

# Responding to the unpredictable.



At this time last year, the world was in the throws of the unknown; with each day bringing more questions than answers. With the onset of COVID-19, Jewish Family and Child Service clients faced many unforeseen challenges such as lockdowns, increased isolation, domestic violence, job loss and financial instability. Today, over a year in to the pandemic, we are still facing more loss, loneliness and hardship than we could have ever predicted.

In the following stories, you will read about those in our community who have been confronted with enormous challenges and have persevered. Prior to, and during the pandemic, the JF&CS clients and staff who are featured in this year's annual campaign act as beacons of hope for all, demonstrating how it is possible to overcome adversity, making us better, kinder, and more compassionate human beings.

**All of these stories share a common theme; responding to the unpredictable.** They highlight the ways that JF&CS has adapted and responded to unpredictability in the face of adversity and how our community of generous donors has made pivoting our services possible. These stories bring volume to those whose voices are often muted and showcase that everyone has an important story to tell. More than that, these stories remind us that even when life takes turns we could never imagine, JF&CS is always there to help.

## IN THIS EDITION

- How one woman rebuilt her life after surviving abuse.
- Meeting the unique challenges faced by Survivors living below the poverty line.
- Losing a loved one during the pandemic.

# “I feel like a rich woman with not a lot of money in my pocket today.”

## HOW ONE WOMAN REBUILT HER LIFE AFTER SURVIVING ABUSE.

Ten years ago, Shawna\* would have never believed that she would have the strength and confidence to thrive as a recently unemployed single mother of two, living through a global pandemic. However, the thought of what she would do after separating from her husband and leaving her abusive marriage had also never crossed her mind; until it had.

Over a decade ago, Shawna found herself alone and in desperate need of support. She was living in a two-room apartment with her mother and two children and felt like nobody else understood what she was going through. It was only when she sat across from a legal aid worker and began to tell her story that they directed her to JF&CS, an agency that Shawna knew little about, let alone thought to approach for help.

Despite her initial feelings of embarrassment, Shawna agreed to call JF&CS and spoke with a member of the Intake team. Immediately, she was referred to the Woman Abuse Program and from that moment on Shawna describes her experience as being one of learning and healing.

Her beginning with JF&CS was rocky, Shawna admits, however every time she left a counselling session with her social worker or participated in group therapy sessions with other abuse survivors, Shawna felt herself growing stronger.

Shawna was able to access many of the services JF&CS had to offer, attending numerous programs for woman abuse survivors as well as the *Effective Parenting* workshop. With the aid of donor-funded financial support, Shawna’s older daughter was able to attend summer camp. JF&CS made sure the family received holiday meals and Chanukah gifts, helping them stay connected to their Jewish roots.

Just as Shawna was beginning to settle into her new reality, her mother grew sick with cancer and ultimately succumbed to her illness. This was, of course, a devastating loss for Shawna and her children. Not only did Shawna lose her mother, she lost her entire support system. Suddenly, Shawna found herself unable to sustain her current housing situation and felt an extreme sense of hopelessness.

Just a short time later, something incredible happened.

Shawna received a call from her worker at JF&CS to tell her that she was eligible to be part of a housing program for survivors of abuse. Shawna remembers feeling her mother’s presence in that moment and thinking, “maybe my mom is watching over me.”

“Moving into my very own house was a wonderful new chapter,” Shawna recalled. “It’s my home with my rules and I can do what I want here. I feel free.”

Then in March 2020, the pandemic hit; another unexpected hurdle in Shawna’s life. In spite of losing her job, Shawna says she is stronger now than ever before thanks to the support she receives from JF&CS. She describes her bi-weekly counselling as, “invaluable, providing me with direction, support, and validation.” The *Mind-Body Connection for Women* workshop teaches her to practice self-care at a time when external resources are not an option. Last summer she benefitted from JF&CS’ alternative camp program, receiving a bike for her younger daughter and then in the fall she received back-to-school gift cards to help buy much needed school supplies for her children. She feels extremely grateful for the COVID Relief Fund money she receives for food, which alleviates some of her financial burdens.

Shawna has used the time away from work to make her house a home and to reconnect with her children. She has become an expert at positive thinking saying, “I feel like a rich woman with not a lot of money in my pocket today. I am strong and independent. I’m happy.”

The COVID Relief Fund for Woman Abuse clients is 100% donor-funded.

In the last year, many women were confined to their homes with limited opportunities to seek help. This resulted in a minor decrease in new calls to our Intake department but overall there were more active cases.

