

JF&CS

JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILD
SERVICE OF GREATER TORONTO

REDUCING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

IN THIS EDITION

- SUPPORTING OUR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS: "I FEEL SAFE NOW"
- HELPING ADULTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES BUILD CONNECTIONS: SOCIALLY ISOLATED, BUT STILL TOGETHER
- OFFERING A PATHWAY THROUGH GRIEF: "THEY LEAVE UNDERSTANDING THEY'RE NOT ALONE"
- FINDING CREATIVE WAYS TO ENSURE NO ONE GOES HUNGRY: THE COMFORT OF TRADITION DURING PASSOVER



"YOU FORGET A LITTLE OF WHAT YOU WENT THROUGH"

CAFÉ EUROPA BRINGS TOGETHER SURVIVORS FOR FOOD, MUSIC AND JOY

Sylvia is 84 and had a hip replaced not too long ago. Still, she says, she is always moving, always running around. My kids can't keep up with me," she says, laughing. And then she pauses. "My husband died last June. **I think maybe I'm running from myself."**

That shift, from laughter to grief and back again in a moment, is a familiar one to Sylvia — and to her many peers who are also Holocaust survivors. Born in Hungary in 1936, she was sheltered for a time in an apartment designated by Raul Wallenberg as Swedish territory. Miraculously, Sylvia and her family survived the Budapest ghetto and then Bergen-Belsen where she and her husband Zev met as children. They stayed in Hungary after the war and started a family before finally fleeing the country when the Hungarian Revolution began in 1956.

It's good, says Sylvia, to be able to meet and spend time with other people who have gone through similar things. That's why she attends Café Europa. Launched in 2002 as a joint partnership between JF&CS and the Bernard Betel Centre, **the Café is a social and cultural get-together for Holocaust survivors.**

Every month, Café Europa provides between 250 and 300 Survivors with a hot kosher lunch and live music performances in a range of languages, including English, Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, French, Spanish and Italian.

Café Europa provides an opportunity for otherwise isolated seniors to enjoy the



company of others and get out into the community. **It's also a good way for them to access other services.**

Sylvia knows the value of keeping busy. "I need to go out," she says. "I get very depressed when I'm on my own, so I push myself."

"I FEEL SAFE NOW."

In March, COVID-19 forced the world into isolation and Café Europa was shut down. Sylvia and other Survivors, very familiar with what it means to be hungry, alone and frightened for their lives, — found themselves anxious and panicked, desperately worried that they would run out of food and too fearful of getting sick to go out to get it. Without latex gloves or face masks, Survivors don't even want to risk getting into their apartment buildings' elevators. **"COVID-19 brings back all the old memories and fears," Sylvia says.**

Sylvia's experience, says Lisa Kronenberg, Manager of Holocaust Survivor Services at JF&CS, is shared by hundreds of survivors across Toronto. "The pandemic has been enormously triggering for this aging and already vulnerable population."

Jewish Family and Child Service has long served the needs of Holocaust survivors, providing psychosocial, financial and medical support to approximately 700 Survivors each year in the GTA. With COVID-19, says Lisa, **the agency has shifted into full-on crisis response.** "Before, we were working to get someone

a wheelchair or a hearing aid. Now, we are making sure they have basic, life-sustaining needs: food in the pantry, hand sanitizer, medications, incontinence supplies."

JF&CS, says Lisa, has been inundated with calls from existing and new clients, many of whom are deeply upset and triggered by isolation and the fear of hunger and illness. They need emotional support as much as anything else. **"Our social workers are spending 150% more time talking to each client than they were before the pandemic," she says.** "Survivors are scared. How do we work with a population that has survived a very significant historical trauma and who are now vulnerable seniors in the midst of a pandemic? There are no clinical models for this."

JF&CS has been working overtime to support Survivors, entering into partnerships to enhance services for each client. For example, the agency has collaborated with the Bernard Betel Centre to provide hot, kosher meals to seniors and Survivors, with funding from

COVID-19 IS RE-TRAUMATIZING HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS. JF&CS IS WORKING TIRELESSLY TO ENSURE THAT THESE ALREADY VULNERABLE SENIORS HAVE THE FINANCIAL, MEDICAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT THEY NEED TO LIVE PEACEFUL AND DIGNIFIED LIVES DURING THE PANDEMIC.

