

## Jewish Family Service Clinical Director Participates in COVID-19 Clinical Trial

By BARBARA DAB

Tucked away in a nondescript building on the Vanderbilt University campus, a team of physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses and research assistants are working on what they hope will be a successful vaccine for COVID-19. This vaccine, being developed by pharmaceutical research company Moderna, is currently in the clinical trial phase 3, with over 30,000 people participating nationally and 500 at Vanderbilt under the direction of Dr. Buddy Creech.

One participant in the Vanderbilt study is Jewish Family Service Clinical Director, Toni Jacobsen, who recently completed her two vaccine trial. During her final visit to the clinic, Toni spent about 90 minutes and interacted with over a half dozen people. The visit began with a check-in with the Nurse Practitioner Anna Gallion, who took



Vanderbilt Nurse Practitioner Anna Gallion conducts a pre-trial exam on COVID-19 trial participant Toni Jacobsen



Jewish Family Service Clinical Director, Toni Jacobsen, receives the second of two vaccines in the Vanderbilt/Moderna COVID-19 phase 3 clinical trial

Toni's vital signs, took a COVID-19 swab, and interviewed her about her recent health status. After a waiting period of about 20 minutes, Gallion left the room and another nurse entered to administer the vaccine. According to Anna Gallion, the study is what is called, "observer-blind," meaning the process aims to minimize or eliminate bias or preferential treatment about which participant receives the vaccine and which receives a placebo. She says, "We follow each study subject's symptoms and it is important that we, as researchers and study staff, take each symptom as if it were covid-19 so we can track the efficacy of this vaccine. For example, if I knew that a patient received the vaccine, I might feel that his/her symptoms are related to a different disease or virus. It helps eliminate the bias." This means that neither the nurse administering Toni's trial nor

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## New Report Showcases Positive Impact of Federation on the Jewish Community of Nashville and Beyond

By BARBARA DAB and ELLIE FLIER

Effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continue to affect Nashville's Jewish community and to create challenges for most segments of the population. The Jewish Federation and Jewish Foundation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee reports in a typical year, it provides services to more than 11,000 people and provides over \$2 million in funding through direct grants. Although this year started out as most, the devastation from the tornado in early March, followed closely by the pandemic, has resulted in additional needs for assistance. According to Pam Kelner, Executive Director of Jewish Family Service, 24 people received aid from the Tornado Relief Fund in the amount of over \$17,000, and over \$6,000 in COVID-19 relief was distributed to

help families with basic needs such as rent and utilities. Additionally, school supplies that are typically donated by volunteers and distributed by JFS, were provided using COVID-19 Emergency Response Funds.

While the numbers highlight the ongoing need in the Jewish community, leaders at the Jewish Federation wanted to also illustrate the impact of the services provided in a personal way. As the 2021 campaign gears up, a new Impact Report is being rolled out. It combines elements from this year's Annual Report and a case for giving for the year ahead to give donors a clear understanding of the positive results of Federation-funded programming.

The report is completely digital and Federation CEO Eric Stillman explained, "The Impact Report is an online experi-

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## A Sense of Belonging - The "Why"

By ARON KARABEL

My father, Jacob Karabel, was born in Atlanta, raised in Philadelphia, and lived part of his childhood with my grandfather in Philly and part of his childhood with my grandmother in Atlantic City. His humor was crude with a Philly flare and his laugh was contagious. He could talk to just about anyone about anything. Literally, even perfect strangers who needed to be lifted up and waiters and waitresses who were down on their luck. He also was the type of person who would engage in random acts of kindness by giving someone walking in the rain a lift, giving strangers the clothing off his own back, and assisting those involved in car accidents.

Though he died with shekels in his bank account, those conversations, acts of Mitzvot and general interest in others was his way of giving back. He

had this uncanny ability to make a connection and to make others feel like they belong. He always said that everyone - no matter background, ethnicity, physical impairment - should feel as though they belong to something.

The feeling of belonging is extremely powerful - it is literally what drives people and strengthens communities. I believe this year we, as a community, need to fight for that feeling. We need to find a way to make everyone feel as though they belong - to expand the tent however and wherever we can.

