

# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2020

By Rael Kaimowitz 2017-2020

WITH SUPPORT FROM GWYNNE ROBINS  
& MATHILDE MYBURGH

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CAPE  
SA JEWISH BOARD  
OF DEPUTIES

## *November 2019 - September 2020*



*by Rael Kaimowitz, Chairperson 2017-2020*

I have had the honour to chair the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD), the umbrella organisation of Western Cape Jewry, which works for the betterment of human relations between Jews and all other peoples of South Africa based on mutual respect, understanding and goodwill. This year has been different for two reasons. The first is our new constitution and our new system of a democratic election — for which I must thank Judith Cohen, Moonyeen Castle, Professor Hugh Corder, Judge Dennis Davis and Philip Krawitz, who formed our Constitutional Commission and drew up an updated constitution for the organisation that is in line with the modern legislation of Advocate Anton Katz, Richard Friedman and Advocate Doron Goldberg who sat on our Electoral Commission 2020 to ensure that our new electoral system would be democratic, free and fair.

I must also take this opportunity to thank the leadership of our director Stuart Diamond and his professional team who developed a media strategy to inform the public of the election process, developed the Voters Registration Form for Elections 2020 with help from the United Jewish Campaign (UJC), opened registration on the Cape SAJBD website and social media channels during the nomination period and arranged for the successful public ballot to take place. To enable our community, before voting in our democratic election, to engage with the eight public ballot nominees on their reasons for running in this year's election we held a Public Ballot Town Hall on ZOOM.

The second reason is the invisible elephant in the room — the ZOOM room. For the first time in our 116-year history, we cannot come together in a room at our annual conference to report back to our affiliate organisations in person. For the first time in our history, we have had to close our facilities, our schools, our shuls, our organisations and our community centre because of the random lethality of COVID-19. For the first time in our history, such closure is not because of antisemitic or anti-Israel protests, but because of an enemy that is as invisible as it is nonselective.

## COVID-19 strikes

So, what has the Cape SAJBD been doing during this time? The danger represented by the COVID-19 pandemic has made us turn our attention to issues of mortality and our vulnerability but it also has given us the opportunity to turn our attention to our future as a community in the post-COVID-19 world. Sharing a risk creates an extraordinary bond between individuals and organisations. It has brought out the best in us, all working in unity towards a common purpose — safeguarding our community and assisting others. The virus has affected every aspect of our work, sending us to ZOOM instead of into face-to-face meetings.

With our ever-abiding faith in G-d who is the healer, we pray that we, as well as our fellow South Africans and the peoples of the world, will conquer this disease speedily in our own days.

Over the centuries, the Jewish community has been through one crisis after another. We have learned a number of lessons, of which one is that you must let people know they are not alone; together we can persevere and triumph over the challenges. We have always lived among our fellow Jews and looked out for one another's wellbeing. We have long recognised that we are strongest when we stand together, helping and supporting each other. We demonstrated this with a community-wide Unity & Togetherness ZOOM gathering to thank all those assisting with the COVID-19 pandemic and to pray for the health of the community.

The Cape SAJBD has had to take a leadership position in bringing the community organisations together as never before, to fight the virus as one. We also had to facilitate the return of a Cape Town communal member stuck in Egypt. I would like to thank all the affiliates who have joined our board meetings to report on their COVID-19 operations.

Advised by Dr Gareth Kantor to set up a COVID-19 structure to assist communal organisations in their response operations, a Cape Communal Steering Committee (SteerCom) was set up with clusters dealing specifically with issues relating to shuls, to welfare organisations, to schools, to medical concerns, and to installations and public space. Over this SteerCom is an Executive Steering Committee, which I chair, consisting of Shane Butlion and Loren Raize (CSO), Ronnie Stein, Marco Van Emden, Philip Krawitz (UJC) and Stuart Diamond. We meet regularly as a committee and with the various sectors of the community to strategise for their current and future needs and to plan how best to assist.

One of the first things we did was set up a chain of volunteers through the synagogues and the CSO. These would be able to help the vulnerable with shopping and other needs. Viv Anstey and Adrienne Jacobson drafted a questionnaire for volunteers which Mathilde Myburgh digitised and launched as the #CommunityHero campaign and they put together a Mental Health Stream, a volunteer counselling network of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and counsellors who with the Jewish Community Services (JCS) would be available to counsel and advise on a strictly confidential basis.

Another one of the initial concerns tackled was the welfare needs of our community, particularly possible personal protective equipment (PPE) needs —especially for Highlands House and Glendale Home— and a food security risk assessment. We issued a call to our community, who responded with their traditional generosity and over R60,000 was raised to help JCS with its food bank. The welfare stream with Loren Raize (CSO), Hazel Levin (JCS) and Judith Cohen (Glendale

Home) also discussed client and residential support, using a communal volunteer Call Line and the use of an Israeli food parcels delivery app.

