

# Help & Happenings

A Biannual Newsletter | Fall/Winter 2020

## A letter from the Executive Director



This year has been quite a crazy one for us so far, unlike any we could have imagined. Who would have thought that 2020 would bring a pandemic that would turn all our lives upside down?

The JFS mission has always been to help people realize an improved life through responsive, caring programs. This is where we need your help. We decided not to have a Gala this year, virtual or otherwise, so we could continue to focus all of our efforts on helping our community.

As we pack food bags, deliver meals and constantly check in with our seniors and Holocaust survivors, we need help to keep these vital services going. Funders have cut our funding and we are working every day to seek new financial sources to help continue our essential services when our community needs us the most.

**So many more people are coming to our JFS food pantries, people who have never had to ask for help before — families whose children are not receiving their meals at school, seniors who used to have help putting food in their cabinets, people who lost jobs and must decide whether to pay a bill or eat.**

If you are one of the lucky ones who is working from home, saving money by not going to the gym, not commuting, not having your hair cut or nails done, please consider sharing your savings with JFS.

To those of you who have given so generously to JFS during the past few months, my sincere gratitude for your thoughtfulness and support. Please take a minute to meet the faces of JFS and hear about what we are doing to help the most vulnerable members of our community.

See how we've adapted to serve those in need during this time of social distancing and quarantine, making sure our isolated seniors and others are connected to JFS and the critical services they need.

And, remember, we can't do this without your support — and the situation is not changing any time soon. Thousands of people are out of work and they rely on JFS for help. We have promised to be there for our community, especially now when they need us the most. We are counting on your support to help us keep that promise.

From all of us at JFS may you and your loved ones stay safe and well. Thank you and join me in celebrating the amazing team that is JFS.

Roni Salkin  
JFS Executive Director

# During the pandemic, Holocaust survivors offer lessons in perseverance

Chaya and Jerry, a Holocaust survivor couple, have been taking the pandemic in stride. They spoke about their experience with life in quarantine during a recent JFS wellness check.

"So now we are on Zoom," Chaya shrugged. "We [spent] Rosh Hashanah on Zoom. What else can you do? We are staying home. We want to stay safe. We don't want to end up in a hospital where no one can come to us." Chaya's children were able to set up social media on her smartphone, so she has been able to keep in touch with her family throughout the pandemic. Nevertheless, Chaya noted, "I was so petrified, with all these things happening."

Holocaust survivors are no strangers to hardship. The Covid-19 pandemic has been one more round in their lifetime of challenges. Fay Ross, the JFS Holocaust Survivor Services Coordinator, describes the unique issues that survivors face.

"We had to cancel Café Europa, and they miss it terribly. They come together as a group of survivors and they see their friends and they have a meal and they have entertainment and it's their day out. They've been asking me what's going on and I don't have an answer. And it's heartbreaking to hear them say we wish we could come back to Café Europa." The monthly luncheon used to entertain around 100 survivors and caregivers before the pandemic forced its suspension. The seniors would enjoy a kosher lunch, a musical performance, and a chance to socialize with the only other people with whom they could truly relate.

Now, with community centers closed and grocery shopping more difficult, Fay says, "I think the clients feel food insecure. One of the triggers for Holocaust survivors is going into the stores and not seeing toilet paper. During the War and even afterwards there was a very big shortage of toilet paper. So in the beginning of this when they were going into the stores and there was no toilet paper, they had tremendous anxiety and some even had panic attacks."



Chaya and Jerry participate in the JFS Holocaust Survivor Services program, which provides homecare, wellness checks, socialization, nutrition, and more to survivors. JFS currently serves more than 150 seniors.

## "This is a real trigger."

"A lot of clients became very depressed before Passover because they couldn't see their families, they're isolated, they couldn't have a Seder, a lot of them can't do Zoom, they don't even have computers. It was a very, very hard time for them. A lot of them expressed real anxiety and real depression over the phone. Holidays are [usually] triggers for [Holocaust survivors] anyway because they bring back such a [sense of] loss for them, and the pandemic has just exacerbated that."

Despite the uncertainty, Chaya is optimistic. Both having lost their first spouses, she and Jerry met in their 50s at a party in Brooklyn. "He was a good dancer and I liked to dance." After more than twenty years of marriage, "now we help each other. We're trying, with the time we have to live, to make the best of it. I have five grandchildren, Jerry six. They're my life." 🌱





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A survey by the Claims Conference found that 49% of young adults cannot name one single concentration camp or ghetto. There were more than 40,000.

