

# Impact Report

2020

# JF&CS

JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILD SERVICE OF GREATER TORONTO

Jerome D. Diamond Adolescent Centre

As of the middle of March, the JDD had to close its physical building due to COVID-19. This left students and their families anxious about their education and, perhaps more importantly, access to their mental health supports. Concerns around social isolation, deteriorating mental health and family strains became more paramount. The JDD quickly transitioned and the outcomes have been inspiring.

## Children's Mental Health Organization (CMHO) Recognition

This year, Marc Shimwell and Lee Thompson, Child & Youth Workers at the JDD middle school, were recognized as CMHO's Care Heroes for going above and beyond.

Within a week after returning from March break, these two CYWs admirably and creatively responded to the new realities caused by the pandemic. They created a wonderful program, mostly virtually, that supported the students, their families and their colleagues in a way that brought a sense of calm, cohesion and continuity to all of those involved with the program- this included both the academic and therapeutic support they provided.

Almost immediately, a Google platform was put in place whereby the teachers could continue to deliver 'live' lessons for 2-3 hours every morning, with the CYW in the class supporting the students with their academics, engagement, and behaviour. After class the CYW met one-on-one with each student to support and assess their needs. The CYW also connected with the parents daily to report any concerns and to praise the amazing efforts of the students. Each afternoon the CYWs met via Zoom with the students as a group (without teachers) for a therapeutic session. These sessions provided a wonderful social connection for the students and were intended to support engagement and interest in activities at a time when there were few outlets for fun in their lives.

The students remained on task academically and were given opportunities to access emotional and social support. Attendance was high and the feedback from the students and their parents had been overwhelmingly positive. Congratulations on being recognized for your commitment and outstanding work at the JDD.



Lee Thompson



Marc Shimwell

## Virtual Classes through Zoom

- Community circle every morning to start the day
- Weekly chess instruction taught by a chess master who teaches life and social skills through the game
- Online cooking
- Communications workshops and class debates
- Book club
- Zoom activities with a focus on wellness
- Playing online educational games as a group



## Students at the JDD 2019-2020

27 students enrolled

11 middle school students

16 high school students

### Highlights

8 Grade 8 students graduated in June

3 students are moving from the JDD middle school to the JDD high school

13 students are transitioning out of the JDD to their new school

# Congratulations to our JDD graduates

**This year, due to the pandemic, the JDD graduation ceremony was held virtually through Zoom. The ceremony was absolutely beautiful with lots of heartfelt tributes to students who persevered and overcame abundant challenges to reach this year's finish line. After the ceremony, the following parent shared her child's experiences at the JDD this year and about the graduation ceremony:**

"I want to thank you all for all of the support you've given L; not just this year, but over the last three years. I also want to thank you for all the support you've given my husband and me as well - You've been patient with all of our frustrations and insecurities and annoyances. Your patience, kindness and wealth of knowledge has been instrumental in helping our child (and family) get to where she is right now. I don't know what the fall holds - she is feeling optimistic and we are hoping that what she has learned has seeped in and will be something she can draw on in difficult times."

## Another parent shared the following:

"I wanted to thank you for all the effort you all put into the zoom session on Friday. I thought it was fantastic with such a good blend of different presentations and speeches. It was informative and inspirational.

You have all provided such a safe space for our child this past year. It is such a pity how we ended the year but it does not take away from the strides we achieved during the year. I truly cannot rave more about JDD and cannot thank you all enough!!"

## The Stan Lerner and Gordon S. Wolfe Awards

At this year's graduation, the Stan Lerner and Gordon S. Wolfe Awards were divided amongst four students – 2 middle school and 2 high school students. All four students prior to COVID-19 were doing well and were fully engaged in the JDD treatment program. Once classes were moved online, they continued to be engaged, attended and participated in the alternative programming offered and continued to seek out support when needed. They have persevered and have proven that they are resilient and can continue to be successful despite the challenges they are facing.

