

**An Interim Report on**

# **Poverty in the San Diego Jewish Community**

**in Preparation for Community Convening  
February 26, 2020**

**by**

**Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego  
Jewish Family Service of San Diego  
Jewish Federation of San Diego County  
Isakow Foundation**

## Introduction

Based on expert analysis we believe that at least 9,000 of the approximately 100,000 Jews in San Diego county live on less than \$25,365 per year in household income (150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines for a household of two people, which is the average size of a Jewish household in the county). *(Research report prepared for this project by Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz, Jewish Federations of North America)*

They live in poverty, unable **to meet basic human needs, including shelter, food and clothing.**

When we look at broader indications of financial instability, we believe that in addition to the households described above, another 5,000 Jewish households in the county can barely make ends meet.

This means that poverty touches up to 20% of the approximately 50,000 Jewish households in San Diego County (those in which there is at least one person who identifies as Jewish or in which there is a child being raised as Jewish).

While the Jewish community is generally fortunate to experience lower levels of poverty and economic distress than the general population, many of the drivers of poverty - sudden loss of jobs, family break-up, single-parent households, fluctuations in the economy, unexpected emergencies, health problems, and disabilities - are the same. As Jews we're are not exempt from the challenges, personal and communal, of poverty.

## Why was this Report Prepared, Who Prepared It and How?

In April 2019 the Harry and Janette Weinberg Foundation and the Jewish Funders Network hosted a national convening on Jewish poverty. In response to that convening Jewish Community Foundation, Jewish Family Service, Jewish Federation and the Isakow Foundation joined forces in May 2019 to begin addressing the following questions:

- What do we know about the extent and scope of poverty in the San Diego Jewish community?
- In what ways, and to what extent, is San Diego's Jewish community different from other North American communities of comparable size?
- What efforts are currently or have recently been in place to address poverty in the San Diego Jewish community? What organizations are involved and what results have been obtained?
- What would our community need to do in order to alleviate or greatly reduce poverty in Jewish San Diego county?

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- What are the perceived obstacles to alleviating or greatly reducing poverty in the San Diego Jewish community and conversely what strengths of our community could we build on to achieve our goal?
- How should we get started?

The four sponsoring organizations put together a working group that included Heidi Gantwerk, consultant; Darren Schwartz, Jewish Federation; Michael Sonduck, project manager and Carole Yellen, Jewish Family Service to explore the questions.

Because the last study of the San Diego Jewish community was conducted in 2003 the first question the sponsors and working group asked was how reliable the data are given all the changes in our community over the past 16+ years. We engaged Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz, Ph.D., Senior Director, Research and Analysis at The Jewish Federations of North America to help answer that question. He conducted an exhaustive analysis of the 2003 data, comparing it to Federation, California and San Diego County data at the time and for the most recent years. He also examined other, more recent, Jewish communal studies and other research on poverty. Laurence concluded that we could reliably extrapolate findings about poverty in the San Diego Jewish community from the 2003 study.

The working group conducted interviews of community professionals who we believed were likely to have knowledge about Jews living in poverty in our community. This included staff at Jewish Family Service; G'mach, the Jewish Gift Closet; synagogue rabbis; Rabbi Ralph Dalin, Jewish Community Chaplain, the JCC, Jewish camps, schools, Hillel and others. Michael Sonduck attended two additional national conferences on poverty in Jewish communities to gather information about national trends and specifically on communities that are addressing poverty as a communal issue. Members of the working group and sponsors met directly with fellow Jews in San Diego living in poverty and also contacted organizations across North America.

In November 2019 the Jewish Community Foundation and Interfaith Community Services hosted a simulation on poverty which was attended by several sponsors and working group members. The experience added immeasurably to our understanding of the issues facing people living in poverty, specifically highlighting the complexity of getting services on a day-to-day basis.

This Interim Report was written by Michael Sonduck, project manager, with significant review of its content by the other members of the working group. In addition, all of the sponsors of the project reviewed and helped in the preparation of the final version.

## **Findings**

In addition to the findings reported at the beginning of this report we can say, based on our interviews and research that:

**Living in poverty is far more complex and harrowing than not having enough money to buy food, pay rent or get medicine.**

For people living in poverty it may mean living in a car or on the street; having mental health issues that go unaddressed; being unable to find a job; outliving financial resources and not having family able or willing to help; not being part of communal life; not having transportation to get to basic services; not having anyone to help figure out what services are available to you and how to qualify, just to name a few of the obstacles facing those living in poverty.

There are social consequences which can be equally challenging, for example, dealing with shame, loss of personal dignity, feeling ostracized and/or losing relationships, having to relocate to unknown parts of town, losing friendship or family relationships, feeling isolated, etc.

There is very limited coordination of efforts within the Jewish community to make sure that no Jew experiencing poverty falls through the cracks. In fact, because of the complexity and diverse needs, it may be impossible for one organization to be a “one-stop shop,” even if this was desirable. As a result, members of our community often do not know where to turn. Most professionals in our community do not know what services are available to those living in poverty, how to obtain those services or how to qualify. The standard response is to refer people to JFS, even in cases where the scope of JFS services may not be ideal for that community member.