Some of the JFS Holocaust survivors experienced the horrors of multiple camps. Our job at JFS is not only to support these incredible people who persevered, but also to ensure that no generation ever forgets.

Your support helps us provide homecare, wellness checks, socialization, nutrition, and more to Holocaust survivors, and enables us to preserve their memories so the world never forgets. To make a difference, visit our website:

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# Finding A Sense of Belonging

The JFS Women's Center is a member of the Displaced Homemaker Network of New Jersey, a coalition of organizations that empower women working toward self-sufficiency. Every year the DH Network hosts an awards reception for women who have overcome tremendous obstacles and have made impressive strides in their journeys to independence. Ms. A, a member of the JFS Women's Center, was a recipient of the New Beginnings Award at this year's virtual event. Ms. A joined five other women who shared their heart wrenching stories of love, loss, hardship, and ultimate triumph. Diane Markowitz, JFS Career Specialist, and Lisa Balewitz, JFS Women's Center Coordinator, represented Ms. A at the Zoom ceremony. Lisa shared Ms. A's remarkable story with the DH Network:



"Men and women of domestic violence, you are not alone. I am Ms. A.; I am 72 years young and a 50-year survivor of domestic violence. No one escaped the violence in our home. There were 50 years of abuse – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual – for me and my three children. My ex-husband even attempted to end my life at least three times during our marriage. I knew I had to do something or face the inevitable. I never told my children what I planned to do. I managed to save a little bit of money and finally get out. I arrived at JFS about four years ago by way of my therapist. My journey began again with JFS Women's and Career Centers-Diane who helped me find a job; Roni who introduced me to the women's support group with kind and wonderful people; Lisa B, who continues to guide me along the way. I find everyone's journey is different. Through [JFS], I found a sense of belonging; I know now what I was feeling all those years was fear, and it was my constant companion. Today, I am very proud of who I am - the mother of three lovely children; a daughter, Lisa, who was 50 when she passed away; two sons Frank and Michael; and doggie Mom to my beloved Conner, who recently passed away. I was in the lost and found department and finally found my true self! I made it – you can, too!" 🌱



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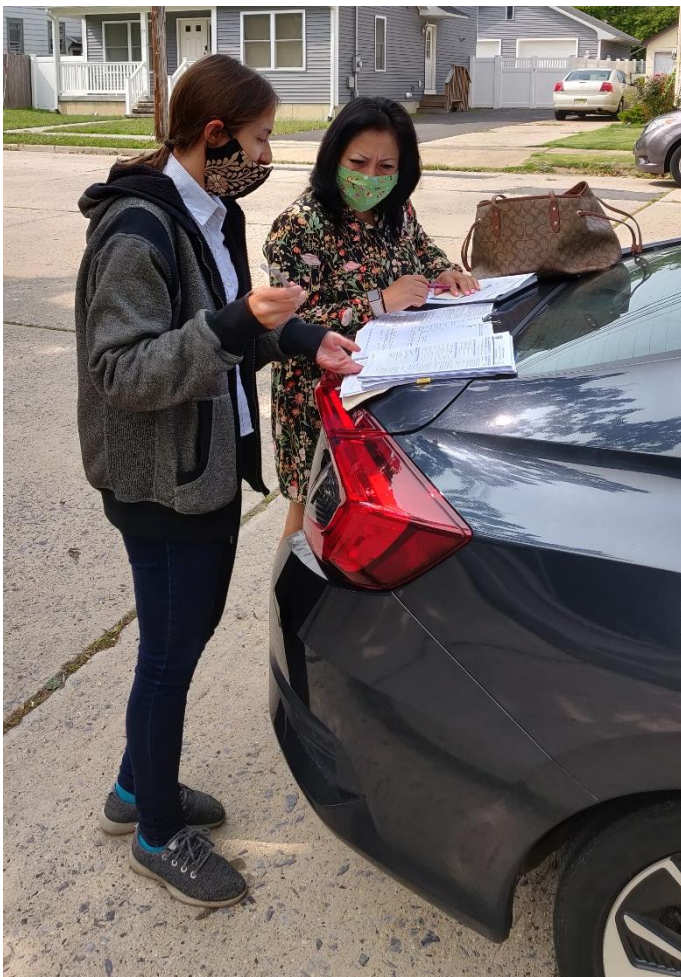
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## Adjusting to the “new normal” and social services al fresco

On milder days, JFS staff take advantage of the fresh outside air to meet with clients. Immigration applications can involve assembling hundreds of pages of information, and sometimes Zoom just doesn't cut it. While the JFS office buildings remain closed to the public during the pandemic, car trunks, foldable tables, and the parking lot became our outdoor offices. Clients still prefer in-person meetings, especially when various signatures are needed on lengthy forms. For individuals whose first language is not English, communication has always been a challenge; the increased use of phones and computers can exacerbate this issue. When a client calls asking for an appointment, the JFS Immigration team is happy to oblige, as long as the meteorologists give a thumbs up!



