



Jewish Family Services was founded on the concept of Tikkun Olam, repairing the world through acts of kindness and dedicated service. It reminds us that our community is only as strong as we work to make it.

As JFS started this fiscal year in celebration of our 170th anniversary, no one would have imagined what we would be facing as it ends. We can't think of a year in our history that better highlights the JFS legacy of caring and hope.

We were privileged to plan our 170th celebration with so many members of our community who have been part of our legacy. From the many staff and board members to our amazing Russian resettlement volunteers and families to current agency partners, you have strengthened our mission.

JFS expanded our legacy of caring with two new initiatives. In October, we held our first annual Connecting Hearts Bowling Ball that supports our efforts to find loving families for children in Virginia's foster system. In December, JFS launched our Lights of Love program to provide gifts to neighbors in need of a little extra help and warmth. With our partners at the Weinstein JCC and the overwhelming support of the community, 50 individuals of all ages received gifts and a reminder they are not alone.

In the New Year, the JFS legacy of caring and hope was called on more than ever by covid-19. From the first days of the pandemic, our doors remained open to provide critical services. The JFS Counselors pivoted to telecounseling in one week. Our Home Care staff and aides delivered essential care to our most vulnerable older adults and kept them safe and connected. JFS volunteers called homebound Seniors to offer food, access to medications and companionship. Our community partners have provided much needed resources to support our clients. Our JFS staff has worked tirelessly, often on the front lines, and always from the heart.

Most recently, we are reminded of our work every day to fight injustice and inequality by bringing needed human services to individuals across Richmond regardless of race, faith, income, gender or sexuality. Our Richmond community can only be strengthened when everyone has a role in assuring the well-being of others.

Below you will find excerpts from an annual report letter written by JFS President Zipporah Cohen in 1918. We take strength in her words, so relevant today, and the reminder JFS will continue to meet each crisis and provide care to strengthen our community.

We remain humbled and grateful for your support.

Sandy

Sandy Sisisky
Board President



Wendy

Wendy Kreuter
Chief Executive Officer



You find me again before you with a detailed account of the work of the year gone and the responsibilities of the year to come. I do not need to bring before you the meaning of responsibility. The anxieties of today, from the conflicts raging around us to those the world over, bring home the meaning of responsibility more clearly to our hearts than I can tell you all.

Each year we have strived to broaden our usefulness and today we stand forth like a giant oak, bringing shelter to those in need. From time to time, we have faced crises and periods of distress. But, suffice it to say that no crisis has come upon us that we could not take care of, and we have the satisfaction of knowing that our vulnerable have been well cared for.

My most grateful thanks for all who gave and to all who did not, may it be their pleasure to do so in the future. We know no matter what may come to us or how severe the test, we will be able to meet these demands, for in the hearts of our people dwell love and charity.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Sam Cohen

Mrs. Sam Cohen
President



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Celebrating 170 Years of Service



L-R, Louis Adams, JCFR President Ellen Renee Adams, Mindy Funk, and Beth Sholom CEO Mo Funk.

Jewish Family Services celebrated its 170th Anniversary at a Birthday Party on Sunday, October 6 at the Virginia War Memorial. The warm, overcast afternoon was perfect for enjoying the sweeping views of the James and the Richmond skyline. Many friends of JFS gathered to celebrate: current and former Board and staff members, people resettled by JFS from the Soviet Union in the 80s and 90s, representatives from Richmond's Jewish agencies, and many others touched by JFS over the years.

JFS' 170-year history was on prominent display throughout the event. Posters honored the Straus, Cohen and Thalhimier families and their many generations of JFS leaders. A timeline of important moments in JFS history, from 1849 to 2019, flanked the wall overlooking the river. People resettled from the former Soviet Union by JFS in the 80s and 90s told stories about their first days in Richmond to laughter and applause.

Friends of JFS lit seven birthday candles to honor aspects of JFS' history, present, and future:

- Rabbi Nagel, honoring JFS' 170 year history.
- Kate Bellemen, honoring her great great grandmother Fannie Heller Straus, the Ladies Hebrew Association's first President.
- JFS Adoption Social Worker Jessica Carty for JFS' work in adoption.
- Ellen Glass, representing JFS Counseling.
- Teresa Baldwin, supervisor of JFS' Senior Engagement program, lit the candle for JFS Care.
- JFS volunteer leaders Jerry and Ann Samford, for JFS' birthday.
- Finally, young Isaiah and Eva Sisisky, celebrating the lives JFS will transform in the future.

Many thanks to all the committee members, volunteers, sponsors, and guests who made JFS' 170th Birthday Party special!



L-R, JFS Trustees Richard Birnbaum, Benita Felmus, Scott Belleman, and Jerry Samford.