So how do we do that in this year's annual campaign? In a word, "Impact." We need to make an impact on people who have been ravaged by the Pandemic, people who want to feel safe and secure when entering schools, synagogues and community centers, people who rely on, and are supported

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# Repairing the World: An Interview with Jewish Family Service Clinical Director on Her Participation in a COVID19 Clinical Trial

**How did you get involved in the clinical trial?**

I saw an ad on Facebook about the Vanderbilt trial and was immediately intrigued. I met all the qualifications for the study and submitted an inquiry. I heard back in a few weeks inviting me to be further screened for eligibility which I passed.

**What made you want to participate?**

I have been doing my part in staying home and social distancing when I am out and about, but I still felt helpless. I had the desire to help in the fight against COVID-19 but didn't want to get up close and personal with it. Participating in the vaccine trials seemed like a good fit for me.

**Talk a little about the process surrounding the vaccine itself.**

Once I got beyond the screening, it has been pretty simple. My first appointment took 90 minutes where

I was thoroughly screened again and received the vaccine. The study is blinded so the medical team that I am assigned to doesn't even know whether I got the real vaccine or the placebo. After all the paperwork was complete, my information was entered into the computer that randomly decided which injection I received. It took about 20 minutes and then a completely different physician and nurse came to my room with the injection. My initial medical team had to leave the room and I had to look away when the injection was administered to eliminate any possibility of any of us seeing the label on the vial. I had a few side effects within the first 24 hours including fatigue and nausea but have felt great since then. I had to use a medical app to chart any side effects for seven days after each vaccine. My second vaccine was 28 days after the first.

**What is your motivation for participating in the clinical trial?**

I was motivated by the opportunity to protect my family. I worried about our health and thought if I could get a jumpstart on the vaccine, why wouldn't I take the opportunity? The second part of my motivation is my work within the community. As soon as it is safe to return to the office and begin interacting with clients again, I want to be ready. My hope is that by participating in this trial, I will be ready to have face-to-face contact with clients again and catch up on all the missed hugs from the seniors.

**What are your fears?**

I don't have any fears about the actual vaccine because SARS has been around a long time, so the researchers are not starting from scratch with the vaccine. I am told they know it is safe, but they do not know if it is effective. My fears come from other people judging and

criticizing my decision to participate. I have heard many people say they will not take the first approved vaccine, but how are we ever going to get past this if some of us do not roll up our sleeves and join the fight? I feel that it is my moral obligation to contribute to the fight against Covid19.

**What are your hopes?**

My hope is to help in the battle against this terrible virus that has claimed too many lives. I want to be able to be a part of something that saves lives in our community and around the world by having a safe and effective vaccine. My hope is that my participation will protect my family, friends, co-workers and everyone I come in contact with it. The seniors that I see at the J's weekly lunch program are like surrogate grandparents to me. I want to protect them and be a part of developing a vaccine that could save their lives. I hope to be a part of the solution. •

## Clinical Trial

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the nurse who provides the actual vaccine know which she received. Only the pharmacist and the unblinded staff know which product she, and the other participants, receive. The final stop for Toni Jacobsen is a visit with a doctor, who ensures she is not having any severe reaction to the vaccine and helps her complete an electronic diary entry. Toni is tasked with making daily entries for the first week and will be followed for up to two years as part of the formal study.

The goal of the current Phase 3 clinical trial is two-fold. Nurse Practitioner Anna Gallion says overall, the team is looking to find out if the vaccine works to help the body produce antibodies against the COVID-19 virus. She says, "This vaccine is unique in that it isn't made from a weakened or inactive virus, in fact, it doesn't have the virus in it at all. It contains the genetic code that tells cells how to make the protein that helps the body fight off the virus." The other key goal of the study is to make sure the vaccine is safe for use by the general population.

In recent weeks, three COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials have been put on pause at pharmaceutical giants Johnson & Johnson, Eli Lilly and AstraZeneca, leading many to question the process of rushing the vaccine to the open market. But experts say the delays mean the process is working. Dr. Kelly Moore is an Adjunct Professor of Health Policy at the

Vanderbilt School of Medicine and is also the Associate Director of Immunization Education at the Immunization Action Coalition. She says these delays during phase three of the clinical trials are overseen by committees of experts not related to the actual study. "Every clinical trial is overseen by a Data Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB). They have the capacity to halt a trial and evaluate any serious adverse effect that occurs, and it is not uncommon for these delays to happen," she says. In fact, Dr. Moore says even after a vaccine is approved and licensed by the Food and Drug Administration for distribution, studies continue to look at the responses of millions more people to detect any rare reactions. For companies like Moderna, the stakes are particularly high. According to Moore, Moderna's traditional focus on research and development means it has never brought a vaccine to market. But Anna Gallion says her team is pleased with the process so far. She says the Moderna company is unique in its transparency, publishing the entire study protocol and even making it available online.

