

A Message from Our Executive Director and Board President



We are privileged to write a message for Sherut highlighting two important happenings at JCFS. Recently, a generous JCFS donor proposed a “double mitzvah” opportunity – supporting JCFS for Passover while also supporting a sister agency at the same time. It’s not often that JCFS has the pleasure of highlighting our own “double mitzvah” opportunity, our annual Passover Assistance Campaign and our Community of Caring Gala.



With the upcoming celebration of Passover comes our annual Passover Assistance Campaign that enhances the Passover experiences of so many in our community who are less fortunate. JCFS is able to help over 400 people each year enjoy Passover and feel the spirituality that comes with celebrating freedom in the arms of an embracing and caring community, whether through the delivery of holiday food products or the support to attend community Seders.

This year offers us a second opportunity to highlight another important mitzvah opportunity, our Community of Caring Gala that takes place on May 10th at the RBC Conventions Centre, and features entertainment by the Jewish a cappella group and YouTube sensations, The Maccabeats. We are proud and excited to host this Gala and highlight our important work supporting and assisting the needs of hundreds of clients living with the challenges of mental illness and the devastating effects of addiction. Each year JCFS impacts lives in positive ways. We help build connections, offer stability, and heal relationships.

The goal of the Community of Caring Gala is to raise awareness, reduce stigma and advance our capacity to help as many people as we can through our accessible services, best-practise clinical expertise, welcoming support groups, and caring staff. The funds raised at the Gala through your generosity will be allocated to further advancing and growing our mental health and addiction recovery resources, programs and services.

Passover is the celebration of our physical and emotional freedom from slavery. The JCFS Passover Assistance program and our Community of Caring Gala both provide beacons of hope and freedom to those experiencing financial strain, the isolation of mental illness or the slavery of addiction. It is only collectively, and with the power of your support, that we offer this hope of true freedom by growing our Community of Caring. Please join us in celebrating our successes and help us grow for the future.

Wishing you all a Happy Passover.

Al Benarroch
Executive Director

Danita Dubinsky Aziza
President

Presentation Helps Counsellors Help Themselves and their Clients



As JCFS’s Employment Coordinator of Settlement Services, Carina Blumgrund helps current and former immigrants to the Winnipeg Jewish community, as well as some other JCFS clients, navigate the labour market, access resources, and find satisfying and sustainable employment.

Last November, Carina shared her experiences and insights at Manitoba’s annual Career Development Conference,

called Let’s Get to Work (LGTW) – Increasing Resilience: Supporting Successful Career Transitions. The conference, which took place on November 10th, 2017 at the Victoria Inn and Conference Centre, is the province’s only Career Development focused event dedicated to demographics, research, and current labour market trends.

Carina’s afternoon interactive breakout session, entitled Finding Joy in What We Do – Approaches and Tools that Work, was extremely well received.

During the session, Carina elaborated on the various concepts, approaches and tools that have helped her help her clients and that have, at the same time, reinforced her own enjoyment and sense of satisfaction in the work that she does.

“My work with clients is very rewarding at many levels,” Carina says. “I have the privilege of assisting individuals who have such potential, helping them better understand the labour market and working with them as they strengthen their job search strategies.”

“The interactive exercises and activities of our employment program are aimed at helping job seekers successfully navigate the complexities of the job search,” she adds. “Staying on task with a feeling of purpose, and having a positive outlook, are key factors for a successful outcome of the job search process.”

“My presentation to my colleagues at the LGTW Conference,” Carina continues, “showed how some of the practical approaches and strategies that we use are not only useful to help clients, but are also a powerful way to help us, as practitioners, find meaning and enjoyment in every day work.”

Additionally, Carina used the session to elaborate on the importance of making clients feel welcomed and supported, fostering their hope, strengthening their self-image and helping them reach their full potential.

Settlement and Integration programming at JCFS is generously funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

Ma’ot Chitim Going to the Birds



For the third year in a row, JCFS is enhancing its Passover Assistance, or Ma’ot Chitim program, with a Chicken Challenge at Gray Academy of Jewish Education.

