LONG READS *Issue **1134** · October 28, 2026*

Golden Opportunities

A few minutes can make a world of difference for a cause that truly matters

Sa

By Sandy Eller
18 min read October 28, 2026



It's sort of like a flash sale without the shopping bags. The message goes out for a special project, the clock starts ticking, and friends have half an hour to step up. Before the chat closes, the funds are raised and another initiative moves from "we wish we could" to "it's taken care of." In the world of opportunity chats, a few minutes makes a lot happen

They say that opportunity only knocks once.

But over the last few weeks, I've come to disagree with that old adage, seeing for myself how hundreds of people on multiple opportunity chats jump each week at the chance to donate to a specific cause that touches their hearts.

It was just a few months ago that I first heard the term "opportunity chat," which is basically a crowdfunding WhatsApp group that presents vetted situations of a specific financial need to its members. The chats are intended to be pressure-free environments, where members can choose to donate any amount to a cause that speaks to them, or can totally ignore the request and continue on with their day. Opportunities typically move quickly once announced on the chat, where — much like a corn popper on steroids — the group explodes with rapid-fire donations until the target amount has been raised. Chat members know if they want to help meet the goal, they need to act quickly, before the opportunity vanishes.

On a bright, sunny Friday morning, I finally got to see an opportunity chat operating in real time. Having been asked to write this article, I joined a chat run by Links, which supports children and teens who have lost a parent, and was looking forward to getting a front-row seat to the action. Was it really true that people were falling all over themselves to *chap* a mitzvah before it disappeared? Were the donations just going to come rolling in in a matter of moments, even in today's difficult financial climate?

The answer to both those questions was a resounding *yes*, as the Links Family Opportunities chat pinged at 9 a.m. sharp with a request for $16,500 to see to

the needs of the children of a new *almanah* who was unable to cope with her new reality.

"Watch this, Mom," I said, sitting down at the kitchen table next to my mother.

The first donations were posted on the chat at 9:02 a.m. There were 20 of them to be precise, and by 9:03, $7,537 had already been pledged. Mom and I were stunned to realize that 45.6 percent of the total amount needed had come through in just the first minute, with the entire amount raised in 50 minutes. The statistics were incredibly impressive: 393 kind-hearted souls had taken advantage of this particular opportunity, with an average donation of $41.98. The largesse of all these people who had rushed to help this family left both Mom and me marveling at the knowledge that we are truly blessed to be part of such a giving nation.

Jump In

While my first introduction to opportunity chats was through Links, multiple organizations and groups have found them to be a successful vehicle for raising funds for things that don't fall under the purview of their normal operations. Interestingly enough, the opportunity chats for Chai Lifeline, Knafayim, and Brooklyn's Syrian Jewish community are all offshoots of the Links chat, a reality that fills Sarah Rivkah Kohn, the Links founder and director, with incredible joy.

"I feel like a grand-bubby," says Kohn. "It's a tremendous *zechus* to start something that didn't really exist and to create a new wave of crowdfunding, enabling so many others to do so as well."

The seeds for what would eventually become the Links Family Opportunity chat were first sown in December 2021. Daniel Danesh, chairman of Links's legal division, noticed that Kohn had been sharing small fundraising needs on her WhatsApp status, and that people were coming through for her. After Danesh suggested that she post those same opportunities on a broadcast group, Kohn took the idea and ran with it.

"The idea was jump in to get it, and once it's gone, it's gone," explains Links director of development and marketing Esti Bald. "That's how it all started, with 70 people on this group."

The first opportunity posted on the Links chat was for a 16-year-old who had two wisdom teeth that were so painfully impacted they kept her out of school. Her mother mentioned the situation in passing during a conversation with her Links family case manager, sharing that she couldn't afford to pay for the teeth to be extracted. Hearing about the need, which their regular services didn't address, Kohn decided to try posting it as the chat's first opportunity. Within hours, the $1,500 expense had been covered entirely by the group, giving Kohn incontrovertible evidence that the model worked.

