



# Report of the Jewish Food Security Task Force

DECEMBER 2018



**JEWISH  
FAMILY  
SERVICES**



**JEWISH FEDERATION**  
GREATER VANCOUVER

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## Message from the Co-Chairs

We are pleased to present the report of the Jewish Food Security Task Force. This work has been a collaborative effort, involving a tremendous level of active engagement by task force members, combined with input from many contributors in the Jewish community and content experts in food security across B.C. and Canada. This document has also been informed through past work undertaken by Jewish Family Services staff and volunteers, who have contributed detailed reports and recommendations in recent years, for which we are most grateful.

The ideas presented in this report address urgent and longer-term issues that impact an increasing number of Jewish community members who are food insecure. These individuals and families are increasingly finding it difficult to access affordable and nutritious food on a regular basis. There are a number of factors contributing to the urgency, many of which are outlined in the report. A key focus of the report is on short- and intermediate-term recommendations that we believe offer solutions to the challenges that have been identified.

We invite community members and organizations to work with our respective organizations to put a plan in place to promote food security for those in need across the Jewish community in the Lower Mainland.

**Renée Katz and Stan Shaw**

*Co-Chairs, Jewish Food Security Task Force*

## Introduction

Poverty in the Jewish community is not a new issue for us to address. Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver and Jewish Family Services have been actively working on this file for many years. The poverty coalition launched in 2001 was one such response. Through the work of this coalition, a number of initiatives were undertaken to reduce the stigma and increase social connection.

Over the past 10 years, with the dramatic rise in the region's housing prices both for purchase and rental, the financial pressures on low-income families have grown. These pressures have been exacerbated for families who want to participate in Jewish community life and, despite scholarships and other forms of financial assistance, find themselves increasingly stretched. Our rabbis, heads of schools, camp directors and JCC staff have all reported the growing number of community members under financial stress.

## Context

There are over 2,635 Jewish households in the Lower Mainland, or 16% of the total number of Jewish households, that earn less than \$30,000 annually and live below the low income cut-off (National Household Survey, 2011). Another 1,900 households earn less than \$50,000, significantly below the median income for Metro Vancouver (National Household Survey, 2011). Approximately 32% of these low income households are composed of working families living in the West End of Vancouver. This is the largest concentration of poor Jews residing in one location in our community.

Approximately 20% of these households live in the Tri-Cities, Mission, Langley and Maple Ridge. Another 5% of households in these

areas earn less than \$50,000. This means there are approximately 1,000 people living in these communities, many who are single parent working families, who are considered food insecure. This is the largest concentration of poor Jews outside the City of Vancouver. **The graphs below show the breakdown by community and age.**

These concerns prompted the holding of an affordability summit in March 2017. Four issues were highlighted: Food security, affordable housing, early childhood education and Jewish community participation. One of the recommendations arising out of the summit was the need to establish a food security task force, jointly shared by Jewish Federation and Jewish Family Services.

