

NATIONAL THINK TANK ON JEWISH POVERTY IN CANADA: NATIONAL STATEMENT

On October 17th, the international community will mark the 21st annual UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty. On this same day on the Hebrew calendar, the 23rd of Tishrei 5775, Jews around the world will celebrate the joyous holiday of Simchat Torah, which celebrates the conclusion and start of the reading of the sefer Torah. It is from this ancient and holy text that we derive our communal commitment and obligation to ensuring that every member is sustained by the whole.

The Jewish community's experience with poverty mirrors the broader Canadian reality. Almost 15% of the Canadian Jewish population, including one in five children, lives below the poverty line. But poverty within the Jewish community is as elusive as it is pervasive: it remains largely hidden. When the research paper The Poor Among Us was published 30 years ago, it noted that the Jewish poor are a minority among Jews because they are poor, and are a minority among the poor because they are Jews.

Today, the challenge of the invisibility of Jewish poverty persists. Jewish individuals and families living in poverty attend our day schools, worship in synagogues, and participate in community activities. They are our new immigrants here to make a fresh start; our seniors; and families with dual working parents. They may struggle with mental and physical illness. Like all of us. They are our neighbours, friends and family. Poverty affects not only the individual or family in crisis, but also our community's overall health and welfare as well.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

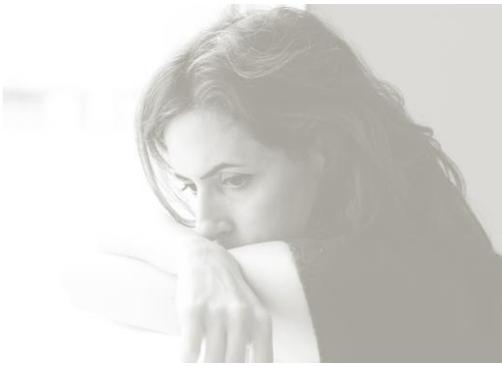
We cannot change what we don't acknowledge. We need to sensitize and educate ourselves. We need to develop community-specific responses to the needs of our members living in poverty. We need to invest in our youth and support our seniors. We need to hold governments accountable and ensure that they create, fund, and deliver adequate social and economic policies, programs and services to end injustices, including poverty, and prevent them, to the benefit of our communities as part of the greater whole. Strategies may vary city by city, or community by community, but fundamentally, *we need to act*.

Jewish Family Service agencies and the Jewish Federations across Canada have joined together to raise awareness surrounding this critical issue facing our communities. Coast to coast, we are committed to instilling an increased mindfulness of poverty in our vibrant and caring Jewish community. And we are committed to being part of a national solution. Over the coming months, we will be outreaching to Canadian Jewish communities with opportunities to inform, engage and act. In the same manner that anyone can be affected by poverty, we all have the capacity to fight poverty and improve the lives of our Jewish brothers and sisters.

Members of Poverty Think Tank Committee:

- **Linda Kislowicz**, CEO, Jewish Federations Canada – UIA, Convenor & Moderator
- **Dalia Margalit-Faircloth**, Director, Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies of Canada
- **Adam Minsky**, Senior Vice-President of Community Capacity Building, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto
- **Andrea Gardiner**, Assistant Executive Director, JFS, Ottawa
- **Faye Rosenberg-Cohen**, Planning Director, Jewish Federation of Winnipeg
- **Janis Roth**, Executive Director, JIAS Toronto
- **Leah Berger**, Senior Planner, Strategic Planning & Community Relations, Federation CJA, Montreal
- **Marty Hornstein**, Executive Director, JCFS Calgary
- **Richard L. Cummings**, Executive Director, JF&CS, Toronto
- **Sandi Pelly**, Director, Capacity Building for the Social Services, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto
- **Shelley Rivkin**, Associate Executive Director, Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver
- **Stephen Adler**, Associate Director, Ontario Government Relations, CIJA
- **Susan Karpman**, Director of Community Services, Ometz, Montreal

POVERTY IN TORONTO'S JEWISH COMMUNITY HAS INCREASED FROM 10.9% IN 2001 TO 12.9% IN 2011



Poverty isn't just the lack of money; it's the lack of everything –luxuries, social life, peace of mind, self. It's forever thinking about money because there is never enough. It's forever doing mental arithmetic as money gets moved in your head from one allocation to another as things come up. It's having people not understand that you can't do something simple like meet for coffee because the money simply isn't there. It's living with shoddy things that don't work well because you can't afford to replace them. It's the false economy of dollar-store purchases and cheap, badly-maintained apartments with massive hydro bills. It's

about feeling visible and judged as you wear your clothes until they are threadbare and your shoes until they fall apart - painfully aware of your uncut hair. It's forever saying 'no' to your children and praying they don't get sick as the money for their medication will have to come from somewhere. It's constantly worrying about the future, yours and your children's, until it looks so bleak that you just stop. It's prioritizing the food you buy and not having the luxury of making the same choices as normal people; having to sacrifice quality, variety and ethics to make sure your family is fed. It's watching the world go past you knowing you cannot afford to join in. Poverty feels like a weight, like you're drowning and there is no land in sight. -Current Client of Jewish Family & Child

24,315 OF JEWS IN THE GTA LIVE BELOW THE POVERTY LINE. 3,545 ARE CHILDREN; 5,035 ARE SENIORS.

THERE ARE 5,665 PEOPLE LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE IN YORK REGION.

Toronto's Response

Supporting those living in poverty is a core Jewish value. In order to shift the poverty paradigm, we recognize that a new approach to breaking the cycle can only come with a different approach and by developing effective and informed practices combined with collaboration, conversation, knowledge mobilization and advocacy. As a community, Jewish Toronto has an opportunity to strengthen our effort to reduce poverty. Together, a coalition of community agencies is engaged in a battle against poverty. We are working to leverage our communal resources to have a greater impact. Our goal is to engage new partnerships, community members, people with lived experience, government, philanthropists, and civic leaders to join us in our fight against poverty.

A Call to Action

October 17th marks the United Nations' (UN) International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. We call upon you to join us in a Joint Poverty Awareness Action Day across Jewish Toronto. Representatives from a number of agencies and organizations will kick-start an awareness-raising campaign about Jewish poverty. The event will be held the week of October 20th 2014. Interactive conversations will take place at locations throughout the Jewish community and beyond. The public will be invited to sign up to participate in future opportunities and take an online poverty quiz.



JEWISH FEDERATIONS OF CANADA - UIA
הפדרציות היהודיות בקנדה - UIA
FÉDÉRATIONS JUIVES DU CANADA - UIA