The economic shockwaves of COVID-19 impacted immediately on communal funding and the Cape SAJBD, like all other organisations, has had to take a budget cut — which is perhaps the one advantage of a ZOOM conference without coffee and delicious savouries. The welfare stream met with Barry Levitt and Kristy Evans of the UJC to discuss communal fundraising and opportunities and Stuart Diamond consulted with Nachum Goldman fellow Eli Ovets, who specialises in communal fundraising and restructuring. The UJC immediately launched a COVID-19 Emergency Campaign, headed by Ronnie Stein, to raise money to cover over-budget expenses — like the need for PPE, to top up welfare organisations that relied on donations and assist organisations in difficulties; and the Chief Rabbi initiated the Geshar Small Business Relief Fund to advance loans to previously-sustainable small Jewish-owned businesses. JCS has had to cope with massive increases in the need for food parcels and accommodation. Hunger has become a reality for some among us. COVID-19 has affected the financial sustainability of many of our members and we thank Professor Adam Mendelsohn of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT) for putting together a Cape COVID-19 Financial Survey to gather data on its impact.

Since COVID-19, the Cape SAJBD has been assisting the Congolese, Rwandan and Burundi communities with donations for food, much of the funding coming through the Angel Network from a national donor. As foreign nationals, they do not qualify for government assistance and their UIF contributions were held up.

The relevant clusters have also discussed the logistics of opening shuls and Jewish day schools around testing and health protocols, including a wider schools feedback meeting with the Cape schools cluster. On the downside, the Western Cape government has been holding meetings with the shul cluster, the Cemetery Board and faith-based organisations on fatality management and, as numbers infected started to rise with the lowering of lockdown restrictions, with the City, Union of Orthodox Synagogues (UOS) and the Chevra Kadisha around death rates and funerals. We were invited by the Western Cape Department of Health to participate in a two-part webinar on Grief & Spirituality during COVID-19 and Stuart Diamond held discussions about COVID-19 with Mayor Dan Plato, Premier Alan Winde and MMC JP Smith and attended the City of Cape Town's Town Hall Interfaith COVID-19 meetings.

When COVID-19 struck the residents and staff of Highlands House causing panic in the community, the Cape SAJBD stepped in and helped the Highlands House team deal with the outbreak, meeting with the staff, UJC and the CSO. To reassure our community, we arranged a well-attended Highlands House Community Update ZOOM meeting with Dr Leon Geffen, Delia Kaplan and Judge Dennis Davis and arranged for Mathilde Myburgh, our writer and content developer, to assist with its communication strategy — including providing updates to residents' families on its COVID-19 response as well as regular Community Releases, social media and media releases, a website overhaul and a messaging platform to staff members. She wrote a press release after media enquiries and was contacted by *Jewish Report*, *News 24*, *EWN*, *Primedia*, *Weekend Argus*, *Netwerk 24*, *Die Burger*, *SABC News* and the *Sunday Times*. When COVID-19 reached Glendale Home, we stepped in again assisting with ongoing communication, logistics and statements and we facilitated ZOOM meetings with families of residents. Baruch Hashem, all the vulnerable residents and staff recovered with only one death each recorded at Highlands House and at Glendale Home at the time of the release of this report.

## Unity

In addition, to the organisations that fall directly under the Cape SAJBD, we work in friendly and close cooperation with: B'noth Zion Association-WIZO, CSO under the capable leadership of Loren Raize who, with her dedicated team of professionals and volunteers, secure our functions and our Jewish way of life, the Cape Town Holocaust Centre, the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation, the Eliot Osrin Leadership Institute, Fairplay (South Africa), Jacob Gitlin Library, Jewish Care Cape, the Cape Jewish Chronicle, the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT, Limmud, Melton, ORT JET Cape, Phyllis Jowell School, the South African Zionist Federation (Cape Council) and all its departments, including the youth movements, Sinai Academy, Torah Academy, the UOS, United Herzlia Schools, UJC and the Union of Jewish Women. The cooperation and cohesiveness that exists in Cape Town between the Cape SAJBD and all Jewish organisations is an example of unity which augers well for the continuity and post-COVID-19 future of the Jewish community in Cape Town.

## Involvement in Communal Organisations

### National

We work closely with the National SAJBD in Johannesburg and we participate in regular National Executive Council Management Meetings, as well as National meetings around COVID-19, a National COVID-19 Medical Update, a COVID-19 National Communal Leaders' meeting and a National Survey Meeting — now all on ZOOM, and we welcomed Shaun Zagnoev, Wendy Kahn, David Saks and Charisse Zeifert to a Cape board meeting.

### South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Cape Council

The Cape SAJBD works closely with the SAZF and attended many of its events, including the Aliyah Expo, and met with the Chayainu Children, chronically-ill Israeli children brought out on holiday to South Africa. Stuart Diamond met with SAZF chairman Esta Levitas and director Julie Berman to discuss collaborating with them, but the lockdown put paid to these plans and also resulted in the SAZF's Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut commemorations having to be held online. We linked into those ZOOM events as well as into the SAZF meeting on Extending Israel's Borders: Annexation or Sovereignty. To educate the Cape SAJBD on the matter, we held a webinar with human rights lawyer Gadi Ezra on Understanding the Legal Background for the Peace Plan. Stuart Diamond participated in the ZOOM Shlichim Conversations for the Colorado Jewish Community on the South African Jewish community with community shaliach Michal Ilan, in an American Jewish Committee (AJC) ZOOM discussion on the Israeli response to COVID-19, a WIZO webinar on Israel beyond the conflict with Rolene Marks, a ZOOM call with the Israel Trauma about the expertise of community resilience and trauma care during emergency situations in Israel and abroad, and he gave an update to the SAZF Cape Council meeting on COVID-19 and the community. Stuart Diamond attended the ZOOM farewell events for community shaliach Michal Ilan and Deputy Israeli Ambassador Ayellet Black. He participates regularly in ZOOM Fairplay meetings and we held a special Cape board meeting with the participation of Wendy Kahn and Benjy Shulman to discuss countering possible BDS involvement in the forthcoming election for the UCT council. We also wrote to MEC Debbie Schafer regarding the bussing in of school children to a BDS march outside Parliament. Prior to the lockdown, Stuart Diamond was the guest speaker at the Succot of the Ruth WIZO Branch.

