



# Irving J. Fain Social Action Awards

Models of Outstanding Synagogue Social Action



[rac.org/fain](http://rac.org/fain)

Active commitment to social justice is a hallmark of Reform Judaism. That commitment has inspired Reform congregations across North America to develop and pursue a wide range of activities and programs designed *l'taken et ha'olam*, to mend the world. By reaching out to those in need, by forming coalitions of concern across religious and racial lines, by advocating for equality and justice, the congregations of our Movement help realize the vision of the prophets and create communities informed by that vision.

Irving J. Fain was a passionate proponent of social justice and served for a decade as Chair of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism. The Fain Awards, established in 1983 in his honor and memory, are awarded every two years to congregations whose work in the area of social justice is exemplary. We hope and expect that the 2015 Fain Award winners will inspire others to embark creatively and energetically on the road to justice.

*The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.*



# Award Winners

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## Ferguson Activism Central Reform Congregation St. Louis, MO

Central Reform Congregation's clergy, lay leaders and members have been on the front lines of the Ferguson protest movement. CRC promoted non-violent civil disobedience and served as a sanctuary for protesters when the non-indictment was announced, providing spiritual, psychological, medical and legal support. CRC has also established a Truth and Reconciliation coalition, hosted a Social Responsibility Shabbat and are advocating for law enforcement reform.



## Crossing the Street - A Shul, a School and an Evolving Covenant Congregation Rodef Sholom San Rafael, CA

Crossing the Street initiates and fosters enduring relationships between Congregation Rodef Sholom's members and a nearby school community. Joint programs have included sharing immigration stories during Sukkot, a Yizkor/Dia de los Muertos program, monthly programs with the 6th and 7th grade classes, and a Teen Leader initiative. In addition, congregants tutor the students, among other programs and initiatives. The congregation has also raised money to hire a Literacy Specialist Teacher for the school and for swim lessons for 25 students.

## MIKLAT - Spaces of Refuge Congregation Sinai Fox Point, WI



Through their MIKLAT - Spaces of Refuge program, Congregation Sinai educated their members about issues facing the population of undocumented migrants who have come to Milwaukee in order to flee repressive and dangerous regimes. Their efforts included joining the Immigrant Rights March on May Day, running an interfaith Immigrant Freedom Seder, hosting a Deportation Prayer Vigil, accompanying immigrants to court, joining the New Sanctuary Movement, and attending a protest at the Immigration Customs and Enforcement Agency office buildings.

## TIKKUN: To Take on the World Temple Israel Boston, MA

Temple Israel developed an intensive curriculum to bridge students' L'Taken experience with the need for ongoing advocacy at home. A 12-session TIKKUN curriculum was launched in their weekly high school program, focusing on equipping students with the tools they need to pursue justice. The course culminates with a lobby day, following which students draft and offer a sermon during a Kabbalat Shabbat service reflecting on their experience.

## Getting to Know You: Muslim-Jewish Teen Dialogue Temple Avodat Shalom River Edge, NJ

Temple Avodat Shalom sought to create opportunities for relationship-building and dialogue between Muslim and Jewish youth by establishing Getting to Know You: Muslim-Jewish Teen Dialogue. Six weekly sessions were held at the Temple and the Muslim students hosted an evening of exploration at their mosque. Additionally, students participated in a food-packing event in the wider community, with the goal of feeding over 8,000 people in Northern New Jersey who are in need.



## Roots and Wings

**Temple Isaiah**  
Los Angeles, CA

Through their Roots and Wings Program, Temple Isaiah created a mentoring program with an inner city school in order to positively influence and broaden the experience of students. Mentors from the congregation meet with mentees twice a month focusing on building relationship and helping students form and fulfill their goals of attending college and developing a career path. In addition to mentors assisting with college applications, mock interviews, and public speaking, college trips and SAT preparation courses were organized for mentees. In the first group, 85% of students continued their education and this year 94% plan to attend college.



## A Year of Tzedek - Having the Conversation

**Mount Zion Temple**  
St Paul, MN

The synagogue leadership spent 6 months planning a year of Tzedek and then launched a year-long program, including workshops, Shabbat after-service conversations about monthly Jewish values, a trip to the Abayudaya community in Uganda, a conversation with 25 Minnesota Senators and Representatives as their new session was set to begin, and more. Additionally, at the beginning of the Year of Tzedek, Mount Zion distributed brochures and fridge magnets encouraging congregants to engage in conversations on Tzedek and inviting them to an OpenSpace Technology meeting to reflect on the state of the country and our moral responsibility to take action.

## Campaign for Gun Responsibility

**Temple De Hirsch Sinai**  
Seattle, WA



In the aftermath of the Sandy Hook shooting, Temple De Hirsch Sinai invited an interfaith coalition to join in memorial and express their moral outrage at the scourge of gun violence plaguing our nation. They then transformed this outrage into action by helping draft and fund Initiative 594, an effort to close the background check loophole in Washington State. They then launched a synagogue-based Campaign for Gun Responsibility in support of I-594 which included education, fundraising and advocacy components. The initiative passed during the November 2014 mid-term election.

## Knead to Feed @ Temple Har Shalom

**Temple Har Shalom**  
Warren, NJ

Knead to Feed was founded to engage congregants through baking and selling artisan challah in order to raise money to donate to vetted charities that help to feed the hungry. Temple Har Shalom arranged baking workshops, baked once or twice a month, and donated over \$10,000.00 over the span of 20 months. They also used this as an opportunity to engage the wider community by donating challah to a home for people with mental disabilities, teaching residents how to braid dough, and baking challah for the campers and staff at a local camp for people with mental and physical disabilities.



See detailed program descriptions of all honorees at

[rac.org/fain](http://rac.org/fain)



# Honorable Mentions

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CABI Garden  
Congregation Ahavath Beth Israel (CABI)  
Boise, ID

For 10 years, CABI has provided a community garden to its congregants and members of the local Somali refugee community. CABI Garden is a core feature of their environmental justice work. The congregation has created an action plan for this project, which includes hosting a food bank and “Cooking Matters” educational courses to support Somali refugees.

Social Action Goes to the Movies: Building Community Through Film  
Congregation Shomrei Torah  
Santa Rosa, California

Social Action Goes to the Movies is an annual program of film screenings and panel discussions hosted by the congregation for three months a year. A series of film screenings on domestic violence inspired a group from the synagogue to visit the local YWCA safe house and affiliated preschool for children from families affected by domestic violence. The congregation now operates an ongoing drive to fund industrial-grade appliances for the safe house. Other films on social justice issues have spawned similarly wide-reaching actions by the synagogue community, including lobbying the state capital to change law enforcement actions against at-risk immigrants.

Pre B'nai Mitzvah Tikkun Olam Projects  
Temple Emanu-El  
Dallas, TX

Through this program, Temple Emanu-El's 6th grade families are connected with social justice partners in the city of Dallas. During their first meeting, families learn about tikkun olam and the importance of giving back to the community through a Jewish lens. Students choose a project that inspires them, and then join classmates to work with their partner organizations 4-8 times a year. Each project is different, from working in a community garden to collecting food for the local food pantry to visiting with occupants at a local senior residence.

## rac.org/fain

*We are obligated to pursue tzedek, justice and righteousness, and to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, to act against discrimination and oppression, to pursue peace, to welcome the stranger, to protect the earth's biodiversity and natural resources, and to redeem those in physical, economic and spiritual bondage.*

- A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism, Pittsburgh, 1999 (CCAR)

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