

# COMJEE II

Task Force on  
Reinforcing the  
Effectiveness of  
Jewish Education  
in JCCs



MAY, 1995

# COMTEE II

## Task Force on Reinforcing the Effectiveness of Jewish Education in JCCs

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This final report of the COMJEE II Task Force marks the completion of eighteen months of exploration and deliberation. In a larger sense, it marks the continued commitment on the part of Jewish Community Center movement leadership to shape JCCs in such fashion that they become ever more effective instruments of creative Jewish learning and continuity.

The opportunity to work with JCC leaders and visit communities and see firsthand what JCCs are doing has been inspirational. It is my hope that the work of the COMJEE II Task Force will provide Centers with additional tools to fulfill their mandate.

My thanks to Task Force members for their devoted service and commitment to the Jewish continuity enterprise. Their efforts have helped ensure that JCCs will continue to provide leadership service to our Jewish community.

Ann P. Kaufman

*President*

The Task Force on Reinforcing The Effectiveness of Jewish Education in JCCs [COMJEE II] gratefully acknowledges the financial support received from the following:

Ann and Stephen Kaufman

Judith and Lester Lieberman

Barbara and Morton Mandel

Harriet and Alan Miller

Merle and Michael Orlove

Geri and Lester Pollack

Esther Leah Ritz

Joanna and Daniel Rose

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# Task Force on Reinforcing the Effectiveness of Jewish Education in JCCs: COWEE II

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## Historical perspective

The Commission on Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers [COMJEE] chaired by JCC Association Honorary President, Morton L. Mandel, began its work in 1982 and delivered its recommendations two years later. The Commission developed seven recommendations and a definition of Jewish education designed to guide the Jewish education and identity enhancement work of Jewish Community Centers and Jewish Community Centers Association, the movement's headquarters.

In anticipation of the tenth anniversary of the issuance of the COMJEE recommendations, JCC Association President, Lester Pollack, appointed then Vice-President, Ann Kaufman, to chair a committee which would assess what changes had occurred as a result of the COMJEE process, explore current and future needs and make recommendations as to what will be required of the JCC movement and individual JCCs to continue to be effective instruments for Jewish education and Jewish identity enhancement.

The "Task Force on Reinforcing the Effectiveness of Jewish Education in JCCs: COMJEE II," began its work in September 1993. This is its final report.

## The Impact of COMJEE

The COMJEE II Task Force began its work with a strong consensus that the COMJEE process, including the many initiatives undertaken in the subsequent decade, has left its mark on the JCC



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movement. The results of these efforts have created significant systemic change.

Some of the consequences of this systemic change are that it is now an accepted fact that Jewish identity enhancement is a central mission of the JCC, almost half of the JCC staffs have been to Israel on intensive Jewish education study trips, the position of Jewish education director is now an established fact in sixty-five JCCs, thirteen senior JCC executives spent three months studying in Israel and about fifty JCC executives are currently engaged in an organized program of weekly Jewish study.

## The COMJEE II Challenge

The work of the first commission built a foundation and developed guideposts and a philosophical underpinning to the JCC's Jewish mission. The results have indeed brought the JCCs to a new level. They have also left the Center movement with a new set of questions and challenges.

Consequently, the COMJEE II task was not merely to build on the foundation created by the Mandel Commission [COMJEE] but to create a new vision of how to make the promise of Jewish education and identity enhancement happen in the ongoing program, calendar and daily life of the JCC. What is needed is a clear idea of what Jewish education in JCCs should mean - and how it should be done. What is needed are the ideas, plans, programs, resource development and continuing education strategies necessary to energize and re-energize this aspect of the JCC. What is needed is being able to ensure that each succeeding generation of lay leaders and professionals will come to the task equally committed and even better prepared to assure this vitality of JCC Jewish education and identity enhancement mission. To guide its work, the COMJEE II Task Force adopted a Study Design.[See Appendix A]

As called for in the Study Design, the COMJEE II Task Force met five times, visited a number of Jewish communities and authorized several kinds of initiatives. These included:

**a. Biennial '94 Happening**

Designed to interpret to JCC leaders and others the range of educational programs and services currently being offered by JCCs.