United Way. Now JF&CS is beginning to focus on the huge number of medical and dental services that Survivors simply couldn't access during the initial phase of the lockdown. And the amount of unmet need is overwhelming.

Still, person by person, meal by meal, conversation by conversation, Jewish Family and Child Service is working with Survivors to ensure that we meet all their needs. Lisa recalls one conversation between a particularly vulnerable client and his caseworker: after weeks of phone calls and crisis assistance, the elderly man told her, **"I feel safe now. I know that I can call you. I know that you and the community are there for me."**



"IT HELPS ME TO BE HAPPY."

84%

of Café Europa participants have made new friendships through the program.

94%

spend time outside of Café Europa with the friends they met there, and say that Café Europa helps them learn about services in the community.

98%

say they feel respected as Holocaust survivors.

100%

like the opportunity to spend time with other Holocaust survivors, look forward to attending, say that Café Europa motivates them to leave home to attend, and makes them feel more connected to the Jewish community.*

"IT GIVES ME A CHANCE TO BE AROUND OTHER PEOPLE."

JF&CS' BAGEL CLUB BRINGS TOGETHER ADULTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES BUILD SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Every Wednesday, no matter the weather, Jeff makes his way from his North York apartment to Jewish Family and Child Service at the Bathurst and Sheppard branch. He is going to The Bagel Club. And sometimes, that's the highlight of his week.

The Bagel Club is a place where adults living with mental health challenges can come together for a weekly lunch, conversation and support. It's a long-running JF&CS program, dating back at least three decades, says Mike Snizetsky, Family Support Worker, who has run The Bagel Club for the past 13 years. The program's longevity, he says, lies in "camaraderie, community and consistency. **It's a place where clients feel a sense of belonging, where they feel welcomed, safe and comfortable.** They know the structure of the program and what to expect, and they know they're not going to be judged."

Jeff started coming to The Bagel Club about four years ago, after he'd experienced a devastating string of losses. Jeff's JF&CS worker suggested that he join The Bagel Club, "because I had almost zero interactions with other people and that was really missing from my life." The Bagel Club, says Jeff, "is essential. Without it, I wouldn't see or talk to anybody. It's vital for me to have at least one day a week to look forward to where I can socialize with other people who have similar issues."



For Jeff and many of his peers at The Bagel Club, the free program is a lifeline to society. "It gives me a chance to be around other people. It's part of our human nature to be social with each other," he explains. "It keeps us on a more even keel. Being alone all the time, it's like being in solitary confinement. It will damage you. But when you have other people to share with, laugh with, cry with, that's crucial. The Bagel Club is critical for that — without it, I don't know what would become of me."

SOCIALLY ISOLATED, BUT STILL TOGETHER

**IN PANDEMIC TIMES
JF&CS'S BAGEL CLUB IS FINDING CREATIVE WAYS TO SUPPORT ADULTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES.**

When COVID-19 hit, The Bagel Club faced a nearly existential crisis: how could it best support an already socially isolated population through pandemic-imposed physical distancing and office closures?

"We've had to come up with creative ideas," says Marina Machado, a social worker at JF&CS who co-facilitates The Bagel Club.

Throughout the pandemic, Marina and her co-facilitator, Mike, have checked in regularly with the group's members by phone. Many Bagel Club members live on limited incomes, at or below the poverty line, Marina points out. So, as the pandemic pushed grocery prices higher and made shopping more difficult, she and Mike found ways to help ensure members had access to food. Everyone in the Club received a Passover food box, as part of

a partnership between JF&CS, United Jewish Appeal and Chabad Midtown. JF&CS also provided five weeks' worth of Meals on Wheels to club members over age 65, as well as boxes of much-needed household supplies.

The club has continued to offer income tax clinics at a distance, supporting members in filing out tax returns in order to ensure they received all the benefits and supports they're entitled to and as soon as possible.

Marina also spent a week driving all over the GTA to personally deliver (at a social distance) handwritten notes and grocery gift cards to club members. **The in-person visits were also a chance to deliver new winter parkas to members, made possible by a donation to the club.** "Everyone was really happy to see me, even in my mask and gloves," she says. "They were so excited. Several said I was the first person they had spoken to face-to-face in many weeks. One gentleman even shaved off his three-month beard for the occasion."