## Other Affiliated Organisations

Before COVID-19 fell upon us, we attended many events hosted by our affiliated organisations, including the UJC launch, where former Cape chair and current NEC member Philip Krawitz received the Gerald Kleinman Communal Service Award; JCS's One Mother One Daughter Donor Appreciation tea; the opening of Tony Raphaely's *Hand full of Sand* Exhibition at the South African Jewish Museum (SAJM) and his book launch. As part of our affiliates' programme designed to meet with as many of our affiliates as we could (another victim to COVID-19), we met with the Rabbinical Council Executive and there was a strong affiliate attendance at our February Special General Meeting (SGM), which I addressed. Wendy Kahn and Gwynne Robins attended an event outside the ruins of the Arthurs Road Shul on the anniversary of its destruction by fire, during which Auschwitz survivor Ella Blumenthal lit candles in one of the looted chanukiot from the Cape SAJBD's collection.

Since the lockdown we have joined UJC ZOOM calls on the "Global Economy and its impact" with Bradley Fried, and on "Taking Care of our Community Health during COVID-19"; the United Herzlia Schools AGM; a Mensch webinar on "Leading Through Lockdown: Purpose, Priorities, and Practice" with Brandon Srot; an Eliot Osrin Leadership Institute (EOLI) Directors' Forum on "Claiming Time, Thought & Space"; the E-Limmud online event; ORT JET Business Sessions and ORT JET webinars on "The Next Normal — Managing the Return" facilitated by Mike Freedman, on "Business Survival before and after COVID-19", on "Future Proofing your Company in a Post COVID-19 World" facilitated by Ann Nurock, on "How to Mentor in a Time of Crisis" facilitated by Gavin Shaskolsky, and on Hope Stories with Dawn Nathan-Jones; a *South African Jewish Report* meeting about a "South African Jewish Response Campaign"; a Nechama Grief Counselling Training Discussion with Sarit Suiza and Avi Popac; a Temple Israel ZOOM talk on "Let's talk about Race"; a Gardens Shul social with Nik Rabinowitz; and a Marais Road Shul ZOOM call with the Chief Rabbi, Mike Abel and Judge Dennis Davis on the topic "Lockdown or Locked Up".

## International Jewish Organisations

Stuart Diamond attended a Schusterman Cohort in New York where he made many useful contacts and has participated in the Schusterman Fellowship Community Connection Series webinars including with Isra Aid and its work during COVID-19 with Ambassador Ron Dermer, on Decision Making with Pippa Kessler and on Understanding Anti-Racism and Your Role with Michelle Molitor. He met with David Sandmel to discuss the partnership between the Cape SAJBD and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and had a ZOOM call with Adam Rossano regarding Moishe House International.

Stuart Diamond had a ZOOM call with Jeni Friedman and David Jacobson about a proposal to initiate a regional Nahum Goldmann Foundation (NGF) in the Cape and met with David Jacobson (NGF) to speak about a localised fellowship for the Cape community, and has participated in NGF meetings on "Facilitating a Future Global Workshop", on "Growing Connection During the Time of Social Change", on "Unexpected Jewish Lessons from the Corona Virus Pandemic", on "COVID-19 issues around the globe" and Peer-Led Learnings with Dani Rotstein and with David Mizrachi.

## External Events

Board members and professionals have attended Ubuntu Breakfast events with guest speakers like principal of global consulting firm Management Solutions, Erik Jenkinson on "Moving Horizons"; Simon Susman on "Value from values"; Pieter-Louis Myburgh on the "Gangster State and The Republic of Gupta"; and a talk by Shakes Dlutu, who used to work for Afrika Tikkun running after school classes in the townships, and who spoke at a previous Cape SAJBD conference. He mentioned the Cape SAJBD and Tikkun in his introduction. Stuart Diamond and Mathilde Myburgh attended the *Daily Maverick's* "The Gathering"; Stuart Diamond participated in Stellenbosch University's ZOOM dialogue on "Social Justice and Mental Health in the Face of Corona: The Social Justice implications and constitutional compliance of policy responses to the Corona pandemic" and a UCT ZOOM webinar on "What role can young, African



entrepreneurs play during COVID-19?”, as well as a UCT webinar on “The Spanish flu Pandemic of 1918-19” with Professors Howard Phillips and Ed Rybicki. Tyla Dallas attended a World Justice Project webinar on the Decline of Rule of Law and Democratic Multilateralism.