As the weeks went by, Links began posting more opportunities, but it was clear that the key to getting more donations was getting more members. One member of the chat took matters into his own hands, promising to donate $5,000 to Links if the group could be grown to 1,000 members by a certain date. Seeing the success of that effort, Links did something similar, asking people at a Chol Hamoed benefit concert to join the chat in lieu of donations, which they happily did.

The ball kept on rolling from there, as Links settled into a routine of posting its opportunities each Friday morning at 9 a.m. Eastern time. Chat members felt comfortable making donations at whatever pace worked for them, whether it was weekly, monthly, or sporadically. And while some people donated larger amounts, there were plenty of group members chiming in with $5 and $10 donations, knowing that every dollar contributed brought the group closer and closer to its goal. Each week, it was clear that members appreciated the opportunity to be part of something larger, and Kohn routinely received heartwarming messages, confirming that participating in the chat was an uplifting experience for everyone.

"We have people on the group who are millionaires, and people who really, really struggle, some of whom have told us that they can't contribute financially but that they have connections that can be helpful in this situation," says Kohn. "The fact is that every single person is inspired by the giving, and they enjoy the feel-good vibe of watching the numbers going up. People are really changing lives, and it's not just the beneficiaries who are benefitting here."

Chatter That Matters

It wasn't long before others took notice of how the Links opportunity chat was far exceeding expectations. Seeing raises completing successfully week after week after week, Donna Marcos, the Links director of simchah services, case management, and therapy referrals, began wondering if perhaps she could create a similar platform to help fill unmet needs within Brooklyn's Syrian community.

First on her list was asking Kohn if she could replicate her model. Kohn readily agreed.

"I don't believe in gatekeeping things that work for tzedakah," says Kohn. "I don't believe HaKadosh Baruch Hu has a *cheshbon* with me that says, 'Well, now that you gave away your trade secrets, I can't provide for your families.' "

Marcos understood from the beginning that while Links was supplementing the needs of families who were already coming to them for help, she needed a different approach when it came to communal needs. Knowing that Yad Yosef's Rabbi David Ozeri was the go-to address for those needing help in the local Syrian community, and that his name would lend credence to her WhatsApp group, she made an appointment to meet with him. While the meeting went well, Marcos knew right away that hearing about an opportunity chat was one thing, but seeing it was a totally different experience. She wasn't surprised that Rabbi Ozeri's response to her pitch was polite, but unenthusiastic. Undaunted, she added Rabbi Ozeri to the Links opportunity chat, and a few nights later he saw for himself how quickly and generously people responded when Kohn posted her weekly raise.

"He texted me to tell me that it was really amazing," recalls Marcos. "Once he saw it, he understood what it was."

The SY Opportunities chat posted its first raise during the summer of 2023, as soon as Rabbi Ozeri confirmed that he was on board with the concept. Their first ask came on a Sunday morning, and Marcos was shocked to see several hundred members on the group, thanks to her son-in-law, who had added his contacts to the chat as soon as it had been created just hours earlier. While

Marcos was appalled at the idea of simply putting people on the chat without asking them first, it clearly worked, because they raised the full amount, $4,000, fairly quickly, giving them the ability to send several children to summer camp.

Since then, Marcos has discovered that adding as many people as possible to the chat has been an effective strategy. Once new members see the group responding to an ask, they usually want to get in on the action too. And those who don't can easily exit the chat.

The next opportunities chat came about that December, when Kohn encouraged her good friend Malkie Klaristenfeld, founder and director of Knafayim, to create a similar group to cover the cost of needs that fall outside its regular budget.

"There are always things that come up, and we knew we had to help, but where were we getting this money from?" observes Esty Stein, Knafayim's project coordinator. "A few of us were on opportunity chats and we felt we should go for it."

The Knafayim chat is titled "Heartbeats," an apt term for an organization that deals with pregnancy loss. Its first raise, known on the chat as a "moment," aimed to cover the cost of sending a couple who had just lost a full-term baby away to a hotel for Shabbos.

"When someone experiences a loss, our hearts break," shares Stein. "This is the moment where if they had had a baby the world would be celebrating with them. Obviously, we couldn't celebrate with this couple, but at least they knew that the world was still there for them."

