For JFCS, like so many other vital organizations, the challenge this year has become how to navigate the now and prepare for what comes next.

Our agency has always shown a capacity to pivot and grow to meet the changing needs in the community. Our staff and Board of Directors are regularly asking “how can JFCS best help in this moment?” and “what can we do to prepare for future challenges?”

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything, JFCS had recognized there were food insecure individuals in Mercer County who could not access existing pantries, including our own, due to transportation issues and mobility limitations. In response, we proudly launched the JFCS Mobile Food Pantry bringing our healthy, choice model directly to these individuals throughout the region. We knew from the start the mobile pantry would give us long-term adaptability, yet never realized how quickly the next big hurdle would come. Bringing our pantry to especially vulnerable populations during the pandemic has proven an invaluable resource to individuals we serve across Mercer County.

More broadly, JFCS has been extraordinarily creative and resilient through this ongoing crisis.

• When indoor gatherings were no longer an option, we turned our Kosher Café into a grab-and-go model to ensure the low-income elderly attendees would still receive four hot lunches each week.

• When there was an immediate increase in demand for our on-site and mobile food pantries, we connected with new food suppliers to ensure our shelves remained stocked.

• When schools closed for the year, our agency knew that youth and teens would be seeking a place to connect about their feelings and share their experiences, so we launched weekly virtual meetings.

• For seniors, our team established a Friendly Phone Call program where volunteers check in for a weekly friendly chat with isolated elderly clients. In the months ahead, we know seniors will continue to feel the effects of isolation and our friendly caller program will be there to provide socialization and support.

• For those struggling mentally and emotionally, we have a successful teletherapy system in place as well as drop-in hours available on weekdays. We have made mental healthcare more accessible in anticipation of a growing need as the long-term emotional effects of the pandemic persist.

These are only a few examples of how JFCS has lived up to its charge to bring help, hope and healing to the communities we serve — when they need it the most. We are so proud of what we’ve accomplished, and incredibly grateful to our employees and volunteers who have heroically kept the agency vital and responsive.

Now, we turn to you for equally vital support. When you invest in JFCS, as so many have this past year, it allows us to remain adaptable and resilient in providing services to our seniors, our pantry patrons, our counseling clients, our entire community.

Please make a donation today. Your gift helps us to navigate the very complicated “now” and be ready for whatever comes next.
In late March, schools across Mercer County made the determination to not return to in-person learning following spring break in response to procedural challenges resulting from COVID-19. We received a call from a mother who worked at a local school office. Her three children were now home for the remainder of the school year; all three had previously received free lunches at school. She was almost in tears and said she was fed up with the amount of food she received and the quality — fresh vegetables and meat, it was incredible.

“I never imagined in a million years I would need to reach out to a food pantry for help. The staff at JFCS was so understanding. I had all these ideas of what a food pantry would be, but when I arrived, I didn’t feel judged, I felt welcomed and comforted. I was absolutely blown away with the amount of food I received and the quality — fresh vegetables and meat, it was incredible.”

—Pantry Client

In March, when almost everything shut down in our community, our students’ families were immediately facing reduced income due to job loss. Not only were the parents unsure of how to keep food on the table, but they were also unable to access local stores or food pantries on their own. Most of our families rely on public transportation and were wary of traveling in such public spaces during the early days of the pandemic. A small group of teachers set up a food pantry at the school that would be open to families most in need.

In the first few months we grew from helping 10 families a week, to 50 families. We started calling and emailing any area pantry or food bank we could find to keep our shelves stocked. We reached out to JFCS to see if we could pick up food at their pantry to distribute to our families, when they said they could bring the pantry to us we were floored. We are so thankful for the monthly deliveries. JFCS is an incredible partner, their generosity has helped our community move forward through this difficult time.”

—Pantry Pantry Volunteers at the Paul Robeson Charter School for the Humanities (Trenton, NJ)

The JFCS Women’s Alliance is a membership-based collaboration of women focused on addressing hunger in greater Mercer County. Launched in 2019, the Women’s Alliance serves as the largest founding sponsor of the Mobile Food Pantry. This year, the Women’s Alliance is once again supporting the mobile pantry efforts as the demand for the program continues to grow. The Women’s Alliance introduced tiered membership options for 2020–2021, inviting more members to join at different giving levels. In its second year, 131 members raised more than $82,000 which will directly support the purchase of food for the Mobile Food Pantry.

Why I Give...

“I grew up in a traditionally Jewish home where my parents placed a high value on helping those less fortunate. Charitable giving was not just part of the conversation but also a part of our daily lives. My parents always felt that they had ‘enough’ and that they had the responsibility to help our local community. During the current pandemic and the food insecurity in our area, I often think of my father. His family suffered financially during the Great Depression, his father was out of work and food was limited. He could either go to bed hungry or fill his belly with water. It is my hope that children in our area do not have the choice of going to bed hungry or filling their bellies with water. Apathy does not feed these families: action does help feed these families. Please join me with a meaningful gift to this very worthy cause.”

