

Jewish Family Services Newsletter

In Touch With the Community

Issue 14

January 2000

Poverty: Beyond Denial

by Mark Zarecki, Executive Director

The 1996 Canada Census data is out. The most recent analysis by Prof. Allan Moscovitch, Carleton School of Social Work, must be a shock to community leaders, who for years have set priorities for what was perceived as an affluent Jewish community in Ottawa. The actual numbers of Ottawa Jews who are low income is 12.5% (1,535 people). Those under the age of 18 who are poor make up 27% (415) of our Jewish children; more than one in four of them live in homes where parents cannot afford to offer their children - OUR children - a Jewish quality of life.

The numbers of Ottawa Jews living in poverty is actually much greater than the quoted census' Low Income Cut Off (LICO) indicates. As well, it is much more damaging to our Jewish community, in its affect on Jewish continuity. The cost of being Jewish and instilling a Jewish identity is much higher than the poverty levels for the broader community consider, as universally recognized by North American Jewish centres. Kosher food, synagogue membership, Jewish ritual observance in the home, and Jewish school attendance, all raise the minimum costs of living for Jews. This generally accepted measure would increase the numbers of people below the LICO poverty line to 14.9% (1800 people), parallel to the numbers in the general community.

Our community breaks the stereotypes of poverty. As examples: 30% of our poor have a university degree or higher level of education, and only 20% have disabilities that hinder their availability for work. First generation Jews in Ottawa make up 31% of those in poverty.

The profile of the Ottawa Jewish community and the general impressions of its affluent

members - are wrong. And yet, these impressions have been the guiding lights for the community's priority setting, spending and expectations of what Jewish consumers can afford to pay for affiliation. There is a need for a major shift in thinking and monetary spending, if we are going to address affiliation, alienation and, ultimately, the demographic decline of our community. Yes, new programs must be created, but so must a new openness to those who don't fit our paradigm and definition of "member of our community".

Jewish Family Services has been pointing this out for years...the census data now reflects this reality. Serious and immediate action must be taken to incorporate these people, who have been discouraged by a poor vision and even poorer priority setting. They have waited long enough on the margins.

We welcome the Vaad's new *Kehilla* initiative and look forward to creative change within our community, hoping that we don't have to wait for the next census to mourn for those who are excluded.

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Jewish Family Services 19th Annual General Meeting

December 7/99 marked the 19th Annual General Meeting of Jewish Family Services, with an inspirational keynote address by Professor James Torczyner, that held the 80+ attendees spellbound. Speaking from his experience with *Project Genesis*, which originated in Montreal and has now expanded throughout Israel, Jordan and Syria, Prof. Torczyner emphasized the mandatory inclusion of the marginalized in setting communal direction, and in meeting their own needs. This key ingredient of *Project Genesis* strengthens both the community and its individual members.

The Elaine Rabin Social Service Award was graciously accepted by Howard Osterer, on behalf of the 39th Ottawa Henry "Hank" Torontow Scouting Movement, the only remaining Jewish troop in Canada. Recognized for their outstanding efforts and accomplishments, the 39th Ottawa is most deserving of this award for commitment to community service.

The exceptional staff, Board and volunteers of the agency were also recognized for their dedication, effort and commitment, both to JFS and to the community.

While confirming our current success, this inspiring event also provided motivation and direction for future endeavours. Yasher Koach to all who contributed.

The following is a reprint of the D'var Torah given at the 19th Annual General Meeting:

The term D'var Torah literally translates to mean "words of Torah". Generally, a person giving a D'var Torah discusses themes or ideas from a recent or upcoming Torah portion, making it meaningful and relative both to the audience and to the issues of the day. In this case, I would like to stretch that definition just a little, and discuss instead the story of Chanukah, since we are currently in the midst of celebrating this festival of light.

