



A Matter of Dignity

Beth Tfiloh students spearhead fundraising efforts to help women living in dire financial conditions.

By Caryn R. Sagal

Shown baking here are (left to right) Sunny Diamond, Shana Leibowitz, Rowan Adler, Ella Glick, Lea Silverman and Shalhevet Leichter of BT's Women Empowerment Club. (Provided photo)

For some teens, baking brownies may be a fun and delicious hobby. But for a group of students at Pikesville's Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School, it was a way to embody the Jewish values of *tzedakah* (righteousness) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

Recently, the high school's Women Empowerment Club hosted a bake sale for The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore's chapter of Dignity Grows. Dignity Grows provides feminine hygiene and personal care products for those experiencing financial constraints.

Such necessities are not generally covered by welfare programs and rarely available at food pantries, leaving countless women and girls with a sense of shame and low self-confidence.

As a countermeasure, Dignity Grows was founded in 2019 in Connecticut by the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford's Women's Philanthropy division and supported by the Jewish Federations of North America's National Women's Philanthropy division.

The Beth Tfiloh students decided to pitch in after learning about the program last September from Eli Creeger, the high school's director of student life.

"It was important for us to participate in this national initiative to ensure girls have the feminine hygiene products they need so menstruation does not get in the way of their education," said Noa Rone, a BT senior and co-chair of the Women Empowerment Club. "Helping Dignity Grows is a beautiful example of the ways empowered teenage girls can make an impact. ...

"And it's not just girls that can and should be advocates for women," she said. "Anyone who has a mother, a sister, a daughter, should be invested in the success and welfare of women."

Noa — who serves as director of CHANA's Teen Ambassador Program and started a program for BT students to interview female professionals in Baltimore — shares a passion for feminism and women's causes with BT junior Sunny Diamond.

Sunny, who is co-chair of the Women Empowerment Club, also launched the organization PlantMyStory to spread awareness of women's rights while promoting environmental causes with the local group Civic Works.

"I strongly advise women in our local communities to empower each other," said Sunny. "Empower women who are from different backgrounds and walks of life than you. Empower and help women who need assistance because at the end of the day, we must realize that we can only make a difference in the world if we are willing to create change."

Sunny approached Melinda Michel, vice president of women's philanthropy at The Associated, about hosting a bake sale fundraiser for Dignity Grows.

"I was very impressed with Sunny, who had a clear vision about what she wanted to do to bring awareness to the issue of period poverty," said Michel. "This is the first high school group to partner with The Associated on a Dignity Grows event,

and we hope it will inspire other school groups to organize Dignity Grows packing parties for their students, too."

Sunny created a Microsoft form on her school's homework-based website where club members could sign up to bake three-layer brownies. She also created flyers, arranged when the club could bake at the high school kitchen and called kosher bakeries to donate items to the fundraiser.


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—Noa Rone

Overall, 14 of the club's 50 members baked six boxes of Duncan Hines brownies — layered with six batches of cookie dough made by Sunny, topped with Oreos provided by Beth Tfiloh and more brownie mix.

Junior Elle Brody and freshman Lilah Messing baked a pan of brownies together and helped set up the bake sale stand. Meanwhile, Noa and Sunny sold the brownies, along with danishes and muffins donated by Pariser's Bakery in Northwest Baltimore, at \$2 a piece, raising nearly \$500.

On Tuesday, Jan. 9, the club participated in a "packing party" at Beth Tfiloh to assemble packages of hygiene items purchased by The Associated for Dignity Grows. Plans also call for hosting another bake sale for this project, as well as fundraising for additional organizations through raffles and CareGrams.

"We will definitely plan more fundraisers for women's issues as we have done in the past," said Noa. "We also hope to hold programming for girls at our school related to the atrocities that happened to women after the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel." 

For information about Dignity Grows, visit associated.org/getinvolved/women/dignity-grows.

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