“We used to make Pesach hampers for JCFS in previous years,” explains Gray Academy Elementary School principal, Joyce Kerr. “But we decided to change it up as the items coming in did not fully complete the hampers.”

In order to enhance the hampers, and in so doing make the holiday a little more enjoyable and nurturing for the hamper recipients, the school launched a Chicken Challenge.

The Chicken Challenge involves Gray Academy students purchasing kosher chickens and having each class keep track of their purchases by tacking paper chickens on to a big board in the hallway just outside the school office. The funds raised are donated to JCFS toward the cost of the fresh kosher chickens that are part of every JCFS Passover hamper.

While the initial goal was for every classroom to purchase

at least one chicken, at \$10 apiece, the response from the students and their families, from the outset, was overwhelming. “Our first year, 128 chickens were purchased,” says Joyce, “and last year 170 chickens were bought.”

This year the goal is 200 chickens.

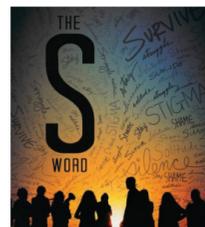
“The visual of the chickens going up on the board is the best motivator,” Joyce says.

Gray Academy students, she adds proudly, also donate the Shabbat tzedakah collected in the month of March to JCFS in support of its Passover Assistance program. Considering that the demand for Passover hampers increases each year, JCFS is grateful for and relies on the support it receives from community partners like Gray Academy.

This spring, the agency will distribute as many as 150 Passover hampers just before the holiday, primarily to seniors, newcomers and community members who are isolated, ill, housebound or lacking financial resources.

The Passover Assistance program is one of many services that JCFS facilitates in order to ensure that all community members feel connected, appreciated and valued, particularly during the holidays. It is a perfect example of the agency’s mission in action – Strengthening Lives in Keeping with Jewish Values.

Film Examines the Silence and Stigma of Suicide



Lisa Klein is changing the way that we talk about suicide.

A survivor of her father’s and her brother’s suicides, Lisa struggled for years to understand why they did what they did, and to come to terms with the guilt, anguish, shame and stigma that she experienced as a result of their actions.

And then she decided to make a documentary film about the topic.

That film, the S Word, will be premiered in Winnipeg on Thursday, March 22.

A feature length film, The S Word focuses on the journey of a suicide survivor and suicide awareness advocate named Dese’Rae L. Stage, as she candidly talks to other suicide attempt survivors and family members who have lost loved ones to suicide.

The film is an attempt to break the silence, remove the stigma, and bring suicide into the public discourse. It is a powerful and poignant narrative about finding reasons to live.

The local screening of the film, which takes place at the Berney Theatre at 7:00 p.m., is being co-sponsored by JCFS and Jewish Federation Young Adult Division, in partnership with the Winnipeg Suicide Prevention Network. It will be followed by a Skype Q and A with Lisa Klein, from her home in Los Angeles, and a mental health resource fair and refreshments.

Tickets for the event are \$8.00 and available at: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/the-s-word-tickets-42956685603>.

Newcomers Warmly Welcomed at Meet and Greet

In 2017, about 350 newcomers settled into Winnipeg’s Jewish community. On a frosty Sunday in January, over 120 people gathered at the Asper Jewish Community Campus for the community’s annual Meet and Greet.

This event, co-sponsored by JCFS and the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg, provided those in attendance - from Israel, Russia, Brazil and Argentina - with the opportunity to meet other newly arrived immigrants to Winnipeg, learn about different community organizations and their activities and programs, and be on the receiving end of the community’s warm and welcoming hospitality.

That hospitality included a performance by the Yona Choir, an awe inspiring magic show by Winnipeg legend Brian Glow, children’s activities and, of course, plenty of refreshments.

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BREAKING NEWS...

Spring Gala will Educate and Entertain

Alcohol, drug addiction, and mental illness are not new issues within the Winnipeg Jewish community, but are definitely being talked about more openly and honestly than at any time in the past. And that’s a good thing.

This increased community awareness about addictions, their co-occurring mental health challenges, and the tremendous toll that they have on individuals and their families, is largely due to a number of initiatives undertaken by JCFS in recent years.

