

## **National Think Tank on Jewish Poverty in Canada: National statement**

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, the international community will mark the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 in poverty. In our own Greater Vancouver community, the most recent statistics indicate that 1 in 6 is poor. 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 Jewish 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, Jewish communities across Canada will be engaging in activities to raise awareness, develop strategies and increase capacity to fight poverty and improve the lives of our Jewish brothers and sisters.

Watch for information from your local Federation and Jewish Family Service Agency about poverty reduction activities in your community. Together we can make a difference.

### **Members of Poverty Think Tank Committee**

**Linda Kislowicz**, CEO, Jewish Federations Canada – UJA, 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 Cummings**, Executive Director, JF&CS, Toronto

**Sandi Pelley**, 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