



JAFCO CEO Sarah Franco Announces Plans for Retirement

May 19, 2024

After more than three decades as JAFCO's (Jewish Adoption and Family Care Options) first and founding CEO, the JAFCO Board of Trustees is announcing that Sarah Franco plans to retire at the end of this year, effective December 31, 2024.

JAFCO was founded in 1992 to fill an unmet need in the Jewish community. Some 32 years and 20,000 children later, JAFCO has become the first point of contact for any child or family in crisis in the Jewish community and beyond, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. Literally starting the agency at her kitchen table, Sarah helped grow JAFCO from

a one-person grass-roots foster care, adoption, and family preservation agency with an annual budget of \$50,000, to a major child welfare agency with four sites, a staff of 200 employees, and an annual budget of over \$16 Million.

JAFCO provides an entire continuum of quality professional child welfare services, free of charge, to abused, neglected, and at-risk children, and support and respite services to children with developmental disabilities and their families while also restoring hope and wellness to those traumatized by the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school tragedy. Sarah is transferring leadership of the agency in strong financial and organizational health with zero dollars in debt or liability. Unlike most charities, JAFCO began with only private donations. It has since gained public government funding which accounts for 50% of the total annual budget while still enjoying the support of the private sector for the remaining 50%. With full fiscal transparency and at less than 11% in administrative costs (which are all covered by public funds), JAFCO donors are assured that their donations go directly to the children and families that JAFCO serves.

Sarah is a proud mother to son Evan (Kara) whose life was greatly impacted by JAFCO as he and JAFCO are about the same age. Sarah's role as doting grandmother to two-year-old Atlas is a primary factor in her retirement decision. As a proud second-generation holocaust survivor, Sarah feels that, through JAFCO, she is completing a circle started by her parents, JAFCO Legacy Donors Abraham and Fay Zalcborg, who were orphaned by the Holocaust with nowhere to go in the Jewish community. Her parents immigrated to Israel where Sarah was born. Her family then moved to New York City where Sarah experienced the desegregation busing program in the early 60's while she was in elementary school. Reflecting back on her childhood, Sarah feels that the civil rights movement, along with her family's Holocaust roots, were the two major factors that influenced her lifelong career choice. During the Vietnam war, her brother was eligible for the draft so her parents moved the family to Toronto to avoid being part of another war.

"When I took the leadership position at JAFCO I didn't realize why I was drawn to work for a faith-based Jewish agency. As I announce my retirement today, I recognize that JAFCO's mission has never been more relevant. It will be extremely important that our new CEO brings with them a connection to our roots as a faith-based organization within the Jewish community that also cares deeply about all children, both within the Jewish community and beyond."

"This is both a difficult and exciting moment in JAFCO's history," said JAFCO Founder Ron Simon. "While it is hard to envision JAFCO without Sarah sitting at her desk, we know her heart will remain with us forever. As a dedicated leader she has created a strong, healthy organization that will continue to provide the same quality of services that JAFCO is known for. We are excited for the future and we know that Sarah will remain part of our JAFCO family".

Richard L. Allen, Esq., Vice-Chair of the Board of the JAFCO Children's Village and a Foundation Board member, was appointed five years ago to help the agency make this important transition successfully and to lead the search committee in identifying and recommending JAFCO's next CEO.

"The succession planning for our founding CEO is an incredibly important undertaking, and I am honored to have been entrusted with this responsibility," said Allen. "Our search for Sarah's successor will focus on finding a trusted, dynamic, and passionate leader who is poised to help JAFCO save the lives of children and families in our community each and every single day."

Embracing the vision of JAFCO Founder Dr. Ron Simon, and with his guidance and mentorship, Sarah and her incredible professional team opened the first tiny, windowless JAFCO office in 1992, where the seeds were planted for the foster care, adoption and family preservation programs. Ten years later, with the support of the Jewish community, the JAFCO Children's Village was built, the only village of its kind in the Jewish community in the entire country, providing a loving and safe space for up to 52 children within 6 group homes and emergency shelter. In 2014 JAFCO opened the Children's Ability Center which provides support to families raising children with developmental disabilities, followed by FamilyMatters in Philadelphia. Then Eagles' Haven Wellness Center opened after the Parkland MSD shooting.

Recounting her time as CEO of JAFCO, Sarah Franco noted "I cannot think of a greater career in the entire world than my 32-year leadership role at JAFCO. In any given day I was able to witness some of the deepest struggles and greatest moments in life. Sitting in court with a mother as she voluntarily surrendered her parental rights because she wanted her child to have a life that she was unable to give them. Placing a child in the arms of a family who could only dream of being parents. Hearing the Rabbi call one of our children at the Village up to the Torah for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and then years later attending their high school and college graduations and their wedding. Watching the tears fall from a parent's eyes as their child sings at the Ability Center Summer Camp talent show, seeing our community smiling and laughing together during a wellness class with the friends they have made at Eagles' Haven.

Working alongside our COO Wendy Jenkins for the past three decades, I knew that along with our dedicated staff, we could handle anything that G-d sent our way. Our motto at JAFCO is that the right thing always happens in the end so if the right thing is not happening, it is not the end. I am so grateful to the volunteers, the donors, and the foster and adoptive parents who are my ultimate heroes opening their homes and their hearts to a child who is all alone in this world. I recall fondly the donors who became JAFCO Godparents, or made major donations to place their family name on one of our campuses, always with tears of joy because they knew they were truly saving lives. Second to the honor of being a mother, it has been the greatest honor of my life to have been trusted by the community and my incredible JAFCO Board to be the CEO of an agency with a soul as deep as JAFCO. This is not goodbye for me, I will always be a part of the JAFCO family in some way".

For more information visit jafco.org or call 954-749-7230.

JAFCO's mission is to provide care, safety and support to children and their families within the Jewish community and beyond who are impacted by abuse, neglect, trauma or developmental disabilities...giving every child a place to belong.