In the eyes of our clients, Jewish Family Services has surely become a guiding light. Leading the fight on behalf of those we serve, our mission has become one of shifting the paradigm of how the members of our community think. In so very many ways, our agency has become the Maccabees for the new millennium, fighting a battle called **ADVOCACY**.

The holiday of Chanukah commemorates a revolution against forced conversion and assimilation, fought by few who won against overwhelming odds and over powerful oppressors. Today's revolution is fought on behalf of the isolated, the marginalized and the poor - a struggle against governments, leaders and individuals who would otherwise denounce their existence. We no longer fight with swords and shields; we must now rely on the power of anger & the strength of words. We, too, are having to exert the examples set by Matathias, Judah and the Maccabees, in being strong, brave and **insightful**.

The issues we face today are very different from those faced so long ago in Judea: we are not fighting for the right to celebrate Shabbos, keep Kosher, or pray in the Bais Hamikdash, as God commanded. We are, however, fighting for respect of the elderly, inclusion of the newcomer, and dignity for the poor among us...also as God commanded.

The Chanukah story tells of the fight against tyrants and oppressors named Greeks, Syrians, Hellenists. The generally omitted element of the story, which is the most troubling for me, is the fact that the majority of those that the Hasmonians were fighting against, were in fact other Jews. So too, is the sadness in our fight today, when the walls we bang our heads against are more often than not, walls which hold up mezzuzahs. Like the Jews of Judea preferring to frequent gymnasiums and amphitheatres over worshipping in the Temple, our community today is also losing Jews to modern pursuits. In the process, many are turning away from the very same Jewish values this agency is fighting to remember: *derech erez, gimilut chassadim*, and *tzedakah* - respect, kindness and righteousness.

An Annual General Meeting offers an opportunity to reflect on our past and set goals for our future. In the truest spirit and meaning of this holiday season, we **REDEDICATE** ourselves to fight the struggle of our clients. In doing so, we hope to ensure that the light we provide continues to glow far longer than the 8 days of Chanukah.

National Conference on Jewish Poverty

On November 6-7, 1999, more than 55 professionals, lay leaders and clients met in Winnipeg to discuss Jewish poverty in Canada, including 6 delegates and presenters from Ottawa. Representatives from across the country shared their trials and triumphs in addressing this growing and overwhelming issue of concern to every community.

JFSOC's own Allan Moscovitch, wearing his "hat" from the Carleton School of Social Work, presented statistics on Canadian poverty in general, as well as within Jewish parameters, outlining sources and measurement tools. Although none who work in the field were surprised at the stats presented, this keynote address set the tone for the day's workshops, panel discussion, and speakers to delve into the ramifications and solutions to those numbers of Jewish poor and the struggles they face.

Presentations by representatives from Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal Jewish Family Service agencies offered concrete and innovative direction in terms of successful initiatives in the areas of employment, advocacy and inclusion - the most common themes in working with the marginalized.

Other topics explored included the ramifications of poverty on family and Jewish continuity, the roles of synagogues and Federations, and engaging community in the fight against Jewish poverty.

This AJFCA-sponsored conference is the first one geared specifically to Canadian members, and was borne out of a need identified by delegates to the North American conference held in Florida last year. Organizers were over-joyed at the success of this first of (hopefully) annual meetings looking at common issues among Jewish communities throughout Canada.

I am hereby officially tendering my resignation as an adult.

I have decided I would like to accept the responsibilities of an 8 year old again. I want to go to McDonald's and think that it's a four star restaurant. I want to sail sticks across a fresh mud puddle and make ripples with rocks. I want to think M&Ms are better than money because you can eat them.

I want to lie under a big oak tree and run a lemonade stand with my friends on a hot summer's day. I want to return to a time when life was simple: when all you knew were colours, multiplication tables, and nursery rhymes, but that didn't bother you, because you didn't know what you didn't know and you didn't care. All you knew was to be happy because you were blissfully unaware of all the things that should make you worried or upset.