## Advocacy



Before COVID-19 struck, we attended the State of the Province Address (SOPA), the German Unity Day event, the EU/ French/ German Ambassador SONA opening and the State of the Nation Address discussion hosted by the *Mail and Guardian*. Stuart Diamond met Zhoa Peiyao, Jia Yongmei and Lin Jing of the Chinese Consulate General and went to the Chinese New Year celebrations at the invitation of Lin Jing. Stuart Diamond also met with Tasso Evangelinos of the Cape Town Central City Improvement District and with MPL of the Western Cape, Brett Herron on the Tafelberg property matter.

We submitted a comment to the City on its revised Draft Housing Allocation Policy: Housing Opportunities. In addition, Stuart Diamond contacted Premier Alan Winde, and Mayor Dan Plato with a suggestion from Gwynne Robins that Cape Town instituted a two-minute silence to remember those who have fallen victim to COVID-19 and to pray for the wellbeing and safety of the nurses, essential workers and the community as a whole. A similar silence had been instituted by the City in 1918 and was taken up by King George V as an Armistice Day custom all over the Commonwealth, as well as in Israel on Yom Hashanah and Yom Hazikaron. He received enthusiastic feedback. Our *Argus* letter, “Observing two minutes of silence after noon gun to honour our health workers”, received much media coverage, both in the press and on air. As a result, Anroux Marais, the Western Cape Minister of Cultural Affairs and Sport, has announced that a minute’s silence would be held every Wednesday at noon.

Our Advocacy Subcommittee chaired by Rael Koping arranged a panel discussion on Shared Wealth with JHI CEO Johnny Copelyn, Wesgro CEO Tim Harris and *Daily Maverick* correspondent Marianne Merten, as well as a breakfast with Jonny Steinberg addressing President Ramaphosa’s options and thinking through the next few years in the presidency — but all notions of his strategic thinking has been swept away by COVID-19 hitting South Africa. Since then, we have been holding zoom strategy sessions for the Cape board with Grant Sieff.

## Antisemitism and Social Justice - No Place for Hate



The Cape SAJBD investigated reported cases of antisemitism and other forms of hatred with the assistance of our Antisemitism & Legal Subcommittee, chaired by Tzvi Brivik, who were also addressed on the topic by SAJBD Associate Director, David Saks. I am pleased to inform you that, six years after we took former Western Cape Cosatu leader Tony Ehrenreich to the Human Rights Commission (which found him guilty of hate speech for his 2014 social media posts accusing the SAJBD of complicity in the murder of Gazans and calling for “an eye for and eye” retribution against our members and other Zionists), he has finally

apologised. We hope that this will send a strong message that will prevent people from threatening those whose opinions they do not like.

Among other actions we have taken, Facebook USA closed an account after we wrote to them about an antisemitic and defamatory posting, we referred a complaint from Somerset West to the Human Rights Council and complained about a controversial social media post from a popular South African clothing brand. In response to an appeal from the Lithuanian Jewish community about a proposed law denying Lithuanian culpability in the Holocaust, we wrote to Lithuania's Parliament asking them not to pass it and also facilitated similar letters being sent from the Rwandan and Congolese community. Explanatory letters from the Lithuanian President were received by the Cape SAJBD and by those communities.

The Cape SAJBD is a founder member of the Hate Crimes Working Group and we participate in its meetings. Stuart Diamond has attended ADL webinars on "Fighting Hate from Home", "dealing with Mayors on the Front-Line", "Viruses and Violence - Dealing with Antisemitism in the Shadow of COVID-19", "Standing up in the Face of Hate in America Today", "Educating – and protecting – kids during the pandemic", "Debunking Digital Myths" with Holocaust media expert Dr Victoria Walden from the University of Sussex, a talk on "Fighting Hate from Home " by Reut Group and Tikkun Olam Makers founder Gidi Grinstein, and a *SA Jewish Report* webinar on "How to avoid having racist kids". Stuart Diamond spoke to the learners at the Kommetjie Generation School on antisemitism, racism and sexism. We have met with Prof Adam Mendelsohn and Graham Wright regarding a proposed UCT Campus Survey testing bias and prejudice on campus, and with David Horwitz and Raoul Miller to unpack the results of the Kaplan Centre communal survey.

In line with Hillel's famous comment, "If I am only for myself, what am I?" and believing that there should be No Place for Hate, we also assist other communities facing prejudice. We were approached for assistance by the Congolese Civil Society for about 1,000 immigrants camping outside the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' office, demanding resettlement and afraid of threats of renewed xenophobic attacks. Stuart Diamond sent out an appeal for food and bought emergency supplies which Gwynne Robins delivered, accompanied by two refugees. The street was crowded with hundreds of panicked refugees. When they were harshly removed by the police, we issued a media statement. The refugees took shelter in the Methodist Church and Stuart Diamond and Gardens Centre PnP (a donor) visited them to do a further donor drop to the refugees sheltering. Unfortunately, the refugees inside fell under the control of two warlords, who rejected outside assistance, including that offered by the Cape SAJBD and the Gift of the Givers. Stuart Diamond met Dalia Katz of the Western Cape Angel Network and Romy Petersen from Africa Awake to discuss the foreign nationals situation. In addition, with the assistance of Susan Heller Pinto, ADL Associate Director of International Affairs, Stuart Diamond arranged an introduction to the Ottawa ADL office for the Congolese Civil Society, which wished to get advice on establishing a branch in Canada.