A reunion of individuals resettled in Richmond from the former Soviet Union in the late '80s and early '90s, as well as JFS staff and volunteers who were involved in the effort.



1,309

Clients Served



129,279

Hours of Service



60%

of Clients are Low-Income

Care

Habibah – or “BB” as she’s fondly known – has only been a JFS companion for a year, but she already has many heartwarming stories to tell about the lives she’s transformed.

One of her clients is 93, and though he lives independently, he needs help remembering to take his medicine and check his blood sugar. Habibah visits him bright and early, seven days a week. “We reminisce about Queens and Brooklyn in the 1960s,” she said.

“I used to walk him down to the dining room and help him pick a healthy breakfast,” Habibah continued. But, with the onset of the pandemic, he’s been eating in his room. “Now that he’s not going to the dining room, his blood sugar is under control,” she joked.

“I always make sure he’s talking about something positive when I leave, and I call him during the day to check on him.” Sometimes she recommends ways for him to pass the time, or reminds him when his favorite TV shows come on.

Denise, JFS’ Home Care Services Coordinator, said Habibah “goes above and beyond for our clients! She is always willing to help out when and wherever she can.”

Habibah fit that bill this fall by accompanying a mother with memory loss to her daughter’s wedding. Habibah laid out her outfit, fixed her hair, and helped the mother of the bride participate in the wedding.

“You’ve got to talk with them and engage them in things they are interested in,” Habibah said. “The bride cried when she saw her mother dancing.”

Now, Habibah is mindful of the pandemic’s effects on her own life and the lives of her clients. “For me, it’s about caring enough to help my clients through their time of not knowing what will come, and having hope that there will be more answers soon.”

The doctor, the pharmacist, the aide, the counselor – we’re all part of a team. Every one of us has a role to play in helping a person live their best possible life at the time.”



Counseling

Sonya “Sonni” Gittleman has what she calls “a bit of a history with JFS.” She interned at JFS in 1990 and later was hired as social worker to help newly arrived Jewish individuals and families from the former Soviet Union. She took on the role of “warehouse supervisor,” organizing donations to fill the resettled families’ new homes and lifting “big, heavy stuff” to the amazement of the other volunteers, many of them Russian men.

Sonni returned to JFS as a counselor in December. Three months later, at the outset of the pandemic, the entire Counseling team switched in a single week from in-person to telehealth sessions over the phone or video call.

“The transition to telehealth was much smoother than I expected,” Sonni said. “Telehealth requires clinicians to be creative. Building rapport through telehealth is very different with new clients, but a positive piece is how you can connect to them where they are, meeting pets and seeing their space.”

“It’s a great icebreaker in a telehealth session. One new client cried through both of her in-person sessions, but in her first telehealth session, she was beaming as she introduced me to her puppy.”



Sonni as her clients see her in a telehealth counseling session.

In May, Sonni had a full appointment book: at least 36 sessions per week. The pandemic and its economic impact is a major concern for many JFS Counseling clients.

“I try to help people focus on what they can control and pay attention to how the media they engage with is affecting them, because that can be anxiety-provoking,” Sonni said.

“As therapists, we’re supposed to do a lot of self-care. I’m realizing how important it is to practice the same daily self-care that I tell my clients to practice during this crisis, so I can best serve them.”

Adoption

Lisa and Scott knew they wanted to adopt a child, but like many families, they didn't know where to begin. They first contacted JFS in 2017 to learn more about the adoption process. Jessica, a JFS Adoption social worker, said, "When Scott and Lisa came into the office, I looked forward to meeting them. I remembered Scott's mother, Claudette. She volunteered for years at JFS and we all adored her. Scott shared memories of his mother's cherished time at JFS and her drive to serve the community through volunteerism."

A year later, Lisa and Scott reached out to JFS again to begin their adoption home study. Jessica said, "Their home study gave us an opportunity to learn more about Scott and how he is living out his mother's legacy by volunteering with Meals on Wheels."

They completed the home study and created a family profile to share with adoption agencies around the country, widening their search for a child far beyond Richmond. Jessica got in touch with Lisa and Scott in January 2019 to ask if she could share their profile with a birth mother.

"We were able to provide a copy of our profile that day," Lisa said. "What we didn't know was that the mother Jessica had asked us about had already delivered her baby! We were in for quite a surprise when she called us back to tell us that the mother had chosen us! We got to meet our sweet girl Jillian in the hospital that night and brought her home two days later when she was released from the hospital!"

Lisa continued, "We anticipated waiting for months for somebody to choose us and then having time to prepare. We never thought that we'd receive a call from JFS a week after we created a profile, and that it would've been for a child born at Chippenham! The timing of everything was absolutely surreal. Nobody believes it when we share our story."