**There are multiple reasons people end up living in poverty and multiple ways they experience and deal with poverty.** This means that providing assistance isn’t as simple as giving cash. Very often mental health related services, or other counseling services are necessary.

**Jews in San Diego county are among the least effective users of local, State, Federal or communal benefits available for those living in poverty.** This may be due to feelings of shame, unfamiliarity with government bureaucracy, and others. In the San Diego Jewish community, this is complicated by the limited coordination among the few existing service providers. With some exceptions, even within most communal organizations, there is little or no knowledge of who is being served, how they are being served, what service gaps exist, etc. This is a vital issue. Without connecting those who are qualified to existing government and secular services and resources it will be virtually impossible to address the needs of our target population.

**There is no centralized navigation system of financial and other resources to serve the Jewish community.** No organization knows what or how much help is needed, what it would cost to provide that assistance, etc.

There are conflicting professional points of view about what the best course of action should be. Furthermore, since such a small percentage of Jews in San Diego county are connected to the Jewish community in any manner, we will need bold, innovative approaches to identify and connect those Jews living in poverty to services.

There is a widely held belief among communal professionals and donors that Jewish Family Services is taking care of the Jewish poor in San Diego. JFS reports that of those people it serves about 1400 identify as Jewish. Because JFS cannot require clients in programs supported by government funding to identify by religion it is difficult for them to do more than estimate the total number of Jews they serve.

There are organizations such as G'mach, the Jewish Gift Closet; synagogues; private foundations and individuals who assist needy Jews on a case-by-case basis. G'mach reports that it touches about 1500 individuals per year. Most synagogue rabbis provide some assistance, usually no more than \$100 - \$500 at a time, to no more than 15- 20 people in the course of a year. There is no means of knowing what support is provided by generous individuals or private foundations.

There are no communal standards of care; determining or setting priority for use of resources; oversight; education or other communal tasks associated with addressing an issue of significant communal importance.

**Based on our interviews and research we have confirmed that a multi-faceted approach is necessary to address issues faced by people living in poverty.** It must include wrap-around services that incorporate and coordinate:

- case management
- mental health services
- dental services
- medical services
- financial aid
- financial literacy
- food assistance
- employment & job coaching
- housing
- advocacy
- other human services
- emotional and social support
- transportation
- auto repair
- and other needs

Many larger Jewish communities, e.g., New York, Chicago, Baltimore and Philadelphia have established Jewish agencies focused on providing services for those living in poverty in their communities.

**The impact of living in poverty should not be confused with leading a Jewishly engaged life.**

There have been many efforts over the years to make Jewish communal life more affordable and accessible to members of the community. Many community leaders, both professional and volunteer, have decried the high cost of “living Jewishly” as a primary reason for the low level of affiliation in our community.

We should not confuse or gloss over an important distinction – there is no similarity between not being able to put food on the table or provide safe shelter and not being able to afford synagogue or JCC membership, day school tuition, etc. These are important aspects of leading a Jewish life, but there is nothing more basic to leading a Jewish life than having food, shelter, healthcare, transportation, etc. Being poor is a barrier to full inclusion in Jewish life in San Diego county. However, we should not overlook the importance of these programs as they can affect the ability for parent(s) to work and provide for their families.

**How do we balance “high priority” issues with those that are most “actionable”?** Some of the highest priority issues, for example mental health, may consume large amounts of available resources, while other issues, for example engaging and training volunteers to assist those living in poverty with obtaining government services may be able to be started quickly and then scaled up based on experience.

The following list includes some of issues which were repeatedly identified during the research phase of this effort as needing systematic, community-wide attention.

- Education on poverty in the San Diego Jewish community for all communal professional and leaders (board members) to dispel myths and inspire action
- Hebrew Free Loan Society
- Addressing mental health Issues
- Assuring the dignity of Jewish poor in our own community beginning with assuring that being poor is never a barrier to any doorway to Jewish life in our community
- Low cost short-term housing
- Volunteer advocate corps to support those seeking assistance

## **Issues to be Addressed at the Community Convening**

**Given the history and culture of the San Diego Jewish community, how should we develop an integrated model of navigating and delivering services to Jewish poor?**

**How do we avoid unnecessary bureaucracy and build on the strengths of various Jewish, secular and governmental services providers?**

**How do we address the need of those living in poverty for personal dignity and meaningful communal relationships?**

**How can volunteers support those living in poverty along with professionals?**

**Do we need to establish communal oversight of priorities, plans, financial and other resources, standard setting, education and support for all services addressing the needs of Jews in San Diego county living in poverty while assuring the most effective delivery of services? And, if so, how do we establish communal oversight?**

- Do we need a communal oversight “board” to set priorities, assure resources, establish coordinative functions and assess impact?
- Do we need a professional director for this effort? If so, where would that person “sit?”
- How much start-up funding do we need and how will it be obtained?
- How do we balance the need for a comprehensive road map developed in coordination with communal professionals and organizations with the need for immediate action to address pressing needs of those living in poverty?
- How should an educational program for the San Diego Jewish Community about Jewish poor be started?