I want to think the world is fair - that everyone is honest and good. I want to believe that anything is possible. I want to be oblivious to the complexities of life and be over-excited by the little things once again.

I want to live simple again. I don't want my day to consist of computer crashes, mountains of paperwork, depressing news, how to survive more days in the month than there is money in the bank, taxes, gossip, illness, and loss of loved ones. I want to believe in the power of smiles, hugs, a kind word, truth, justice, peace, dreams, the imagination, mankind, and making angels in the snow.

So...here's my checkbook and my car keys, my credit card bills and my income tax assessment. I am officially resigning from adulthood. And, if you want to discuss this further, you'll have to catch me first, 'cause "Tag! You're It!"

**Have you or someone you love experienced
a miscarriage, stillbirth, ectopic pregnancy
or neonatal death?**

**Feeling angry, sad, guilty or hopeless over
this loss?**

**Jewish Family Services is in the process of
planning a perinatal bereavement group.**

**If you have an interest in helping to
develop or participate in this program,
please leave a confidential voice-mail
message for Glenda Carman at 722-2225,
ext. 411**

Employment Opportunities

JFSOC has been on a mission to expand and develop employment opportunities, in an effort to meet the needs of hundreds of clients who are under- or un-employed. Many of the seeds planted over the past few years are finally starting to come to fruition.

In conjunction with Catholic Family Service of Ottawa-Carleton and the Family Service Centre, JFSOC has established a new employment initiative geared to Canadians looking for work, thanks to approved funding from the Trillium Foundation and the Vaad Ha'ir. Working with the acclaimed World Skills Employment Project, this new initiative will expound on the success of the LASI program, which only serves newcomers. Already, a number of community businesses have offered potential job opportunities for these programs.

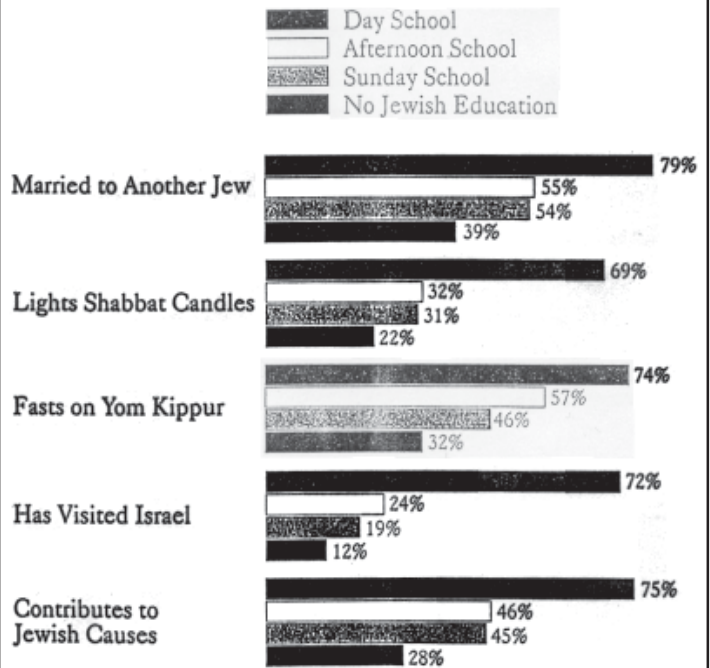
The highlight of the LASI World Skills project these days, is a new contract signed with the RMOC to help welfare recipients find employment. In keeping with the province's push to get those receiving social assistance into the workforce, funds allocated for this mission will now be made available as incentives to potential employers willing to hire a welfare recipient. World Skills has been chosen as one of two local agencies to participate in this program, matching jobs with those most in need.

In keeping with Jewish values and traditions, assisting in securing employment is truly the greatest help one can give. Moving in this direction as an agency offers excitement and challenge. If you have a need for hiring, please call Esther at 722-2225 ext.403. You may just find the right person for the job!



Did You Know...?