Right now, The Bagel Club is planning a second round of visits to drop off more supplies, including face masks. "Not all of our members can afford to buy masks," says Marina, "and they need them to ride the TTC or go into stores, so that's an important product to supply."

Marina doesn't know when The Bagel Club will resume its face-to-face meetings. She's exploring possibilities for online chats or outdoor meetings. For now, she and Mike and the larger JF&CS community will continue to find creative ways to keep Bagel Club members supported at a distance. "We've been running for 30 years — we're not going away anytime soon."

What Mike and Marina have found remarkable is how the group's camaraderie has continued, even while face-to-face meetings are on hiatus. "Whenever I call a Bagel Club member to check in, they also check in on me: 'How are you? How is your family doing? Are you staying healthy?' It's quite touching, really. It speaks to the unique relationship we have with each other — **we're an extended family and Bagel Club members realize we're all going through this together.**"

"THEY LEAVE UNDERSTANDING THEY'RE NOT ALONE."

JF&CS BEREAVEMENT GROUPS OFFER A PATHWAY THROUGH GRIEF

When her husband George died, Sharon was overcome by waves of intense emotion.

"I was sad, lonely, depressed — all of it. I was angry at him for dying, for leaving me. I was the first of all my friends to be widowed and I couldn't talk to them about it. I'd look around at all of them travelling together, going out to dinner with their spouses, and I was alone. I'd lost my best friend, my lover, my travel companion, my dinner companion, the person I could tell everything to, make jokes with, and cry with. **I'd like to say that I cried every day, but at the beginning, really, I cried every hour.**"

Sharon, 68, found herself talking to — and sometimes yelling at — a photograph of her husband. "I'd ask him, 'Why did you leave me? We didn't even have 20 years together!'"

The intensity of her grief and anger, not to mention her one-sided conversations with her late husband, had Sharon worried. "Was it strange or wrong for me to be so angry at him? To be talking to him?"

She looked around for a safe space to talk about her struggles but couldn't find what she was looking for. So when she saw an ad for a JF&CS Bereavement Group, she signed up immediately. She ended up in a group with four other women who had also lost spouses.

"And I told them about my worries, about talking to my dead husband's photograph. And one of the ladies looked at me and said, 'Sharon, I do the exact same thing.'"

GRIEVING ALONE, BUT TOGETHER.

THE PANDEMIC IS TESTING OUR CAPACITY TO OBSERVE END-OF-LIFE RITUALS THAT ARE SO CRUCIAL IN JUDAISM. WITH A BEREAVEMENT GROUP FOR COVID-19 LOSSES, JF&CS IS HELPING MOURNERS COPE.



COVID-19 protocols have significantly disrupted life as we know it — including end-of-life rituals and traditions so key to saying goodbye to a loved one.

With social distancing, people may not be able to visit relatives in hospitals. We worry that our loved ones will die alone. Chaplains can't necessarily visit and guide the dying and their families through end-of-life rituals. We may not be able to attend funerals or participate in rituals like Shivas. Unveilings have been delayed due to cemetery closures. For the observant, Jewish prayers like the Mourners' Kaddish cannot be said without a minyan, or group of 10 adults — who may not be able to gather for fear of spreading the virus.

All these restrictions and shifts can amplify our sense of loss at a time when the world is already experiencing a collective trauma, says Rabbi Ronald Weiss, Director of Chaplaincy Services at Jewish Family and Child Service. "People don't have a sense of closure." In normal times, he continues, social rituals like Shivas "keep mourners engaged at a time when many would be tempted to shut down. **Today, comfort and healing are far more elusive.**"

For all these reasons, JF&CS introduced an online bereavement group for people who have lost loved ones during COVID-19. Over six sessions, participants have been able to explore their grief and bereavement in a safe and supportive environment and learn about strategies and coping skills to help normalize what they're feeling and move forward.

The group also provides space for participants to talk about the unique

aspects of mourning during a global pandemic, says Shawna Sidney, Coordinator of Family Life Education at the agency. "People are reporting feelings like, 'This is unfair or I've been robbed,'" she says. "They're angry — How come the funeral home staff can be there and I can't? Participants can explore those feelings with people who have been through similar experiences. Especially during social isolation, people need to know that what they're going through is normal."