The average length of each initial call to Intake increased by

52%

348 active cases

Shorter, more frequent calls were made by workers to each client.

amount of calls

↑ 28%

length of each call

↓ 8%

During COVID-19, the number of financial requisitions have almost doubled, with the average amount

increasing by 18% to \$682



“I am strong and independent. I’m happy.”

# “They should not need to ask or beg for money or help. We should be able to offer it to them.”

## MEETING THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES FACED BY SURVIVORS LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE.

This year commemorates 76 years since the liberation of Auschwitz and also marks the beginning of year two of the pandemic. For many Survivors, the pandemic has triggered memories of the trauma suffered during the Holocaust and they are now experiencing increased anxiety. This is especially so for the 25% of Holocaust survivors in our community who live below the poverty line.

Shirley\*, a Holocaust survivor, lives alone in her small Toronto apartment with no family support, financial or otherwise. Living cheque to cheque she could not afford the medical supplies needed to live a dignified and meaningful life, including incontinent supplies and orthopaedic supports.

Shirley reached out to JF&CS for help two years ago and became a client of the

Holocaust Survivor Emergency Assistance Program (HSEAP). JF&CS helped her with the cost of her medical needs and referred her to other essential community resources. With this help, Shirley overcame some of her physical challenges and began to enjoy activities such as JF&CS' Café Europa, a socialization group for Holocaust survivors, run in partnership with the Bernard Betel Centre.

When the pandemic hit, and Shirley once again became confined to her lonely, one bedroom apartment, the horrors of the Holocaust began to resurface. Memories of being alone and hungry soon became a devastating reality for Shirley. Her needs became more urgent and her JF&CS social worker became her lifeline. Her worker called regularly, understanding the importance of building a sense of trust that is often difficult to establish with Survivors. Warm meals and groceries were delivered to her home and Shirley's social worker arranged for the in-home medical care she so desperately needed.

Shirley never would have predicted that she would again be faced with these mounting challenges in her lifetime, and is grateful for the support she is receiving from JF&CS. However, Shirley is just one of the 1,000+ Survivors calling us for help. Even before the pandemic, there was a significant year over year increase in the number of clients requesting support through the HSEAP program.

Pinchas Gutter, Holocaust survivor and Chair of the Committee for Holocaust Survivors in Need, notes “when the committee started almost 25 years ago only 200 Survivors were accessing JF&CS' services, whereas today, over 1,000 Survivors are requesting

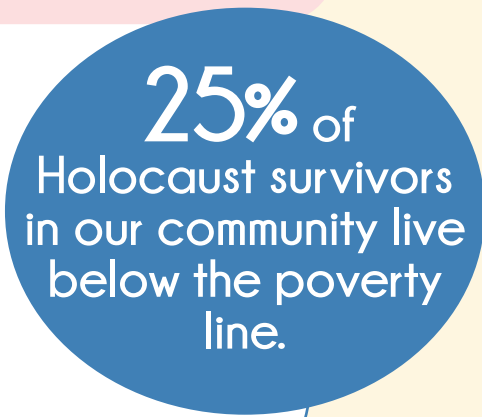
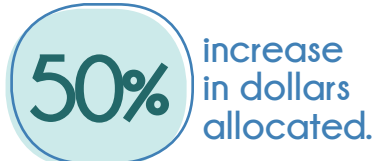
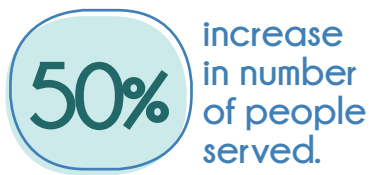
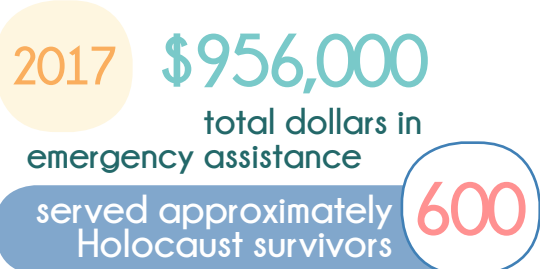
In the last year, workers reached out to clients of our Holocaust services **25% more** than they did before the pandemic.

support.” Pinchas has seen firsthand the needs of Survivors change substantially throughout the years, and especially during the pandemic. To address these urgent and ever growing client needs, increased support from our funders and donors is critical. “They [Survivors] should not need to ask or beg for money or help. We should be able to offer it to them. It is our duty to enable human beings, especially Holocaust survivors, to live their final days with absolute dignity,” says Pinchas, and we stand behind this statement wholeheartedly.