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## A pathway to citizenship

What does it take to become an American citizen? For individuals born outside the US, quite a lot!

**Get a visa.** Even to be tourists, people from most countries need special visas. Applicants might submit their personal financial information, sign affidavits, attend interviews, and more.

**Get a green card.** One does not simply show up in the United States intending to live here. Immigrants who want to stay need a sponsor, namely an employer or an immediate family member. For a worker to get a green card, that person must have extraordinary vocational abilities. Most others will need a specific family member to file a petition for them, a process that can be lengthy and costly.

**Apply for citizenship.** If an immigrant manages to get into the US, they can apply for citizenship after several years if they meet various strict requirements.

**Pass the test.** An interview with USCIS will test applicants on their English skills, good moral character, and knowledge of US history and civics.

JFS helps people with every step in the process!



The JFS Immigration program is accredited by the US Department of Justice to provide USCIS application assistance for immigrants and their families.



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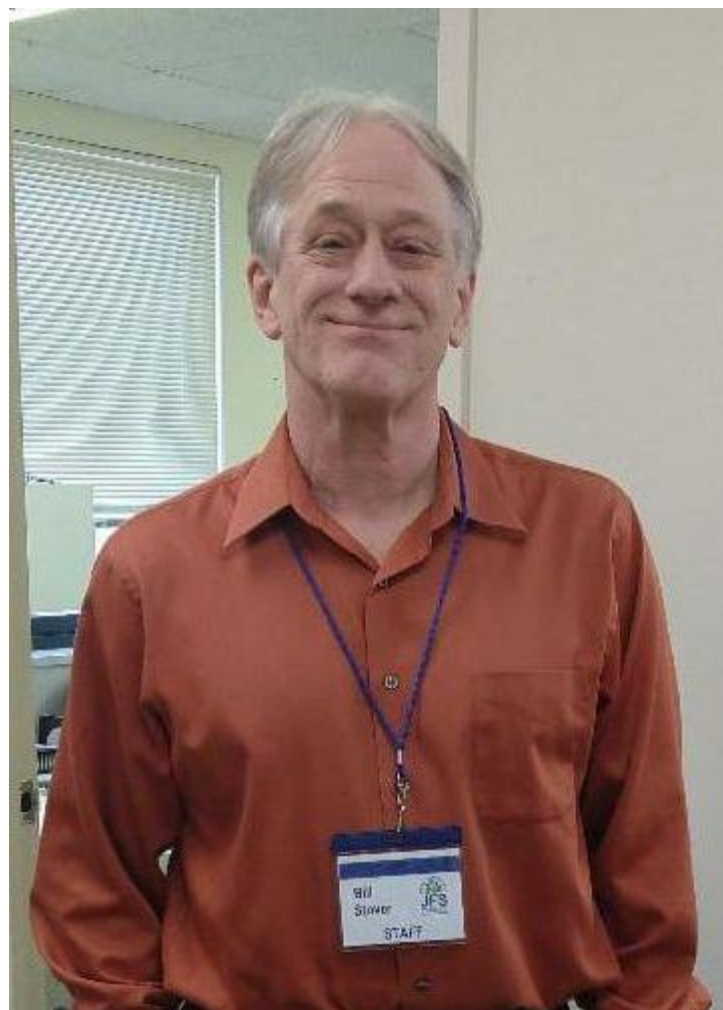
**The more we care, the more beautiful life becomes.**

## Q&A with Bill Stover, LCSW

Bill Stover, a licensed clinical social worker, is the JFS Associate Executive Director and Clinical Director. He and his team of dedicated therapists have been working hard to help people cope with general anxiety as well as current pandemic-related stress.

*Q: What led you to pursue a career as a mental health counselor?*

A: I began to work with adolescents who had dropped out of school and were experiencing various issues with life and society. I had realized while in college and graduate school that working with people would be my professional life in some fashion. I have been fortunate in my career to have worked in many clinical settings. This included inpatient psychiatric units for children, adolescents, and adults, residential treatment programs for adolescents and adults, a counselling program on a Native American Reservation, outpatient therapy, in school treatment, substance abuse treatment, and sexual abuse/trauma treatment. I have been blessed to work with many outstanding peers at every setting.