These initiatives include the hosting of several community wide programs, speakers and conferences on the topic; the sponsorship of a weekly 12-step meeting for Jewish addicts; and last year’s hiring of a mental health and substance use caseworker to work alongside addiction services coordinator, Ivy Kopstein.

That caseworker, Carli Rossall, will be one of the featured speakers at the agency’s upcoming Community of Caring Gala fundraising event. That much-anticipated event will be held May 10, 2018 at the RBC Convention Centre.

During the gala, Carli will share her personal journey of addiction and recovery. She will elaborate on the stigma and shame that accompany the disease and the hope and healing that can be found in recovery. She also will touch on the prevalence of addictions and substance use within the Jewish community and of the ongoing need to increase awareness, understanding and supports within our community.

Funds raised from the gala will be used to advance JCFS’s addiction recovery and mental health services.

“JCFS is proud to be the open door through which those living with mental health and addiction issues can receive supports,” says agency executive director, Al Benarroch. “Funds raised through this gala will help to keep JCFS on the leading edge of our mental health and addiction recovery practices.”

“The gala,” adds JCFS president, Danita Aziza, “will provide an opportunity to learn more about the impact that mental health and addictions have on individuals and their families.”

At the same time, it will provide community members with an opportunity to celebrate JCFS’s many achievements, relax, and have a good time.

“The gala,” Danita continues, “will bring members of our community together to enjoy an evening of great food and fabulous entertainment.”

That fabulous entertainment will be provided by none other than The Maccabeats, the world-renowned a cappella group from New York’s Yeshiva University.

The Maccabeats, which began harmonizing together back in 2007, specialize in upbeat, clever and funny parody songs of Jewish holidays and contemporary musical hits. The group has performed to rave reviews at venues around the world, including the White House and the Knesset, and garnered more than 20 million views on YouTube for a variety of songs, including its beloved Hanukah parody Candlelight and its Passover mash-up of Dayeinu.

The Maccabeats’ performance at the Community of Caring Gala will mark their first appearance ever in Winnipeg.

Continued on next page

The group's lively, Jewish infused performance will ensure that the gala is fun, entertaining and enjoyable, even as it raises awareness about and raises funds for a critical issue that adversely affects so many people in the community.

"No one in our community is immune to addictions or mental illness, or to the stigma that so often accompanies these challenges," Danita says.

Conference Focuses on Diversity and Inclusion



On March 12, 2018, JCFS initiated a new and vital conversation in the community by hosting a one-day Conference on Diversity and Inclusion. The conference was generously supported by a grant from the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba.

Rabbi Micah Buck-Yael, a visiting Conservative rabbi from St. Louis, opened the conference with an engaging and educational talk about clinical best practices for supporting transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Buck-Yael is the coordinator of community chaplaincy with the Jewish Family and Children's Service in his hometown and an educator and advocate for broader and deeper diversity within the Jewish community.

"By broader diversity," he explains, "I mean acknowledging the full range of diversity that exists in our communities, and by deeper I mean allowing the full realities, stories, and experiences of all Jews to shape the Jewish story."

Jewish communities, he adds, should be built on the assumption that no one belongs on the margins."

JCFS at Limmud

JCFS's Al Benarroch and Carli Rossall, together with community and JACS member Scott McWilliam, led a fascinating and interactive session at this year's Limmud.

Their session, entitled "Enhancing Your Mindfulness, Wellness, and Spirituality through a Jewish Lens," offered an experiential sampling of a text study process that provides opportunities for using Jewish resources as a springboard for self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-improvement. This approach lends itself well to the spiritual focus of mental health and addiction recovery work.

Tribute Cards Support Agency Activities

JCFS tribute cards provide an easy and meaningful way to recognize any milestone or occasion. Cards can be ordered on-line or over the phone, and can include personal messages that reflect the senders'

"But by raising awareness through the gala," she adds, "that stigma will gradually be removed and JCFS will be able to advance its mental health and addiction programs and reach out to many more individuals in our community who are struggling with the disease."

