

Strengthening Our Community **TOGETHER**

2023-2024 Annual Campaign

Jewish Family and Child Service continues to enhance the strength and resilience of our community members. **We have been doing this for the past 155 years.**

Over the past year, the demand for our programs and services has significantly increased due to factors including: the long-term effects of the pandemic on mental health, increased food insecurity, and the current lack of affordable housing. Our staff are witnessing this firsthand. For example, our housing social workers are supporting more people at risk of homelessness after years of having a home.

With donor support, we are able to meet so many of these needs and fulfill our mission to increase safety and security, improve mental health and wellness, and reduce the effects of poverty.

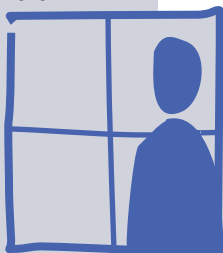
We can effectively address the often overlapping poverty and mental health related needs in our community through our multi-service and holistic approach to service delivery. Each story in this year's Annual Campaign highlights JF&CS' innovative programming designed to address these needs — whether offering produce baskets, access to housing, hospice care or mental health supports.

With your support, we are **Strengthening Our Community Together.**

*Names, photos and certain identifying features of our clients have been changed in all three stories in order to protect their anonymity.



98% of JF&CS clients who receive ongoing and long-term support through our Poverty Reduction Program **live alone.**



FOR RENT



38% of clients who received housing support in 2022 are over the age of 60.

JF&CS currently has **25 staff** members who speak other languages in addition to English, such as Hebrew and Russian.



Karina Receives Holistic Support as She Battles Terminal Illness

Karina and her family immigrated to Canada in search of a new and more hopeful life. Karina was fortunate that she quickly found employment, but her husband Nikolay had to attend college to update his occupational skills. With Karina's job being the family's sole source of income, they struggled to make ends meet. In addition to their financial troubles, Karina received an unexpected diagnosis of a neurodegenerative disease, exacerbating their already stressful situation.

Sadly, Karina's health deteriorated quickly, and she could no longer maintain her job. This caused a dramatic and abrupt decrease in the family's income, making it incredibly hard for Karina and Nikolay to afford their everyday needs. Karina's healthcare expenses skyrocketed, and suddenly the family found themselves at risk of eviction. That was when one of the members of Karina's healthcare team suggested that the family reach out to JF&CS for support.

At first, JF&CS provided Karina and Nikolay with financial aid to help cover the cost of assistive equipment such as specialized breathing masks, mobility aids and

safety equipment. As Karina's health struggles continued to worsen, JF&CS also helped the family pay for their rent, emergency groceries, seasonally appropriate clothing, and utilities. This was reassuring to Karina and Nikolay as they had become dependent on electricity to power Karina's life-sustaining equipment.

JF&CS was able to offer the family services and counselling in their language of origin which was comforting to Karina and Nikolay. Liana, their social worker from JF&CS' Jewish Hospice Program, provided emotional support, helped advocate for them and coordinated in-home care. "We learned about healthcare," says Nikolay, "what to expect and how to get the benefits we needed for Karina. Liana helped us set realistic plans for care." Liana also connected the family with a

hospice volunteer through Circle of Care to provide respite for Nikolay and the children.

Unfortunately, Karina succumbed to her illness, leaving Nikolay and their children alone to process their grief. Nikolay relied on Liana's guidance to learn how to parent through a loss this great, while also supporting his children through this challenging time. Liana also helped Nikolay apply for government assistance programs to supplement his income until he could find work.

"I received employment assistance and a computer to help me complete my studies. Programs like this and the grief and bereavement groups have been a big help," Nikolay shares.



The grief and bereavement group meetings were helpful, supportive, and interesting. I learned new aspects about grieving and received validation that my grieving is normal and healthy. Having completed the program, I am more confident and optimistic that, in time, I will move forward with my life.

– Participant in the Widow/Widower Under Age 68 Bereavement Group



Between 2021 and 2022, requests for financial assistance from individuals and families experiencing terminal illness **increased by 58%.**



For almost 50 years, the JDD has provided services to youth and their families between the ages of 11 and 17 (grades 6-11). Youth receive ongoing support for their experiences of psychological, behavioural and/or academic challenges. For many students, challenges extend beyond the school day, facing issues such as family stress and inadequate housing, clothing or mental health support.

Gabriel and His Family Receive Extensive Support at The Jerome D. Diamond Adolescent Centre

Gabriel's family contacted JF&CS to help address his growing mental health struggles. A decrease in the family's income, along with the stress of the pandemic, led to increased tension for all family members, including their teenage son, Gabriel.

Due to the increased financial and emotional burdens on the other family members, Gabriel's mental health struggles were missed. He was having trouble staying focused in school, and his academics and emotional well-being were suffering. His family was referred to the Jerome D. Diamond Adolescent Centre (JDD).

Gabriel's situation is not unique. There has been a steady rise in youth mental health struggles in recent years, creating a considerable increase in demand for support from JF&CS. The JDD offers an alternate classroom setting where students receive Toronto District School Board (TDSB) accredited schooling, along with mental health supports from JF&CS workers.

Mental health struggles make it difficult for students to maintain academic success. **Over 70% of JF&CS clients in our Poverty**

Reduction Program have mental health challenges, and nearly a third do not have adequate access to mental health care.

With the help of Sarah, a JF&CS social worker at the JDD, Gabriel's family received holistic mental health, academic and poverty reduction support. This included ongoing counselling and family therapy, providing the family with seasonally-appropriate clothes and coats, and a laptop computer for Gabriel to complete his school work.