**b. Data Collection**

*1. Assessing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of JCCs.*

Barry Chazan and Steven M. Cohen [Executive Summary Appendix B. Full report will be released as separate document.]

*2. Jewish Educational Excellence in the JCC Movement.*

Steven M. Cohen and Barry Holtz. This is a joint venture between JCC Association for Initiatives in Jewish Education [CIJE]. [The Study Design can be found in Appendix C. Full report will be released as separate document.]

*3. What is Jewish Education in the JCC?*

Barry Chazan [Will be released as separate document.]

**c. Jewish Program Enhancement**

- *Jewish Program Resource Book*

[A Work in Progress to be released as a separate document.]

- *The Think Tank - Symposium*

[Designed to expand the JCCs' Jewish education possibilities; See Appendix D.]

**d. Tools to Enhance JCC Effectiveness**

*Marketing the Jewish Edge* - jay Levenberg

[Will be released as a separate document.]

- *The Vision Statement* [included in this report on page 9]

This final report seeks to draw on the work of the first Commission and then connect its own vision and recommendations. Thus, the "*Definition of Jewish Education in the JCC*" is drawn from COMJEE and followed immediately by COMJEE IPs *Vision Statement*. " In the Observations and Recommendations section, the relevant quote from the first commission is stated as a prelude to the COMJEE II observations and recommendations.



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# Defin'ng Jewish Education in the J Ash Community Center

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The definition of Jewish education in the Jewish Community Center was developed by the first commission [COMJEE] and is repeated here because it informs the remainder of this report.

## Definition

Jewish education is a lifelong process of acquiring Jewish knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Its goals are to help individuals develop and reinforce positive Jewish identity and participate intelligently in Jewish life.

Jewish education takes place in the home, synagogue, classroom, Center and wherever efforts are made to awaken and deepen the sense of Jewish belonging, to motivate the pursuit of Jewish knowledge and to give expression to Jewish beliefs, practices and values.

## Goals

The Jewish Community Center has special Jewish educational opportunities and obligations, which include:

1. Stimulating people to be more aware of and to deepen their sense of Jewish belonging and responsibility;
2. Motivating and assisting them in the pursuit of Jewish knowledge;
3. Helping give expression to Jewish beliefs, practices and values.

This lifelong educational process realizes itself in each individual's ability to live effectively and fully as a Jew in an open society.

## Unique Role of the JCC

The Jewish Community Center is uniquely equipped to reinforce and contribute to the Jewish educational process. Its special education role results in part from its community-sponsored setting where Jewish people of all ages and various ideological orientations can come together. Similarly, the Center's uniqueness stems from its involvement of Jews in life experiences that both educate and motivate the pursuit of Jewish enrichment.



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## Statement

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As the nature of the Jewish encounter with American and Canadian societies has changed, so too, have the priorities of Jewish Community Centers. Thus, while YM-YWHA's placed great emphasis at the turn of the century on helping Jews to acculturate into American and Canadian societies, today's mission is to help all Jews experience the richness of Jewish tradition, Jewish community and Jewish living, and to make these part of their lives.

The Task Force on Reinforcing the Effectiveness of Jewish Education in JCCs - COMJEE II - has undertaken the task of building on the work of the past decade and setting new goals and directions for the Jewish Community Center movement.

As part of its effort, the Task Force seeks to create a vision which will guide the Jewish Community Center movement in its Jewish educational and identity building mission and articulate what it means for a JCC to maximize its potential in that area. **The Vision Statement and Maximizing Jewish Educational Potential have been deliberately framed as ideals so that all JCCs will be encouraged to strive to reach their full potential.**

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### Statement

*The vision of the JCC movement is to maximize the use of the programs and services, the position in the community, and the accessibility of the Jewish Community Center to welcome all Jews, to help each Jew move along a continuum of Jewish growth, and to build Jewish memories. The ultimate goal is to create a community of learning Jews who are consciously Jewish; who are respectful of Jewish differences; who are knowledgeable of and committed to Jewish values and practice; who participate in synagogue life and in Jewish communal and cultural life; who make Israel a central component in their identities as Jews; and who manifest their Jewishness in lifestyle, life choices, and life commitment, thus creating a Jewish community capable of continuing creative renewal.*

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# Maximizing Jewish Educational Potential

