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## There Was a Seat for Everyone This Passover



This Passover, something special happened at JF&CS.

For the first time, staff from across all branches and departments gathered at the Bernard Betel Centre for a shared Seder filled with reflection, connection, and joy. Organized by Eden Filonov, Manager of Jewish Life & Culture, Sascha Gurwitz, Manager of Family

Services, and our Staff Chaplain, the Seder brought the story of Passover to life in a deeply meaningful way.

Around the table, over a delicious kosher meal and music, colleagues became a community. Together, they moved through the rituals and retelling, reflecting on freedom, resilience, and the work they do every day to support others through moments of hardship.

This gathering was made possible through the generosity of JF&CS's **Dora Wilensky Memorial Fund**. It was especially meaningful to honour Dora's legacy alongside CEO Talyah Breslin, the first woman to lead JF&CS since Dora in the 1940s. This is a powerful reminder of the strength and leadership that continues to shape the agency.

However, what began in the room that day carried outward in powerful ways.

Across the community, JF&CS helped bring the Seder to those who might otherwise go without. Led by JF&CS's Chaplaincy department, model Seders were held at the Jerome D. Diamond Adolescent Centre (JDD), CAMH: The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and Sunnybrook Hospital. A Sunnybrook partner shared, "*At a time when our community faces profound challenges, hosting a model Seder for a handful of veterans and patients may not seem to be a high priority.*" And yet, those moments of connection mattered deeply.

We also saw incredible success with this year's JF&CS Passover fundraising campaign. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, the funds raised from Mitzvah Gifts were used to send 21 clients to a community seder, deliver 215 seder meals to families, and provide 340 families with financial assistance to purchase Passover food, totalling \$35,450. In addition, over 800 clients received food boxes from NCJWC, Toronto Section, and another 27 from UJA Federation. Thank you for your support.

The Passover Seder teaches us that memory can spark empathy and lead to action. Thanks to the generosity of our community, that lesson came to life in countless ways. To learn more about our Jewish programming, please [click here](#).

### Become a Monthly Mitzvah Maker!

Monthly Mitzvah Makers is JF&CS's monthly giving program, providing steady, year-round support to individuals and families in our community.

[Click here](#) to learn more or to join.

### Thank You to Our Food Pantry Sponsors

**March:** Krol & Krol

**April:** TI Foods

### Did You Know?

Jewish Family and Child Service is a multi-service agency that strengthens and supports individuals, children and families, serving the Jewish community and all others who seek support.

Our Pillars of Impact include **Safety and Security, Poverty Reduction, and Mental Health and Wellness**.

## From Table to Tzedakah: Isla's Bat Mitzvah

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When planning her Bat Mitzvah, Isla's family wanted the celebration to feel meaningful not just for one evening, but to have a lasting impact beyond it.

The milestone was marked with a Friday night service followed by a Shabbat dinner. The intimate gathering centred on tradition, family, and community. Isla's mother also held a strong commitment to celebrating without excess and to ensuring that what was used would

continue to bring value long after the event ended.

Instead of disposable décor, the tables were thoughtfully decorated with Shabbat décor, including candlesticks and Kiddush cups. These pieces were chosen not only for their beauty, but for their purpose. Behind these items is a story of connection that stretches across continents. The family is currently hosting Shahar, an Israeli teen participating in the UJA Shinshinim program. During his winter break, Shahar and his mother helped source the items in Israel. Then, in an act of care and commitment, Shahar carefully packed and carried them back to Canada in his luggage.

The gesture transformed simple table settings into something far more meaningful, a reflection of shared culture, generosity, and community spirit. After the celebration, the family donated the beautiful candlesticks and Kiddush cups to JF&CS.

*"We're so happy they have found a home with JF&CS clients," shared Isla's mother. "We hope that they will grace the Shabbat tables of other Jewish families in the city and they will find joy in them."*

What began as one family's effort to reduce waste has become an ongoing gift, spreading warmth, tradition, and joy from one home to another. Your family can get involved in the community, just like Isla's. [Click here](#) to learn more about ways to support JF&CS.

## JF&CS Awarded Full Accreditation by the Canadian Centre for Accreditation

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Thanks to the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and community partners, JF&CS has been awarded full accreditation by the Canadian Centre for Accreditation (CCA) for a four-year term, from March 28, 2026 to March 27, 2030.

This achievement reflects the strength of our organization and our shared commitment to delivering high-quality, client-centred care across Toronto and York Region. The agency met 100% of mandatory standards and achieved 89% of leading practice standards, an outstanding result that reflects excellence in governance, service delivery, and organizational performance.