It is against this backdrop which, at times, feels like a race to the finish line, that people like Toni Jacobsen are stepping into the unknown. She believes passionately in her role in helping to combat COVID-19. "I want to be able to be a part of something that saves lives in our community and around the world by having a safe and effective vaccine," she says. And Dr. Kelly Moore says it is people like Jacobsen who give everyone

reasonable hope for the future. The key, she says, is to manage expectations. "The goal of the vaccine right now is 70 to 80 percent effectiveness. No one expects this first vaccine to work perfectly. It will continue to be important to use sensible behavior practices, like wearing a mask, washing hands and some social distancing,

to prevent the spread of COVID-19." •

**To learn more about the Moderna phase 3 protocol, visit [www.modernatx.com/cove-study](http://www.modernatx.com/cove-study) and for more information about vaccines or to ask an expert, visit the Immunization Action Coalition at [www.immunize.org](http://www.immunize.org).**

## New Report

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to provide people with an opportunity virtually to explore 10 different areas of impact in which our Federation is making a positive difference." As to why this report will be released ahead of the Federation's upcoming campaign, Stillman continues, "Because of you, the Federation has the resources to do this, which is why the Annual Campaign is so important to the Jewish community of Nashville and Middle Tennessee."

The Impact Report segments what the Federation does into ten sections, and each impact area will include a short description along with photos, and the specific grant distribution for the category. Community members will be able to easily access the digital files and delve deeper into the topics that impact themselves most as well as learn about successful programming geared toward other demographics.

"This report will serve to remind our community that the Annual Campaign

gives us the ability to respond during times of crisis," Federation President Steven Hirsch added, "and a further reminder that our work on Covid-19 relief efforts will continue well into 2021."

The ten sections of impact are:

- Addressing Economic Uncertainty
- Next Generation of Leadership
- Community Bridge Building & Jewish Advocacy
- Jewish Teen Experiences
- Community Building
- Jewish Education & Strengthening Jewish Identity
- Caring for Aging Adults
- College Campus Life
- Keeping Our Communities Safe & Secure
- Partnership & Bridge Building with Israel & Jewish Communities Overseas

The report will be available in the coming weeks to the general public and will be accessible from the Federation website. For more information, contact Jessica Banish at [jessica@jewishnashville.org](mailto:jessica@jewishnashville.org). •

## The "Why"

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by, our local agencies, and people whose survival is dependent on our partnership agencies in Israel and overseas.

Because of you, each year the Jewish Federation makes an Impact. Because of you we are able to identify community need, gaps in resources, and problems we all must solve. Because of you we are able to do good.

This year we know that more people are hurting. We know it because we see it - they are in need of community and a sense of belonging more than ever. These needs are not amorphous - they are concrete and real and must be addressed with empathy and compassion. These are needs that can only be addressed by the entire Jewish community - those who have given before and those who have not; those who have built this community and those who

have just recently called it home; and those who have always been involved and those who are just now getting involved. Why? Because that is what a Mishpacha (family) does. We grow and build, we stand together, and we lift each other up to make everyone feel like they belong.

I feel lucky that Batia and I are able to help those in our community, in Israel and around the world. Like you, we get to do that, with every gift, every day, near and far. Please share your giving story with anyone and everyone. Share your sense of belonging. Through your stories and commitment to the Jewish community, we will find innovative ways to expand the tent so that our Nashville Kehilla (Community) can Impact those we know and those we do not. •

*Aron Karabel is the 2021 Campaign Chair for The Jewish Federation and Jewish Foundation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee.*

**If one of the worries on your mind is how to tell your family there will be no gifts this year for Chanukah -**

**The Jewish Family Service Chanukah Gift Program is waiting to hear from you.**

Please call 354-1672, confidentially, to let us know how we can help. Volunteers are waiting to bring some light into your Chanukah.



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