



TELLING STORY

our

“Diamond Days” for Seniors
in Our Community

Dawn Diamond, an 88-year-old widow who attends the free Senior Adult Center at the JCC, lives up to her name. Alert, full of vitality and still eager to engage in all life has to offer, Dawn sparkles like the diamond she is. So what’s her secret? According to Dawn, the answer is simple: “The JCC. It keeps me feeling young, allows me to be out and about with people who care about me, and gives me something to look forward to every day.”

“Companionship is critical for all people,” explains JCC Senior Services Director Judi Nahary, “but seniors are more susceptible to isolation. After spending a large portion of their lives in the company of others, their opportunities for consistent socialization often decrease, especially if they need to rely on others for transportation. SAC, which provides transportation and meets five days a week for a program-packed schedule, is the perfect cure for loneliness. Geared for active seniors 75 years and older, it allows otherwise homebound people like Dawn to get out, meet new people and enjoy themselves in the company of their peers. As we all know, there is a direct correlation between social interaction and mental and physical well-being, and the goal of our program is to provide vital social engagement that can help our participants remain sharp, happy and connected to the world around them.”

This is exactly what Dawn has achieved and the fact that she’s been coming for 26 years is a veritable testament to the value it has brought to her life. “I no longer drive, most of my friends are deceased or live far away, and due to everyone’s busy lives, I don’t get to see my family as often as I’d like,” says Dawn.

“*The Senior Adult Center fills the empty spaces I’ve been left with, especially since my husband Murray died, and it’s given me a whole new life. I’ve made close friends here, I get nutritious meals I can no longer prepare for myself, I spend precious time with children in our nursery and most importantly, I have a real purpose to my day. I feel needed and wanted and less of a burden to my family, because they know I’m safe and cared for.*”

PHOTO LEFT: Dawn who is a grand friend to Daniel
PHOTOS RIGHT: Dawn being a grand friend to a
Leonard Rubin Nursery School Classroom

“When my son moved to Wyckoff, he offered to have me move in with him and his wife, but I turned him down because I didn’t want to give up the life I have at the senior center. It means too much to me. I’m ‘Bubbe Dawn,’ to the nursery school kids here and there’s nothing more delicious than getting to spend time with those little ones. I fell in love with one little boy, Daniel, the first second I laid eyes on him. I visited him in Miss Debbie’s class for three years, and now that I don’t visit that classroom anymore, his teachers still bring him to visit me in my program. Imagine that! It’s these kinds of things that make this place so special.”

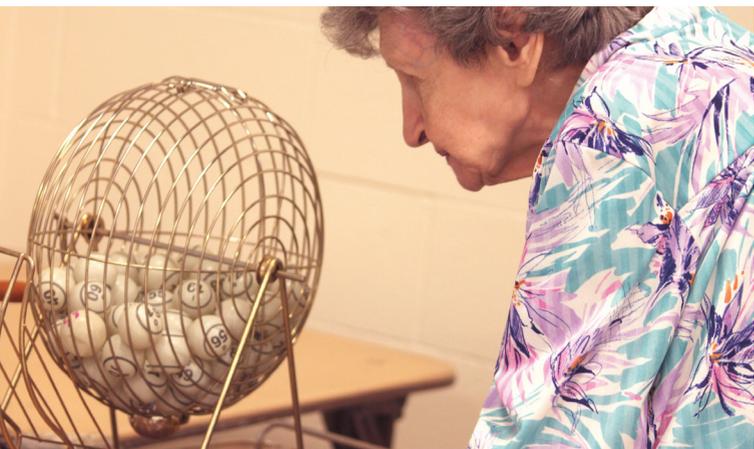


Dawn also loves the program for the non-stop activities she gets to enjoy all week long – the shows, the Broadway level entertainment, the Yiddish concerts, the bingo games, the holiday celebrations, the daily exercise and a personal favorite, the manicures, which are a special treat for her. But what Dawn loves best is knowing that she is wanted and has a place to come every day that gives her the human connection we all long for.



“The people here are my family and they treat me like I’m part of theirs. I don’t even have the words to express what this means to me. All I can say is that it’s beyond remarkable.”

Dawn recently had a fall that kept her out of the program for a few weeks, but Helene Schwartz, the SAC supervisor, kept calling her at home to cheer her up and to coax her to get out of the house and back to her program. “I could hardly get my feet in my shoes,” she said, “but I felt wanted and missed and it motivated me! I decided to borrow my husband’s cane, which I’ve saved all these years, and returned to my group. And I feel better already.”



Dawn and the staff and others in the program often joke that Dawn’s 26 years in SAC add up to more than elementary, middle, high school and college combined – making a program like this one of the longest a person might attend in his or her lifetime. As we see it, there’s no greater evidence to support the value of a thriving senior community center that can bring people together so they don’t feel isolated and alone.

“It’s all the little things that really make a difference,” Dawn concludes. “It’s getting on the bus in the morning and seeing my good friend Abe smiling at me and patting the seat next to him that he’s saved for me to ride to our JCC together. It’s the wonderful people on staff who walk us to the bus at the end of each day, or call me at home, like after my fall, to check up on me. It’s the meals and the holiday celebrations and the children we read to in the nursery school. And most of all, it’s the friends I’ve made and the effort everyone makes to be sure all of us feel wanted. I am blessed with wonderful children and grandchildren, but I’m equally blessed to be part of a program that keeps me consistently engaged with my peers. It gives me more than I could ever have imagined and all I can say is that my life would feel pretty empty without it.”

The JCC’s Senior Adult Center meets weekdays, Monday-Friday, 9 am–2 pm, for a full day of programs. Under the supervision of highly qualified and professional staff, it features a wide range of programs and activities, including birthday & holiday celebrations, health & wellness sessions, social games, helpful resources and referrals to social work professionals, and support services such as blood pressure screenings. The program is free with suggested daily donation of \$4 for lunch and \$5 for transportation. An intake interview is required.

For more information, contact Helene Schwartz 201.408.1451 or hschwartz@jccotp.org.

PHOTO LEFT: Dawn coloring with coloring with a JCC camper
PHOTO BOTTOM LEFT: Dawn playing Bingo Tuesday mornings
PHOTO TOP: Dawn with the dance intensive camp after performance