Jewish Education's Impact on Jewish Identity



Source: Jewish Involvement of The Baby Boom Generation: Interrogating The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. The Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research, 1993.

Welcome to Prime Time

Prime Time of Temple Israel, originally established as a social/recreational program for the 55+ age group, welcomes any and all to their upcoming programs. Some of the highlights include the following.

On Thursday, January 13 at 12:00 noon, Shirley Berman, a former archivist of the Ottawa Jewish Historical Society, will be speaking on the *Early History of the Jewish Community of Ottawa*.

On Thursday, February 10th, also at 12:00 noon, Janice Proctor will present *At Work in Monet's Garden*. Through her exquisite slide presentation, Janice will share the breathtaking beauty of Monet's garden and the surrounding area of Giverny.

Both events will include lunch, and will take place at Temple Israel Synagogue, 1301 Prince of Wales Dr. The cost is \$7 per person, and subsidies are available as needed. For more information or to RSVP, please contact Bill Danson at 721-8986 or Francine Altman at 722-4405.

Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids?

Ten years ago, at the end of November 1989, a motion proposed by Ed Broadbent to eradicate hunger amongst Canadian children within 10 years, was endorsed by all parties. At that time, it was estimated that one million children lived below the poverty line, their families needing public assistance to obtain sufficient food, clothing and shelter to stay alive. All the politicians who spoke to the motion were unanimous in assigning the highest priority to this initiative. A decade later, an assessment is in order.

Parliament has done little to live up to its 1989 pledge to eradicate child poverty by the turn of the century. In fact, the number of hungry children has risen to 1,400,000 over the past decade. Federal programs to redirect money to the poor, especially the much-touted child tax benefit trumpeted by the politicians, has actually delivered precious little to the working poor. For welfare recipients the situation is worse, since any new benefit received is clawed back. In Ontario, Premier Mike Harris' vicious cutbacks to welfare payments has been especially severe on our most vulnerable citizens.

Unfortunately, along with the high-tech and financial services sectors, one other industry has experienced skyrocketing growth: in 1984, there were 75 food banks in Canada; by 1997 that number had risen to 625 (as reported by Mel Huntig in his recently published book, *Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids: The Tragedy and Disgrace of Poverty in Canada*). These figures would be much higher, had they taken into account the number of hot meals provided to pupils in schools who, without that food, could not get through the school day, let alone learn what is being taught.

Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids highlights the agonizing dilemma hundreds of thousands of people face at the end of every month: how to allocate meagre resources amongst life's necessities. We in Canada live in a cold country and, in cold countries, having a place to live is a must, even if it means tightening the food belt to the extent of missing meals at the end of the month.

In a country as wealthy as Canada such dilemmas should not - indeed, would not - exist, if our politicians were serious about addressing the problem of child poverty and hunger. One powerful voice has been raised, calling all governments in Canada to account. Mel Huntig's book has been compared to Emile Zola's *J'Accuse*, and should be compulsory reading for every politician in Canada who would like to retain our status as the best country in the world to live in, according to the United Nations. It should also be read by every Canadian with a social conscience.

What Goes Around Comes Around

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to make a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved. "I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life."

"No, I can't accept payment for what I did," the Scottish farmer replied, waving off the offer. At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel. "Is that your son?" the nobleman asked. "Yes," the farmer replied proudly.

"I'll make you a deal. Let me take him and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll grow to a man you can be proud of."

And he did. In time, Farmer Fleming's son graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the nobleman's son was stricken with pneumonia. What saved him? Penicillin.

The nobleman's name? Lord Randolph Churchill.
His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

Update: Seniors Task Force

The Seniors Task Force, under the chair of Cecily Bregman, has presented an in-depth, well thought out report on the needs of Ottawa's Jewish seniors, recently accepted by the Executive of JFSOC. Moving quickly, this committee will soon incorporate to become an independent, Jewish association of seniors.

