

JF&CS

JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILD
SERVICE OF GREATER TORONTO

Repairing Our Community TOGETHER

2024 Annual Campaign

We are living in an *Olam Hafukh* – an upside-down world. Many of the societal certainties we took for granted are collapsing, with very few constants remaining. Despite this, JF&CS remains steadfast in our belief in humanity and the fundamental Jewish value of *Tikun Olam* – repairing the world.

For over 155 years, JF&CS has been the **safety net** for our community, a place people can turn to when they are unable to make it on their own. We provide **dignity** to those who have endured unimaginable hardships, ensuring that everyone feels included and embraced by our community.

Now more than ever, as the Jewish community seeks safety and reassurance, JF&CS provides a welcoming and supportive space. Since October 7th antisemitism has been on

the rise and the mounting impacts of trauma have changed the way we, as Jews and as Canadians, live our lives.

Mental health struggles are increasing. More community members are unable to find affordable housing or put food on their table. We offer services that **heal** those who are suffering from physical and emotional pain, poverty and isolation – without judgment.

Together, through acts of *Tikun Olam*, we can right the *Olam Hafukh*. For every call we receive, we have an opportunity to improve the lives of individuals and families. We cannot do this alone and remain eternally grateful for a community that stands behind us and the incredibly important work we do. The client journeys you will read in this year's Annual Campaign reflect our guiding value of *Tikun Olam*.



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



Providing Dignity

Isaiah*, age 45, had not seen his extended family in over 10 years following his mother's death. An injury had left him with limited mobility and a modest income through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). He was living on his own, feeling isolated, only leaving his home for his daily walk. At a recent appointment, Isaiah's doctor noticed his skin pallor and his inability to make eye contact. He suspected Isaiah was suffering from malnutrition and depression. Familiar with JF&CS' services, the doctor recommended that Isaiah reach out for counselling and financial assistance.

Simon, a member of the JF&CS counselling team for 46 years, visited Isaiah in his home bringing a box of groceries, including comfort foods such as coffee and cookies. Simon observed Isaiah's environment, noting the bare cupboards. Over coffee, Simon encouraged Isaiah to open up and share his hopes and goals. He then asked if Isaiah might like to walk to the nearby shul or the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre (MNJCC). Isaiah seemed hesitant, asking, "But why would they want to see me?"

Acknowledging Isaiah's insecurities, Simon began introducing him to the community, connecting him with a Rabbi at the nearby shul and programs at the MNJCC. Isaiah also began working with Jordan, a social worker on JF&CS' Poverty Reduction team at the downtown office. Jordan facilitated financial assistance to pay overdue utility bills and provided access to regular produce delivery and JF&CS' food pantry.

Throughout the process, Isaiah received reassurance about his social anxieties. With support from Simon and Jordan, they came up with simple, feasible goals for Isaiah to work towards, including seeking part-time employment and volunteer opportunities.

Today, Isaiah's overall health and well-being have significantly improved. With a new part-time job that allows him to be less reliant on ODSP, Isaiah has regained his sense of **dignity** and has found the energy to participate in social activities. What makes him most proud these days is being able to complete small tasks for his elderly neighbours.

821 people were supported by JF&CS in accessing food last year.

THE IMPACT OF YOUR GIFT

\$100

Provides families with a gift card to purchase essentials for their children.

\$200

Distributes four months of fresh produce deliveries for an individual.

\$360

Provides an individual with holiday meals and groceries surrounding Jewish holidays.

Offering Ways to Heal

Tammy loved being a grandmother to 7-year-old Caleb, who has autism. With her daughter Rebecca raising Caleb alone, Tammy provided invaluable support after school. However, tragedy struck when Rebecca passed away unexpectedly, leaving Tammy to become Caleb's primary caregiver.

Coping with her own grief, Tammy felt alone and worried she was doing a poor job caring for Caleb, who had stopped speaking after his mother's death. Tammy was unsure how to parent a child with special needs, especially with her limited financial resources. Rebecca had regularly participated in JF&CS' support group which welcomes parents from across the GTA who have a child with special needs. When Sabrina, JF&CS' SupportAbility social worker became aware of the recent loss, she reached out to Tammy.

