

*From AIDS Activism: Over 27 Years, 100's of Volunteers and 1000's of Casseroles.*  
**THE TIOH LUNCH PROJECT CONTINUES.**

*By Jessica Ritz*



On the third Thursday of every month, volunteers congregate in the Temple Israel of Hollywood kitchen to quickly prep meals that serve anywhere from 50 to 100 people in need.

But what might seem like a routine mitzvah—the act of feeding hungry souls is hardly a new concept—actually has unique roots in L.A.'s interfaith partnerships and AIDS/HIV activism that began over two decades ago and continues to this day.

While an HIV diagnosis is no longer a death sentence, things were very different in the late 1980s when the roots of The Lunch Project, founded by the TIOH Sisterhood, began. "There was a lot of stigma attached," recalls Karen Gilman, Women of TIOH (formerly known as Sisterhood) stalwart and longtime Lunch Project participant. The meals that were being organized and delivered to an L.A. County clinic were part of an effort to "show that the community cared." Misinformation and trepidation about the disease abounded.

Rabbi Rosove arrived at TIOH during the time when the program was in its relative infancy. "This community and the Reform movement wanted to help in a brave way, saying, 'We are not going to be intimidated by this disease. We're going to help,'" he explains some 27 years later.

Rabbi Janet Marder, then of Beth Chayim Chadashim, helped organize potluck meals served at AIDS clinics in partnership with local Reform Sisterhoods, but it was also a coalition that involved local churches and other religious institutions. The Nechama AIDS support network, as well as organizations such as Project Chicken Soup, for example, grew out of this activism. Gradually, individual churches and synagogues including TIOH began bringing prepared meals to an L.A. County AIDS/HIV clinic, cycling through two locations in and around the County Hospital area. The Lunch Project finally found a home at the then-new 5P21 Rand Schrader Clinic on Mission Avenue in Boyle Heights, across from the main County public hospital. This particular facility was named in honor of Schrader, an attorney and judge who was a prominent AIDS and gay rights activist.

Longtime former TIOH Lunch Project chair and VP of Sisterhood Social Action Jody Porter explains, "We started our involvement in a robust way in late 1991 or early 1992," thanks in part to seed money from her employer, Toyota Motor Sales, where the legal department incentivized community involvement. "We also got a few grants, held Tupperware parties and other fundraisers, and solicited donations from foundations, as well as Temple members," she says.

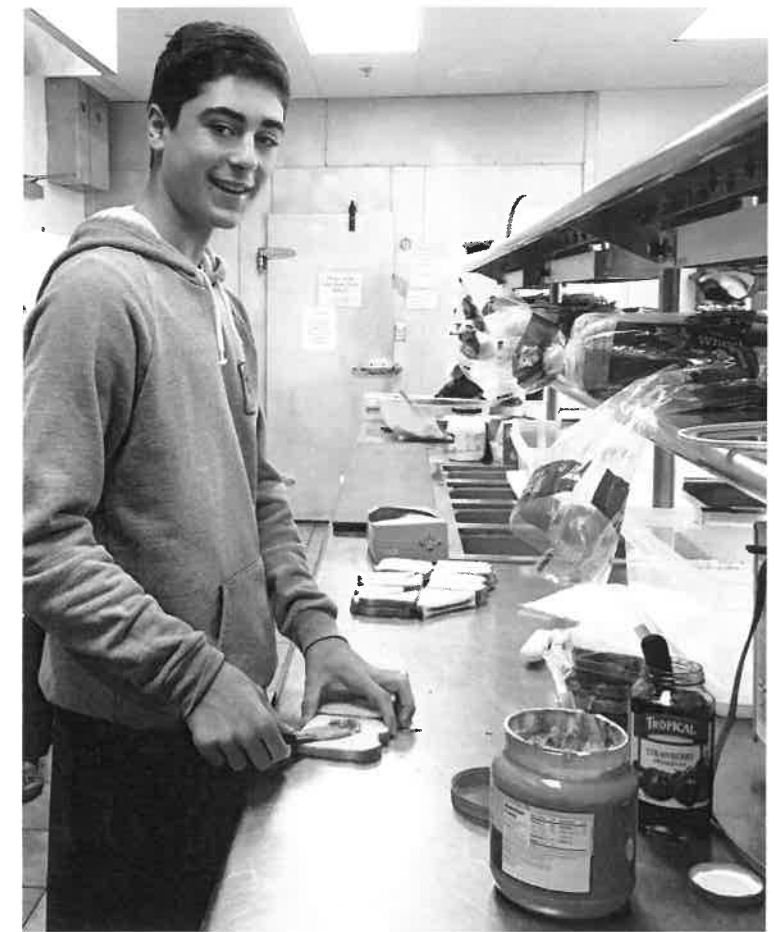
Gilman and Porter also point out how The Lunch Project became a vehicle for raising awareness about AIDS and HIV, since the TIOH Sisterhood would also organize educational events for youth. Sisterhood members also helped raise funds to purchase art supplies and clothing for patients at the clinic in need, and for the Maternal, Child & Adolescent clinic in particular. "We distinguished ourselves as the lunch sponsor that brought hot food, in addition to sandwiches," Porter says. It's a tradition and reputation that still stands.

