We all know the famous adage, “It takes a village.”

It’s about our special networks and relationships that connect us together.

Friends Become Family

For Emily Sachs, making a new life in the Greater Hartford area was not without its challenges. After leaving her family and friends in New York where she worked full-time as a licensed therapist, Emily, who was three months pregnant, found herself feeling isolated. Her husband Adam was embarking on a new position as a doctor and working demanding hours, which only enhanced Emily’s feeling of loneliness. When their son Dylan arrived very prematurely in 2014, Emily spent nearly a month in the hospital by his side, and she and her husband were now facing overwhelming fears about their little boys’ health.

Not long after Emily brought Dylan home, she found the JCC. What began with parent/child classes, soon evolved into Emily enrolling Dylan in the Early Childhood Center (ECC). This is when Emily first discovered the “village” she so desperately needed. These new-found friendships blossomed, giving her an extended ‘family’ to share the joys and burdens of everyday life. When Emily became pregnant with her second child, Madison, the concerns for her baby’s girls’ health could have been an all-consuming worry, if not for being surrounded by a community ready to support her through it all.

As Emily spent more and more of her time at the J, she realized just how much there is to offer, “When the kids started to grow, and their interest in activities began to develop, it became more obvious that we were going to be even more involved at the J than we already were. This truly is a full community center.

This truly is a full community center. Where else can your kids go to school, take dance, karate and swim lessons and then grab dinner at the café?”

A True Village

When Emily and Adam’s third child Brayden was born, they found themselves once again saddled with concern after learning their newborn son needed an unexpected surgery.
Emily was spending endless days in the hospital, unable to be home with Dylan and Madison, and this is when she truly recognized the role the J played in her life and just how much her “village” means to her and her family.

While Emily’s parents came from New York to care for Dylan and Madison, before and after school, her JCC family morphed into superheroes; the Sachs received notes offering caring support from Mandell JCC Executive Director David Jacobs and Director of Jewish & Family Life, Jane Pasternak, the teachers in the ECC kept Dylan at school for full days, and her tribe of new friends helped care for Dylan and Madison outside the JCC walls. But her ‘village’ extended even further, with parents from the ECC creating meal trains, even delivering food to her and Adam at the hospital.

The JCC is My Home

Emily reflects on her experience at the JCC with an extraordinarily grateful heart, “I just can’t tell you how much this place means to me. The JCC is my home. I don’t ever want to leave.”

And sometimes the Sachs really don’t leave. Emily, Adam, Dylan, Madison and Brayden have become fixtures at the J. While Emily can often be found in the Family Room Parenting Center spending time with other moms, or at Café J connecting with friends, or shuffling her kids between activities, Adam enjoys working out in the fitness center after his long shifts at the hospital. He is also a familiar face in the morning, dropping the kids off at school, and when his schedule permits, the Sachs family spends quality time at the J as a party of five. Surrounded by a community who became family, Emily now lives her life with the motto, “Truly great friends are hard to find, difficult to leave and impossible to forget.”

The Mandell JCC is a warm and welcoming community where people care about one another, share with one another and grow together day after day, year after year.