The online group is just one of the ways in which Jewish Family and Child Service has adapted its services during the pandemic. The agency has long offered in-person bereavement groups, bringing together small groups of adults who have recently lost partners, spouses or parents. Trained facilitators lead group members through a series of evidence-based readings, exercises, and discussions that help them gain a better understanding of themselves and how to cope with grief, loneliness, changing relationships and new beginnings. The groups are also a chance for agency staff to identify people who are suffering from more complicated grief and might need additional services.

Like so many agencies, JF&CS is experiencing huge increases in requests for grief and bereavement support during the pandemic. "Judaism," says Rabbi Weiss, "is adaptable to changing circumstances. As gut-wrenching as it is to socially isolate during grieving", he says, "it's crucial to remember that in doing so we are performing a tremendous kindness to others during a time of great distress. **We are helping to protect their health and prevent the spread of this virus.** What a great tribute to a loved one."

JF&CS SERVICE DELIVERY TRENDS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19: SNAPSHOT FROM MARCH 16, 2019 - MAY 16, 2020

INCREASING SAFETY & SECURITY

Child Welfare

Child Welfare Workers are still supporting their clients in-person where necessary.



New Child Welfare cases have increased by **85%** between April and May.

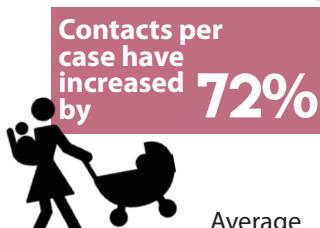
213
March 16, 2019
to
April 15, 2019

103
March 16, 2020
to
April 15, 2020

191
April 16, 2020
to
May 15, 2020

Woman Abuse Program

Workers are contacting their clients more often.



15 times per case
March 16, 2019
to
April 27, 2019

14 times per case
January 1, 2020
to
March 15, 2020

26 times per case
March 16, 2020
to
April 27, 2020

\$350

\$573

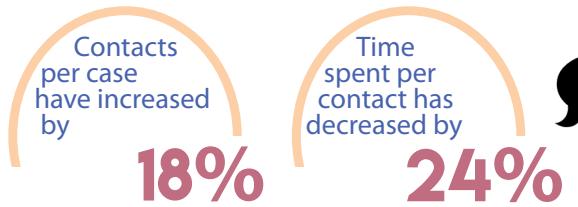
\$691

Average financial requisition amounts have almost doubled since this time last year.

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

Counselling

Since last year, workers have had more frequent and shorter contacts with clients.



New counselling cases have more than doubled in the last month.

30
March 16, 2019
to
April 15, 2019

19
March 16, 2020
to
April 15, 2020

47
April 16, 2020
to
May 15, 2020

Since January 2020, there has been a 14% increase in the amount of financial assistance provided to each client suffering from mental health issues.

monthly average per client

\$243
March 16, 2019
to
April 27, 2019

\$219
January 1, 2020
to
March 15, 2020

\$251
March 16, 2020
to
April 27, 2020

Emerging Trends

- Unsafe domestic situations
- Evictions and loss of housing
- Mental health and addictions issues among children, youth, and adults
- COVID-19 related counselling
- Unemployment amongst youth
- Professionals unable to run their practices
- Debt
- Zoom fatigue



REDUCING THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY

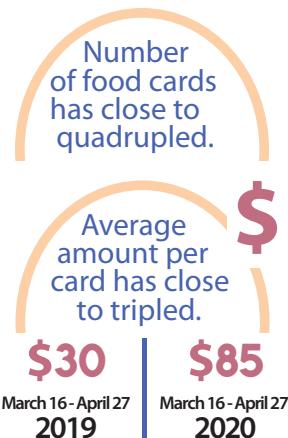
Financial Assistance

Intake calls for financial assistance have increased by

79%

from this time last year.

Over ten times the amount has been spent on Food Cards¹ this year, compared to this time last year (\$2,550 vs \$240).



Homelessness Prevention Program

The number of HPP calls has decreased by **85%** from this time last year.



Most evictions are currently on hold as a result of the virus. As social distancing measures are lifted, it is expected that the number of calls will increase substantially, especially when considering the increase in Financial Assistance calls.