Sarah recognizes that poverty is not just a financial issue but a multifaceted problem that requires a comprehensive solution. She shares that financial hardships can place "added stress on the parents who are then not able to actively engage in necessary deeper mental health work that their children may need to make positive change at home." Combining poverty reduction strategies helps families "to be more fully present in the mental health work because when they don't have their basic needs met, they can't do the rest," Sarah adds.

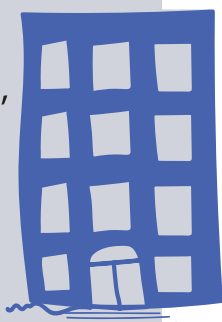
Students who come to school without lunch are provided healthy snacks from a regularly-stocked food

cupboard. Thanks to the generosity of donors, student development can extend beyond the classroom. The JDD offers students the opportunity to participate in impactful educational experiences within the community, such as field trips, chess and yoga. The overarching objective is to eliminate barriers to education, provide relief to families, and alleviate mental health challenges.

"We are fortunate to have access to donor-funded resources that enable us to level the playing field for our clients," says Judah, a youth worker supporting students transitioning back into the mainstream school system. He adds that the JDD is "well equipped to offer comprehensive assistance to our clients in their journey towards improved mental health."

Gabriel is now back in a community high school and looking forward to graduating. **Gabriel and his family are one of 683 families who accessed youth and family counselling supports in 2022. 131 of those clients also received support through our Financial Advocacy, Empowerment, and Problem-solving Services (FEPS).**

JF&CS provided clients with over **\$180,000** of housing support in 2022, a **17.5% increase** from the previous year.



The cost of food in the City of Toronto has increased by **11.5%**. Yet, Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program rates have not risen to match this change, resulting in people struggling to afford food.



In 2022, JF&CS provided **284 clients** with over **\$73,000** worth of clothing.



Rivka Avoids Homelessness and Food Insecurity

Rivka never thought that a head of lettuce would have such significance until she was facing homelessness in Toronto. As a recent immigrant, Rivka's excitement to establish herself in Canada was soon challenged by her limited knowledge of English and her lack of social connections.

As a result, she became increasingly isolated and unable to secure employment or affordable housing. Every day, Rivka had to find new ways to ensure she had something to eat, factoring in Toronto's ever-rising cost of food and rent.

As time went on, Rivka's situation became more tenuous, with no funds left to pay her rent. For weeks, she had been stretching her money as best she could, opting to eat less and choosing the lowest-cost food options with minimal nutritional value.

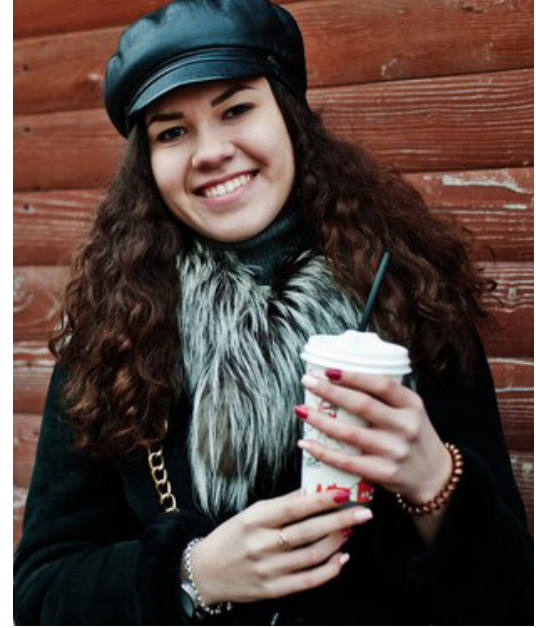
A neighbour reached out, noticing Rivka's change in demeanour, and suggested she contact JF&CS for support. After being connected to a JF&CS social worker who spoke her

language of origin, Rivka discovered that she met the criteria for special priority housing. Rivka was able to secure immediate housing, giving her the ability to focus on her mental, physical and financial issues.

It was during this time that Shirley, Rivka's social worker, suggested she begin receiving bi-weekly produce boxes delivered to her home by JF&CS volunteers.

"The produce boxes are remarkable," says Rivka, "I am so grateful that I now have access to fresh produce that I couldn't afford before. I love lettuce and never bought it because of its high price, but now I get it every other week in the produce box, and it has been an immense help in improving my diet." Rivka also receives recipes, along with the produce, that outline ways for her to prepare healthy meals.

"These produce boxes really are incredible and have a huge impact on our clients," says Shirley. "My clients report a significant improvement in their overall health, well-being and quality of life due



to the produce box delivery," she adds. "It helps them save money on groceries and eat better and also lets them know that JF&CS cares about their well-being. It makes them feel closer to the community and helps them feel less alone."

Since receiving this assistance, Rivka is also working with Shirley to register for the joint JF&CS and Shoresh community garden program, Dawne's Garden.

"Food programs really are amazing. I am grateful for the fresh produce that I truly need for my basic diet. But most importantly, it's helping me survive a very difficult time," shares Rivka.

The Impact of Your Gift

\$1,000

Supports a family with grocery cards and gift cards for seasonally-appropriate clothes

\$360

Supplies a family with meaningful holiday meals for Rosh Hashanah and Passover

\$100

Provides Survivors with a gift card to access over-the-counter medicine, incontinence supplies and other items not covered by OHIP

\$5,000

Assists a family with first and last month's rent and moving expenses

\$500

Covers counselling sessions for youth and young adults for up to a year

\$200

Distributes four months of fresh produce deliveries for an individual



With the current housing and shelter crisis, JF&CS housing social workers have shifted from finding affordable housing to preventing and intervening in homelessness. As a result, 50% of the clients who were housed by the agency in 2022 were either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The total number of requests to help pay for food **increased by 30%** in 2022.