Fig 1: Poverty Status by Age — Jewish Population of Vancouver CMA

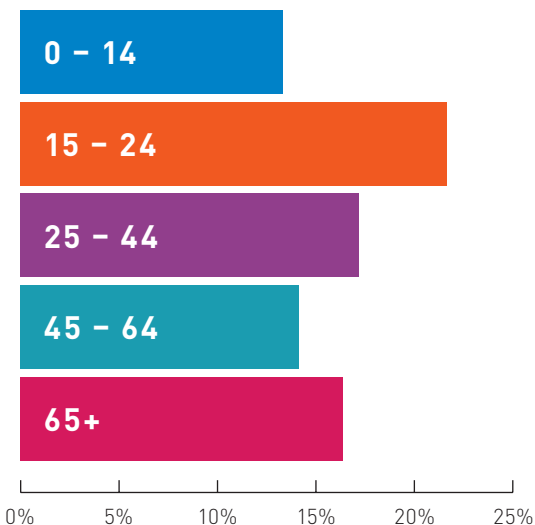
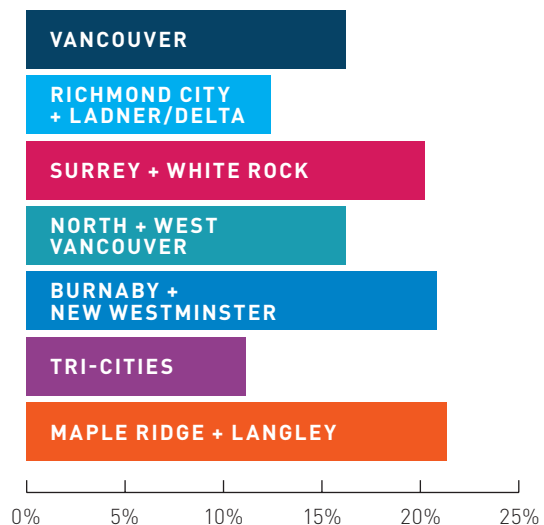


Fig 2: Poverty Status by Geographic Area — Jewish Population of Vancouver CMA



The mandate of the task force, as outlined in its terms of reference, was as follows:

## GOALS

- To raise awareness about available and accessible healthy food options.
- To identify and implement food security strategies to ensure dignity and promote healthy choices for people in need.

## OBJECTIVES

- Identify and document the food security needs of community members not currently being served.
- Gather information and review best practices related to food security consistent with our population size and community capacity.
- Increase access to healthy food for community members throughout the Lower Mainland.
- Build links with other stakeholders to support community initiatives that address food issues.
- Educate and promote awareness of food and poverty issues and alternatives to existing food distribution mechanisms.

## OUTCOMES

- An action plan incorporating specific strategies with measurable goals to the boards of Jewish Federation and Jewish Family Services by May 2018.

The task force's emphasis on food security rather than the food bank was intentional. The concept of food security encompasses a broad range of strategies and policies that enable organizations and communities to expand their scope of service beyond food banks. Food security includes everything from farming and harvesting to distributing "recovered" and recycled food products. Food security programs strive to address the needs of all consumers, not just low-income consumers. The selected strategies and programs move organizations and agencies beyond transactional relationships, between those in need and those who provide, to actively engaging people in food production and delivery.

Incorporating the concept of food security as part of the task force's mandate enabled members to think creatively and expansively about potential options and solutions.

Access to nutritious, safe and affordable food on an ongoing basis is the cornerstone of a viable food security strategy. Within our own community, the two primary mechanisms available to members are the Jewish Food Bank and emergency or short-term food vouchers.

As illustrated in Fig. 3 below, of the estimated 4,200 community members living in poverty, as identified by the National Household Survey in 2011,

we are able to document approximately 25% of those individuals, and where they are receiving community assistance. Without increasing our capacity to provide support in a variety of ways, it is difficult to determine how many more community members would seek services through Jewish sources. We do know, however, that if the food bank had greater capacity, more clients who currently attend once a month would be able to attend more frequently.