## Bursaries

The Bursary Committee has sat and awarded tertiary bursaries amounting to R2,101,500 to 73 students, of which 22 were new applications, 14 were renewals and 37 were post graduates. With the onset of COVID-19, the Cape SAJBD admin officer Jodi Goldberg sent letters to the bursary students wishing them well and appreciating the challenges they faced. We are grateful to people who have donated bursaries and appeal to the community to consider leaving money in their wills for bursaries – bursaries assist our youth to become independent and the costs of tertiary education continue to skyrocket.



## Country Communities



The Cape SAJBD looks after the Western Cape Country Communities through its Country Communities Subcommittee, chaired by David King – unfortunately, no visits have taken place recently because of lockdown, but we held a ZOOM Country Communities meeting to discuss COVID-19 and arranged for local shops to stock Passover supplies. Before lockdown, we visited the Wellington Cemetery to check on the progress in the restoration works, and we have discussed Country Communities repairs and maintenance with a focus on the cemeteries in Robertson, Ceres and Tulbagh and wrote to the Hessequa Municipality regarding its work with Jewish graves. We met Ken Botes from Whalemark around issues at the Old Parow Shul. After Rabbi Stuart Serwator pointed out that the Moorreesburg Wheat Industry Museum did not display their Jewish artefacts, we wrote to the Museum, the Moorreesburg Tourism Bureau and Swartland Municipality's Town Planning Office about the Jewish heritage in their museum. The Museum responded gratefully, asking for assistance in finding more artefacts for their exhibition, but due to lockdown, this has had to be put on hold.

With the UOS, we facilitated the funeral of a resident in the Strand-Somerset West area and coordinated with CSO regarding a Minyan.

Stuart Diamond met with Anne Harris, Mr Plitt and Mr Geldbart to discuss how the Cape SAJBD could work together with the Small Jewish Communities Association and met with Rabbi Stuart Serwator to discuss country communities.

## Education Subcommittee



This is a new portfolio headed by our executive director. We have been running an extensive information campaign on our platform ([www.capesajbd.org](http://www.capesajbd.org)). To this end, we have issued a number of letters, updating our community about communal preparedness, about changes in lockdown rules and actions taken by Parliament to minimise the impact, encouraging people to volunteer to assist others in the community and informing them about business mentorships through ORT JET. We have provided answers to frequently-asked questions about COVID-19, about the rules affecting communal organisations, an easy COVID-19 guide for employers, about safety in the workplace, about essential services during lockdown, and a COVID-19 behavioural campaign for social media, quoting medical experts and politicians in cautioning the public. I must here thank Tvi Brivik, our legal intern Tyla Dallas and Mathilde Myburgh for their assistance in drafting and publishing these resources.

As part of our focus on informing the community through ZOOM, we organised events on the City's COVID-19 Preparedness Plan with Dr Zahid Badroodien, MMC for Community Services & Health, with MPs Michael Bagraim and Dr Michael Cardo on COVID-19 labour issues, with Dr Merle Friedman on mental health, with Ginna Green and Gamal Palmer —two American Jews of colour— on Black Lives Matter, and on Communal Democracy in Action with Judge Dennis Davis and Adv Anton Katz, moderated by Tyla Dallas.

We have not only been concerned about our own community. We held a meeting with Mensch on Jewish external responses to COVID-19 with a Cape focus and we translated and distributed FAQs about COVID-19 into Afrikaans, Xhosa and French. Gwynne Robins prepared a document for COVID-19 hospital wards with contact details and information on how different faith communities handled death, and assisted Adv Fairouz Nagia, the Deputy Director of the Western Cape government's Specialised Support Department, in drafting an in-house Provincial Guide to Cultural and Religious Practices and Observances in Managing COVID-19 Fatalities.

I have spoken to the Cape Jewish Seniors Association's (CJSA's) Sea Point branch and its Milnerton's men's group on the work of the Cape SAJBD, while Stuart Diamond has addressed its Cape Town and Wynberg branches, the Highlands House residents, the Constantia Shul community and the Broth Zion WIZO Gilah branch. He also addressed the Cape Town Progressive Congregation ZOOM event on what the Cape SAJBD has been doing during COVID-19.

"Once the storm is over," wrote Japanese writer Haruki Murakami, "you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain, when you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in."

## Generation Next



The Generation Next Subcommittee is chaired by Adrienne Jacobson and has served as an advisory committee for the youth organisations over critical issues and concerns, particularly with campus issues. It has worked closely with SAUJS, Moishe House, Chabad on Campus and student and young adult representation and has provided them with strategic workshops, addressed issues of antisemitism and social justice on campus through the introduction of a student helpline to support them during IAW on campus. Fortunately, IAW 2020 had to be cancelled because of the virus. Recently, the subcommittee has been working on collaborative projects between the youth organisations around the COVID-19 crisis and implementing our No Place for Hate campaign among Generation Next participants and on Herzlia campuses, as well as the broader community.