## Student Story



Jacob\*, age 11, was referred to the JDD by a social worker due to his increased anxiety, oppositional behaviour at home, and sudden onset of school refusal in early 2019. Jacob, who typically received good grades and was usually engaged academically, explained that he stopped attending school because he thought his teachers were "scary". When Jacob started at the JDD, his anxiety was so intense that he was unable to get himself into the building. The CYW's and parents worked effortlessly, to help Jacob. They came up with various 'exposures' to help Jacob feel comfortable. For example, first Jacob was helped to simply get out of the car. Once he was able to do that, he refused to get off of the grass outside of JDD. After lots of support Jacob was able to build up his courage and proceed onto the porch of JDD. Eventually, Jacob and his CYW were able to sit in the waiting room, and after one month, Jacob made his way into the classroom.

Jacob's time in the classroom slowly increased until he was in class full time. Throughout this process, Jacob's teachers gradually got to know him and continued to assure him that they weren't as "scary" as he may have initially feared. Jacob's parents, with the support of their social worker, learned how to set new boundaries and expectations with Jacob around school

attendance and his behaviour. The social worker encouraged Jacob to communicate his fears and reservations about school and his teachers, as well as anything else that was interfering with Jacob's functioning. Of course it wasn't completely without incident after that; on occasion, Jacob would regress.

In time, though, Jacob settled in and in a typical teenage way became more interested in socializing with other JDD students. With continued support from his CYW and social worker, along with one-to-one meetings with his teachers, Jacob was able to turn things around and became both socially competent and academically engaged. He gained trust in his teachers, started performing well academically, and attended school every day.

After March break, the JDD closed indefinitely due to COVID-19. The staff and Jacob's parents feared that this would set Jacob back and that he would decide not to participate in the online platform that the teachers and JDD staff were using to provide instruction and counselling. To everyone's amazement, Jacob continued to be engaged in school and therapy. His attendance remained consistent; he participated in classes and continued to complete his online work and assignments. Due to the amazing progress he made this year, Jacob, his family, and the staff at JDD all agreed that he's ready to go back to mainstream school. Jacob will be starting at his home school in September 2020 with the support of JDD's Transition Worker ensuring he will succeed.

**“When attending the JDD, the teachers, social workers and child & youth workers routinely exemplified a deep commitment to our child’s learning and well-being.**

We couldn’t have been more pleased with the quality of teaching, immense support for our family and the countless acts of kindness. Although we recognized and appreciated their dedication, never could we have imagined how they would come through for us during such a trying time as the current pandemic. From simple phone calls, e-mails, video chats and check-ins, staff has been there to support our child and whole family in the best way possible.

The teachers have found creative ways to teach the course material. Over the past several weeks, our child has engaged in distance learning with eagerness and enthusiasm. She has learned a great deal and has applied her knowledge as is evident through the assignments she has submitted. Moreover, the teachers have reported that there is an increase in her overall output. The CYW’s have also sought innovative ways to connect her with other students and staff.

It is my pleasure to express my gratitude for the exceptional work done by the staff at the JDD. Despite being in the midst of a pandemic, they have gone above and beyond the call of duty to maintain their high standards. Thank you to all.”

- Parent of a JDD Student



**Meet Gilian Horenfeldt-Pomer**  
*Transition Worker at the JDD*

Gilian plays a pivotal role at the JDD as the Transition Worker. Once students leave the JDD, they return to high school to graduate. To ensure that students are transitioning well to their new schools, Gilian is there to offer support, encouragement and any resources they may need to help them succeed.

Gilian’s relationship with students begins as soon as they start classes at the JDD. Gilian is there to help CYWs by working one-on-one with students to support them with their work and begin to build a relationship with the students and their families. By getting to know the students well, Gilian is able to work with the TDSB to find the right school for them, whether it be their community school or a more specialized program.

Once a school has been chosen, Gilian meets with the staff (VP, Guidance, Spec Ed) to communicate students’ strengths and needs so they can succeed in their new schools. In September, Gilian reaches out to the

students regularly ensuring that they are adjusting and getting the resources and help they need. As the school year progresses, Gilian’s meetings with former JDD students decrease however if needed, Gilian is there for them.

*“I would love to thank Gilian for helping me with my transition. She actually went with me to some of the schools on my list and I’m going to continue using her as a resource next year and I can’t wait to stay in touch.” - Graduating student.*

For more information on how you can help please [\*\*click here.\*\*](#)

