

UJA COVID-19 REPORT: A LOOK BACK AT THE FIRST NINE MONTHS

MARCH — DECEMBER 2020



NINE MONTHS AFTER A GLOBAL PANDEMIC GROUND EVERYDAY LIFE TO A HALT IN NEW YORK, WE'RE SHARING A DETAILED OVERVIEW OF OUR INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS, RECOGNIZING THERE'S A LONG AND UNCERTAIN ROAD STILL AHEAD.

A LOOK BACK

On March 1, 2020, New York reported its first case of coronavirus. Over the next weeks, as health experts and elected officials scrambled to contain a wider outbreak, **UJA and our partners raced against the clock mapping out scenarios and what would be required to ensure the continuation of indispensable services.**

On March 22, New York entered a lockdown that shuttered schools, synagogues, and all but essential businesses.

As the New York region rapidly became the epicenter of the global pandemic, streets were eerily silent save for the sound of sirens. Many families suffered terrible losses, unable to visit loved ones in hospitals or take comfort in traditional mourning rituals.

Bearing the brunt of the crisis were those who were more vulnerable to start with: the elderly, the poor, and people with disabilities. The lockdown exacerbated existing challenges and created new stresses: Unemployment skyrocketed, and people living paycheck to paycheck were left with no safety net. Growing numbers were now dealing with food insufficiency and no money for rent or other essentials. **We acted quickly to offer tens of millions of dollars in emergency funding in response to escalating needs.**



At the same time, another issue required our attention: the viability of Jewish institutions, many of which were unable to run revenue-driving programs on which they depended. While early on we were unsure whether or when summer camps would be able to open, it was clear our support would be required. **Every possibility needed to be planned for, and as events shifted, plans needed to shift as well.**

Nine months after it all began, with New York open but still fearful of a second wave, we have continued to adapt to a new normal, focusing on what's needed to address the economic and emotional upheaval felt throughout New York and the Jewish community.

Every step of the way, UJA has been resolute in our conviction: we can find strength in one another; none of us are alone. Our founders created UJA precisely so that we have the infrastructure in place to respond to unforeseen crises. **And it is because of the generosity of those who stand with us that we're ready for whatever comes next.**

ASSESSING NEED IN REAL TIME

From the very beginning, we communicated daily with city and state officials, and worked with our partners in every sector — human services, day schools, JCCs, synagogues — to assess evolving needs.

IN ORDER TO DETERMINE HOW TO ALLOCATE FUNDING FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT, WE ASKED:

- What’s needed right now to keep the most vulnerable — the elderly, Holocaust survivors, people with disabilities — safe and cared for in a completely changed landscape?
- How do we help partners pivot so they can continue to offer services in new ways? (For example: now that lunch programs at senior centers are closed, how do we get food to seniors?)

NEW CHALLENGES QUICKLY EMERGED:

- How do we ensure the dignified burial of Jewish victims of the virus, regardless of a family’s means?
- How can we ease the pain of isolation, especially for the elderly?
- How can we help front-line essential workers at partner agencies secure personal protective equipment?
- How do we help summer camps open on a tight timeline while facing financial challenges due to reduced capacity?
- How do we create meaningful opportunities for Jewish life and connection when we can’t be together in person?

Through our strategic funding, we were able to offer solutions that changed lives.



BUILT FOR THIS MOMENT

UJA has a long history of responding to crises both far away and in our own backyard, having seen our community through 9/11, the 2008 economic recession, and Hurricane Sandy. Once again, we were able to offer a swift and comprehensive response because we have built a system based on collaboration and

shared expertise. Longstanding relationships with City Hall and Albany meant that our government relations team was able to get critical information quickly and advocate on behalf of our network. We also turned to allies in other faith-based communities and across the philanthropic arena to maximize our impact.