## SAUJS Western Cape

*by Cassandra Mayekiso, Western Cape Coordinator*

The year 2020 started with a lot of great plans and, while a number of those plans came to fruition, SAUJS, as with the rest of the world, had to make some dramatic changes to its regular programming. Its 2020 opening party was held at Café Caprice in Camps Bay with nearly 300 attendees! Everyone had a great time and although SAUJS leadership was sad that it would not likely have the opportunity to throw a party again this year, it was grateful that it had such a strong start to the year! Before lockdown became the new normal, SAUJS hosted a self-defence class for female students with Fight Back SA, partnered with Chabad on Campus for a Purim Hamantaschen Bake, and hosted a Purim event with Ohrsom Student. It took some time to adjust to shifting everything online, and the committee had to cope with the university moving online at the same time, but it has found that, although operating in the online sphere might not be ideal, it was entirely possible. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, SAUJS was still able to engage with its members through its social media platforms and run projects, including partnering with local small Jewish businesses, running a raffle to celebrate Lag B'Omer and Shavuot and hosting a mental health talk targeted at helping students balance mental wellbeing and university stress within COVID-19, with psychologist

David Abrahamsohn. SAUJS recently launched its Ahavat Yisrael photo campaign to commemorate the Three Weeks, where students across the province submitted photos with their fellow Jews highlighting what Ahavat Yisrael means to them.

The circumstances that COVID-19 has forced the students into have been difficult to adjust to, and it has highlighted a number of issues that our country was faced with. However, it has also shown them how kind people can be to one another and how persevering we as a community are. We would like to thank the Cape SAJBD for its assistance and for our discussions with Chairperson Rael Kaimowitz and Executive Director Stuart Diamond. SAUJS was grateful to the community structures that have reached out to it to offer their support, and they strive to do the same for their community as they make their way through these unprecedented times.

## Yom HaShoah Vehagevurah & the Holocaust

Yom Hashoah VeHagevurah is usually the largest event we organise each year. Not this year. This year, it had to be a commemoration in isolation with an outstanding video programme of pre-recorded clips from previous events put together by Mary Kluk and the National SAJBD with assistance from Gwynne Robins, Stuart Diamond and videographer Sean O'Sullivan. Mathilde Myburgh arranged community participation in the World Jewish Congress' digital #WeRemember campaign. Gwynne Robins has been helping the Cape Town Holocaust and Genocide Centre (CTHGC) with a project for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation survivors and helped two survivors to obtain compensation. She also arranged for antique dealer Andrew Newall to donate to the Centre material from his late mother, who managed to escape into England from Germany in the 1930s as a domestic worker. Stuart Diamond attended an ADL ZOOM talk with Shoah Foundation Director Roberta Grossman entitled "Who Will Write Our History?". At CTHGC, we have attended International Holocaust Remembrance talks by Ella Blumenthal and Alberto Rollo on Garden of Memory, the screening of the film *Romania and the Holocaust - Forgotten Perpetrators* by Natasha Skoryk, and the exhibition on *Objects from the Concentration Camp* photographed by Richard Wiesel, Elie Wiesel's cousin, and addressed by Dr Andrew Lamprecht.

## Gender & Sexuality

Under its No Place for Hate campaign, the Cape SAJBD works actively to educate our community on gender and sexuality issues and encourage the acceptance of diversity. Having met with David Kossew, Gina Flash and Jodi Ramsay from the *Mensch* and *Mankind* project, the Cape SAJBD joined Mensch in running regular Men's Discussion Groups, where they discussed topics like "Gender-Based Violence (GBV)", "Gender in the world of COVID-19" and "Ramaphosa on GBV". We referred a complaint of GBV against a learner received from the Congolese Civil Society to Mosaic for action.

Stuart Diamond attended a multi-sectoral working session on the development of a collaborative effort to address violence against women and children in the Western Cape as a guest of MEC Sharna Fernandes, and a panel discussion on Queerness in Religion hosted by the UCT Rainbow Society. Gwynne Robins attended the AGM of the South African Faith and Family Institute, which focuses on GBV.

We have met with Jacqui Benson around the Cape LGBTQIA+ community and with Jacqui Rodgers of the Jacob Gitlin Library and arranged for the library to extend its LGBTQIA+ selection. The Cape SAJBD hosted a ZOOM call around issues of gender, gender pronouns and trans identity with Rabbi Greg Alexander and Jacqui Benson. Mathilde Myburgh met with Rabbi Laynie Soloman in the US on ZOOM to discuss LGBTQIA+ inclusion in synagogues, a question raised by the Progressive community. Rabbi Solomon shared resources and offered their assistance in developing the conversation. Mathilde Myburgh put together a social media Pride Month campaign to educate the Jewish community on LGBTQIA+ issues.

