

# Cookies And More

Kadima and Shaarey Zedek partner on a project that expands horizons.

**Sarah Cohen** | Special to the Jewish News



**Bakers from Kadima and Shaarey Zedek are participating in the Progressive Cookie Project.**

**T**he Progressive Cookie Project is not about baking cookies — rather it is a teaching and learning environment for all participants.

The project was inspired by the Altamont Bakery at Congregation B'nai Emunah in Tulsa, Okla., which pairs synagogue volunteers with residents of the Altamont Apartments operated by the local mental health association for amazing outcomes that go beyond cookies.

In a similar way, Southfield's Congregation Shaarey Zedek volunteers are teaming up with participants from Kadima, a 33-year-old organization dedicated to providing service and support to individuals with mental illness.

While cookies are the only tangible outcome of the Progressive Cookie Project, there are many unseen benefits to this immersive experience, and partnering allows a new way to educate and break barriers on the topic of mental illness.

The first day of cookie baking was June 25 at Shaarey Zedek. Before the oven had been heated or the batter mixed, the group talked about the personal challenges they thought would affect them during the baking process. Some participants discussed how they were nervous about baking or unsure of what was to come. Everyone had a challenge that would be met with during the day.

Two team leaders were chosen from Kadima. They then chose their cooking crews. Each team had its own recipe to make that day — each submitted by

synagogue members. Cella Kleiman's Cowboy Cookie is crunchy around the edges and softer in the middle. The other was an old-fashioned chocolate chip cookie submitted by Mireille Plotke.

The game was on in this competition for the reigning cookie. The first batch from the oven looked like a big pancake; while not a conventional cookie, it was still delicious. The teams quickly learned how to perfect their batches.

Whether or not Kadima participants chose to share their illness with their teammates didn't matter. Labels were shed at the door.

"I'd been around people with mental illness my entire life; I knew better than to place a label on someone," CSZ Rabbi Yonatan Dahlen said. "That was special about the day. No one was treating anyone differently than you would a friend. As soon as we threw on the hairnets, we were all full of laughter. It was a great bonding experience."

Now it was time to hear what the public thought. More than 350 cookies came out of the kitchen that June day. They were to be devoured and voted on the next day at Shabbat lunch. When the results were in, Team "Ol' Fashion" had the reigning cookie.

But what really mattered was the experience of getting to know each other.

Participants of the Progressive Cookie Project will come together twice a month for more baking and bonding. For details, contact Wren Hack at Congregation Shaarey Zedek at (248) 357-5544. ✳