By virtue of their circumstances, Holocaust survivors know what it is like to encounter unpredictable and unimaginable situations. At JF&CS we are proud that we have been able to continuously enhance and adapt our services to support Survivors like Shirley, and we remain steadfastly determined to support them throughout the pandemic and beyond.



“...today, over 1,000 Survivors are requesting support.”



# “They never made me feel like I had to move forward with my grief, into a place I wasn’t ready for.”

## LOSING A LOVED ONE DURING THE PANDEMIC.

How do you prioritize tragedy during a global pandemic? How can we ensure that there is enough support available in a time when so many people are overwhelmed by the unpredictability of their own situation? These are some of the questions that we are grappling with today.

As a result of the pandemic, most of JF&CS’ services became restricted to online delivery, including Jewish hospice and bereavement services. With the loss of in-person interactions, it became more difficult to provide clients with grief counselling and emotional support. Our staff recognized that the immense grief suffered when losing a loved one was further compounded as families were alone and feeling isolated during the mourning period.

The Jewish Hospice Program, together with Family Life Education, worked quickly to develop a new bereavement support group, *Losing a Loved One During COVID-19*. A safe place was created for those to mourn the loss of a loved one and gather with others sharing a similar experience. Now in its fifth cycle, the group is co-led by Rabbi Chemel, a JF&CS Chaplain with a Masters of Social Work who explains, “it was clear from the first session that the feelings associated with losing a loved one during COVID-19 are not the same as those that might have been felt prior to the pandemic. So many people come to us feeling extreme guilt, whether it be about their family member being cared for in a long term care home where they caught the virus, not being able to visit them in the hospital to say goodbye

due to pandemic related restrictions, or not wanting to overburden their friends with their grief in a time when everyone is struggling.”

A JF&CS client and bereavement group participant, Lisa\*, echoed the feelings of Rabbi Chemel when she told the story of her mother’s passing. Lisa’s husband had fallen ill in the months before the pandemic and she was no longer able to care for her elderly mother as well as her husband. Lisa made the difficult decision to place her mother in a care-home as a temporary measure, assuring her that as soon as her husband was on the mend she would bring her mother home. However, a few weeks later the care-home and the entire country went into lockdown, Lisa’s mother’s health rapidly deteriorated and Lisa never saw her again.

When she learned about the *Losing a Loved One During COVID-19* bereavement group she was grateful to find others who shared in her experience. “I truly don’t know how I would have made it through without the group,” she said. “They were able to validate my feelings in a warm and caring way and never made me feel like I had to move forward with my grief, into a place I wasn’t ready for.”

Though grief is a feeling experienced by many, the disruption to mourning traditions during COVID-19

has intensified the feelings of isolation and loneliness. People find themselves grieving alone, unable to attend funerals or gather at the Shiva house. No hugging, no holding hands; comfort is now being offered through phone calls and Zoom, which cannot replace the warmth of someone beside you.

JF&CS staff continue to be there virtually for individuals and families who are grieving alone. We are grateful to be able to offer support to those struggling through an abundance of loss; the loss of their loved one, the loss of their chance to say goodbye, and the loss of a community they once knew.



The average length of each counselling call to intake increased by **56%**

New counselling cases during the pandemic have increased by **10%**

Active, ongoing counselling cases have increased from **879 to 977** and workers are now contacting each client more frequently, by **41.5%**

Each call is approximately 27.5 minutes.



When David’s\* wife lost her battle with cancer, he turned to JF&CS’ *Widow/Widower Under Age 68* group. When the group moved online due to the pandemic, David was hesitant to join. After pushing himself to face his fears and share his story with the Zoom group, David wrote to tell us that he was so grateful for everything the group taught him about dealing with life’s unpredictable losses, adapting to changing circumstances, and the importance of shared experiences.

## THE IMPACT OF YOUR GIFT\*

**\$5,000** helps two women leaving abusive homes with first and last month’s rent and moving expenses.

**\$1,000** assists a Holocaust survivor with their basic needs and medical expenses.

**\$500** supports isolated clients with grocery cards and access to technology.

**\$360** subsidizes the cost of bereavement groups for clients.

**\$180** provides a family with summer activities for children.

**\$72** covers two months of fresh produce deliveries to a client living in poverty.

\*These are examples of how your donation may be used.