Words flooded from Tammy, who shared her sense of loss and feelings of being overwhelmed. Tammy worried Caleb's silence was proof of her incapability to parent him. Sabrina reassured Tammy that this was a normal reaction for a child. She encouraged Tammy to talk to Caleb about his mother, share her feelings about the loss, and show Caleb his mother's picture. Sabrina also recommended using communication cards, which include simple graphics to engage with Caleb in a meaningful way.

Sabrina invited Tammy to join the support group for caregivers of children with special needs. There, Tammy built a network of friends

who understood her situation and shared strategies to meet the needs of their children.

In addition to providing one-on-one coaching to help build her caretaking skills, Sabrina helped Tammy apply for community programs and services, including government financial assistance, special at-home services, extra-curricular activities, and more. Together, they were able to navigate public and private funding available to support her and Caleb's everyday life. Tammy also received help from Catalina, a JF&CS Financial Empowerment & Problem Solving worker who assisted with filing taxes and switching the government benefits over to Tammy. Tammy felt as if an enormous burden had been lifted from her shoulders.

With these additional resources, Tammy was able to arrange for a Professional Support Worker to

care for her grandson. This allowed her the opportunity to attend a 12-week bereavement group at JF&CS. Through sharing her experience and feelings with the group, Tammy felt as though she was finally given the time and space to process the loss of her daughter and begin to **heal**. She found others with similar stories and knew she was not alone.

Tammy recently shared with Sabrina that she feels more energetic, partly due to her grandson who 'keeps her young,' but also thanks to the support she received from JF&CS and her new community of friends.

"I'm glad that there is a safe space for parents to listen and share – not just hard stories but also some success stories, even if they are small and might look like insignificant. It really empowers me and makes me hopeful."

–SupportAbility parent group participant

In 2023, more families with children needed financial assistance than ever before.

\$500

Provides counselling sessions for a child, youth, or family for up to a year.

\$1,000

Provides families funding for groceries and winter coats.

\$5,000

Assists a family with first and last month's rent.



We Are the Safety Net

Ari and Eleanor were looking forward to celebrating their upcoming 20th wedding anniversary with their three boys and long-time family friends. Sadly, in the span of a single week, their lives were turned upside down. Ari was unexpectedly fired from his new job and ineligible for unemployment benefits. Eleanor, who had suffered from migraines, was now diagnosed with brain cancer. The family's life as they knew it began to unravel.

Ari's efforts to gain new employment were initially fruitless due to the extensive layoffs in his sector and the immense stress he felt related to his wife's diagnosis. Their boys struggled in school and withdrew from social activities. Refusing to accept charity, Ari initially planned to cash out a portion of his retirement

savings to cover the family's short-term needs so everyone could focus on Eleanor's care. It was Eleanor who called JF&CS, worried about her boys.

From that first phone call, Ari and Eleanor were overwhelmed by the wrap-around care and support they received.

The JF&CS team connected Ari with Jewish Vocational Services (JVS), who helped him find a new job within weeks. At the same time, Leanne, a social worker on JF&CS' Jewish Hospice team, met with Eleanor and Ari to make a plan for her care, including arranging for a Nurse Practitioner and Palliative Care Physician. Leanne organized help from volunteer organizations such as Meals on Wheels to assist with food. Although Eleanor and Ari struggled to be optimistic, they realized that the Jewish community was there to support them during their most challenging time.

Possibly of greatest relief to Eleanor was the assistance provided to her sons. Leanne helped them understand their mother's condition

and connected them with a child-life specialist to support the boys during their mother's surgery. Thanks to JF&CS donor dollars, the boys were able to attend a Jewish day camp when Eleanor commenced chemotherapy. Here they could escape their worries while also providing Eleanor with respite. At camp, they formed new friendships and deeper connections to their Jewish heritage. At night they spent time with their mom, making her smile as they told her about their day.

As the new school year began, Eleanor's condition stabilized, and the family entered a new routine at home. Now able to refocus some of her attention back on her boys, she encouraged them to get involved in a local Jewish youth group where they are forging a lifelong connection to their Jewish culture and community. She and Ari credit JF&CS with creating a welcoming space for their family and offering a **safety net** to fall back on when they needed support.

Over 1600 people called JF&CS for help last year.