For further information about the Community of Caring Gala, or to purchase tickets or make a donation, please visit www.jcfswinnipeg.org or phone 204-477-7430.

Buck-Yael's interest and devotion to this topic derived from his personal experiences.

"In my own story, I became traditionally observant and passionate about Judaism at the same time that I was figuring out who I was in the world, and that as a member of the LGBTQ community, my own story was not always represented or reflected in the mainstream," he explains.

While he notes that Jewish communities have become increasingly welcoming as the years go by, he says that there is still a lot of work to be done.

"We need to understand our communities as inherently diverse, meeting a wide range of needs, and needing to account for less-common needs along with more-common needs," he elaborates. "And we need to understand that our language, practices, buildings, and assumptions need to reflect the diversity of our people."

Those ideas were reiterated in both the afternoon and evening sessions of the Winnipeg conference, which included workshops on Gender and Sexual Diversity, Accessibility, Cross Cultural Families and Inclusive Language for the Jewish community.

As Al, Carli and Scott demonstrated, this new approach to the study of Jewish text facilitates open and candid group discussion and the gleaning of personally meaningful insights for greater self-awareness. It encourages the exploration of several key questions, among them: How can I improve myself? How can I improve my relations with others? How can I live a more balanced life?

This approach is being incorporated by JCFS staff to support their work with clients and maintain a Jewish lens to the work they do.

sentiments, good wishes or condolences. All tribute card donations are used to support the many vital services and programs that JCFS offers to Winnipeg Jewish community members.

Jewish Texts Help Focus JCFS's Work

In the year since JCFS executive director Al Benarroch and three other agency staff participated in an intensive training program at Beit T'shuva, the Los Angeles Jewish addiction rehab and residential treatment centre, they have incorporated many of the approaches and activities that they learned there to their work in Winnipeg.

"One of the main activities we took home from our visit to Beit T'Shuvah last February," Al says, "was the approach that they use toward studying Jewish texts."

The key element of this approach, he explains, does not require one to be a Torah scholar. Rather, it involves examining the text through a lens that applies a personal interpretation to our self-awareness, personal growth, and understanding of how to assume greater accountability and responsibility, improve our relationships with others and with the larger community.

"It gets you straight to the heart of Jewish values," Al adds.

Operation Ezra Continues to Sponsor and Support Yazidi Refugees

In the summer of 2014, Laila Mushko and her family fled their village in Northern Iraq after it was overrun by ISIS. Three years later, thanks to the unstinting efforts of Operation Ezra, Laila, her husband and her nine children are comfortably settled in Winnipeg. She is learning English, her children are attending school, and she feels safe, supported and hopeful for the first time in years.

Operation Ezra is the Winnipeg Jewish community's rescue effort on behalf of the Yazidis, a beleaguered people who have been targeted for genocide by ISIS in Northern Iraq.

Since its founding four years ago, Operation Ezra has raised significant awareness about the plight of the Yazidis and significant funds for the sponsorship of Yazidi refugees to Canada. To date, it has raised over \$500,000 and privately sponsored 10 Yazidi families, representing 55 individuals, and helped them to successfully resettle in Winnipeg. Currently, it has several other refugee sponsorship applications in process, and expects to welcome about two families a year to the city.

Additionally, Operation Ezra provides supplemental settlement assistance to 34 Government Assisted Refugee Yazidi families in Winnipeg, all of which are led by single mothers who are survivors of ISIS. That

As a means of implementing this approach at JCFS, Al and his senior management team have been meeting every two to four weeks to study a piece of Jewish text or teaching. During these sessions, they examine the selected copy through an agency lens, trying to understand how it could benefit their professional practice and engagement with clients.

Part of this exercise, Al says, was borne out of the agency's desire to better define and understand what the "J" in JCFS really meant.

Ultimately, it led to the determination that JCFS is not a Jewish agency because of its staff, its clients or its funders – because none of these is exclusively Jewish – but because it consistently applies a Jewish value-based lens to the work that it does and the approach that it takes to those it serves.

assistance includes emotional and social support, as well as food, clothing and furnishings. Last December, Operation Ezra also provided emergency food and winter clothing to Yazidi families

still living in refugee camps in Northern Iraq.