**How do we avoid being reduced to doing nothing in the face of the almost insurmountable challenges of dealing with mental health and general health related issues among those living in poverty?** These issues are so large and complicated they can be “showstoppers” when it comes to figuring out first steps.

**What other questions should we be asking, or addressing at this time?**

An addendum to this report, **What Other Jewish Communities are Doing**, is attached.

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### ADDENDUM – WHAT OTHER JEWISH COMMUNITIES ARE DOING

*Almost every Jewish community in North America provides some level of social services, including efforts to meet the needs of Jews living in poverty.*

*The list below identifies communities that have become visible because of collaborations, innovation or scale.*

<b>COMMUNITY</b>	<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>SCOPE/FOCUS</b>	<b>CONTACT</b>
Baltimore	Comprehensive Housing Assistance, Inc. (CHAI)	Housing Assistance	<b>Lisa K. Budlow</b> Chief Executive Officer <a href="mailto:lbudlow@chaibaltimore.org">lbudlow@chaibaltimore.org</a> 410-500-5354 <a href="http://www.chaibaltimore.org">www.chaibaltimore.org</a>
Boston	Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP)	Centralized services across communal agencies; “No Wrong Door” referral system	Sarah Abramson, Sr. VP <a href="mailto:saraha@cjp.org">saraha@cjp.org</a> <a href="http://www.cjp.org">www.cjp.org</a>
Chicago	The Ark	Comprehensive services; new focus on suburban Jewish poor	Marc Swatez, Executive Director 773-973-1000 <a href="http://www.arkchicago.org">www.arkchicago.org</a>
Cleveland	Jewish Federation and Jewish Family Services	Collaborative approach to financial literacy	<a href="http://www.jewishcleveland.org">www.jewishcleveland.org</a> <a href="http://www.jfsa-cleveland.org">www.jfsa-cleveland.org</a>
Cleveland	Gesher Cleveland	Benefits referral program	Rabbi A. Adler, Executive Director 216.862.4599 x244 <a href="http://www.geshercleveland.com">www.geshercleveland.com</a>
Columbus, OH	Jewish Family Service	Working Poor with mental health issues (One of the NJHSA funded projects)	<a href="http://www.jfscolumbus.org">www.jfscolumbus.org</a>
Detroit	JFS of Metropolitan Detroit, JVS Human Services, and Yad Ezra.	Middle aged working poor, especially Orthodox (One of the NJHSA funded projects)	<a href="http://www.jfsdetroit.org">www.jfsdetroit.org</a> <a href="http://www.jvshumanservices.org">www.jvshumanservices.org</a> <a href="http://www.yadezra.org">www.yadezra.org</a>
Maryland	A Wider Circle	Comprehensive service organization that uses income-based approach to determine eligibility	Mark Bergel, CEO 4808 Moorland Lane, Suite 802 Bethesda, MD 20814 Phone: 301-608-3504 <a href="mailto:mark@awidercircle.org">mark@awidercircle.org</a> <a href="http://www.awidercircle.org">www.awidercircle.org</a>

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NYC	Bikur Holim	Use of Volunteers to serve primarily Orthodox community	Nathan Krasnovsky, CEO SBH Community Services Network 718-787-1100 <a href="http://www.sbhonline.org">www.sbhonline.org</a>
NYC	UJA Federation with Met Council & Central Queens Y	Centralized services in two community resource hubs; digital food pantries	Jessica Chait, Managing Director Food Programs - Met Council 212.453.9500 <a href="http://www.metcouncil.org">www.metcouncil.org</a> <a href="http://www.commonpointqueens.org">www.commonpointqueens.org</a>
North America	Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies & Jewish Funders Network	Challenge grants to address innovation in serving people living in poverty	Reuben Rotman, President & CEO <a href="mailto:rrotman@networkjhsa.org">rrotman@networkjhsa.org</a> 201-977-2423 <a href="http://www.networkjhsa.org">www.networkjhsa.org</a>
Philadelphia	Federation	New approaches to using data across the community to identify underserved populations; Digital food pantry	Brian Gralnick, Director -Social Responsibility Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia <a href="mailto:bgralnick@jewishphilly.org">bgralnick@jewishphilly.org</a> 215-832-0850
Philadelphia	Jewish Relief Agency	Large number of volunteers prepare and deliver meals	Judith Roth-Saks, Executive Director 610-660-0190 <a href="http://www.jewishrelief.org">www.jewishrelief.org</a>
Philadelphia	Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Greater Philadelphia	Clients who have successfully worked with JF&CS but lack skills to obtain full-time work, will be trained to assist overburdened case managers and serve as peer mentors. (One of the NJHSA funded projects)	Paula Goldstein, President & CEO <a href="http://www.jfcsphilly.org">www.jfcsphilly.org</a>
Pittsburgh	AgeWell Pittsburgh	8000 older adults served by over 2000 volunteers	<a href="http://www.agewellpgh.org">www.agewellpgh.org</a>
Washington, DC	HousingUp DC	Focus on homelessness; ptnshps with for-profit developers	<a href="http://www.housingup.org">www.housingup.org</a>