physical and mental health needs). He had no support system in his life when he arrived. He was estranged from his family with the exception of his brother who occasionally provided financial assistance. The home his brother purchased for him in East Akron was in very poor repair and unsafe. He had no transportation. He had personal care needs that were going unmet.

Randy reached out to Jewish Family Service for assistance applying for older adult supports through Summit Co., coordination of health care, and transportation to his medical appts.

Jewish Family Service social workers quickly assessed that he was a vulnerable older adult with complex needs. They ascertained that his self-reported goal was to stay in his home, and age at home for as long as possible though he was worried about the poor repair of the house being a stable, safe option.

A service plan was developed with his input and he was assigned a therapeutic behavioral health support specialist from JFS Akron due to his mental health diagnosis of severe and persistent anxiety. The social worker facilitated his application to the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services for Medicaid health insurance, which he was awarded. This reduced the medical bills he had been receiving.

A referral to Direction Home Akron Canton Area Office on Aging was made and he qualified for the PASSPORT program which has provided for all of his in-home and hands on care needs, including home health aides who visit Randy weekly.

To take care of the structural needs of the home, JFS social workers made a referral to Habitat for Humanity's new program that enables home repairs to be completed for free to qualifying older adults in Summit County.

Grab bars were installed throughout his home, along with a new toilet, a new front screen door, front door, and back house door that lock properly and safely. New house numbers were put on the front of his house so that emergency medical services could easily identify his home in case of medical crisis. Habitat is currently assessing the drafts in the home which cause it to be quite cold and devising a plan to help.

Today, Randy is thriving. Randy is now physical and mentally stable, safe, and is even experiencing quality of life events that he was never able to before. His home is in better repair, and is a safer environment for him to age in. All of this support allows him to be in the community to do his own grocery shopping and attend social events. JFS staff are currently working to arrange transportation for Randy to attend his local synagogue.

Randy says to his social worker, "My whole life has changed for the better because of JFS Akron!"



Purim JOY

BRINGS GENERATIONS TOGETHER

The Mercaz Room on the Schultz Campus for Jewish Life was filled with laughter, costumes, and the sounds of Purim celebration on March 3, when Jewish Family Service hosted "A Purim Palooza" for older adults in the Akron community.

Friends of JFS gathered from across the community—clients, Center Towers residents, volunteers, board members, and staff. Adding a special energy to the afternoon were students and staff from The Lippman School, along with sixth graders who came prepared to bring the Purim story to life. The event was made possible in part through the generous support of Jewish Akron.

For those interested in learning more about JFS's free socialization, arts, and cultural programs for older adults, the agency welcomes you to reach out. To receive information about upcoming events and programs, please contact JFS at **330.867.3388**.



Glenda Rubenstein cheers during the Lippman students' performance and enthusiastically boomed whenever Haman's name was mentioned—accompanied by the rattling of groggers.



Josie Sayegh eagerly joined in a playful game of tabletop bowling, where the goal was to "knock down Haman"—his face taped to each bowling pin.



Students of the 6th grade class at The Lippman School with staff Sarah Greenblatt (back row center) performed a lively reenactment of the story of Queen Esther.



Denise Hargrove (left) and Sharon Kozak (right) relaxed by creating beautiful mandala designs that were displayed around the room.



Harriett Berloff (left) and Ruth Embly (right).



Haman decorated bowling 'pins'.