The family adjusted quickly to the new dynamic in the year since the adoption. Lisa said, "We thought there would be more challenges to bringing a baby (and a new sibling) into the family, but everyone adjusted so well, especially big brother! It's so easy to see how much Joshua and Jillian adore each other. Our family would not be where it is today without the help of JFS."



A portrait with the newest member of Scott and Lisa's family.

Senior Engagement

Steve moved with his family from Los Angeles to Richmond for his job. After settling in, he wanted to get involved: "I was looking for an opportunity to expand my horizons, learn from older generations of people, and help show my children the importance of giving back. I knew I wanted to volunteer with the elderly, and when I read about JFS' Friendly Visitor program, I knew it was up my alley."

"My friend Rob and I have become just that: friends. He has taught me so much and listens so deeply. My family and some of my closest friends have met him, and he is a big piece of my life now," Steve said.

Before the pandemic, Steve and Rob's Friendly Visits included going out to eat, taking walks, and one especially memorable trip to the pet store to visit with friendly reptiles. Now, they stay in touch despite the physical distance, texting each other and sharing jokes.

Rob said, "Steve is a wonderful guy, very generous. I text him and ask how his wife and kids are doing. I can't wait to see him again."



Steve and Rob visiting a pet store so Rob can meet his first chameleon.

Another Senior Engagement volunteer, Bill, started with JFS after his retirement in 2013. "I felt an obligation to be constructive. Not everyone has been as fortunate in life as I have," he said.

Now, Bill makes Telephone Reassurance calls from home. He said, "The subjects we talk about do include the pandemic and quarantines. I ask if they are in good health. If they've been out of the house lately, if they have enough food, or if they have any urgent needs JFS could help with."

"I've met Telephone Reassurance clients who are remarkably strong in facing personal difficulties." Bill concluded, "Several of them feel like regular acquaintances or neighbors to me. And a couple of them give great blessings! That's my compensation right there!"

It's Official: JFS Connecting Hearts

This year, Connecting Hearts officially joined us to become JFS Connecting Hearts! Its mission is to find foster, adoptive, and kinship families for every child in central Virginia's foster system through collaboration with agencies, families, and youth.

One of the program's major initiatives is "A Hand to Hold," an awareness campaign during Adoption Awareness Month in partnership with WTVR CBS 6. Every day in November, CBS 6 features a child or sibling group in foster care awaiting adoption in central Virginia on "Virginia This Morning," the evening news and their website and social media outlets.

The goal of the campaign is to find permanent, loving homes for the 30 children or sibling groups featured and to raise awareness about the other 1,000+ children in foster care awaiting adoption.

In November 2019, CBS 6 featured 31 children in foster care awaiting adoption, and 153 families reached out to JFS Connecting Hearts. 18 of the 31 children featured were placed in foster-to-adopt homes, 12 have been adopted, and 4 are in the process of being adopted! Campaigns like "A Hand to Hold" are essential to spread the word, recruit foster, adoptive, or kinship parents, and find permanent, loving homes for every child in central Virginia!



In center, the JFS Connecting Hearts' Heart Gallery at the Weinstein JCC, and at the left and right, two of the children who were placed in foster-to-adopt homes as a result of "A Hand to Hold."

The First Annual Bowling Ball

JFS Connecting Hearts hosted a new fundraiser, the Bowling Ball, on November 7, 2019 at River City Roll. Led by the amazing volunteer committee of Page Bethke, Shelley Birnbaum, Debbie Johnston, and Libby Lewis, the event raised \$35,000 to support JFS Connecting Hearts' mission!

The Bowling Ball featured speakers including former Governor Terry McAuliffe, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, and local adoption advocate and musician George Dennehy.

The entire venue was a large Heart Gallery: the faces of central Virginia's children in foster care awaiting adoption were arranged around the room and shown on every TV screen.

We are profoundly grateful for our partnership with CBS 6, the generosity of the Bowling Ball's inaugural sponsors, and for everyone who attended, bought raffle tickets, or made a gift. Keep an eye out for the second annual Bowling Ball!



L-R, Bowling Ball co-chair Libby Lewis and Martha Quinn.



L-R, Becky Massey, former Va. Governor Terry McAuliffe, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, and Bowling Ball co-chair Debbie Johnston.



CBS 6 Anchor Bill Fitzgerald addresses the crowd.

"Lights of Love" Shed Lots of Light!

This past December, JFS launched Lights of Love, a new program to help brighten the season for those whose holidays might be lonely or cold. JFS staff collected wish lists from clients across the community in need of a little extra holiday warmth and light. Paper flames with the wish lists hung from a menorah in the Weinstein JCC for people to take and shop for. Many asked for essentials: winterwear, personal care items, and grocery gift cards.

While we hoped Lights of Love's first year would be a success, JFS staff was floored by the extraordinary response: every single flame was returned! Thanks to so many generous, compassionate community members, 50 people of all ages received gifts, visits, and a small reminder that they weren't alone during the holidays.