PREVIOUS

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The JCC which seeks to reach its potential as an institution of creative Jewish continuity will:

- welcome all Jews and encourage them to participate at the level of their interest while having program and service strategies in place to encourage each Jew to move along a Jewish growth continuum.
- D have an ambiance that is warm, embracing and visibly Jewish.
- D create a new Jewish "neighborhood" in the JCC with its unique smells, sounds, and diversity. This will include a Jewish library, Jewish media center and other resources for Jewish living.
- forge alliances with synagogues and other Jewish institutions concerned with enriched Jewish continuity. The JCC will also have services in place to encourage Jews to join synagogues, to seek intensive Jewish schooling for their children and to engage in quality Jewish learning experiences wherever they are found.
- have in place programs that provide Center members with opportunities to help others and understand how the impulse to help derives from their Jewish heritage.
- D take a leadership role in joining with others to plan and advocate for ways to meet unmet Jewish educational needs.
- D create opportunities for young Jews to meet other young Jews.
- D encourage marriage between Jews as a value, design programs and services that will facilitate this goal and mobilize community resources to help strengthen existing marriages.
- be mindful of, welcome, and design appropriate services for Jews living alone.

- D have in place programs and services which will encourage Jews to adapt to the rhythm of the Jewish calendar [incorporating the celebrations that have become part of Jewish life since the creation of the State of Israel], celebrate life cycle events Jewishly, internalize Jewish values and live full Jewish lives.
- emphasize the centrality of Israel, connect Jews to Israel and build an ever more intensive relationship between the JCC constituency and the land, the state and the people of Israel.
  - sensitize and educate its constituency about Jewish communities around the world and in the State of Israel and encourage this constituency to support Jewish needs wherever they may be.
- D make budgetary provision for Jewish educational experimentation and innovation.
- D evaluate its experiences annually and set new goals to meet its evolving Jewish continuity challenges.
- D see itself in the business of sustaining Jewish memories and building Jewish life.
- D offer a range of Jewish educational possibilities that include:
- programs and services for those with limited Jewish education.
  - age-appropriate curricula which provide Jewish educational opportunities for individuals and families including those with special needs to move to an ever more intensive engagement with Judaism.
  - opportunities, too, for the most Jewishly educated among us to continue their study and share their knowledge and experience.
  - programs and services designed to deepen the connection with Israel with special emphasis on helping young people get to Israel as part of an organized experience.
  - Jewish programs which are offered free as part of the basic membership package.

- services that demonstrate a sensitivity to the changing needs of the Jewish family.
- services and strategies designed to help individuals and families function more effectively as Jews in their homes.
- opportunities to help Jews articulate the meaning of being Jewish.

have a Jewish professional staff that

- is led by a Jewishly knowledgeable and learning executive.
  - is involved in Jewish life and living to such a degree that they can serve as models for Center members.
  - has Jewish educators as part of its staff, including a senior Jewish educator as part of its executive staff.
- constantly upgrades its level of Jewish knowledge and connection with Israel including travel and study in Israel.
  - uses time spent in Jewish studies as a key criterion for agency advancement.

D view lay leaders as an important link in Jewish history and seek to assure that

- they enhance their own Jewish education in order to realize their full potential as Jewish leaders and serve as models for their peers.
  - they understand and strongly support the Jewish education mission of the JCC.
  - they understand and support local community efforts to maintain Jewish services and enhance Jewish community building.
  - they develop a personal relationship with and commitment to the continental and world Jewish communities and Israel including travel and study in Israel.
- time spent on Jewish studies is seen as a key criterion for advancement.

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To help the reader understand the context of these recommendations, each recommendation section is preceded by an observation section. *Where appropriate, the relevant recommendation from the first commission will appear in italics prior to the observation section.*

*The determination of Center Leadership to have meaningful, well-targeted Jewish education programming and the capacity of these leaders to assure that such programs are developed and maintained are vital to the Center's ability to fulfill its Jewish education mission. Centers, therefore, should give priority to the recruitment, selection and development of qualified and experienced community leaders who understand and support the Center's Jewish education mission. JCC Association should assist Centers in this effort. [COMJEE recommendation]*

## Observation 1A

Lay leaders involved in accepting, defining or redefining the JCC's Jewish educational mission are more apt to be supportive of that mission.

