MICHELLE BLACK, ROBIN FRIEDMAN, AND JUDE SYDNEY

Empowering the Next Generation

In 2019, three friends and mothers — Michelle Black, Robin Friedman, and Jude Sydney — sat together at an ADL (Anti-Defamation League) conference that highlighted the troubling rise of antisemitism on college campuses.

As the trio, who had nine teenagers between them, headed out, Robin sounded an alarm.

"Our kids are so not prepared for what's coming," she recalls saying to Michelle and Jude, who agreed. "They don't know what they need to know."

The three came up with an idea: They would coordinate a one-day seminar in May 2020 to educate rising college students from New England about campus antisemitism.

So, Michelle, Robin, and Jude began their own listening tour, having coffee with nearly 100 parents, educators, teens, and Jewish professionals to learn more about how students were experiencing antisemitism, what resources already existed, and what gaps were left to fill.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic, and the seminar was canceled. Michelle, Robin, and Jude were forced to pivot — and TribeTalk was born.

It takes a village

With the help of 25 college interns and the guidance of local experts, the three spent the summer of 2020 creating the TribeTalk website. It included tools, resources, and webinars to help future college students (and their parents) understand various campus climates so they could ultimately choose the right school.

"We saw a big need for all of these offerings," says Michelle. "We decided to just lean in as three moms and see what we could accomplish."

Five years later, TribeTalk has blossomed into a full-service nonprofit organization focused on educating and empowering students at middle schools, high schools, and colleges to respond to antisemitism in their communities and on social media. Its signature offering is an interactive "Standing Strong" workshop, which explores the history of antisemitism, how to recognize it, and what to do about it.

"We are raising a village of students together," says Jude. "TribeTalk is here to help families navigate all of the challenges of modern antisemitism. We always tell them that if we don't have the answer, we will get it. We want families to know they're not alone."

With the rise in Jewish hate since the October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel, TribeTalk has redoubled its efforts to provide students with tools and tactics on how to fight antisemitism. To date, TribeTalk has run more than 100 trainings for nearly 8,000 students at schools, summer camps, and community centers around the country.

"I grew up with a very strong sense that everyone should have an opportunity to practice our beautiful Jewish religion free from discrimination and harassment," says Robin. "What we're doing is important because we're helping students and parents navigate a new world."

Support from CJP

Early on, Michelle, Robin, and Jude — who are all longtime CJP donors and volunteers — met with CJP professionals to share their vision for TribeTalk.

The idea, they say, was enthusiastically received. CJP signed on as their first funder (and continues to support TribeTalk to this day), helping the three test and iterate their original curriculum and make connections throughout the Jewish teen network.

Brett Lubarsky, CJP's Director of Jewish Communal Life, remembers first learning about TribeTalk during lunch with the founders.

"What was once a kernel of an idea is now a full menu of trainings and resources to support teens and their families in Greater Boston and beyond," he says. "With the rapid rise of antisemitism, TribeTalk stepped in — and has become an important partner to CJP and our community."

A proud Jewish future

As they look to the next five years and beyond, the TribeTalk founders say they're focused on broadening their organization's reach.

They're growing their team of trainers to bring TribeTalk to more communities nationwide, working with more public school districts to offer programs on fighting antisemitism, and rolling out a follow-up initiative to "Standing Strong" called "Standing Up" to help college students better understand and respond to anti-Israel rhetoric on campus.

"Unfortunately, I don't think we're going to cure antisemitism, but we also can't allow it to continue to be normalized," says Jude. "We understand that it can feel very overwhelming when you don't know how to fight it. Our work allows kids to feel like they've got the agency to stand proud in their Jewish identities. It's not a *nice* to have; it's a *need* to have."