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Sheri Langer, former Sisterhood Chair and longtime TIOH member who now lives in Northern California, fondly remembers how the program impacted all of the participants, not just the organizers and those serving the meal. "It was just a wonderful thing. People really appreciated it, and you got to know people from other places." While this particular event hasn't happened in about a decade, faith leaders would organize a city-wide thank you lunch for all of the volunteers from the over 30 churches and synagogues that provided lunch at the clinic.

Instead of fundraising on its own, Women of TIOH now generously receives funding from the Temple for The Lunch Project. Campaigns and special efforts such as Big Sunday and a recent TIOH Party Book "Casserole-O-Rama" evening help keep the freezer stocked with casseroles that are reheated and enjoyed by grateful clients all year long. "I was proud of the congregation for doing this [in the beginning], and it has continued without stop," Rabbi Rosove says.

Fortunately, much of the fear and stigma around AIDS and HIV have abated and treatment has vastly improved, but the need to feed patients has not. That's why Temple Israel and Women of TIOH's dedication stands firm, with new volunteers joining expe-



*Zach Schwartz, Teen Volunteer*

rienced hands to pitch in on a monthly basis. Regular helpers in the kitchen include Day School sixth graders, Religious School teens and folks who aren't technically TIOH members but show up to cook and serve anyway. "We get the honor of doing this. It gives us so much pleasure," Gilman proudly states.

In January 2016, with the County clinic no longer in need of this service, the Lunch Project formed a partnership with My Friend's Place, a drop-in center for homeless youth on Hollywood Boulevard. Chances are you've passed it countless times on Hollywood near Bronson. This non-profit facility provides vital services for a population with tremendous needs in our community. It's tireless and inspiring Executive Director, Heather Carmichael, is excited to welcome TIOH volunteers.

With service moved to My Friend's Place, Hollywood, the lunch is now served at 1:00 instead of noon, and concludes around 2:00. Bonus: the location is much closer to TIOH.

Special note: Volunteer participation is not limited to Women of TIOH members or one gender.

**Each month, we need volunteers to help with:**

- Grocery shopping at Smart & Final.
- Prepping the food in the temple kitchen in the morning (start time is 9:00 a.m.)
- Bringing the lunch to My Friend's Place to start setting up at 12:30.
- Serving food to the clients.

To join this much-needed, fun and rewarding effort, please contact Jessica Ritz at [jnritz@gmail.com](mailto:jnritz@gmail.com) or Kerry Holmwood at [kerry.holmwood@me.com](mailto:kerry.holmwood@me.com).

**There are nearly 4,000 young homeless people on the streets of Los Angeles every year. My Friend's Place provides a day shelter, hot meals, showers, hygiene supplies, toiletries and clothing. Additionally, 30% of the youth they serve participate in employment readiness programming and 81% participate in creative arts and educational programming at My Friends Place.**

*my friend's place*



*Left to Right: Karen Gilman, Lucy Robinson Kagan, Dean Morimoto, Amber Green, Jessica Ritz*