Each year, JF&CS supports nearly 28,000 individuals through more than 30 programs grounded in our Pillars of Impact: Mental Health & Wellness, Poverty Reduction, and Safety & Security. Our integrated, wrap-around approach ensures that individuals and families can access coordinated, culturally responsive care that meets them where they are.

The accreditation review highlighted many strengths, including our strong alignment between mission, strategy and daily work; a deep commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion; and a

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strong culture of quality, accountability, and continuous learning. Reviewers also recognized our use of data to inform decisions; our integrated, wrap-around services model that allows individuals and families to access support across multiple programs; and the high quality of our counselling and youth mental health services.

As we look ahead, we remain focused on growth and improvement, enhancing how we communicate, strengthening how we measure impact, and deepening engagement with the communities we serve.

This accreditation is more than a milestone; it is a reflection of the trust placed in us by our community. With strong leadership, dedicated staff and volunteers, and the continued support of our funders, donors and partners, JF&CS is well-positioned to grow our impact in the years ahead. We remain deeply committed to delivering compassionate, high-quality care, responding to emerging community needs, and using resources responsibly and transparently.

Together, we are ensuring that individuals and families across our community continue to receive the support they need, today and into the future. Read more about our 2025-2030 Strategic Plan by [clicking here](#).

## The Life and Legacy of Bernard (Bernie) Aaron

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For Bernie Aaron, caring for others wasn't a single act; it was a lifelong commitment rooted in compassion, leadership, and community.

In the early 1970s, Bernie and his wife, Joan, opened their home to children in need, operating a group home in partnership with JF&CS. For weeks or months at a time, up to six children found safety, structure, and warmth under their roof. Joan's professional expertise as

a social worker, combined with Bernie's steady organization and thoughtful programming, created an environment so impactful it became the subject of a published Master's thesis.

Bernie's dedication to JF&CS extended well beyond those early years. He served as President of the Board of Directors from 1978 to 1980 and, together with Joan, remained a committed donor and Legacy Society member. Guided by a shared belief in building a stronger, more responsive community, their philanthropy reflected a deep commitment to the agency's longevity.

One of Bernie's most meaningful recent contributions was helping bring "Bernie's Backyard" to life at the JDD. It is a vibrant outdoor space where students can gather, play, and grow. Named in part for Bernie, the space reflects both his generosity and his deep personal connection to the school and its mission.

Born in Regina, Saskatchewan, Bernie lived a full and dynamic life as a business leader, devoted husband of 63 years, father, grandfather, and friend. He was known for his wisdom, humour, and "out-of-the-box" spirit. Bernie leaves behind a legacy of care that will continue to shape lives for generations.

He will be deeply missed.

## Our JF&CS Community Lovingly Remembers Ferne Kappy

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Ferne Kappy's life was defined by compassion, deep relationships, and a steady inner strength. When she passed away this month, her loss was felt far beyond her family, touching a community she shaped with warmth and dedication.

Ferne devoted 25 years to Jewish Family and Child Service. She began her work as a Family Life Educator and group facilitator, and later took on the additional role of a Transitional Support Worker for JF&CS's Woman Abuse Program.

Through this work, Ferne supported women and children experiencing violence, contributing to a broad spectrum of services, including the Here to Help program for children and their mothers, as well as advocacy, outreach, education, and connecting families with essential resources such as referrals and priority housing support.

As a Family Life Educator, group facilitator, and Transitional Housing and Support Worker, Ferne offered more than guidance. She offered dignity, safety, and hope. She went above and beyond in each of her roles, supporting countless women and families through some of their most difficult moments.

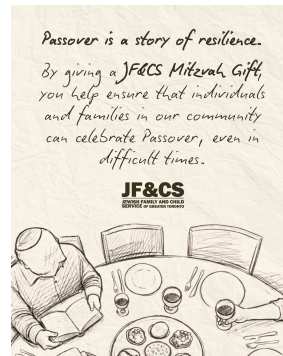
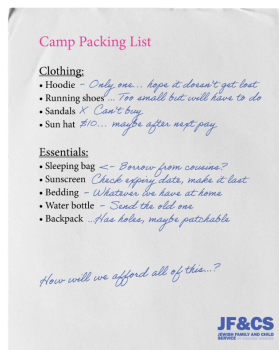
Colleagues remember her as genuine, loyal, and selfless, as well as a friend as much as a teammate. Her absence is deeply felt, yet her legacy endures in every life she touched.

Ferne delighted in the everyday moments including baking, dressing in her signature style, or heading out for a brisk walk. At home, her world revolved around family, and she always brought warmth and energy to those around her.

Ferne's story is one of love in action, and her memory will remain a blessing for generations.

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