

# United Chesed like a guardian angel

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When her marriage broke up over a decade ago, Lisa (not her real name) now 52, was confident that she would be able to support herself and her four children.

She had a job she loved and the pay, she said, was good.

But after being injured in two separate accidents, Lisa's ability to work was impaired, and, for the past five years, she has been unable to earn a living.

She's currently a recipient of Ontario Works, and is in the process of applying to the Ontario Disability Support Program.

"I was starting at ground zero...my parents have passed away and I have a sibling who helps what little she can, but otherwise, it's just me and my children," Lisa said.

Her sense of alienation has, however, been partially allayed by the ongoing support she's received from Toronto charity, United Chesed, which she heard about several years ago through word of mouth.

With a mandate to provide urgent, short-term assistance to families and individuals in crisis due to poverty, United Chesed uses its network of supporters and donors to obtain necessities like extra money for rent or food, furniture or help with basic services for people in a pinch.

Lisa says the organization, and particularly its manager of client services, Bernice Chaplin, has been instrumental to helping her stay afloat in a sea of bills.

For example, when she needed to move her family to save money, she opted to rent a basement apartment close by, rather than uproot her kids from the neighbourhood and school they knew.

"Consistency is very important to children," she said firmly.

Still, she said she would not have been able to secure the place without the help of United Chesed, which stepped in and helped her pay the \$1,500 she owed the new landlord for first and last months' rent.

If a month has been particularly tough, United Chesed has given her a \$100 gift card to buy groceries.

When, several years ago, she con-



veyed to Chaplin that buying gas was a real hardship, the latter sought donations and presented Lisa with a \$500 gas card.

"It was amazing. To me, that's like winning the lottery. That's how much it meant to me and how much it helped our family," Lisa said.

Every Passover, United Chesed drops off two boxes at her home, each stocked with goods for the holiday.

"There's no way I could afford food for Pesach...but every year they give me everything I need for me and my family to keep Passover."

A few months ago, the organization held a toiletries drive, and presented Lisa's family with a box full of toothbrushes, deodorant, razors and other hygiene supplies.

"It had all these things you need that are expensive, but that most people don't really think about," she explained.

Lisa has immense gratitude both for the support United Chesed has provided and for the kindness and dignity with which they have treated her.

"Bernice has given me her cell number," Lisa said.

"She's met me places after work, because I needed money then and there for groceries or whatever. She goes above and beyond her job description...and she never judges me."

Lisa is proud of everything she's endured so far and is enthusiastic about sharing her story of resilience. She has no shame regarding the help she has received.



Bernice Chaplin

"There's no way I could've gotten by without [United Chesed and its network of supporters'] help. I probably would've had to go to a shelter," she said.

"There are so many good people doing so many wonderful things for the community and helping people like me – a person who never thought I'd be in a position to need help."

Most of all, she is grateful for Chaplin.

"I call her my guardian angel. If I ever slip to fall, she's there to catch me and to help me for the next week, or the next month, or until the next cheque." ■

United Chesed is at [www.unitedchesed.com](http://www.unitedchesed.com)