

In 2016 the Soloway Jewish Community Centre embarked on a strategic planning process to determine how to best prepare the SJCC to serve the future needs of the Ottawa Jewish community and create a plan for change and growth.

A Strategic Planning Committee composed of an SJCC Board Member, a professional facilitator and senior staff, was struck to oversee the process. The committee created new mission, vision and values statements, which were discussed with Board members and SJCC staff and approved by the Board of Directors.

In June 2017 the Board approved the Strategic Plan and struck an implementation committee chaired by then board member, Rabbi Steven Garten to prioritize the actions stipulated in the strategic plan and create a timeline for measurable results.

CURRENT SITUATION

Due to the pandemic, the SJCC has been closed for the majority of the time from March 2020 to the present (Summer 2021). This situation has affected everything about how we run all aspects of our Centre. Unlike other JCCs across the country, we have remained open as much as possible and continued to offer many programs virtually. By remaining open we were able to retain some membership revenue and keep people connected and engaged. We continued to be a resource for our community during a difficult time and create an ongoing, prolonged and deep connection within the community.

Throughout the pandemic we continued to offer a wide range of virtual Adult Cultural and Educational Programs, that were well attended, as well as many Israeli-themed programs, some in partnership with other local agencies. Even during the brief times when our building was open, with limited capacities, we offered these programs virtually.

The Fitness Centre, lap swimming and fitness classes ran with limited capacities for members-only and anyone interested in participating was required to register in advance using our online registration system.



Telling the SJCC Story

Present: During this time we have continued to remain a relevant and important part of our community by staying connected and keeping our membership informed. Throughout the pandemic we sent a monthly e-news to more than 3000 email addresses letting our members and users know what was happening virtually at the Centre as well as keeping them abreast of our camp plans and fundraising. In addition, we sent out a bi-weekly, more personal, update from our President/COO which was focused on how we're doing and our future plans, and less about programming. Social media posts, the JFO eblasts, E-OJB, and submission to the AJA 50+ eblasts helped inform our community of how we remain the centre of Jewish life during this time.

Next Steps: We will continue to spread the word about what's happening at the SJCC through our enews, social media posts and through our website. As we prepared to re-open we communicated our plans to our lists and contacted past members to encourage them to come back to the Centre.

2

Strengthen Customer Service Experience

Present: The pandemic has shed light on many aspects of our business as it relates to servicing our members and users that we will aim to improve for the future. Provincial restrictions changed the way we ran many of our programs, and our current registration system did not have the capacity to allow members to register themselves in a simple and efficient manner.

Next Steps: We are in the process of investigating a new software system that will allow members to register for classes in a more user friendly manner. In addition to being simpler for members to navigate, it will make collecting member information more streamlined and be easier for people to access on their smart phones. Funding is needed in order to make this happen. Jody Weir, our IT professional, has begun the process of exploration and we see this as at least a 12 month process.

With the majority of our business being conducted online, Customer Service Representatives working behind the front desk will have the opportunity to focus on servicing the needs of our members. The front desk will be a friendlier welcome point rather than a place to transact business.

The pivot to virtual made it possible to offer programs that originated in Israel such as museum tours, sightseeing and entertainment, helping to increase our connection to Israel.

We also held the Grandparents Circle as outreach, using the JCC as a base to discuss the contemporary extended Jewish family which often includes non-Jewish members and how to include their children in the community.

Next Steps: As we are slowly opening and allowing for more members to access our facilities, our membership numbers are climbing once again. Young families are joining the SJCC to take advantage of the Ganon Preschool discount and will use the Centre while their little ones are at preschool and camp families and staff will be offered a special price to join once the summer is over.

In an effort to retain young family memberships and provide meaningful programming, we will ramp up our outreach efforts to this demographic. We will consider the formation of a task force that would help inform the SJCC professionals on how to best program for their demographic and attract more Jewish families to our Centre.

During our closure, many programs that normally have a fee attached were free for anyone who wanted to participate. Fitness programs were online and accessible, there was no charge to download the Israeli Film Festival films and several virtual tours and talks were provided for free. We will reach out to those who took part in our virtual programs and involve them in the SJCC.

While we were limited in our ability to have people physically in our space, the closure provided an opportunity for us to allow more people to participate. We will keep this in mind when programming in the near future and offer hybrid classes allowing space for those who want to come in person as well as those who prefer to participate from home.

3

Improve Outreach and Engagement

Present: When we were mandated to close many members stopped paying for their memberships. Memberships that expired during the pandemic were not renewed. All were given the option to continue paying for their membership during the shutdown and having their expiry date extended once we re-opened. Pre-pandemic we had 1425 units of membership.

The SJCC Family Life Centre held monthly virtual meet-ups for parents with young children giving them an opportunity to discuss their pandemic challenges. Shalom Baby continued to deliver gift bags welcoming new little community members.