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## Bill Stover, continued

*Q: What are the best and most challenging parts of your job?*

A: Often people will ask, "How can you work with people all the time who have such problems, such sad stories?" The answer is really simple. Most of the time, we are able to help people improve their life. That is the most rewarding part of this type of job every day. I learned long ago that I do not need to (nor do I have) the answer to someone else's issues. What I do have is the ability to help them find their own answers. And that is the art of what we do.

The pandemic has taken a toll on our society and our people. The isolation has made already existing issues much more intense. The positive part of this time is that, since technology has advanced, we can continue to help people even remotely. It is not better than in person treatment but it is far better than no treatment. People tend to adjust to what they need to adjust to, staff as well as clients.

*Q: What advice can you share about taking care of mental health during the pandemic?*

I believe the best way to deal with the current situation, whatever it may be, is to honestly evaluate what you want to do with the activities that are available. While we lament not being in person with those that we love, we can increase our other contacts through phone, FaceTime and similar platforms. Monitor your use of substances as they will not make the situation better; they will just distract you for a while. We know addiction issues have increased during this time so we must keep a watchful eye. None of us are immune to addiction. Try to exercise as you can. Do not worry about doing "enough." Some exercise is better than none and will help overall wellbeing and mental health. Be aware of eating due to boredom. In general, accept the current limitations and make the most of what you are able to do rather than what you wish you could do. If the feelings of depression or anxiety feel too strong, reach out for help at JFS or other providers. There is help available; you do not need to suffer through difficult times alone.

In short, if you can be anything, be kind, to yourself and others. 🌱

**"Make the most of what you are able to do rather than what you wish you could do."**



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## “Two Wonder Angels”



JFS staff Lisa Balewitz and Diane Markowitz distribute school supplies to families in need.

JFS Women’s Center Coordinator, Lisa Balewitz, received an emotional email from a client whom she has been helping through some exceedingly difficult times. Enduring a cancer diagnosis, temporary homelessness, and the challenges of single motherhood, Ms. C is now going back to school and working with Lisa to get her life back on track.

“I miss speaking with you, I am the type of person who gets close to people who [genuinely] care for me. I haven’t really had that in my life before. I know you are helping take care of everyone else that needs help, but I miss your encouraging talks and emails.”

Continued on page 13



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**“Two Wonder Angels” continued:**

Ms. C is battling depression and recently underwent a complicated surgery for advanced stage cancer. Despite the obstacles, Ms. C is taking college classes and has, “four A’s and one B that I am determined to turn into an A.” She concludes her email: “Let me get back to this homework. I have 4 essays and 3 computer assignments with a test. Wish me luck.”

