

Broadening Their Reach Amidst The Pandemic

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“I’ve never received a shut-off notice before.”

Sixty-six-year old Arthur* had just returned home from a week’s hospital stay to discover that he was at risk of having his electricity turned off. Up until that point, he had no trouble paying his bills. Between his social security benefits and a little help from his daughter Kaley*, Arthur was able to provide for his needs. But with the arrival of COVID came the departure of Kaley’s new business, a women’s boutique, shuttered just weeks after its opening due to the pandemic.

Arthur is just one of thousands in our area who have been impacted by COVID. One of thousands who are finding themselves struggling financially for the first time in their lives. And thanks to a recent grant from the Oakland Together Community Response Recovery Fund, Jewish Family Service (JFS) is able to assist more Oakland County residents—including Arthur—than ever before.

“We’re looking to reach people who weren’t already walking through our now virtual doors,” says Dini Peterson, Chief Program Officer, Family and Community Services. “We want to expand our services and reach a broader section of Oakland County.”

Jewish Family Service is one of eighty-four non-profit organizations to receive this grant, intended to help agencies such as JFS restore vital services for Oakland County residents, such as food, shelter and utilities. The program is being administered in partnership with United Way for Southeastern Michigan.

The grant has allowed JFS to increase staffing in several departments, including counseling, transportation and the resource center, which is the point of entry for anyone seeking services or resources. The agency has also been able to purchase tech equipment in order to support its now remote staff, and to make COVID safety modifications, such as dividers in its fleet of cars and touchless sinks in the office. But the biggest impact this funding has made is on the lives of those coming to JFS for help.

“I’m trying to get back to work but I don’t have anyone who can stay home with my kids.”

Delia* is a single mother who lost her job at the start of the pandemic, due to her employer shutting down. She has multiple shut-off notices and is behind on her rent. She is trying to find a new job but has limited options as her two school-age children are attending school virtually and can’t be home alone. She has no money in the bank and nowhere else to turn for help.

Thanks to this special COVID funding, JFS is able to help community members, like Delia, stay in their homes and keep the lights on. The agency can help with utility bills, rent or mortgage, car payments and other basic needs.

“We want to prevent people from future financial challenges,” says Peterson. “And we want to be more than just a Band-Aid. So for those community members who would benefit from more than one-time financial assistance, our social workers can help them navigate through the available services, whether at JFS or in the community. We can also help them decide next steps in meeting goals. We help people access health insurance, housing resources, government benefits and so much more. There’s a level of support that comes from working with a social worker, especially during times of transition.”

Whatever challenge someone might be facing, working with a JFS social worker can help community members carve out a new version of their life in a way that feels safe and supported. That feeling of security is needed now more than ever as our whole community tries to find its footing amidst a pandemic.

People are struggling with job losses and shut-off notices. Parents are at their wit’s end as they balance their own work with their children’s virtual schooling. And community members are grieving the loss of loved ones due to COVID-19. While it may feel like our

world is falling apart, Jewish Family Service is a soft place to land.

Contact JFS

Jewish Family Service recognizes that there are many in our community who may find themselves in need of help for the very first time. Whatever expense you're facing, you may be eligible for assistance. For more information, contact JFS at (248) 592-2313 or resourcecenter@jfsdetroit.org.

*Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

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