Holocaust Emergency Support

The average length of time Holocaust Survivors and Agency staff are spending on the phone together has increased by **136%** from this time last year.

This suggests Holocaust Survivors are facing increasingly complex needs.



Number of Holocaust Survivor Emergency food requisitions increased from **0 to 200**

¹ 'Food Cards' are not being physically delivered or handed to clients. They have been replaced by payments to clients to purchase or order food, either by cheque or direct deposit to their bank accounts.

"I ALWAYS COME AWAY FEELING BETTER"

COMMUNITY SEDERS ARE A LIFELINE FOR JF&CS CLIENTS SEEKING THE COMFORT OF KINSHIP AND TRADITION DURING PASSOVER

Growing up, Seders were a highlight in Sam's large extended family – the potato kugel and matzo ball soup, the songs and prayers, the kids searching for the *Afikoman*. However, as he grew older, Sam drifted away from the tradition of the family Seder. He was in the music business, and work often kept him on the road during Passover.

Lately, however, Sam has begun to reconnect to his Jewish roots. And one of the most important parts of that reconnection is attending the Community Passover Seder held each year at the Miles Nadal JCC at Bloor and Spadina.

About five years ago, his doctor referred him to Jewish Family and Child Service, where he connected with social worker, Simon Kalkstein. Through Simon, Sam learned about the community Seder. Sponsored by JF&CS, the JCC, and Chabad of Midtown, **it's a Toronto tradition that goes back at least five decades.**

It's not necessarily an easy thing for Sam to make it to the Seder each year.

"I've been struggling with quite severe depression and anxiety," he explains. "It really knocked me off track for a while." In commenting on the Seders, Sam says, "I enjoy them tremendously. I've met wonderful people, from all walks of life, such as teachers, artists, lawyers, and people from a dozen different countries. The tastes, the smells and, of course, the singing is like walking back to my childhood. **It's a real feeling of belonging, of reconnecting.**"

The Seder brings together roughly 200 people who gather each year for a gourmet meal and to celebrate the Exodus from Egypt. **Many clients who attend the Seder live near or below the poverty line.** Many are on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) for mental health reasons, like depression, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder.



THIS YEAR THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS POSED A CHALLENGE TO THE AGENCY'S PASSOVER ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES.

In 2019, **130** low income/isolated clients attended Seders in the community thanks to the generosity of donors.

This year, community Seders were cancelled due to the city's restrictions on social gatherings.



In total, **\$29,000** was distributed to vulnerable members of our community.

JF&CS's commitment to its clients resulted in

372

households receiving a money supplement for Passover either through direct deposit or a cheque in the mail.

227

families received a Passover Food Box and/or Seder Box.

88%

of clients felt more connected to the Jewish community as a result of the support they received.

JF&CS has worked with a number of organizations to provide accessible Passover Seders to community members, including but not limited to: Baycrest, Bernard Betel Centre, Chabad of Downtown Toronto, Darchei Noam, JRCC Centre Street, Miles Nadal – Midtown Chabad, Oraynu Congregation, Temple Har Zion, Ve'ahavta Community Seder at Holy Blossom.

"ALL WHO ARE HUNGRY, COME AND EAT."

As Toronto went into social isolation, Jewish Family and Child Service began to hear from distraught clients.

JF&CS has always helped to ensure that community members have access to nutritious food. But **when the pandemic hit, many reliable sources of food disappeared overnight**, explains Noa, who manages Poverty Reduction at the agency.

"Food banks, Meals on Wheels, and soup kitchens all closed. Many of our clients suffer from severe health issues and couldn't risk leaving their homes to get groceries. Friends and family members were scared to bring food to them. Many didn't have access to the Internet or a credit card to buy food online. Others couldn't access kosher food or maintain special diets. **People were hungry, alone, and had nowhere to go.** The situation was dire — we had to move fast and think creatively to feed people directly, tailoring solutions for dozens of clients on a case-by-case basis."

And that's what JF&CS has done. Since March, Noa and her colleagues have built partnerships and found solutions to help

feed those left hungry by the pandemic. In addition to directly depositing funds into clients' bank accounts, they have taught clients how to use the Internet to buy food online and, in some cases, have even supplied computers or cell phones to clients so they can access services directly. When Meals on Wheels reopened, Noa and her colleagues quickly reconnected those in need to that service. And they've partnered with community agencies — such as UJA, National Council of Jewish Women and Chabad Midtown — to deliver Shabbat and holiday meals to clients.