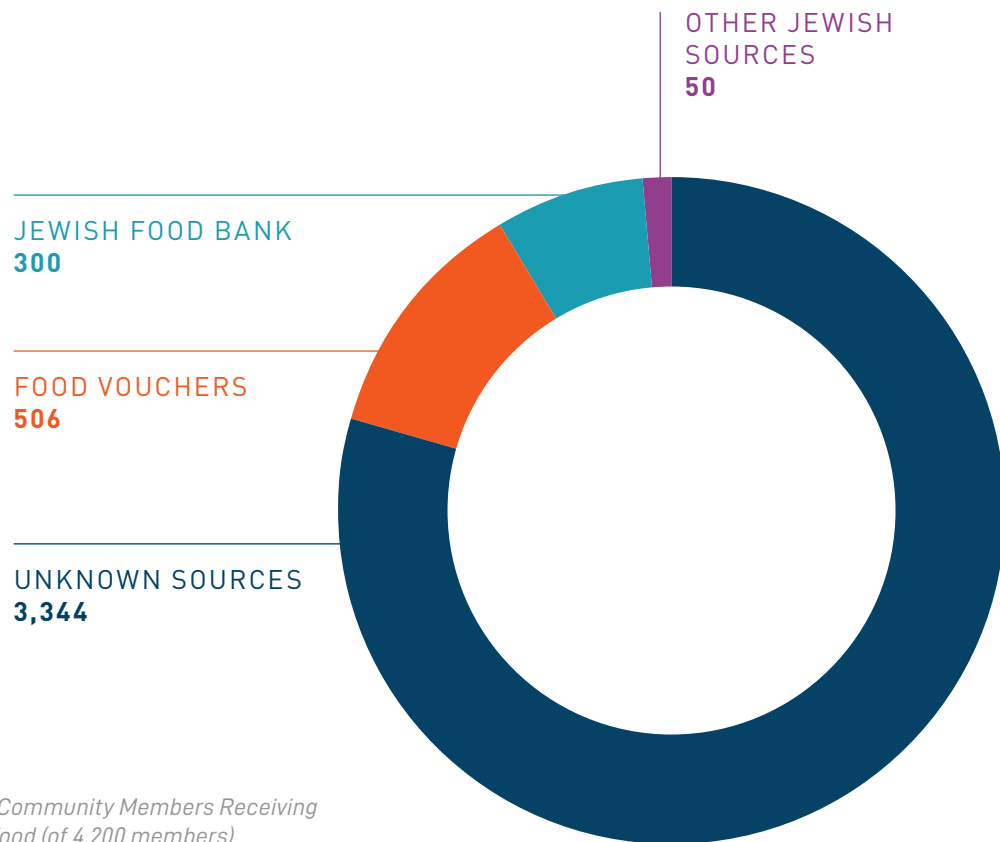


Fig 3: Number of Community Members Receiving Assistance with Food (of 4,200 members)

## Information Gathering Phase

The task force held its kick-off meeting on June 21, 2017, and met monthly until the end of June 2018. Task force members designated the first six months for information gathering through research in other jurisdictions, meetings with content experts and presentations by key stakeholders.

A student intern from the UBC Sauder Business School was hired over the summer of 2017 to conduct an environmental scan of food security initiatives in other Jewish communities across North America with similar size populations. Key takeaways from this research were:

- Most Jewish communities continue to provide food through a food bank model — many of which use a “pop-up” model to provide greater flexibility.
- Most Jewish communities have moved away from a model where people line up early in the day and wait their turn to an appointment based model where individuals turn up at a scheduled time, thus assuring more dignity and confidentiality.
- Many food banks now provide a variety of services at the same time including case management, cooking classes and workshops on relevant topics.
- Many food banks now provide delivery services to facilitate access for working families and frail seniors.
- Some food banks have begun to work with local farmers or community gardens to ensure that there is fresh produce available.
- Organizations such as Hazon and Netiya are US based Jewish organizations actively involved in projects to support environmental sustainability and provide nutrient rich foods that support adequate growth and health but are often too expensive for struggling families.
- There is a growing movement to implement new approaches such as food recovery and food recycling to expand upon and diversify the food available through the Jewish food banks.



The task force also heard from a number of key community stakeholders and subject matter experts. These included presentations from the Burquest Jewish Community Association's seniors' worker, the Jewish Seniors Alliance, Kehila Society of Richmond, Chabad Richmond, Hillel and the Rabbinical Association of Vancouver (RAV). These presentations highlighted the fact that food banks were only meant to be a temporary solution to a longstanding problem, and that our community needs to find some more creative ways to address food security and preserve dignity and choice. These presentations also confirmed for us that:

- There are a growing number of families, university students and seniors who are relying on food banks and food vouchers to meet their basic needs for food.
- There are systemic issues with the level of financial support provided through the federal and provincial governments that contribute to the

level of poverty in the community but are beyond the scope of this report. Many community members living in poverty, either because of choice or because of their personal circumstances, rely on non-Jewish social services and food banks to meet these basic needs.

