

THE JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

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Since the presentation of a survey to the 1977 Annual Conference that documented the widespread underrepresentation of women in executive positions, the JCSA Subcommittee on Women's Issues has not only brought to public attention the unequal opportunities for women but has also developed a mentoring program to better prepare women for executive positions. Since 1990, a major session on women in Jewish communal service has been presented at each Annual Conference, and currently mentors and mentees are currently working together.

We urge all agencies—national and local—to review their personnel practices and to develop guidelines that will ensure equal opportunities for the employment and advancement of professional women in Jewish communal service.

*Proclamation on Equal Professional Opportunities for Women in Jewish Communal Service, December, 1979
Conference of Jewish Communal Service
(now JCSA)*

The continuing struggle for equal employment opportunities for women in the field of Jewish communal service first received serious public recognition with the publication and presentation of "The Status of Women in Jewish Communal Service: Findings of a Survey by the CJCS Committee on Opportunities for Women," at the 1977 CJCS (now JCSA or Association) Annual Conference.

The precedent-shattering survey, based on information from 319 agencies employing over 2,200 professional personnel, concluded, "The vast majority of women are in lower professional levels of employment in

Jewish communal service and appear to have very limited access to top executive and administrative positions." The study found that of the 303 executive positions about which information was available, only ten (3%) of these positions were held by women, despite the fact that 54% of the agencies' employees were women.

Although the widespread underutilization of women in executive positions in Jewish communal service had long been common knowledge, the survey brought these facts to public attention and provided irrefutable, dramatic, and startling details of the lack of opportunities for women, forming a body of knowledge that could no longer be denied. The quest for equal professional opportunities for women in our field became a recognized and accepted public issue.

As co-chairs of the JCSA Subcommittee on Women's Issues, and therefore directly involved with this issue, it is our conviction that the position of professional women in our field has improved during the 25 years since the original survey. However, we are equally certain that much more needs to be accomplished. This article chronicles the

actions taken by JCSA to enhance opportunities for women within the field and the Association.

The ground-breaking 1977 survey led directly to an Association-sponsored "Proclamation"—signed by the chief operating officers of over 100 Jewish agencies in 1979—calling for a review of their agencies' personnel practices in order to help ensure equal opportunities for the employment and advancement of women.

In an extensive follow-up 1981 survey designed to determine what changes had taken place in the hiring and upgrading of women in Jewish communal service since the original study, the Association found a "slight improvement in the number of women in...top executive positions; from 5% in 1977 to 8% in 1981." However, the study noted, "The great majority (of women), 92% (as opposed to 95% in 1977) are in the...lower job categories. The 1981 survey concluded:

While the current findings indicate a small measure of progress for women, there is still a very wide gap between the levels achieved by men and those achieved by women in relation to position and salary. The opportunities for career advancement and for higher earnings are evidently better for men than for women. Since the same qualifications are required of women as of men, the marked disparity in career advancement would seem to suggest prejudice against women in executive positions.

The Association surveys in 1977 and 1981 were later emulated by the Council of Jewish Federations for the federation field, and by several JCSA Affiliated Professional Associations (APAs) for their respective fields of service. The general conclusions of the studies paralleled the initial findings—women did not have equal opportunities for advancement to management and executive level positions in Jewish communal service.

Clearly, although progress in the overall field to enhance opportunities for women

was slow to nonexistent, rapid changes were taking place within JCSA. Two trends underway within the Association in the early 1980s affected positively the role of women in JCSA: dramatic changes in the numbers of women in the field and their increasing leadership roles in the Association.

By 1986, the percentage of women who were members of JCSA had risen to 60%, a substantial increase from 40% in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As a result of this significant membership increase and JCSA's efforts to equalize leadership roles for women and men, the Association's executive director Joel Ollander was able to report in 1987 to the JCSA membership that "in 1985-86, women served in five key leadership roles—president and president-elect; treasurer and assistant treasurer; and chair of the Annual Conference Program Committee." Ollander further noted that "17 of 52—or 33%—of current Association leaders were women...and, for the first time, the keynote speaker at the 1987 Annual Conference will be a woman."

To highlight the issue of equal opportunities and remuneration for women within the field and the Association, the JCSA Executive Board in 1989 directed the Annual Conference Program Committee to feature the subject at all succeeding conferences. Therefore, beginning in 1990, the Subcommittee on Women's Issues has been responsible for planning and executing a major session at each annual meeting.

In 1991, the Subcommittee developed a questionnaire designed to elicit the views of women on factors they believe interfere with their opportunities to assume executive positions in Jewish communal service agencies. The questionnaire was mailed to 300 women who were JCSA members. One hundred responses (33%) were received, collated, and analyzed.

That analysis revealed that the respondents held the following beliefs:

- Employment opportunities for women who aspire to become agency directors

- are limited.
- Such issues as child care responsibilities are often a determining factor affecting women's opportunities for leadership roles.
 - Women are less successful than men in negotiating for salaries, contracts, or benefits.
 - Women consider themselves as or more talented than men in most areas involving management skills.

An analysis of questionnaire responses gave rise to the concept of a mentoring program for women with less than five years experience in the field. Its purpose was to enable more experienced professional women to guide the new professionals through difficult personnel matters. The Association and APAs identified young women desiring mentors, as well as women in senior management positions who were willing to act as such. The project culminated in a series of major sessions at JCSA Annual Conferences: *Leadership Opportunities for Women* (1992), *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling* (1993), and *Issues and Directions for the 21st Century* (1994).

The JCSA Subcommittee on Women's Issues—and its predecessor committee—played a valuable ground-breaking role in documenting and bringing to public attention the issue of unequal opportunities for women in our profession. We—and the Association in general—maintain our early efforts on behalf of full equality, and intend to continue to promote leadership opportunities for women in Jewish communal service.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to the many Association members who played important roles in this evolving process. We would like to offer special recognition and appreciation to those who led the way: Toby Weiner, chair of the original JCSA Committee on Opportunities for Women, and Sophie B. Engel, chair of the 1977 Research Committee.

We would also like to thank Joel Ollander for his assistance in researching this article, for his year-round support for the work of the Subcommittee, and for his consistent advocacy of equal opportunity for women and men—in the Association and throughout the field of Jewish communal service.