

## **Joannie Sichel**

What some might view as an old scrap of fabric, Joannie Sichel sees as the makings of a cloth bag that could help a local family bring home food from the food bank.

A shrunken wool sweater? Joannie imagines warm mittens or other cozy items that could be donated or sold to a deserving cause.

What about a YMCA community garden plot left untended and overgrown?

Useless? Not to Joannie.

To her, that patch of soil would be an excellent opportunity for someone to learn skills that could help them provide food for themselves.

For more than 40 years, Moncton resident Joannie Sichel has contributed this caring vision and creative abilities to a wide variety of area groups, from the YMCA of Greater Moncton, CAFI (Le Centre d'accueil et d'accompagnement francophone des immigrants du Sud-Est du Nouveau-Brunswick), the Moncton Public Library, local food banks and soup kitchens, and many more. Joannie is a connector, a motivator and someone who sees an opportunity in everything, everyone and every situation. She has tirelessly given of herself to engage others and involve them in community-building activities.

Folks at the YMCA perhaps know Joannie best as a long-time member of the YMCA Community Garden. She is an ambassador for the garden and makes sure anyone new to the space feels welcome. She has opened up about her personal struggles with mental health issues and explained how the garden is a fantastic therapy, a place where people can do far more than grow produce; a place where they can share stories and learn from each other.

Among the multitude of other initiatives blessed by Joannie's energy and talent is the Christmas Mitzvah that she helped start 35 years ago, an event that continues to this day. Joannie discovered that local soup kitchens experience a gap in their services during the Christmas holidays because they like to give time off to their dedicated volunteers. Inspired by an article she'd read in a Toronto newspaper, she gathered members of Moncton's local Jewish community who adopted the idea of filling in for those volunteers, ensuring the soup kitchens could stay open during the winter holidays. The idea was a win-win for the community: not only were the regular volunteers thrilled to have time off to celebrate, members of the Jewish Community had something very worthwhile to do during the Christmas period. It was also special for the Jewish children to feel a sense of belonging.

Joannie's many other contributions include her involvement for more than 30 years with organizing Moncton's Holocaust Memorial Service, an event that helps people to remember and be educated about the tragedy of war. The service has included survivors, legion members, veterans and churchgoers of all denominations.

Meanwhile, Joannie has sat on the board of the Moncton Public Library and helped raise funds to buy new books.

She is also a natural teacher. For more than 10 years, Joannie and her husband have helped the children of their new Canadian neighbours with their French homework. (They also continue to serve as their surrogate grandparents). She also taught classes in sewing, recycling fabric, baking and LifeWriting for seniors at Moncton's Tanramar Seniors' college.

When CAFI came calling last summer, Joannie volunteered and taught sewing classes for new teenage immigrants. She also supports the PEDVAC Foundation in Port Elgin and made visits to the Veterans' Health Centre, supported by her therapy dog Mollie. For many years, she also passionately helped the University Women's Club book fair, whose proceeds provided scholarships to mature female students as well as to young female graduates.

Most recently, Joanie has helped to collect sewing machines for distribution to local organizations including the YMCA and CAFI. With those machines and fabric she has collected for years, Joannie has offered classes to newcomer women and youth. As well, she has created bags for the Early Childhood Family Resource Centre in Dieppe so its young participants could leave with a bag and book.

Joannie believes that by working together, people can have a big impact on their community. She embodies this philosophy. Her impact is evident across our region – from the organizations she has aided, the relationships she has created, the funds she has raised, the skills she has shared and the people she has positively affected.

Joannie Sichel has truly helped to make this a stronger, more resourceful community.