## Observation 1B

Lay and professional leaders committed to the Jewish education enterprise are often thwarted in their efforts to move the agency because they lack a clear vision as to where to go.

## Recommendation A

*JCC leaders should* review the JCCs Jewish education-identity enhancement mission at least every three years with the goal of updating the mission and strengthening the resolve of current leaders to vigorously pursue this mission.

JCCs *should* recruit individuals for their Board of Directors who have the commitment and capacity to champion the Center's Jewish education mission. All Board members recruited by the Nominating Committee should be aware of and agree to the JCCs Jewish education-identity enhancement mission. Board education should be provided to help Board members develop the perspective necessary to serve as Jewish community leaders.

To implement this recommendation, JCCs *should*:

- invest the time and energy necessary for the orientation of new Board members and ongoing education of the entire Board.
- emphasize that the privilege of Board membership comes with the obligation to see oneself as a community leader. A community leader needs to understand and support his/her agency, local Jewish community, continental Jewish community, world Jewish community and Israel.
- as part of their Board education strategy, use Board Jewish education trips to Israel and Jewish communities around the world.

*JCC Association should* build into its training manuals and programs the idea that affirmation of the Jewish education mission is a first step to helping JCC Board members begin to confront their responsibilities in this area.

*JCC Association should* develop appropriate Board education models to assist JCCs in helping Board members fulfill their responsibilities as Jewish communal leaders.

## Recommendation 1B Vision Statement

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'CC *leaders should* periodically review the COMJEE II Vision Statement as a means of evaluating what has been accomplished in their JCC and determining future priorities. Lay leadership commitment to the Jewish continuity enterprise is essential for its success.

'CC *Association, having developed the Vision Statement to provide JCCs with an ideal against which to consider their programs, should* circulate the Vision Statement and develop the mechanisms to assist JCCs in using it effectively.

*The desire and capacity of the Center's professional staff to set the appropriate climate and develop effective Jewish programs and services are equally vital determinants. The Center executive and key executive staff give leadership to this effort by setting a personal example, by hiring Jewishly committed staff and by continuously upgrading their Jewish education level. Center Boards make this possible by the development of personnel policies and salary scales designed to attract, retain and stimulate quality professionals.*

*JCC Association should assist in this effort through the development of local and continental recruitment strategies and staff training programs on the regional and continental levels and in Israel. [COMJEE recommendation]*

## **Observation 2**

Strides have indeed been made in upgrading the Jewish education knowledge level of JCC professional staff. Yet, there is still a long way to go if the JCC is to effectively deliver on its Jewish education mission. The JCC Staff Seminars in Israel and Executive Director Programs of Jewish Learning have been highly successful.



## Reco endation 2

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*JCCs should* seek to hire staff even more Jewishly knowledgeable and should give priority to continually upgrading professional staff Jewish knowledge and commitment. Time invested in helping younger professionals understand Jewish community and upgrading their Jewish knowledge will have the additional benefit of encouraging them to view work in the JCC as a career, not just a job.

*JCC Association should* take the lead in recruiting Jewishly knowledgeable professionals for the field. The Association's Scholarship Program is one vehicle that can be used for this effort.

*JCC Association should* continue to offer, and if possible, enhance its ability to offer professional staff Jewish education seminars in Israel, Executive Director Jewish Learning Programs and other Jewish education training initiatives.

*JCC Association should* experiment with summer or holiday Kallot/Retreats for JCC Professionals.

## Obse ti 3

In recent years, JCCs have hired Jewish education specialists. Some seventy are now employed. In general, there are two types of Jewish Educators in JCCs. Advanced Jewish Educators come with an extensive background in Judaica and generally have either rabbinical degrees or degrees in Jewish education. While their training is generally in more formal Jewish education, they have demonstrated the ability to work in the less formal environment of the JCC. They have had an ability to provide in-depth answers to Jewish questions and to impact on JCC policy-making. Additionally, they develop Jewish education curriculum and teach.

The Jewish Programming Specialist is generally an individual with a background in Judaica who has come to his/her position via the JCC program route. His or her emphasis is generally on developing and delivering programs for members.