—Reba Orszag, Women’s Alliance Founding and Sustaining Member

JFCS Women’s ALLIANCE

SUSTAINING MEMBERS
Anonymous (1)
Abrams Foundation/
Nati Kushner
Rachel Berkman
Stacey Bialow
Shari Blecher
Christine Cirkus
Myra Colbert
Andrea Dedrick
Hollis Elias
Susan Falcon
Eliot and Marsha Freeman
Bobbi Freedman
Beth Fieder
Andrea Genek
Carol Golden
Jacqueline Goldfinger
Ellen Gordon
Nadihah Greenberg
Paula Heller
Amy Hoffman
Jodi Horstein
Ilene Jarosfksy
Emily Josephson
Kathy Lane
Barbara Lawrence
Carol Lerner
Mel Lubin
Carl Maisa
Debbye Maisel
Ginny Mason
Linda Meisel
Michelle Napel
Jackie Orr
Reba Orszag
Daniele Perlman
Robin Persky
Anita Plotkin
Carol Poliard
Sheryl Punia
Lois Riskin
Pilhay and Howard Rosenman
Norma Saks
Patricia Schaefer
Marcie Shavel
Dina Shaw
Denise Siegel
Lissette Siegel
Lisa Smukler
Elaine Sussman
Lisa Tobias
Marissa Treu
Amy Vogel
Stacey Wasserman
Audrey Wisosky

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Anne Berman-Waldorf
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Cindy Bright
Sara Bucholtz
Barbara Curran
Barbara Felton
Dara Foster-Storch
Melissa Freedman
Jaimi Gaffe
Randy Gelbard
Debbi Gitterman
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Hedy Shepard-Shavel
Lois Shindelman
Betsy Siegel
Andrea Silverstein
Nadine Singer
Linda Weber
Frances Zeiter
Linda Weber
Frances Zeiter

To learn more about the Women’s Alliance contact Helaine Isaacs at Helaine@jfcsonline.org or 609.987.8100 ext. 104.

Listed Women’s Alliance Members as of November 9, 2020.
JFCS quickly transitioned all counseling clients to teletherapy services as quarantine protocols took effect across New Jersey. Clients of all ages and circumstances were appreciative of the flexibility and accessibility of therapy by phone or video call.

For Max*, this accessibility was critical when he was facing extreme isolation and anxiety when hospitalized with COVID-19. “It was early April and there were so many unknowns about the virus, so much panic surrounding a diagnosis, and even more so around a hospitalization. The days from first feeling ill to becoming hospitalized were a whirlwind. When it was clear I would be in the hospital for several days, and was stable enough to make the call, I connected with my JFCS counselor. I had been seeing my counselor for several months to help address my chronic anxiety; yet, for as much progress as I had made in managing my anxiety, alone in the hospital, sick with this new virus, unable to see my family, I felt completely overwhelmed.

“My counselor was able to connect over Zoom while I was in the hospital and helped me process this situation and manage my nerves for the remainder of my stay.”

Once I was well again, being able to have therapy sessions from the comfort of my home was really appreciated. My counselor helped me through this really difficult time, and I am so thankful to have uninterrupted care, even when hospitalized.*

The pandemic has changed how many services are delivered, and therapy is no different. Teletherapy offers a safe option now and, potentially in the future, more opportunities for those with limited mobility or transportation options.

If you need help, JFCS is here for you. To connect with a counselor, call us at 609.987.8100 ext 102.

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“Creating a (Cyber)Space for Teens

Celeste Albert, Coordinator of Teen Programs, recognized how teens were deeply impacted by their new reality shortly after schools closed. In-person meetings for Jewish Community Youth Foundation (JCYF) and Gesher LeKesher participants had concluded for the school year. Celeste knew there would be an audience of teens seeking connection and community.

At the end of March, Celeste launched weekly virtual meetings with JCYF and Gesher LeKesher participants. The first few weeks focused on helping teens adjust to their new routines and responsibilities of remote learning and coping with distancing from peers. As the weeks and months of remote learning and social distancing continued, programing pivoted to provide engaging opportunities such as virtual service projects and “field trips.”

“It was helpful to hear the experiences of other people during this time, to know I was not alone in my feelings of uncertainty.”

Connecting with my peers each week helped me stay positive and the activities and resources helped me stay clear of boredom.

“The meetings helped me feel connected to other people and spend time with people I haven’t been able to see in person.”

In April, Rita reached out to her synagogue for help. At 85 years old and living on her own, Rita was having a difficult time getting sufficient groceries safely delivered to her home. She was hesitant to pay more for delivery services but fearful of venturing into a grocery store. Her synagogue told her to reach out to JFCS.

Rita connected with our team and was enrolled in the expanded Kosher Meals on Wheels (KHOW) program that was funded by Federation of Princeton Mercer Bucks. She was thrilled when she received her weekly deliveries of meals.

“I have a limited income and with the free grocery delivery, I can direct spending to other necessities. It is a relief to have one less thing to worry about these days.” —Rita

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“A VIEW FROM THE FRONTLINE: A CARE MANAGER’S PERSPECTIVE

“Many times as social workers, we are called upon in a crisis to serve our community. During Hurricane Sandy, when we ourselves were without power and had flooded basements, we were reaching out and responding to our seniors to be sure that they were safe and connected. Just like airlines advise parents to put on their own oxygen mask before their child’s, we are reminded that we need to be strong to help our vulnerable populations, even as we may struggle with our own discomfort.

All this brings to mind our current COVID crisis. As we grapple with making our own personal decisions about what is safe, we are called upon day and night, to respond to questions and concerns from our seniors. When a medical condition arises, we are asked whether it’s safe to go to the hospital (yes, by all means, go), or to visit with grandchildren, or to go grocery shopping. Many times we are contacted by adult children, deeply concerned about navigating care for their elderly parents in light of COVID-19 concerns. We do our best to help address everyone’s concerns about the inherent risks, versus maintaining a reasonable quality of life. As COVID continues to dominate our lives, we expect many more opportunities to serve our seniors. And we’re ready for it!” —Andrea Gaynor, LCSW Geriatric Care Manager
LIFE and LEGACY
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Dr. Meryl Baurmash
Elana Berlinger
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