## Information Resource

The Cape SAJBD also provides an information service, fielding a wide range of queries including updating the Cape Town section of the *Guide to Jewish South Africa*. We have held a ZOOM meeting with photographer Shawn Benjamin over a planned Cape SAJBD Photo Archive. Among the queries handled by Gwynne Robins were questions related to Jews in District Six by documentary television producer Karen Schoonbee; enquiries from Heidi Boise as research for her MA thesis on social aspects of District Six with a focus on reconciliation, community involvement and Jewish participation; with London documentary film maker Alex Emmanuel who was planning a film about his nine-year old Russian great grandfather's journey to South Africa using material he has sourced from Gwynne Robins' articles. Gwynne Robins assisted Alisha Meininghaus from the Department of Religious Studies at Philipps University in Marburg, Germany with information on amulets belonging to the Cape SAJBD; Alderman Owen Kinahan with further information about a World War I memorial in the Gardens Shul for the WWI Cape Town Legacy Project; Dr Sally Frankental for information about Jewish women for an encyclopaedia article she was researching; Jordan Moshe of the *South African Jewish Report* for information about the 1901 plague pandemic; Prof Milton Shain with information for his final book in his trilogy on antisemitism in South Africa; with Nadine Froeman in connection with her research on South African-Israeli artists that will be mounted, COVID-19 depending, at the South African Jewish Museum (SAJM); with Irwin Manoim, Gavin Morris and videographer Sean O Sullivan for another SAJM exhibition on the history of the Progressive Reform Congregation; and she answered queries about finding families or researching ancestors. She assisted Dr Andrew Lamprecht and Len Swimmer in connection with submitting articles to *Jewish Affairs* and met with Andrew Newall who donated some items of Judaica to the collections of the Cape SAJBD and the SAJM in honour of his late mother.

## Interfaith and Intergroup

Fortunately, we were able to host two major interfaith events before COVID-19 hit our shores. The first was our well-attended and much appreciated interfaith Sukkat Shalom lunch in the Gardens Shul sukkah. Guests included the Catholic Archbishop, an imam, the Groote Kerk dominee, an interfaith minister and other interfaith guests with Rabbi Feldman and myself as speakers.

The other was our annual United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week event which this year took the form of a successful interfaith concert held in the Temple Israel, Green Point with the participation of Archbishop Brislin, Rabbi Gottlieb, Rabbi Alexander, Sheikh Moerat, Khoisan Chief Autshumao, the Herzlia Vocal Ensemble, a Congolese Civil Society singer and poet, the Vuka Nomtobhoyi choir and Sufi Instrumentalists. It was featured on SABC2.

We also sit on the annual District Six Reconciliation Day Interfaith walk committee. At the walk, Stuart Diamond spoke on reconciliation in the Muir Street Mosque and blew the shofar. The march, including an interview with Stuart Diamond, was shown on the Newsroom Africa TV news.

Other pre-lockdown events were our attendance at the Bahai Celebrations for the Bicentary of the Birth of the Báb, and Gwynne Robins assisted in organising an interfaith Chanukah celebration in the Open Mosque where she spoke on the festival and demonstrated chanukiot, including some Nazi-looted chanukiot from the Cape SAJBD's collection. She was a panellist at the annual interfaith satsang of the Ananda Kutir ashrama and attended the event hosted by the Deputy Mayor for the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative (CTII)'s Marlene Silbert Youth Interfaith Intercultural programme. Gwynne Robins hosted four Muslim women to lunch in their family sukkah and established a Jewish-Muslim Women's Friendship group, with assistance from Leaza Cowan and Li Boiskin, which met regularly until COVID-19 intervened. Gwynne Robins sits on the CTII Advisory Committee.

We sent out Ramadan and Eid messages. This year, because of the lockdowns, there were no invitations to attend iftars, but Stuart Diamond joined in a family Iftar ZOOM dinner interview session broadcast on

YouTube and joined the Open Mosque Virtual Jumu'ah. He spoke on an Interfaith Virtual Prayer and Reflection hosted by the Turquoise Institute and Gwynne Robins spoke on two ZOOM Bahai Interfaith Devotions. Stuart Diamond shared the Jewish response to COVID-19 with the Cape Town Tygerberg Football Association via ZOOM. Gwynne Robins was one of the panelists in a Heartlines-UNICEF webinar on "An Interfaith Conversation Around Social Cohesion" which attracted nearly 100 listeners, including News24, and she was quoted in the subsequent *Citizen* article, "SA 'has not dealt with its past'".

## Intercommunity Outreach & Tikkun Olam

Before lockdown we celebrated Tu'B Shvat with Rabbi Emma Gottlieb and learners from Herzlia and the very under-resourced Holy Cross Primary School in District Six, where they planted lemon trees at the school, receiving positive press coverage. Unfortunately, the children arrived a few weeks later to discover that the trees had been stolen to much disappointment and tears. For Purim, as mishloach manot, we collected money and food for the JCS Purim Food Bank drive and helped with a social media campaign to collect care items for Kensington House for Seniors, in memory of the late Danny Oosthuizen, *Cape Argus* columnist and intricate member of Souper Troopers (a NPO that assists street people run by Kerry Hoffman and former Cape SAJBD member Caryn Gootkin). We met with Jesse Laitenen from StreetScapes regarding a winter readiness programme, a project that fell victim later to the lockdown.

We had a ZOOM meeting with MMC Zahid Badroodien of the City of Cape Town around the donation by B'noth Zion WIZO of wheelchairs for Hope and Old Age Home Care. Instead of the Cape SAJBD participating in the annual One To One event for disabled people, we asked our community to donate a hygiene haul of hand sanitisers, soap or face towels for them. We launched a winter relief campaign for water-logged shack dwellers after some very bad winter storms, and for Mandela Day, Stuart Diamond made sandwiches for refugees and we launched a #Masks4Mandela campaign.

