

For Northeast Queens Ys, ‘Stronger Together’

Forest Hills’ Central Queens Y and Little Neck’s Samuel Field Y to merge operations in bid for efficiency, expansion.

By Chaim Levin March 22, 2017



Scenes from the Central Queens and Samuel Field Ys. Photos by Marianna Olshtein

In a bid to cut administrative costs and create a “regional” social service network in a growing Northeast Queens, the Central Queens Y in Forest Hills and the Samuel Field Y in Little Neck will merge their management staffs. Both Ys will remain open in their current locations, and the executive director of Central Queens Y, Danielle Ellman, will lead the new management entity.

The merger, ratified last month by the boards of both institutions, goes into effect in July, and in the new management structure the Central Queens Y will now be part of the Samuel Field Y.

“I believe that the borough of Queens and our surrounding areas will be better served [because] the Ys will be stronger together,” Jeri Mendelsohn, current CEO and executive vice president of the Central Queens Y and Samuel Field Y, told The Jewish Week. Mendelsohn will stay on as a senior adviser once the merger is finalized.

Ellman, the incoming CEO, said that no jobs would be lost in the management staff merger. “This is about being more strategic,” Ellman said, adding that there will be no changes in service at the two institutions. “Nothing is changing except for our ability to pool our talent and resources to innovate and serve more people as a truly innovative agency.”



Scenes from the Central Queens and Samuel Field Ys.
Photos by Marianna Olshstein

The two Ys serve about 50,000 Jewish families. According to a UJA-Federation of New York survey in 2011, there are 46,000 Jewish households in the neighborhoods served by the two Ys. The area has seen an influx of Bukharian Jews in the last few decades.

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At their combined 39 sites, the two Ys offer services through programs such as pre-K, after-school, mental health, job training, summer camps, fitness and early dementia care. The number of people

served will likely jump with expanded programming once the merger is complete, agency leaders said in a press release.

Lawrence Gottlieb, president of the board of both institutions and senior counsel for the law firm Cooley, told *The Jewish Week* that both entities hope that, in the long run, the merger will allow them to expand their services to all of Queens and attract more funding.

“We think that adding these two [together] will enable us to attract grants that we’ve never attracted before from government funding and foundations,” he said. “We are going to cover all of Queens, which is a big borough that in some respects has been left behind generally. We are going to be a big player in Queens for those in need and less fortunate, and we will serve other communities well. Middle-class people are going to benefit from this.”



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Asked whether the move is also a strategy to protect the Ys from possible cuts in federal funding under a Trump administration, Gottlieb said, “We’re doing [the merger] for economy of scale, power and influence.” Looking beyond the current administration, he said the move “inoculates us generally, that if there are problems in the nonprofit world, I would expect that these combined agencies would do well.”

Both boards voted on the initial plan for the merger last May. On Feb. 13 both boards unanimously approved the detailed outline of the merger.

Others involved with the merger also see an upside in the Ys' new scope.

“From our perspective, as management consultants for nonprofits, these are organizations that, in joining together, will become a more powerful, regional presence, not only in Queens but in New York City,” said Evan Kingsley, a partner in Plan A Advisors, a firm that works with midsize and large nonprofits regionally and nationally. “That’s important because it allows them to apply the human resources and the intellectual capital that they have across the entirety of the region that they serve. For example, innovations in program delivery at any one of the 39 locations that they serve, can be applied effectively across multiple locations.”

Kingsley also emphasized that the day-to-day operations that most people rely on won’t change. “It’s really about big thinking, sustaining institutions that are historically Jewish in a changing philanthropic landscape, and continuing what we do — taking care of the underserved, taking care of our own, and being anchor institutions.”

Cynthia Zalisky, executive director of the Queens Jewish Community Council, told The Jewish Week, “If this is going to make [operations] cleaner and more concise, then we’re all for it.”

According to Zalisky, the Queens neighborhood has been seeing a significant increase in Jewish families over the last few years. “We have more young Bukharian families that [have] come, we have seniors; thank goodness the Jewish population is thriving here.”