This report - the first of three to be prepared by the Task Force - focused on existing and needed programming for adults over fifty-five. The most immediate needs identified include a seniors' drop-in centre, as well as structured programs to meet various needs of this diverse population. The necessity for programming is urgent, as the less mobile seniors tend to become isolated, having a dramatic impact on both their physical and emotional well-being. Together with the executives of the Vaad and SJCC, as well as with other partners, JFS will develop programs and activities to meet the spectrum of needs within the senior community. Watch for progress reports in future newsletters.

JFS wishes to extend its thanks to the Task Force members who prepared this report: Cecily Bregman, Estelle Gunner, Teena Hendelman and Ruth Levitan. The report reflects both the committee's vision, and their willingness to look at implementing recommendations.

We are all looking forward to creating new opportunities for those Jews who have contributed so much to our community. Copies of the report and its recommendations are available from Mark Zarecki at JFS.

Wanted!

The *Kosher Meals on Wheels* program is absolutely desperate for **volunteer drivers**. If you can spare about 1-1/2 hours on a weekday morning - weekly, monthly, or occasionally - please contact Myra.

Mature, single male looking for either **shared accomodation** or **house-sitting opportunity**, beginning immediately. Contact Andrea at ext. 309.

We have 2 clients in need of **computers** and another would benefit tremendously from a **stereo**. Please call Lynn at ext. 409 to help.

Ideas To Enhance Judaism In Your Home:

- Set aside 20 minutes each week to read a Jewish book with your children.
- Light Shabbat candles on Friday night.
- As a family, visit a nursing home. Find out who has no one to visit them and bring them a card at the next holiday. Children can make their own cards.

Chanukah Party for Newcomers

by Youlia Pyatagorskaya

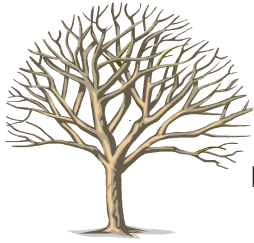
"Are you going to the Hanukka party?" That was the question my friends asked me and each other through the whole month of November. "It looks like the whole town will be there." And it was. The Hanukka party held by Jewish Family Services was a great success. It gathered a lot more people than last year. The party was meant to satisfy a variety of tastes and combine Jewish Hanukka traditions with a Russian way of celebrating holidays. For some of the guests this was an introduction to Jewish culture and religion. A welcome speech was delivered by Rabbi Bulka. It was very warm and full of humor. It made everybody feel at home and created a very special atmosphere. Wonderful voice of Cantor Levinson and a touching melody of Jewish song united and inspired the audience.

Hanukka has commonly been called the "Festival of Lights" referring to the flames kindled on each night. Yet we can also drop the letter "s" and think of Hanukka as the victory of the forces of "light" which include faith and loyalty to the Jewish tradition and the will to fight for those beliefs - over the forces of "darkness", represented by the hedonistic lifestyle of the ancient Greeks. The audience was told about the Jewish revolt headed by Judah the Maccabee, the famous victory and the miracle of a small jar of oil that lasted for 8 days.

This part of the party ended with lighting the Menorah, followed by the traditional supper. A Russian band sang in Russian, English, French and Hebrew. It was almost impossible to stay at the table - everybody was dancing.

Children had their own program. They watched a video about Hanukka, were entertained by a guitar player, and well taken care of by teenager babysitters.

"Are you going to the Purim party?" asked a friend of mine. "Sure I am."



January 22, 2000 is Tu B'Shevat

Why not celebrate the New Year of the trees with a Tu B'Shevat Seder?

Unlike the Passover Seder, there are no firm rules for Tu B'Shevat, only general themes that can be combined and adapted in a variety of creative ways. On this special holiday, it is customary to eat as many different types of fruit as possible, preferably those that come from Israel, and at least one of which is "new" (one that you haven't eaten yet this year). It is also customary to mark the holiday by making a commitment to add something spiritually "new" to one's life. Of course, the tradition of replenishing forests by physically or symbolically planting trees is a given.