- Access to the Jewish Food Bank is extremely difficult for community members living outside of Vancouver or those who have to travel by public transit.
- Operating the Jewish Food Bank every second week is problematic for people who have significant needs.
- Working families find it very difficult to access the Jewish Food Bank during the day.
- Other Jewish organizations, such as synagogues and day schools, are also contributing financially and in-kind to help community members have access to food.

Task force members also met with a senior official from the Greater Vancouver Food Bank, who was instrumental in developing a pilot project called the Food Hub. Many of her recommendations related to preserving the dignity and respect of clients and expanding food choices were consistent with the ideas being implemented in other jurisdictions, and several have already been implemented by the Jewish Food Bank.

A meeting was also held with a group of long term and dedicated Jewish Food Bank volunteers to hear their views. They offered a number of useful recommendations related to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the current food bank operation.

At the request of the task force, JFS did an analysis of the costs and effectiveness of the food bank model versus the food voucher model. (Appendix A.) Through this analysis, it became apparent that while food vouchers ensure dignity and choice, they are considerably more costly than operating the food bank.

At the end of the information-gathering phase, a number of themes emerged that were categorized into three key areas:

## **SYSTEMIC ISSUES (FOOD SECURITY)**

- Need to increase the number of people who benefit from food security initiatives.
- Need to reduce barriers to community members who are not currently able to access current programs due to scheduling and/or geographic locations.
- Need to expand the number of locations where community members living in poverty can access food.
- Need to implement new strategies, based on an expanded understanding of food security, that promote financial sustainability and food choice.

## **OPERATIONAL ISSUES (FOOD BANK)**

- Need to access a permanent facility to undertake the storage of perishable and non-perishable food items, distribution and transportation of pre-packaged parcels.
- Need to expand and enhance volunteer training.
- Need to expand partnerships to provide community services on site.

- Need to track information about who is not being served, and where they are located.

## **COMMUNITY ISSUES**

- Need to raise awareness of the depth of poverty in our community.
- Need to centralize information on appropriate community resources for people living in poverty on all community websites, so that people in need can find the services they need.
- Need to advocate for improved income supports from government.

As the list above illustrates, the task force gathered a wealth of information and suggestions about how our current response could be improved. To move the process forward and keep the focus on the broader view of food security, the task force also invited some individuals who were actively engaged in more expansive food security initiatives.

## Thinking More Broadly

Mindful of the mandate to look beyond traditional models, task force members wanted to learn more about some of the innovative projects that are currently being piloted. One such program is Food Stash. This program, developed in 2016, established relationships with various large grocery chains to provide stale-dated or otherwise “unattractive” food that is still safe and healthy. There is currently a pilot program involving a small group of JFS clients, residing in the Diamond Residences in Richmond, who pay a nominal amount to receive a weekly pre-packed box of food that includes dairy products and frozen meat along with fruit and vegetables. Projects such as this one have the potential to benefit community members who are looking for different ways to access affordable, nutritious food beyond what is currently available to them.

The task force also met with the co-founder of Fresh Roots, an organization that connects community farms with healthy food distribution. Ilana Labow has also served as a food security consultant to the City of Vancouver and other not-for-profits throughout North America. Ms. Labow challenged us to think beyond just serving the needs of low-income clients through various food security programs and consider a more

comprehensive, accessible and universally directed integrated food centre that could include everything from vertical gardening, cooking classes, and a food bank, to an indoor farmers’ market that could be patronized by everyone. She also shared findings from recent studies that showed that environmentally conscious and sustainable food production and food distribution projects were very appealing to Jewish young adults who were not typically engaged in Jewish community life. Coming up with a different approach to food security opens up meaningful volunteer opportunities to local young Jews. Members were so impressed with Ms. Labow’s depth and breadth of knowledge that we met with her again to get her feedback on the specific priorities that were being proposed to address some immediate needs and foster future innovation.