**“I love you and Mrs. Diane so much. G-d sent me two wonder angels and I thank Him every day.”**

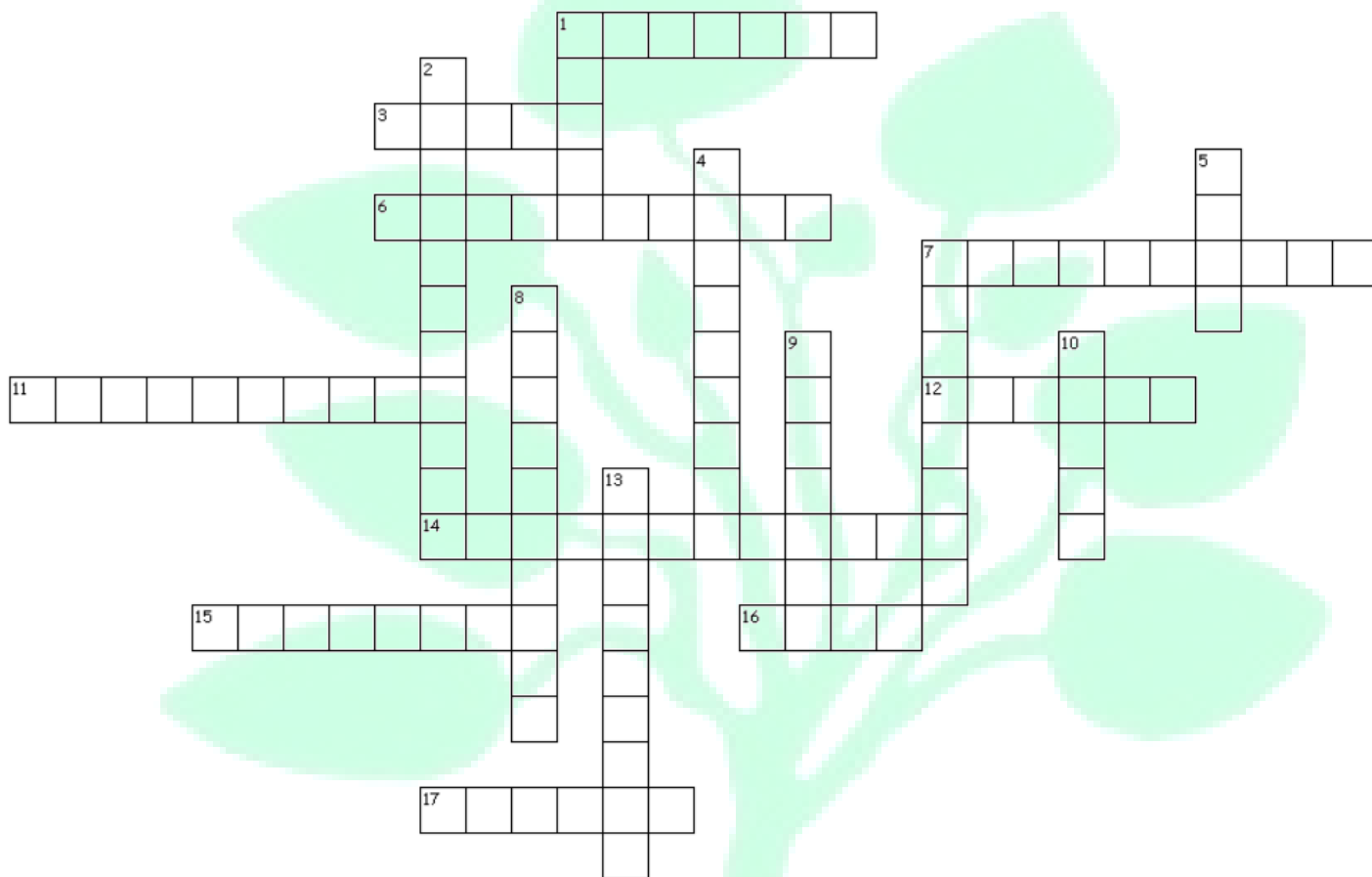
The JFS Women’s Center helps ladies overcome extraordinary challenges to achieve self-sufficiency through individualized coaching, personal development workshops, tuition assistance, job search strategizing, and more. Donations help send women for career training, purchase school supplies, provide groceries from the JFS food pantries, and help our ladies with the resources they need to support their families and become independent.

For more information, visit [jfsmiddlesex.org/womens-center](http://jfsmiddlesex.org/womens-center) or email [womenscenter@jfsmiddlesex.org](mailto:womenscenter@jfsmiddlesex.org). 

# JFS Crossword Puzzle

Visit [www.jfsmiddlesex.org](http://www.jfsmiddlesex.org) to browse for the answers!

(See page 15 for full solution)



## ACROSS

1. Last name of current JFS Board President
3. JFS anniversary celebrated in 2019
6. JFS spends \_ cents of every dollar of revenue on programs
7. In 2019 JFS delivered nearly 3000 hours of mental health \_
11. \_ deliver the JFS Kosher Meals on Wheels
12. The P in SMP NJ
14. Road on which JFS Monroe office is located
15. Location of JFS main office
16. We're here to \_
17. JFS has the only \_ food pantries in Middlesex County

## DOWN

1. Country of origin for majority of JFS refugee/asylee clients
2. JFS offers \_ classes to prepare permanent residents for naturalization
4. The Women's and Career Centers help homemakers enter or re-enter the \_
5. Spring fundraiser and celebration to honor JFS community partners
7. The JFS Career Center offers a \_ lab for jobseekers
8. \_ on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany
9. The JFS Immigration Program is accredited by the US Department of \_
10. The JFS Senior Medicare Patrol fights \_
13. The JFS Women's Center assists \_ homemakers





## Kosher Meals on Wheels - Then and Now

With help from donors and volunteers, JFS delivers meals to seniors, who are able to remain in the comfort and safety of their homes. Seniors can stay connected to the community without being transferred to assisted living facilities, where the pandemic poses a serious health risk.

**Before the pandemic** JFS delivered around 500 nutritious meals to 130 seniors every week.

**Now** there are 175 (and counting!) seniors, including 25 Holocaust survivors, who receive more than 800 meals each week.

**We need your help.** With the pandemic showing no signs of stopping, the need for food keeps growing. To make a donation, visit [www.jfsmiddlesex.org/donate](http://www.jfsmiddlesex.org/donate).



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