NINE-MONTH FUNDING HIGHLIGHTS: \$64 MILLION ALLOCATED

These emergency funds, a combination of grants and interest-free loans, were above and beyond our normal annual allocations. Funding decisions were made quickly to meet immediate needs while also helping ensure the longer-term viability of Jewish institutions.

On Passover, the words, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” resonated with new meaning this year. Before this crisis hit, Met Council was gearing up to distribute Passover essentials to 181,000 people. To meet rising demand, we allocated an additional \$750,000 to the agency.

SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IN NEED

Responding to Food Insufficiency: Our partner and New York’s central hub of kosher food distribution, Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, was inundated with requests, both from new clients and from food pantry sites that were forced shut. Early on, we allocated \$1 million to Met Council to significantly expand its capacity to serve the community. An additional \$360,000 was provided to support food programs at Met Council and other agencies distributing food.



We also recognized that many of the newly financially vulnerable were unlikely to go to food pantries. Working with 75 nonprofit partners representing the broad geographic, religious, and ethnic diversity of Jewish New York, we were able to identify the neediest across the five boroughs, Long Island, and Westchester. With an allocation of \$250,000, we provided 8,500 holiday meals, seder kits, and matzah to over 4,000 households.

To date: 10.2 million pounds of food delivered through Met Council.

“At the height of the crisis, we faced overwhelming challenges: tens of thousands of new clients, dozens more partner sites, health and safety concerns, supply chain issues, and the weight of working in completely uncharted territory. As the largest provider of free, kosher, emergency food, we have always been focused on doing all we can to help those in need,” says **Jessica Chait, Met Council’s managing director of food programs.** *“Not only did UJA’s funding help sustain our operations, it allowed us to expand our services when people needed us most.”*

Providing Cash Assistance: Individuals and families scraping by on modest incomes found themselves jobless and with no safety net. Our funding focused on these low-income New Yorkers, often overlooked populations in need, and those newly in financial distress.



- **Low-Income New Yorkers:** Many immigrants, restaurant employees, and gig workers lost jobs and had no way of making ends meet. UJA was awarded \$2 million through the New York Community Trust, which our partners on the ground distributed to needy low-income New Yorkers.
- **Low-Income CUNY Hillel Students:** Many CUNY students, often the first in their families to attend college, lost part-time jobs, leaving them with no source of income. Working through Hillels, we ensured students were made aware of food pantries. We also allocated \$430,000 in emergency cash support, administered by the Hebrew Free Loan Society, a nonprofit partner.
- **Low-Income Single Parents:** For single parents who are poor or near-poor, the lockdown and related job loss left them without money for basic expenses for food, medical care, and rent. We allocated \$330,000 to provide emergency support through JCCs that had been part of our Single Parent Initiative.

“After all the hard work, this coronavirus comes along and there’s so much uncertainty about how to pay for my education,” says **Daniel, a CUNY student who received emergency cash assistance.** *“This grant makes me feel my community has my back.”*

Synagogue Funds for the Vulnerable: Through our frequent outreach to synagogues, we learned that rabbis were fielding requests from congregants in financial distress. We allocated \$600,000 to four local rabbinic associations so rabbis could assist the most vulnerable members of their congregational communities.

Dignified Burial: At the height of the pandemic, Hebrew Free Burial Association, a UJA partner, reported that they were called on to perform five burials a day. By way of comparison, in 2019 they performed three to four burials a week. We allocated \$250,000 to ensure that every Jew, regardless of financial means or religious affiliation, could receive a dignified, traditional funeral and burial.

“We haven’t turned any cases away,” says **Amy Koplow, Hebrew Free Burial’s executive director.** *“We’ve saved people from cremation. We’ve saved people from the city cemetery and being buried in mass graves.”*

Holocaust Survivors: Advanced age and health issues put survivors at increased risk for the virus. The lockdown and run on basic supplies also resurfaced trauma from an early life spent in hiding and years of food scarcity. We allocated approximately \$785,000 to meet the needs of survivors in New York and Israel.