The information gained from these conversations provided a focus for the task force as they began the process of developing the recommendations contained in this report.

## Setting a new direction

From the outset of the task force's work, members wanted to maintain a balance between focusing on the operational challenges faced by the Jewish Food Bank and the mandate to recommend a community-wide food security strategy. Proposing recommendations to improve options for the people who are currently served, while pursuing more innovative approaches that would expand our community's ability to address food security for a larger segment of those in need, are the core components of a new vision.

Historically, the Jewish Food Bank was designed to assist seniors and families living on fixed incomes or government assistance. Food bank hours of operation and the maximum number of allowable visits during the month were based on this profile of users. Over time, the demographics have shifted, and there are now a growing number of families and young adults who live in poverty and are in need of food. Many work and do not have the flexibility to come to the food bank during the scheduled hours. Most prefer to have more independence and choice as to when and how they access food. There are also more people who are prepared to contribute a nominal amount in return for receiving fresh produce, meat and dairy products on a predictable basis.

The current staffing model of a half-time coordinator and a core of volunteers, while doing amazing work is only able to maintain the status quo. There is little time to implement the proposed changes that would expand the scope of food delivery and diversify the services available. If we are to "move the needle", JFS needs to have the funding to hire a full time coordinator to lead these changes. Appendix B outlines the proposed outcomes of an expanded position.

In addition to raising funds to support a full-time position, we must address issues related to food storage and distribution, along with expanded food delivery. There are some tangible solutions that could significantly improve the ability of the current food bank to serve clients who do not live in close proximity to the existing food bank, who have mobility issues, who work during food bank hours or have to travel by public transit. Having access to a van and driver on a weekly basis to deliver pre-packaged food to these populations would immediately improve access and service. Having access to adequate storage, so that commercial refrigerators and freezers could be purchased, would also contribute to greater variety of the food provided. Assuming appropriate space could be identified, both of these

purchases could quickly demonstrate quantifiable improvements, and the investment in a part-time driver could provide other benefits to the Jewish Food Bank over time.

The issue of appropriate space came up frequently when exploring ways to expand the scope and range of services offered through the existing food bank. The current location has many advantages but does not allow for any expansion or diversification of services. JFS staff are exploring alternate locations but will require further funds to make the necessary renovations in a new space.

## Fostering Innovation

Through our conversations with people in other jurisdictions and our meetings with food security experts, we learned that the new direction in food security is focused on more holistic and universal approaches that are not limited to meeting the needs of people living in poverty. As people, especially young adults, have become more environmentally conscious and more interested in sustainable forms of growing, harvesting and distributing food, new ideas and approaches are emerging that are less stigmatizing or marginalizing and provide greater choice and diversity in food options. Food recovery is a good example of such a trend where the commitment to reducing food waste has resulted in many new initiatives to gather perishable foods and redistribute them to community groups and individuals for a nominal fee.

As a first step, introducing one or two innovative pilot projects would be a significant way to move the agenda forward, expand the scope of services and engage community members who are seeking meaningful volunteer experiences. It is important that these projects are part of an overall plan and not just “one-offs” that are not sustainable in the long term.

Helping the community understand the scope and depth of the issue and the

range of people who are affected is also an important priority. Conversations about access to food and overall food security have primarily been left to Jewish Family Services. We need to have a more collaborative approach to raising awareness about food security and highlighting ways that the community can assist, beyond just donating food to the food bank. Further, we need to develop a strategy to engage young adults to pursue some of the innovative ideas that have been presented to the task force and that could be piloted in our community. Partnerships with other programs that are expanding people’s choices such as bulk buying clubs also need to be explored.

