

A woman with dark hair is shown in profile, looking out of a window. The image is overlaid with a solid blue filter. The window frame and the view outside are visible through the blue tint.

UPGRADING OUR JEWISH SOCIAL SAFETY NET

A SPECIAL REPORT

**ON HOW UJA IS TRANSFORMING
THE WAY WE HELP THE VULNERABLE**

THE CHALLENGE:

CONFRONTING THE SPIKE IN NEED FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

COVID-19 caused a surge of need in Toronto. Our Jewish social service agencies faced significant new demand. In the words of one executive director, “It’s a tsunami.” Our agencies are rising to the challenge, but more is clearly required.

In response, UJA launched an Emergency Campaign for Community Resilience. It included as a core priority ensuring that no vulnerable Jew in our city would be turned away due to a lack of community resources. The campaign was the basis for UJA’s Resilience Fund: \$7 million in new investment for our social service agency partners. The Fund is transforming the process of how we serve community members in need. It could change the future of social service delivery in Toronto. **This brief report outlines how the program upgrades our Jewish social safety net.**

For vulnerable Torontonians, the COVID-19 pandemic has turned life upside down. The wounds cut in many ways.

A CRISIS OF SURVIVAL:

As of April 7th, 2021, more than 23,000 Canadians had died due to COVID-19.¹ Thousands of our neighbours are mourning. Thousands more are facing new pains in their lives. Many already-lonely seniors are stuck at home, facing long bouts of isolation. Critical in-person programming for vulnerable people has been shut down.

AN ECONOMIC DISASTER:

In April 2020, three million Canadians were out of work. The World Bank predicted “the worst recession since World War Two.”² Total hours worked had dropped by a staggering one-third.³ Jobs were wiped away. Income disappeared. As government benefits, savings, and severance run out, many will grow increasingly desperate.

THEY CALL IT “THE NEW NORMAL.” THIS IS NOT NORMAL. A CHALLENGE OF THIS MAGNITUDE AND COMPLEXITY DEMANDS A UNITED, COORDINATED, STRATEGIC RESPONSE.

A MENTAL HEALTH CATASTROPHE:

The strain is breaking people. A Centre for Addiction and Mental Health survey found that nearly one out of four Canadian women and one out of five Canadian men reported moderate to severe anxiety. Nearly one in three men and nearly one in four women reported binge drinking.⁴ Public Health Ontario has noted “preliminary reports indicate an increase in fatal drug poisoning is occurring.”⁵

A CRY FOR HELP IN OUR COMMUNITY:

The result is a massive surge of Canadians needing support. Jewish Toronto is no exception. In our special update on the impact of UJA’s emergency campaign, we shared alarming facts about the surge:

- An over 100% increase in community members seeking help from Jewish Vocational Services Toronto and Jewish Immigrant Aid Services Toronto to find a job;
- An 85% increase in community members requesting addictions counselling from Jewish Addiction Community Services Toronto; and,
- A 72% increase in counselling calls/contacts for the Woman Abuse program at Jewish Family and Child Service.

AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION:

HOW UJA IS FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING THE DELIVERY OF JEWISH SOCIAL SERVICES

UJA's Resilience Fund delivers an extra \$7 million of investment from October 2020 to June 2022 to address these needs. This funding goes to our partner social service agencies—the front line of the crisis. But more investment isn't enough. A shift from the status quo of service delivery is crucial.

HOW SERVICE DELIVERY WORKED BEFORE THE RESILIENCE FUND

Meet Rebecca and Robert, an immigrant Jewish couple with a young family.* Rebecca and Robert were acclimating to their new life and working full-time before the pandemic. They were both laid off in the first month. Rebecca has developed severe anxiety. Robert's own straining mental health led to binge drinking and alcohol dependence. Rebecca and Robert know that they can't get back on their feet alone.

Before the pandemic, they would connect with separate agencies to access different services. The couple might together contact Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS) Toronto or Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) Toronto for help finding new jobs. Rebecca could call Jewish Family and Child Service for counselling. Robert could reach out to Jewish Addiction Community Services (JACS) Toronto for support in overcoming his addiction. Staff at each of these agencies

could refer Rebecca and Robert to other agencies. The couple would have to approach those agencies themselves and apply for help through separate intake processes. This can be daunting, especially given their vulnerability. The agencies don't have the resources to track referrals and follow-up with Rebecca and Robert. Like many clients, they won't be aware of the broad range of services available throughout the full UJA network of social service agencies. **With no unified approach to helping them through the system, like many clients, Rebecca and Robert are at risk of dropping out.**

The first encounter with our social service agencies can be decisive. How Rebecca and Robert navigate service options now could be the difference between a speedy return to a stable life, or chronic poverty.