The Lights of Love display in the Weinstein JCC.

One elderly client had just moved into a new apartment, and her wish list included dishes and a floor mat. When she opened her door to see JFS' Director of Human Resources and Volunteer Services Teresa and her daughter Abbie struggling to carry three giant bags of home goods to get her settled in, she burst into tears. As Teresa and Abbie left to make their next delivery, she said, "Thank you for thinking of me today."

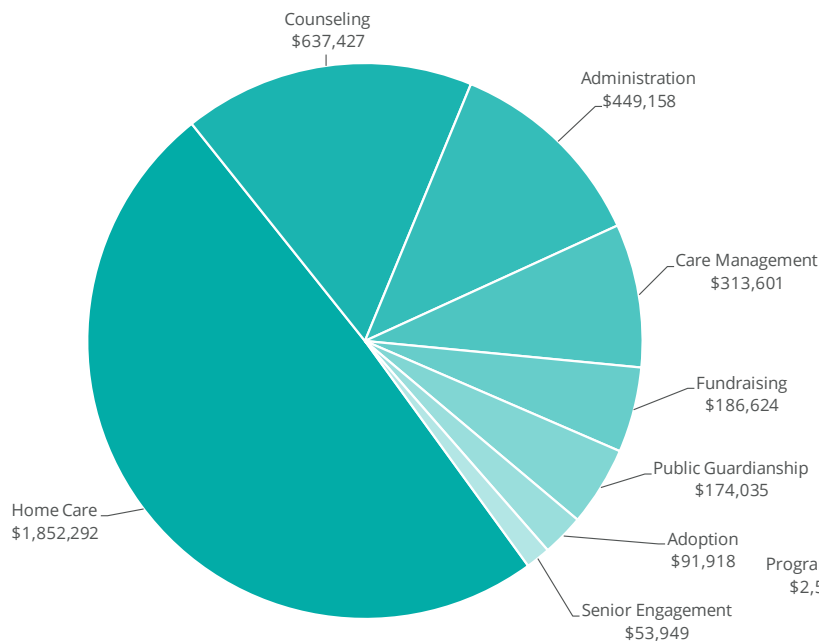
JFS is profoundly grateful for everyone who participated in the first Lights of Love, whether you bought gifts, helped wrap, or spread the word. You brought warmth and joy to 50 people who might otherwise have felt forgotten during the holidays. We are especially thankful to the Weinstein JCC for hosting the display!



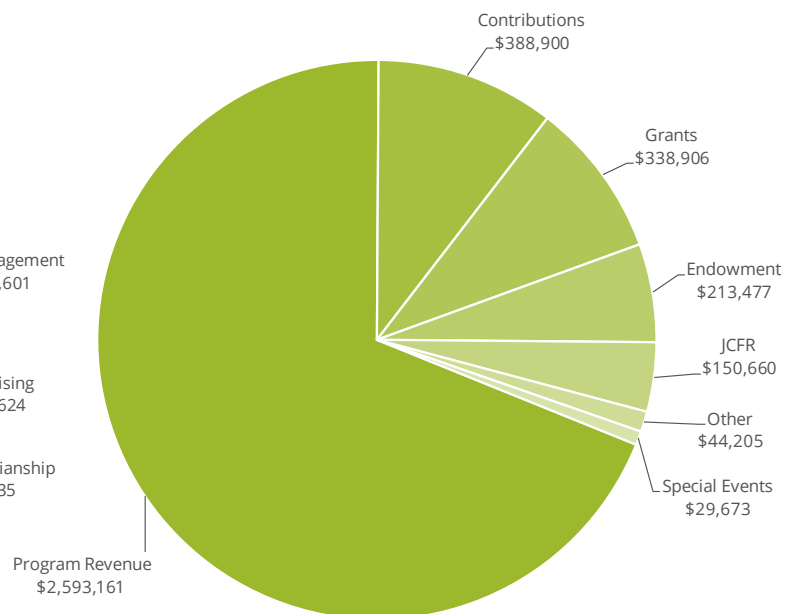
Staff, volunteers, and friends of JFS help wrap gifts.

JFS 2018 - 2019 Financial Summary

Operating Expenses



Operating Revenues



Special thanks to Sid Koerin, Tom Topinka, and Arianna Brown for their photography; Bonnie Eisenman and Amy Roberts for their help in the Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives; and Peter Oppen for his book on JFS' history, *Like a Giant Oak*.



For over 170 years, Jewish Family Services has provided exceptional guidance and support to individuals and families of all ages, faiths, and income levels. We take great pride in helping to change lives in productive and positive ways.

Thank you for being a part of making it all possible.

JFS IS PROUD TO PARTNER WITH: _____



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