To truly address food security in our community, however, we need to capitalize on this growing interest in sustainable food initiatives and to develop a community wide strategic plan with the ultimate goal of establishing an integrated food centre that incorporates many different elements of food security. Instead of keeping the food bank low profile or isolating it from other programs and services, the Jewish Food Bank would become one of an array of food security options available.

This new model would also significantly increase the number of people served. It

would lessen clients' dependence on the food bank or food vouchers and expand the options available to them.

With the proposed redevelopment of the Jewish Community Centre (JCC), there is a unique opportunity to create a purpose-built space and locate a diversified Jewish Food Centre in a highly visible and high traffic space where multiple users would participate in and benefit from a range of volunteer opportunities and services associated with food sustainability.

Pursuing this vision requires a different set of skills and expertise than we currently have. It requires an individual who has strong business acumen and is well versed in food security. It also requires someone who can "think outside the box", manage multiple projects and work collaboratively with a variety of community stakeholders. This task also can't be undertaken by a staff member who is responsible for the day to day operations of the food bank.

We are proposing that a business development consultant position be created. Working with a small team composed of staff from JFS, Jewish Federation and the JCC, this consultant will develop the business plan for the food centre, establish best practices for its operation and work closely with the JCC on

design and implementation.

While the ultimate goal is the establishment of the Jewish Food Centre, there are other, short-term strategies that would increase the number of community members served, and diversify the options available. These include:

- Launching or partnering with an existing group to introduce a rescued food program.
- Creating a community kitchen in a Tivka Housing managed building.
- Piloting a bulk food buying club.
- Introducing vertical gardening in local Jewish day schools.



## Conclusion

The Food Security Task Force was established in response to community concerns about the growing issue of affordability. Many more people are struggling with food security than our existing systems were designed to serve. As more community members live beyond Vancouver's borders, there are more working families seeking assistance. These needs necessitate a broader, more comprehensive food security strategy.

Task force members met over the past 12 months and heard from a variety of community stakeholders about the existing gaps in the community. Members also had the opportunity to meet with some innovative thinkers who are approaching issues of food security in new and creative ways.

The Jewish Food Bank is an important element of a broader food security strategy, and there are a number of suggested improvements and adaptations to expand its scope. However, based on best practices in other jurisdictions and input from community stakeholders, there is a need to take a multi-faceted approach that not only incorporates elements of service delivery but also appeals to people's desire for a more sustainable, and more environmentally sound, food

production and distribution system.

The responsibility for Jewish food security historically has been delegated to Jewish Family Services. They have the experience and expertise to continue to take a leadership role. However, based on the observations of the task force, for the Jewish community to truly address local food security, it must become a community responsibility. In consultation with JFS, adopting strategies that expand the scope of service, facilitate innovation and engage a new generation of volunteers and change-makers, will lead the community in that direction.

As a community concerned about food security, our ultimate focus should be toward a new vision: an integrated, diversified Jewish Food Centre that offers a range of opportunities, including a food bank, cooking classes, a community kitchen, and an open farmer's market that would result in lower-cost food purchases. A Jewish Food Centre would be accessed by a wide range of community members and become a place for social connection.

The following recommendations have been designed to meet both the short- and long-term goals proposed in this report.

# Recommendations

## IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

1. Expand the current food coordinator position from part-time to full-time, with a specific mandate to broaden the scope of services and diversify the number of options available through the Jewish Food Bank to increase the number of people served.

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2. Seek funding for a business development position to explore the feasibility of creating an integrated food centre and, working with JFS staff, to implement specific programs and approaches consistent with a broad-based food security strategy.

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3. Set community-wide targets to increase the number of people who benefit from access to affordable, nutritious food. This can be done in collaboration with Jewish Federation's Planning Council and other relevant partner agencies.

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4. Prioritize expanded options to community members who live outside of Vancouver, through pilot projects such as community satellites, hubs and "pop-up" services.