Domestic Violence Survivors: With a surge in domestic violence related to the lockdown, we provided emergency funding for hotel rooms for people fleeing unsafe situations. Additional funds addressed the needs of the Orthodox community and supported food vouchers.

Small-Business Interest-Free Loans: We allocated \$1 million to our partner the Hebrew Free Loan Society to support its loan program, helping keep small businesses afloat.

Addressing Essential Human Service Needs: Pre-pandemic, we planned to build a one-stop social service Hub in an area of dense Jewish poverty in Queens, where clients could receive an array of services — from job training to emotional support to food — all under one roof. To expand on the Queens Hub, which opened in October, we allocated \$4.6 million to support the creation of six satellite hubs in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Long Island, and Westchester. Together, they are offering a coordinated network of services. This funding is also supporting increased mental health services for the Jewish day school and synagogue community.

Our Covid human service response is expected to benefit approximately 225,000 people.



ISRAEL

At the onset of the crisis, UJA allocated nearly \$1 million in emergency funding, in addition to the tens of millions we give to Israeli partners as part of regular allocations. In December, with ongoing needs increasing dramatically, we provided an additional \$3.5 million from our endowment. Funds are being used to combat food insecurity, help the new poor and struggling small businesses, provide services for at-risk children and teens, strengthen leadership and volunteer networks, and support technological innovations to help people in various sectors work together in answer to Covid-related challenges.

SUPPORT FOR HUMAN SERVICE PARTNERS

Covid-19 Response and Impact Fund:

We provided a \$1.5 million grant to and served on the steering committee of a multipartner New York Covid-19 response fund led by the Ford Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Similar to one that proved very effective after 9/11, this consortium supported at-risk social service organizations as well as cultural institutions.

“Hard times can really bring out the kindness in people,” says Minna, a 97-year-old Holocaust survivor, who receives home-delivered meals and friendly check-in calls. “And perhaps this can be a lesson learned from the crisis and help make the world better.”

Loan Fund for Human Service Agencies:

We allocated \$20 million from our endowment to create an interest-free loan fund at Hebrew Free Loan Society for partners that rely on government contracts to support human services. Anticipating a logjam in cash flow from government sources, the loan fund was designed to ensure that indispensable health and human services could continue. All loans were to be repaid when government payments were secured.

Personal Protective Equipment: In earlier rounds of funding, we allocated \$550,000 to secure PPE for nonprofit partners — including food pantries, agencies providing home health care, nursing homes, and residential programs — and to ensure more efficient distribution. We also granted \$50,000 to Hatzalah to support purchasing gloves and masks for their more than 1,000 volunteers and 100 ambulance crews. In August, we designated \$2.5 million in our Covid emergency loan fund to help UJA partners cover the cost of PPE.

Consultation for Nonprofits: We joined with the New York Community Trust and Robin Hood to fund a \$500,000 effort to provide consulting services for hundreds of nonprofits across New York that are struggling because of Covid-19.

SUPPORT FOR JEWISH COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Sustaining Jewish Community Centers & Day

Camps: Many of the 22 Jewish community centers across our network have been financially distressed by the pandemic. We first allocated \$6.2 million to help sustain JCCs, as well as the Jewish summer camps operated by them, many at our Henry Kaufmann Campgrounds. We also supported Summer in the Cloud, a virtual camp platform that, for the first time, brought together 21 local JCCs under one umbrella, giving campers and families across the region a way to stay engaged. In December, we allocated an additional \$8.1 million to JCCs in a combination of grants and loans to help with general operating support, provide matching dollars to boost JCCs’ fundraising efforts, and help purchase PPE. Interest-free loans were offered to JCCs awaiting government reimbursements.

Residential Summer Camps: We allocated \$2.1 million to support sleepaway camps so they can continue to create life-changing Jewish camping experiences for generations to come.

