

FOREWORD BY MR PAUL BERMAN JEWISH COMMUNITY SERVICES

For more than 150 years, Jewish Community Services (Cape), under a succession of names and in a rapidly changing society, has administered the needs of vulnerable individuals and families in crisis within Cape Town's Jewish community. In that century and a half, the composition and profile of the community has changed profoundly, as a declining and ageing population has faced new challenges of families fragmented by emigration of the young, the social isolation of the elderly and the increasing impoverishment of individuals who find themselves trapped in a mire of inadequate pensions, illness and a deteriorating national economy.

To these and other needful members of our community, Jewish Community Services has provided a comprehensive range of professional services encompassing preventative, educative and supportive projects under the supervision of expert social workers and community development personnel. What makes the organization unique among charitable bodies is that its focus is on the welfare needs of an entire community rather than any one segment such as the indigent, the young or the chronically ill. This generic approach to community service means that over the years we have developed into a holistic humanitarian institution that offers interventions ranging from subsidized accommodation and statutory child care to psychiatric care and substance abuse treatment.

This impressive range of services has enabled JCS to make a meaningful impact on the lives and well-being of those who find themselves in need, but it has come at an ever-growing cost. State grants in the form of Department of Social Development subsidies have become uncertain as all spheres of government are faced with growing demands on the welfare fiscus. Our organization is not alone in experiencing these financial pressures. But we need to bear in mind that by relieving the State of the need to care for the poor, the hungry and the elderly of our own community, we are allowing government funds to be dedicated to those who have nobody to whom they can turn in periods of personal distress.

I therefore believe the continuing viability and expansion of our work speaks eloquently of the vitality of one of the richest and most laudable component of Jewish communal life - our aspiration to create a caring and compassionate community in which the aged are venerated, the hungry are fed, the poor are clothed and the oppressed are made free.

It is a tribute to the dedication of the JCS's administrators and staff, to our loyal volunteers and to our ever-generous donors that the organization has been able not only to sustain its existing programmes, but to expand its projects into new areas as additional community needs arise.

At the time of writing, JCS carries an average caseload of approximately 500 families or individuals, which is a significant increase from the number of only two or three years before. This is an alarming indication of the severe impact of the socio-economic climate on the more vulnerable members of the community in terms of the need for material relief as well as counselling services. But throughout the Jewish world it is a distressing truth that the financial stress and emotional tensions of contemporary society world are testing the bonds of solidarity that have traditionally bound us together. Evidence of this is to be found in the increasing number of cases handled by JCS that involve violence towards children and a weakened sense of responsibility towards the frail and vulnerable elderly.

The greatest proportion of JCS's social work services and the majority of our individual cases are focused on the specialized areas of child protection and family cohesion, older persons at risk and individuals who suffer a psychiatric disability. The extent of these interventions may be judged by the fact that at the beginning of 2017, our social workers were engaged with 125 cases involving domestic violence or children considered to be at risk, 123 cases involving the vulnerable aged and 185 cases where at least one family member had a psychiatric condition which impacted negatively on the functioning of the individual and the family.

In addition to these cases, JCS disburses some R500,000 a month to support destitute members of our community and makes every effort to offset this expenditure through contributions from the clients themselves, families and extended families. Although we have managed to secure contributions that cover almost 60% of what we disburse, this category of relief imposes real stress on our limited financial resources and demands constant attention from our social workers and executive team.

One of JCS's most important - and costly - projects is the provision of accommodation and the subsidization of housing for the indigent and otherwise needy. The organisation owns almost 40 apartments across Cape Town, which provide secure accommodation for over 60 clients, and disburses more than R100,000 a month for the subsidization of rentals for 45 clients living in other properties. The ever-increasing cost of rental accommodation has caused us to use valuable capital resources to purchase additional apartments, to which must be added the considerable costs of maintenance, refurbishment and repairs.

A comparatively recent problem, and one which is adding greatly to JCS's workload, is substance abuse and addiction among young members of the community aged between 18 and 30. In response to what is an increasing phenomenon across all sectors of society, our social workers are dealing with increasing numbers of such cases, to the extent that drug tests are routinely administered to clients approaching us for assistance, while in many such cases relief assistance is made conditional upon compliance with rehabilitation treatment in both in-patient and outpatient facilities.

Sadly, it does not appear that this burden of need is likely to decrease. Every month, JCS processes an average of 40 enquiries and opens approximately 10 new cases, which imposes permanent fund-raising challenges. Not only has the profile of Cape Town's Jewish community changed over time, but there have been many and complex changes in the world of philanthropy. Like all charitable organizations, we have to accept that individual and corporate donations are no longer as resilient as they were in times of economic prosperity, and that we need to adapt to this through more creative initiatives and more cautious management of our resources, and by building strategic partnerships with other agencies and community institutions.

To those of us who are in leadership positions, the challenge is to accommodate these changes while never losing sight of the one imperative that remains constant: Jewish Community Services must continue to be a dependable and stable anchor in the lives of those individuals and families in need who depend on us and who are entitled to live with dignity and self-respect.

I am entirely confident in the ability of our community and the committed staff and the executive of JCS to provide the kind of innovative leadership and compassionate social care that is required in these difficult times, and I thank them for the energy and dedication that have sustained the organization over the past and into the future.



Paul Berman

Jewish Community Services Chairman

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