Posting moments was an intimidating prospect when the chat was first opened, with the Knafayim team wondering if they would hit their goal. Nearly three years since that first ask, the weeks that the Heartbeats chat has fallen short of its goal have been few and far between, with generous donors stepping in to make up the difference.

“We’ve had times where we’ve posted a story and weren’t sure how it would resonate,” shares Klaristinfeld. “If someone hasn’t been in a similar situation, they might not understand the depths of what a couple who experienced a loss is going through, and then someone sends us a $1,500 donation and that tells us that they really do get it.”

It was August 2024 when Chai Lifeline jumped onto the opportunity chat bandwagon, with their very first request asking group members raise $200 for a young husband and wife who were both cancer survivors. In addition to having a baby who had been in the ICU for several months, the wife had relapsed, and the goal was to buy comfortable pillows for the couple to make their hospital stay more comfortable.

“It took us just one minute to cover the cost,” recalls Bracha Mandel, director of special projects for Chai Lifeline. “We realized we were onto something.”

The next ask came a week later. This time it took just 14 minutes to raise $1,100 to cover the cost of a rental car for a one-week vacation for a family from Israel who was staying in the US while their four-year-old daughter underwent experimental treatment.

By now, Chai Lifeline has posted several hundred requests, and Mandel continues to be surprised at how quickly the group responds to its fundraising pitches. Asked to name her most memorable pitch, Mandel falls silent for a moment.

"They're all heartbreaking," she shares. "It's like asking who's your favorite child. Everything we post is a passion."

First of All

Even as multiple chats are created off the Links model, Kohn will be the first to admit that hers wasn't the original opportunity chat. It was approximately a year after she posted her first request that she heard of the Israel-based Mitzvah Opportunity chat, started by Donny Fein in December 2017, quite by accident.

The story of Fein's chat began back in 2008 when the Ramat Beit Shemesh resident was taking a bus home from Jerusalem, something he rarely did. Scrolling through his phone to pass the time, he came across a message in an RBS Facebook group from a woman who needed money to buy food for Shabbos.

"I myself was going through a tough time then, but I felt like the whole world was crashing down on me when I heard her story," recalls Fein. He couldn't stomach the idea that a fellow community member's financial straits could be that dire.

After messaging the woman and speaking with her rabbi, Fein spent the rest of his trip back to Ramat Beit Shemesh texting his friends. By the time he got

home, Fein had collected the 600 NIS that the woman needed and he delivered it straight to her door. Fein continued seizing opportunities to help others as they arose, finally starting a five-person WhatsApp group in 2017.

In time Fein saw his pet project evolving, with more needs coming in and more members joining his group. By the time October 7 happened, he was raising approximately 200,000 to 300,000 NIS each month.

“We did so much for the IDF,” acknowledges Fein. “We raised 2,500,000 NIS, over half a million dollars, for them during the war.”

Fein has enjoyed seeing what he now calls his Mitzvah Opportunity chat spreading. Currently, Mitzvah Opportunity chats have been created in the Five Towns, Bergen County, and Chicago, with a Monsey chat just getting off the ground.

“My dream is to have a Mitzvah Opportunity group in every community in the world,” shares Fein.

Even after all these years, Fein still gets nervous when he posts an opportunity, which these days features needs for multiple families bundled into a single ask.

“My palms get sweaty every time I post, because I don’t know what’s going to happen,” he admits. “In ten years, baruch Hashem, we’ve never not hit our goal. Just tonight we raised 45,000 NIS in 46 minutes, and I told my wife that I can’t believe we did it, because I know how hard it is to raise money. But when 108 donors get together, there’s strength in numbers.”

Anatomy of an Ask

There was one theme that carried through every conversation that I had regarding opportunity chats — the difficulty of deciding which need to feature each week. At Links, only case managers can suggest opportunities, which have to meet three specific criteria – that the family be fully invested in trying to solve the problem, they not have been previously featured, and there is no one else who can come up with the needed funding.

