

## **Peer Services Report for Jewish Seniors Alliance 2020-2021 Fiscal Year**

Firstly, I would like to thank all of you who have supported us in so many ways during this fiscal year. Without your financial contributions, guidance, directions and unwavering belief in the philosophy that everyone regardless of age has the right to be the best that they can be and to live in dignity. Without your support we would not have been able to provide the seamless and excellent services that our clients deserve and have come to expect.

Entering into this fiscal year the Pandemic had already started to take a toll on the population at large but it proved to be especially difficult for older adults. Skyrocketing mortality rates, loneliness, social isolation and numerous restrictions set by the Ministry of Health in an attempt to curb the epidemic became normal in a time of abnormality. Visitors were banned in medical and assisted living facilities and community volunteers were advised not to visit clients in their homes, go for walks or meet for coffee in the community. It became crystal clear that our services could no longer be delivered as usual and that rethinking their delivery entailed an “outside the box” rethinking process. However, the Peer Services Program is most fortunate to have innovative thinkers who genuinely care about clients, program volunteers and who take pride in the provision of excellent services.

All in person contact was discontinued in January 2020 and all services were delivered either by telephone or on zoom. Program staff – Grace Hann and Charles Leibovich – expressed concerns that personal contacts cannot be substituted by technology and hence clients’ emotional wellbeing would possibly decline. As demonstrated by an increase of fifty percent of outgoing support calls with clients in crisis their points were valid. But rather than to throw their hands up in the air Grace and Charles initiated and facilitated a weekly zoom support group for clients in need of extra support. In addition to use zoom as a venue for emotional support it was also used as a classroom for volunteer trainings. Although staff had misgivings in the beginning about how a zoom training may be

impersonal and interfere with the important dynamics between the trainer and the students this did not become an issue.

A sample of the following trainings have all been taking place on zoom.

- Two training sessions conducted by Grace Hann for MLA Michael Lee's staff..
- Two training sessions by Grace Hann and Dolores Luber MApsych. for JSA BoD.
- Friendly Visitors volunteer training
- Senior Peer Counsellor volunteer training
- In partnership with South Vancouver Seniors' Network weekly webinars co-facilitated by Grace Hann.
- Dying with dignity volunteer development event facilitated by staff and a guest speaker.
- Advanced Care Plan lecture by Dr. Gloria Gutman to JSA BoD, staff and volunteers

JSA peer services have been most fortunate to attract loyal and competent volunteers. The program volunteers are the back bone of the peer program and without them there would be no services. It was of great concern that some of the volunteers would leave as the as the pandemic strengthen its chokehold. Staff wanted to ensure that the volunteers maintained the strong bond with JSA and the Peer services so in order to avoid a drastic attrition rate Grace and Charles increased the frequency of volunteer support and development meetings. Again the venue was zoom. To increase flexibility and preserve a more intimate setting we offered three different time slots; thus volunteers had a choice. But to volunteer is not only about performance it is also about relaxing, feeling appreciated and enjoying each others company. Grace and Charles organized three picnics and once again to maximize access these were all held at different locations and at different times. Another successful volunteer appreciation event was the virtual tea party hosted by staff. The result of the increased volunteer support development sessions, the picnics and the virtual tea party clearly demonstrate that these efforts did hold the attrition rate steady. Since last year's report the number of volunteers have increased by

close to ten percent. It is absolutely remarkable what has been accomplished by Charles and Grace during these difficult times.

Throughout the year the Quality Assurance process led by Margot Beauchamp has allowed us to accurately assess the effectiveness and efficiency of peer services. Although at the beginning of this process we were reluctant to take on this time-consuming venture we can now clearly demonstrate that we provide what we say we provide which is a high quality service which is very much in line with Best Practices ideals. Also, kudos go out to Vicky Albarracin who prepared, distributed and analyzed questionnaires re our services sent to clients, caregivers, community agencies and other interested parties.

Aside from the provision of client services we have established contact with LGBTQ and JQT to help support lesbian and gay older adults in the community. In conjunction with these organizations we will work in partnership to assess available services, identify gaps, and if need be work together to develop suitable services.

In May this year we were fortunate to receive a grant from the Jewish Foundation of Greater Vancouver that allowed us to start a tech library for socially isolated seniors. For many borrowers this is a whole new adventure as many are unfamiliar with this kind of technology. To assist these users we provide a two hours introductory in person demonstration and have a “hot line number” available for extra coaching. As this new service is in its infancy it is too early to gauge how well used it will become. It does however have great potential as it allows the borrowers to enter a whole new world of information, entertainment, communication and excitement. Thank you Bob Finkelstein for developing and organizing this very worthwhile project and thank you Federation for providing the start up funds.

My last words go to the readers of this report. Thank you for reading it and please feel free to contact the Jewish Seniors’ Alliance if you have any questions or would like any

further information. We can be reached by dialing 604-732-1555 or via our email [jsalliance@org](mailto:jsalliance@org).

Respectfully submitted

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