UPGRADING THE CLIENT EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE RESILIENCE FUND

Newly vulnerable Jewish community members like Rebecca and Robert need a new approach. We struck two taskforces consisting of UJA professionals, agency executive directors, and other experts:

1. Newly Vulnerable Task Force: Focused on individuals and families made vulnerable by the pandemic, like Rebecca and Robert. Short-term, intensive support through this group can bring people back to stability and self-sufficiency.

2. Existing Client Task Force: Life has gotten harder for already-vulnerable people. Think of seniors living alone, including Holocaust survivors, and families that were living in poverty pre-pandemic. This taskforce is addressing new stresses in the life of this group, caused by the pandemic.

* An example for illustrative purposes. Not real clients.



At the core of our approach is a new, collaborative strategy to move our community forward, maximize resources, and deliver even-better services together. Our taskforces will:

- 1. Allocate funding collectively:** The taskforces will determine how best to deploy dollars to help those in need. They will determine where need is greatest. This is a departure from UJA's normal grant-making process. This means more efficient and effective resource deployment. The agencies themselves are closest to the needs of the vulnerable. They can best determine where help is needed most, in concert with UJA and our community-wide strategy.
- 2. Create a system centered on the individual needs of clients:** The Newly Vulnerable Task Force will collaborate for easy referral between the agencies. Agency staff will jointly track clients' progress. This is far beyond the standard referral process. It means guiding clients through a range of services provided by a network of agencies. To support them, UJA is also funding a new Resilience Coordinator role in each of the agencies. They will direct clients to services, ensure effective follow-up, and jointly monitor clients' outcomes. A single Project Manager will oversee the entire team.
- 3. No extra hurdles for clients:** The Newly Vulnerable process is a fundamental shift away from multiple intake and application processes. This can be confusing—especially for vulnerable people. The new process is a single gateway for a broad suite of services across agencies, assisted by a UJA-funded service team. It's a client-first approach. Clients are connected with the services they most need, faster, with less likelihood of dropout, and support along the way from dedicated, caring professionals.

TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

Newly Vulnerable:

JACS Toronto
Jewish Family and Child Service
JIAS Toronto
JVS Toronto

Existing Vulnerable:

Bernard Betel Centre
Chai-Tikvah Foundation
Circle of Care
Jewish Free Loan Toronto
Kayla's Children Centre
Kehilla Residential Programme
Reena

REBECCA & ROBERT'S SERVICE JOURNEY—BEFORE AND AFTER THE RESILIENCE FUND

BEFORE

Rebecca and Robert search through agencies and services, often with little or no guidance, and apply to each program separately.

AFTER

- Rebecca and Robert go to Jewish Vocational Services Toronto or Jewish Immigrant Aid Services Toronto for help finding new jobs.
- The agency's Resilience Coordinator proactively identifies that Rebecca and Robert need further support. They are connected to other services.
- Robert is introduced to Jewish Addiction Community Services Toronto for support with his alcohol addiction.
- Rebecca receives counselling from Jewish Family and Child Service.
- Jewish Free Loan provides financial support so they can open their own business.
- The Resilience Coordinator follows up with Rebecca and Robert and is able to track their progress. With the Coordinator's help, Rebecca and Robert remain connected to the Jewish community.
- Rebecca and Robert return to a stable life—keeping their family intact and avoiding the trap of chronic poverty.



THE RESULT:

A POWERFUL NEW WAY TO HELP COMMUNITY MEMBERS, MADE POSSIBLE BY UJA'S RESILIENCE FUND

The emergency of the pandemic has prompted innovative thinking. But this innovation would not be possible without UJA's Resilience Fund. New investments made in our agencies are unlocking an unprecedented degree of collaboration. Funding for the Resilience Coordinator team brings to life this ambitious vision for a more seamless and user-friendly client experience.



Together with UJA, our agencies are not just meeting the needs of the moment. We're building an even stronger, more comprehensive Jewish social safety net for the future. We're learning from this year of crisis so that, for generations to come, we can be even more effective in transforming the lives of our community's most vulnerable.