"Our usual community Seders were cancelled," says Noa. "So we made sure that our clients had a Seder delivered to them, with everything — a seder plate, Haggadah, candles, grape juice — they needed to have a full celebration without leaving their homes. For those with access to the Internet, we even provided links to online Seders."

Currently, JF&CS is partnering with Chabad Midtown to deliver fresh-cooked Shabbat dinners, complete with challah, candles and grape juice, to about 50 people every Friday, all made possible through the generosity of donors. At Shavuot, clients received a dairy meal, complete with blintzes.

THE PANDEMIC LEFT UNPRECEDENTED NUMBERS OF JF&CS CLIENTS WITHOUT ACCESS TO FOOD. WE'VE BEEN FINDING CREATIVE WAYS TO ENSURE NO ONE GOES HUNGRY.

The responses, she says, are touching: "Some of our clients told us that they haven't had a fresh salad in years, because they can't afford to buy produce. Others struggle to cook for themselves and are just so happy to have a hot meal. Others have told us that they stretch out their food for two or three meals."

The agency, says Noa, has seen an influx of new clients, many of them single parents of young children, struggling to make ends meet in the face of layoffs and economic shut down. **The pandemic, she says, has made the vulnerable more vulnerable.** The agency, for example has had to create a waiting list for the agency's only housing officer. Social isolation and stress have exacerbated mental health issues like schizophrenia, depression and anxiety. "Sometimes, it's hard to deliver food to people, because they're paranoid about answering the door."

As the country braces for a potential second wave and the long-term economic impact of the COVID-19, Noa and her colleagues are **working hard to make sure that all who are hungry — for food and community — have access to both.**



"THE PASSOVER MEAL BOX FROM CHABAD WAS AWESOME! IT HAD A FULL PASSOVER TRAY, EGGS, HOMEMADE GEFILTE FISH, AND A LOT MORE. IT WAS GREAT GETTING IT AND IT REALLY MADE ME FEEL HAPPY. THANK YOU FOR MAKING IT HAPPEN."

- JF&CS CLIENT

Monthly Mitzvah Makers

Monthly Giving Program

YES! I want to support as a Monthly Mitzvah Maker.

Ways to give



By mail

Complete this form and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope



Online

Visit our website:

www.jfandcs.com/donate



Call us

416-638-7800
ext. 6999

Donation amount

- \$ 100
- \$ 72
- \$ 50
- \$ 36
- \$ 20
- \$ 10
- _____

Donation information

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

Postal Code: _____ Email: _____

Payment information

Cheque payable to: The Jewish Family and Child Foundation Credit Card: VISA MasterCard

Credit Card #: _____ Expiry Date: _____ / _____ CVC (3 digits on the back): _____

Name on Credit Card: _____ Signature: _____

Please email my receipt

CRA Charitable Registration 851300301 RR0001 | A receipt for income tax purposes will be issued in the name of the payer only.



THE IMPACT OF YOUR GIFT

\$5,000

provides food vouchers for 20 Holocaust survivors living in poverty.

\$1,000

provides families with technology and data plans which facilitate virtual learning and programming for children.

\$500

covers the cost of a laptop for an isolated senior.

\$360

provides a family living in poverty with 2 children's bikes and helmets.

\$180

provides an abused woman with the ability to purchase groceries for her children.

\$72

covers the cost of a Seder-in-a-Box or Shabbat Meal Box delivered to an isolated community member.

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



FOUNDA TION

Donation amount

- \$5,000
- \$1,000
- \$500
- \$360
- \$180
- \$72
- Other _____

Please email my receipt

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YES! I want to support with a one-time gift.

Ways to give



By mail

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Online

Visit our website: www.jfandcs.com/donate



Call us

416-638-7800 ext. 6999

Donation information

Payment information

Cheque payable to: The Jewish Family and Child Foundation

Credit Card: VISA MasterCard

Credit Card #: _____ Expiry Date: _____ / _____ CVC (3 digits on the back): _____

Name on Credit Card _____ Signature _____

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