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5. Obtain funding to lease long-term or purchase a van to support food deliveries.

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6. Expand working relationships with complementary food security organizations in the broader community, such as the Vancouver Food Policy Council, to stay informed and keep up to date with current trends.

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7. Engage the JCC in discussions regarding the viability of various food security projects, including a rooftop garden and an integrated food centre as part of their building redevelopment plans.

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8. Develop a communications plan in partnership with Jewish Federation to raise awareness about the scope of poverty as it relates to food security needs, and "change the conversation" with an emphasis on innovation and community engagement.

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9. Use positive and non-stigmatizing opportunities to highlight food security issues (Kosher food festival, farmers' markets etc.).

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## **INTERMEDIATE PRIORITIES**

10. Incorporate the use of technology to aid food distribution, inventory and planning.

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11. Engage youth and young adults in the planning and implementation of pilot projects that combine their interests in social justice and environmental issues with food security endeavours.

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## Appendix A:

### JFS Food Security Cost Analysis, February 2018

#### FOOD BANK

##### Program Expenses

Food	\$145,000.00
Holidays	\$15,000.00
Salaries	\$32,800.00
Program cost	\$4,000.00
Rent	\$5,770.00
IT	\$2,043.00

**Total Expense** **\$204,613.00**

##### Staffing

Food Bank Coordinator (part-time)	21 hrs/week
Food Bank Driver	5 hrs/week

**Total # of hours per week:** **26 hrs/week**

#### FOOD VOUCHERS

##### Program Expenses

Food Vouchers	\$505,600.00
Salaries	\$66,625.00
Program cost	\$2,452.00
Rent	\$11,157.00
IT	\$4,195.00

**Total Expense** **\$590,029.00**

##### Staffing

FAR Case Managers (2 full time + 1 part-time) — 25%	22.75 hrs/week
Settlement Worker (full time) — 25%	8.75 hrs/week
Seniors' Counsellors (3 part-time) — 25%	15.75 hrs/week

**Total # of hours per week:** **47.25 hrs/week**



### # of Clients

Seniors	120
FAR	150
Settlement	30

**Total # of clients: 300**

(100 clients come twice a month – 200 use per month)



### # of Clients

Seniors	190
FAR	300
Settlement	16

**Total # of clients: 506**

### FB/FV Shared clients

Seniors	60
FAR	105
Settlement	10

**Total: 175**

### FV Distribution per Department

Holocaust clients	\$235,600.00
Settlement	\$15,000.00
Seniors	\$40,000.00
Family & Adult Resources	\$190,000.00
Holidays	\$25,000.00

**Total: \$505,600.00**

## Appendix B:

### Expanded role for the Jewish Food Bank Coordinator

The existing Jewish Food Bank structure and location limit the number of clients served, restrict the number of times individual clients can access food, and minimize the number of services offered.

The task force recognizes that without a full-time position, the Jewish Food Bank will not be able to expand its services, increase the number of people served, or diversify the options available.

The goals of expanding the three-day-a-week position to a five-day-a-week position are as follows:

- Locate and establish a new location for the Jewish Food Bank that provides more permanence and additional services.
- Expand the number of days that the Jewish Food Bank is open from two days a month to four days a month.
- Increase the number of people served by the Jewish Food Bank from 300 per month to 500 per month.
- Recruit, train and supervise additional volunteers to meet the demands of expanded hours.
- Grow the food delivery program by 25% to meet the needs of a growing number of clients who find it difficult to physically attend the Jewish Food Bank.
- Develop and implement a plan to expand the food hubs based on the Food Link model to two additional communities (Burnaby/ New Westminster and Maple Ridge/ Langley).
- Oversee the development of a new tracking system to provide an accurate assessment of the food inventory and facilitate more efficient purchasing.
- Work with the business consultant to identify and implement one to two innovative food security projects to maximize the number of people served and increase the choices available.