Operation Ezra's impressive reach and success is due to an ever-expanding group of community-based refugee agencies, multi-faith organizations and corporate partners, as well as the tireless work of a core group of about 50 volunteers from both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. Among numerous other tasks, these volunteers help familiarize the newcomers to the city and Canadian culture, identify housing and employment opportunities, assist with school registrations and medical appointments, and run a weekly English language classes for all ages at Temple Shalom.

All of these efforts are designed to encourage self-sufficiency among the newcomers and to build and reinforce a sense of safety, security and a sense of community among them.

In addition to sponsorship and resettlement efforts, Operation Ezra continues to raise awareness about the persecution of the Yazidi people, and to advocate on their behalf with government, human rights groups and sponsorship agencies.

New Group Supports Women Dealing with Family Addiction



Four years ago, with a generous grant from the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba, JCFS convened several community members in a focus group to help determine how the agency could better respond to the needs of individuals and families impacted by substance abuse or addictive behaviors. The focus group itself proved to be so comforting, that the women who participated in it indicated that they would appreciate further opportunities to get together to discuss their shared concerns and offer one another support.

Now they have that opportunity.

Beginning this month, JCFS is hosting a bi-weekly support group for women affected by a loved one's substance use or addictions. The group, which will meet every other Wednesday at Temple Shalom, will give participants the opportunity to connect with, share with, and comfort other women in similar circumstances.

Asper Helping Hand Initiative Lends Financial Support

It has been 15 years since philanthropist Izzy Asper z'l established the Asper Helping Hand Initiative (TAHHI) at JCFS after realizing just how many local Jewish community members were facing financial challenges.

In the years since, that initiative has distributed almost \$700,000 in interest-free loans to 178 Jewish community members experiencing temporary financial hardship.

The loans, which range in value from \$1,000 to \$5,000, have been requested and approved for a variety of needs, including vocational training, university tuition, medical intervention, and house and car repairs. All loans require a guarantor and must be repaid within three years.

"TAHHI helps people help themselves," program manager Shelley Garfield says. "We are giving individuals an opportunity to get back on their feet and help them move forward at a time when they are faced with financial difficulties and challenges."

"Women find it most helpful to be able to share fully, in an emotionally safe environment, their day to day experience with their loved one," says Ivy Kopstein, JCFS's addiction services coordinator. "The feelings of affirmation, understanding, and even the sense of empowerment that the women provide each other through their shared experience or circumstances are healing and destigmatizing."

Unfortunately, Ivy explains, there is still a lot of societal pressure for women to fulfill their many roles and responsibilities as mothers, wives and daughters, and to always assume the caregiving role in the family. This caregiving, however, often comes at the expense of their own needs.

"The support group," Ivy adds, "addresses the importance of self-care and boundary-setting in coping with the ongoing stress associated with loving someone with an addiction."

Ivy facilitates the group but often invites guests to offer specialty programming such as mindfulness, yoga and art therapy. She devotes part of the sessions to the discussion of relevant topics such as managing stress, dealing with stigma, healing and parenting, and always ensures that there is sufficient opportunity for members to share their personal experiences with one another, and give and receive support.

There are currently about six women participating in the group, but there is room for another half dozen to join. Anyone interested in participating in the women's support group should contact Ivy at ikopstein@jcfswinnipeg.org

TAHHI receives several dozen loan requests each year, which are passed on to a loan committee for approval.

"Names are never disclosed," Shelley emphasizes.

If the TAHHI committee approves the loan, Shelley then sets up a meeting with the applicant and the guarantor to determine a mutually agreed upon repayment schedule. The applicant leaves this meeting with the loan in hand.

"The most important thing that I constantly hear back from clients is that they feel that the Jewish community is there to support them," she says. "They truly appreciate the financial support, but it is so much more. They feel that they are not alone."

In cases where the loan request does not meet TAHHI's strict criteria, Shelley explores other resources or possible sources of financial assistance, such as JCFS's Tzedakah Fund or its Eve and Harry Vickar Community Assistance Program.

