For the most part, my daily routines at Kadima remain the same. I arrive at 9 a.m. and my smiling co-workers greet me. The first thing I do is look through my email. Usually, I am very prompt with responding to emails; however, other donors and sponsors are not and it can be quite frustrating when I have to personally deliver unclaimed raffle prizes from our golf outing to bidders, make phone calls and research revenues for speakers and movie showings. After that, I will look through the Jewish News or notes that my boss left me, and I will also update our donor database.

When my boss arrives I check what my duties for the day will be. Oftentimes these duties are a mix of dull (but necessary) work and more engaging work. One of my less interesting tasks this past week was folding 400 envelopes for Kadima’s “Non-Event Event,” labeling them, sealing them, stamping them and sending them out. I think I now understand what the word “intern” means, and why people have them. Folding envelopes is menial work but worth the reward of being able to interact with the clients in the activities center.

The activities center is a place where clients of Kadima come to participate in activities in the community and to socialize with their peers. Many of them volunteer for a few hours every Tuesday at Everyone’s Garden, Forgotten Harvest or a local animal shelter. We want to give clients every opportunity possible to interact with other members of the community and to feel like contributing members of society. To this end, we invite some of the clients to cook in the kitchen; others make arts and crafts or help grow fresh produce in the garden outside. Going downstairs is my favorite part of the day because many of the clients are very talkative and open about their diagnosis so I get a secondhand look at what their lives are like and how their lives have changed since coming to Kadima. Most days-weather permitting-we walk two blocks and talk about our schedules and plans for the week(end). Kadima is what you make of it: every client will have a different experience depending on her diagnosis and person centered plan. There are some clients I only see once a week—for example, because they are coming in for a weekly therapy appointment—and others I have the pleasure of seeing every day.

After my time downstairs, I return to my cubicle and tackle the paperwork that my boss has ever so kindly left on my desk.

For the most part, this is my normal routine, however, sometimes I have the opportunity to attend meetings that discuss (1) Kadima’s goals, (2) college outreach and how we can connect to different campus groups, and (3) Kadima’s involvement with partner organizations like the Autism Alliance. I enjoy attending meetings because there are a lot of passionate people with great ideas—and the money to execute them. In addition to these meetings, I have visited the Easter Seal’s Dreams Unlimited Clubhouse, attended our Golf Classic, taught a group of high schoolers about mental illness at a MYLE event and even visited the state capitol for a tour.

My schedule Monday through Thursday usually consists of the activities I have mentioned, but my Friday schedules are the most eventful (aside from the days that we take fieldtrips with the clients). We visit two or three of the 14 JOIN locations to learn about them and the services that they offer the community. All of them are Jewish organizations, but most of them are non-sectarian like Kadima.

Visiting other organizations has helped me to understand the goals that I set
for this internship. I wanted to learn more about how clients and people in the community become aware of and learn about Kadima and other organizations like it. While visiting the other non-profits, I have learned that a lot of people actually do not know where to go when they need help. Often times a person will have a crisis and they will be referred to a place like Kadima. Even though Kadima serves everybody and many of its clients are not Jewish, it is largely only the people in the Jewish community who are aware of Kadima. We are working to help spread awareness of the services we offer so that people can get the help that they need.

I also wanted to know how clients can afford Kadima’s service, and I think I’ve found the answer. I talked to Charlotte Sandy, one of the therapists who travels to the houses to see clients. She stated, “Many clients at Kadima pay for their residential needs through social security (Social Security Disability Insurance/Medicare). Some clients pay through private pay, and some also have Medicaid and Food Stamps. It will not be in the immediate future, but we are looking to expand to accept BlueCross BlueShield as well.” Depending on the service a client needs, the homes could be affordable to live in.

A related question is: how do clients pay for the things they want and need in a group home? Most, if not all, of the clients have a bridge card or some other kind of food assistance. One of the issues that clients frequently run into is the limitation of the bridge card because they cannot buy any toiletries or paper products on the card. These restrictions have made it difficult for them to obtain the things that they need, and through my internship my eyes have been opened to the flaws in our social welfare system. While it is not fair to expect a food assistance program to pay for non-food items, it is still an issue that the clients face. Kadima works with Jewish Vocational Services to provide clients with job skill training programs. The hope is that, with these skills, clients will be employed in the community, and the money they make from working will pay for their other necessities.

Now that I know what issues are clearly not being addressed, I can help advocate for those who need it. A few weeks ago we had Representative Jeremy Moss visit Kadima and the clients expressed these concerns to him. I can continue to contact his office and encourage clients to write him letters expressing their concerns. As a JOIN intern, we visited an organization called Yad Ezra—a food bank that provides monthly food and toiletry rations to Jewish people who qualify—and we signed letters asking our state representatives to continue to fund their food service program. Yad Ezra is yet another resource available to Kadima’s clients that are Jewish.

Before this internship I did not realize how many people are impacted by changes in the social welfare system and why it is important to advocate for them. I did not know about places like Yad Ezra and the services they could provide—and I am sure there are other places like it that could help Kadima’s clients. I can volunteer at places like Yad Ezra while I am a home; while I am at school I can volunteer at local food banks. Through this work, I can continue to learn more about the social welfare system and how to improve it (something I can also do, in part, through my coursework). That said, I know I have only scratched the surface of these issues and still have more to learn.
Another, more tangible, accomplishment was making sure our Golf Classic ran smoothly and that my supervisor stayed sane. Even though I sat and watched our prize-winning “hole-in-one” (if someone got a hole in one on this specific hole, they would win a Rolex watch) for five and a half hours, it was interesting to be a part of the process of putting on a fundraising event. I definitely underestimated how much work is involved, but it was worth raising over $100,000 for such a great organization like Kadima. Kadima might be small, but the impact it has on the community is large. In Hebrew, “Kadima” means "move forward"-and that’s exactly what we do.

In my last two weeks I hope to further my knowledge of Kadima by seeing one of the group homes that clients reside in. Also, my supervisor is teaching me how to use Constant Contact-a marketing tool used for sending out e-blasts to groups of subscribers. Because my time with Kadima is limited, I know my supervisor does not want to give me a project that I cannot finish. I am not complaining though, because the skills I am learning now are going to be helpful in any professional setting. As an added bonus, next week we are (hopefully) seeing the movie Minions with the clients. I am definitely looking forward to that!