## Public Relations

A letter of thanks was received from President Ramaphosa for the Cape SAJBD's letter to thank him for his leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we sent out letters to express thankfulness for recovery from COVID-19 infections to MP Rev, Kenneth Meshoe and MP Steve Swart, to MEC Nomafrench Mbombo and French Consul General Laurent Amar. Letters of congratulations were sent to Siyavuya Mzantsi, the new editor of the *Cape Times*, to Geoff Cohen, director of education, David Ginsberg, director of finance and education, Andries van Rensen, CEO, Matthew Gruzd, chairman and Philip Krawitz, head of the Board of Trustees on the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of United Herzlia Schools (UHS), and to Judge Edwin Cameron on his appointment as Stellenbosch University's chancellor. We wrote to Archbishop Stephen Brislin to express sympathy and horror at the desecration and damage in St Mary's Cathedral and theft of R100 000' worth of sacred items. The Cape SAJBD coordinated a Pesach Message from Premier Alan Winde and Yom HaShoah messages from German Consulate General Mathius Hansen and Mayoral Member JP Smith, which were distributed to the community.

## Media

Stuart Diamond and I have often been interviewed on radio, particularly around the reopening of synagogues (SABC news, 31.5, 2.6, Smile FM, 5.6, *Cape Times*, 29.5, *Atlantic Sun*, 4.6), on COVID-19 in Highlands House, and on the possible two-minute Noon Gun silence for COVID-19 victims and for the health of our essential workers (*Argus* 28.5, SABC news, 30.5, 31.5, *Argus*, 2.6 - two letters in support). Charisse Zeiffert has interviewed Stuart Diamond and Gwynne Robins on ChaiFM.

Stuart Diamond met with Jason Felix from EWN and Maxwell Maseko as part of the Cape SAJBD's Media advocacy work and wrote to Pippa Hudson from Cape Talk regarding Yom HaShoah. Nathan Adams of the *Weekend Argus* contacted us about interviewing a Holocaust survivor for an article on mental health issues around COVID-19. We prepared a media statement for *Jüdische Allgemeine* weekly newspaper in Germany

on our response to COVID-19. The *Argus* and the *Atlantic Sun* reported on our Tu B'Shvat tree planting (12.02) and on COVID-19 in Highlands House, and we have been quoted in many *South African Jewish Report* articles, including a front-page article quoting Stuart Diamond on the attendance of school kids at a BDS rally. Stuart Diamond was a panelist in the *South African Jewish Report: The Amazing Race*, talking about what the Cape SAJBD is doing around COVID-19. We have had letters in the *Herald* putting the record straight on the origins of the term 'antisemitism' and another in response to a factually-incorrect op-ed piece from the Palestinian Ambassador.

## Operationally Speaking

### Budget

I would like to thank my treasurer, Lester Hoffman, who is always available to advise and assist us. Apart from the affiliation fees which we receive from our affiliates, we are totally dependent for our budget on the UJC and the Allocations Committee and I must express our thanks to them for always being appreciative of our work and for providing us with the financial support necessary to look after our community. With the financial ramifications of COVID-19 on our community, their work in collecting money to fund our community's increasing needs is becoming more difficult and more vital than ever.

### Staff

No organisation is static and the Cape SAJBD's professional staff has seen many changes. We have welcomed on board our new director Stuart Diamond, whose energy, contacts and vision has brought a renewed vitality to the organisation, and we welcome our writer and content developer Mathilde Myburgh and our legal researcher Tyla Dallas, who have already brought much value to our small professional team. We also thank the professionalism of our super-efficient projects and operations director Jodi Goldberg and our senior researcher Gwynne Robins, who provides us with institutional knowledge and much, much more.

## Conclusion

The former British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has asked: "When the worst of the pandemic is over, what kind of future will we seek? Will we try as far as possible to go back to the way things were? Or will we try to create a more just and caring society? What impact does collective tragedy have on the human imagination? We have to use the pain we've been through to sensitise ourselves to the pain of others, the poor, the weak and the vulnerable — the widow, the orphan and the stranger. Collective suffering can move us from I to We, from the pursuit of self-interest to care for the common good. When war or disease affects all of us, you learn to care for all of us, to build a fairer society, where human values count as much as economic ones. We've been through too much simply to go back to where we were. We have to rescue some blessing from the curse, some hope from the pain."

This is what the Cape SAJBD is trying to do with the help of our affiliated organisations and all the many volunteers in our community and we have to, all of us, do so as a collective. We cannot do so as individuals. We can only pray that the next time that the Cape SAJBD will be holding a conference, the world will appear to be in a better place.

The Cape SAJBD is lucky to have a talented and dedicated professional team to implement its strategies. They are ably-led by our Executive Director, Stuart Diamond, who has made an enormous impact on the organisation since his appointment. I thank them all.

I have been very lucky to be surrounded by lay leadership who have challenged, supported and provided direction during a challenging term. Thank you for your commitment and passion shown to the Cape SAJBD and the wider community.



Lastly, I must thank my executive, who has stood by me in the trenches on a daily basis. Vice Chair, Viv Anstey, a communal asset and change maker. Michael Donen, a Senior Counsel, not just at the bar, and Lester Hoffman, a wise and insightful communal stalwart. I have no words to express my deep gratitude to you all.

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