At a Tu B'Shevat Seder, we traditionally eat 3 different categories of fruit, preceded by blessings:

- 1 - Fruits with *hard cores but soft edible outsides*, such as olives, apricots or dates - these symbolize "yetzriah" - formation
- 2 - Fruits with *hard inedible outer shells but soft cores*, like pomegranates, coconuts and walnuts - symbolizing "assiyah" - physical reality (of creation)
- 3 - Fruits that are *fully edible*, such as grapes, figs and berries - symbols of "beriah" - the earliest creation

After eating a fruit, it is appropriate to read a passage, biblical verse, song, story or poem. These readings would either mention the fruit, connect to the environment, or relate to nature...and especially trees.

We also drink 4 glasses of wine: to open and close the meal, and between groupings of fruit. The 1st glass is white wine, the 2nd and 3rd are combinations of red and white, and the 4th is red, with the gradual brightening of the mixture symbolizing the transition from winter to spring.

The flexible nature of this holiday makes the possibilities for interpretation nearly endless. You can easily add your own symbolic rituals and create unique, personal traditions. However you choose to celebrate Tu B'Shevat, make it fun and meaningful.

Here We Grow Again.....

The staff of JFSOC is thrilled to welcome **Alexandra Katseva**, who joins our administrative team to manage our new database system.

With **Esther Schvan** taking on the development of our newly expanding employment initiatives, **Elayne Schacter** has now come on board to coordinate the Gutten Tog program and support our Volunteer Services department. We wish them both well with their new endeavours and expect exciting reports.

Given so much growth in the agency and its staff, the bookkeeping/accounting department is catching up with the addition of **Sylvia Pasher**, who joins us part-time. Her energy and expertise are already proving to be invaluable.

A very warm welcome to **Debbie Wasserman**, who will be assisting us with mailings on an ad-hoc basis .

Letters

What is a mitzvah? I know because what I just did was one. Knowing that I am so lucky to have what I have, such as, a loving family, food, toys, and many more things, I feel good to help people who don't have any of the sort. A mitzvah makes you feel good and makes you realize that you are a Sadik (a very good person.) If you think about it not only does a mitzvah make you feel good, but it also helps someone else. There are many different kinds of mitzvahs, such as, adopting a child, giving charity, visiting seniors, and giving a helping hand to people all ages. If you are wondering what the mitzvah I did I will tell you right now. "Can you get some toys ready for a little girl, that's nine, the same age as you? She doesn't have any toys of her own". My mom said to me. I said "yes" and felt the happiness that I was supposed to feel, but at the same time felt the pain of the other, little girl!

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Contributions can be made by phoning Myra at 722-2225. A personalized JFS card is sent to convey the appropriate sentiment for donations of \$12 or more. All contributions are

acknowledged with an official tax receipt.

Im Tizku I Mitzvot

On behalf of our clients, JFS thanks the following for their donation of professional services:

Stanley Arron

And, a warm thanks to those who have donated goods:

Lyon Gilbert
Victor Kardish
Marsha Kathnelson
Arkady Kutman
Susan Sassoon
Rebecca Sherman

A special thanks goes to **Pearl Takefman**, who knit several sets of matching children's hats and mittens, donated to JFS clients.

Coming Events:

Watch for the following programs, workshops and special events:

Friendship Club/GA Luncheon
Jan. 10, Feb. 7

12:30 pm, Soloway JCC

Adults for Lively Leisure

Jan. 20, Feb. 17

Agudath Israel Synagogue

Noon - 2:00 pm

Prime Time at Temple

Jan. 13, Feb. 10

Temple Israel Synagogue

12:00 noon

Warm Home Program

Jan. 11, Feb. 8

12:30pm

Jewish Bereavement Group

Jan. 24, Feb. 21

7:00 - 8:30pm

Agudath Israel Synagogue

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