"We have a waiting list and we hate this part of the job — having to decide who needs the funding more," notes Mandel. "Everyone needs the help, and different seasons have different needs. It's never easy."

At Knafayim, it's the board who chooses which moment to be featured next. "The board decides what is a true need, what we can realistically do, and what is important for right now," explains Stein. "The board votes on the case and the amount, always knowing that every dollar being raised is very much needed."

Fein has a simple approach to choosing which case to present next to his groups. "I daven to Hashem to give me the *siyata d'Shmaya* to choose the right one at the right time," he explains.

Ironically, choosing a need appears to be more challenging than coming up with the funding. SY Opportunities finds that the final amount raised for a particular case typically exceeds the initial request, with group members understanding that the featured individual or family needs all the financial help they can get. The chat stops posting donations after 90 minutes, although contributions are accepted for a full week, with the total amount collected

shared at the next ask, giving group members the satisfaction of seeing just how much they exceeded their initial goal.

Very often group members will also volunteer more than just a monetary contribution.

"We've had times where we've raised money for a bar mitzvah and someone will say 'I can make desserts,' while someone else will offer to drop off sweatshirts," says Marcos. "People offer to make dinner or to take the family shopping, and I once had a store that called me and said 'Bring the bar mitzvah boy in. We'll set him up with all the clothes he needs.' "

The stories that chat organizers hear typically pull at the heartstrings. Links was once contacted about a three-year-old who had been home with his mother when she collapsed. It took several hours until someone came home and called for help, with the toddler suffering significant emotional trauma from the experience. A Links opportunity covered the cost of the specialized intense therapy the child needed, and thankfully, a year later, the group received a follow-up message informing them that he was back in a regular school, doing all the things children his age were supposed to be doing.

"Each scenario is just heartbreaking," shares Bald. "When you see all these different situations, you understand that the family shouldn't have to carry this alone, and that's what gets everyone to give."

While large contributions are incredibly satisfying, there is something particularly touching about donations at the lower end of the spectrum.

“I have someone who gives $3 to every raise and people like him just blow me away, because that $3 probably isn’t easy for him and he does it anyway,” says Fein. “For him, that $3 is like someone else giving $3,000.”

Klaristenfeld finds herself surprised by the continuity of donors who contribute to Knafayim’s moments every week without fail. Also heartwarming are the people who contact the chat admins when a request closes quickly, expressing their disappointment that they missed their chance to help the group meet the goal.

“They donate to it anyway,” adds Klaristinfeld. “We often get donations for two to three hours after an opportunity closes, and in some cases, we even have people donating the next day.”

Fein has seen a lot of Hashgachah pratis on his chat, including the time that Mitzvah Opportunity was raising funds for a rosh kollel who had just married off two children. Mitzvah Opportunity has a policy of giving 15,000 NIS for weddings, which meant that it would raise 30,000 NIS for this particular request.

“I raised the 30,000 shekels, and when I contacted the friend who brought me the case, he was in shock,” recalls Fein. “He told me that the father had had to raise money for his kollel, and he had managed to raise 30,000 NIS, which meant that the amount of money he had raised for other people was exactly the same amount I had raised for him. Little things like that feel like Hashem is sending me messages that we’re doing the right thing.”

Still, even as Fein is raising funds through Mitzvah Opportunity, he is adamant that he's not a fundraiser.

"I've never asked anyone for money, and I never asked anyone to join the group," explains Fein. "I present mitzvah opportunities, and if people want to take advantage of those opportunities, that is wonderful."

The fact that those opportunities are available to everyone, no matter how large or small their bank accounts may be, is a major part of the popularity of opportunity chats, where people are thrilled to be able to be part of something larger than themselves, ultimately benefitting someone in need.

"It's amazing how everything adds up, and how people who can't give big can still see their donation making a difference," observes Marcos. "It's anonymous. There's zero pressure. People give because they want to, and I think that's the biggest beauty of it all."

MORE FROM SANDY ELLER



SEP 23, 2026
Always My Charlotte



JUL 1, 2026
Still Standing, Still Praying