Jewish Day Schools: Earlier in the pandemic, recognizing the financial strain on families

suffering job loss or business reversals, we created a new \$2 million Covid scholarship fund to supplement the \$1 million we already distribute for day school tuition assistance. Then, in late August, as day schools prepared to open for in-person learning, they faced unbudgeted expenses related to health and safety guidelines. To offset these costs, we allocated an additional \$2.1 million, with support from The Paul E. Singer Foundation, to nearly 50 Jewish day schools, serving 35,000 students.

HELPING OUR NEIGHBORS

Testing for At-Risk Communities: As it became apparent that lower-income communities of color were the hardest hit by the virus, we provided a grant to offer free Covid-19 testing for a limited time at locations in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

Helping the Workers Who Feed New York:

We granted \$100,000 to Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, with whom we’ve long partnered on interfaith initiatives, to support a cash assistance fund for workers in food-related industries, including agricultural and packing workers. Many of these workers were not eligible for federal stimulus checks.

Dates for Ramadan: When a Muslim community group allied with UJA told us their food pantries were overwhelmed and they could not source dates, a food important during Ramadan, we stepped up. Through our partner Met Council, we helped procure 2,000 pounds of dates for our Muslim friends.

ADDITIONAL VITAL RESOURCES

In addition to emergency dollars, UJA offered other helpful resources to nonprofit partners and members of our community.

Advocacy: From the start of the crisis and continuing to this day, UJA’s government relations team has been advocating on behalf of network agencies on the federal, state, and city level. We’ve helped secure food for vulnerable populations and supplies for our nonprofit partners. We also helped our partners, including day schools and community centers, secure funding from the federal Paycheck Protection Program, which provided forgivable loans to cover payroll and overhead expenses.

Support for Partner Nonprofits: We brought our nonprofit partners together to share important information through webinars for

professionals from day schools, synagogues, and health and human services agencies. More than 7,900 participants joined webinars and sector convenings.

Additionally, in our phase one needs assessment, we heard that nonprofits needed legal guidance in understanding new Covid-19 legislation around paid sick leave, furloughs, tenant contracts, liability, and other employment issues. UJA secured the law firm of Paul, Weiss to provide ongoing pro bono support to our partner nonprofits.

Jewish Life: When schools closed and community programs were canceled, we convened PJ Library, the Foundation for Jewish Camp, and The Jewish Education Project to create a collection of high-quality Jewish activities and content that families could engage in together at home.

Curated Covid Resources: We compiled critical resources on our website for both nonprofits and individuals, including resources for healthcare professionals, mental health support, support for survivors of domestic violence, and ways to stay connected.

Volunteerism: Early on, our partners expressed an increased need for volunteers to deliver food in person, call seniors with a friendly check-in, facilitate Zoom classes, and more. At the same time, members of our community had a genuine desire to help in any way possible. As a first step, we convened agencies that rely on volunteers so the agencies could share best practices, identify service gaps, and brainstorm innovative models for volunteer engagement. To date, we have funded and continue to support over 20 organizations dependent on



volunteer support, helping to mobilize more than 21,200 volunteers. Our efforts are now focused on ensuring digital food pantries and employment service providers have the volunteer management infrastructure in place to meet increased demand.



WHAT’S NEXT

Looking forward, we’re going to continue to address the staggering needs across our community in both the social service and Jewish life sectors.

Our focus now is getting New York back on its feet — feeding the hungry, helping the unemployed with job training, and supporting those dealing with grief, anxiety, and other mental health issues. We’re also preserving the Jewish communal infrastructure by helping Jewish institutions make it through these tough times.

Our hope is that at the other end of this, we won’t get back to where we were — we’ll have moved forward. And we’ll find ourselves a stronger, more resilient, more connected Jewish community than ever before.



UJA-Federation of New York cares for Jews everywhere and New Yorkers of all backgrounds, responds to crises close to home and far away, and shapes our Jewish future.