The Advanced Jewish Educators and Jewish Programming Specialists have joined together to form the Jewish Educators Forum. The Forum seeks to enhance the ability of its members to deliver on the Jewish education mission of the JCC and to encourage and support the JCC movement in its efforts to maximize the Jewish educational effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers.

The employment of Jewish educators is seen as enhancing the JCCs capacity for service in two ways. The educator serves as a resource and stimulus to other JCC staff, in addition to providing direct services to members and community.

### Recommendation 3

JCCs, *which have the capacity to do so, should* employ an Advanced Jewish Educator and Jewish Programming Specialist[s]. Others should endeavor to find individuals who best synthesize the strengths of both. Ideally, the Advanced Jewish Educator should be supervised by the JCC executive and serve on the JCCs Executive Staff so as to be better positioned to influence JCC policy and program.

*JCC Association should* take the lead in developing standards and job descriptions for both the Advanced Jewish Educator and Jewish Programming Specialist positions.

*JCC Association should* take the lead in providing the Advanced Jewish Educators with a greater understanding of program development and helping Jewish Programming Specialists deepen their Jewish knowledge. Resources in North America and Israel should be used in this effort.

*JCC Association should* explore the feasibility of developing a JCC Jewish Educator's position which would combine the best features of the Advanced Jewish Educator and Jewish Programming Specialist. This will require specialized recruitment and training.

*JCC Association should* engage an Advanced Jewish Educator who would serve on a senior level and give leadership to the above efforts as well as implementation of the recommendations of this report.

## **Observation 4**

JCCs feel a responsibility to provide service to the entire spectrum of population within the JCC orbit. From a service and membership perspective, it is often wise to do this. Yet it is probably true that if the JCC wishes to have greater impact on the creative continuity of the Jewish community, it must focus its attention on key market groups.

## Recommendation 4A.1

*JCCs looking for the greatest impact of their Jewish educational efforts should focus on:*

Jewish families with young children

Teens

Single Adults -18-35

Positive Jewish identity development in those areas will have major impact on the Jewish community of the future. Centers have access to these populations through current programs.

To implement these service priorities, *JCCs should:*

- take advantage of their access to young Jewish families through early childhood programs and develop Jewish family education programs designed to influence families at the JCC and in their homes.
- maximize the potential of camp programs to impact the lives of young children and through them their families.
- view camp staffs and JCC part-time staff as potential targets for programs designed to enhance their Jewish identity.

*JCC Association should* give leadership to this effort by providing the necessary information, education and direction.

*JCC Association should* develop programs designed to augment the work of JCCs by providing vehicles for teens and singles to meet on a continental or regional basis.

*JCC Association should* recognize those JCCs which have achieved results and circulate their efforts to the rest of the system.

*JCC Association should seek* funding that will enable the Association to bring onto its professional staff specialists

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## Recommendation 4B

*JCCs should* continue to be as accessible as possible to individuals otherwise unaffiliated with the Jewish community and, where possible, act as a bridge to the rest of the Jewish community. The work JCCs have done with interfaith families is an example of this.

*JCCs should give* priority to providing programs and services to the more than one million Jewish members and participants who enter the JCC each year. The Jewish community is appropriately concerned with unaffiliated Jews but the opportunity to impact the lives of those already affiliated with the JCC offers a more efficient and effective use of the community dollar.

*JCC Association should* give leadership to this effort by providing the materials and training necessary to assist JCCs in this endeavor and by recognizing JCCs which have achieved success in this area.

*Significant Jewish educational programs are rarely self-supporting and frequently require supplemental funding. This represents a worthy challenge to Center Boards and to the leadership of Federations.*

*'CC Association should explore the development of a continent-wide endowment program that would enable Centers to fund experimental programs and develop lay and staff training initiatives. [COMJEE recommendation]*

## Observation 5

Lay and professional leaders continually express the need to develop additional financial resources for Jewish education, staff, programs and services. Dollars are needed to provide for basic services, and for experimentation.

### Recommendation 5

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*JCCs should seek endowed funding for Jewish education staff positions and for enhanced Jewish education service. At the same time, JCCs should make every effort to increase their own resources to reflect the Jewish continuity priority.*

In seeking grants for Jewish continuity endeavors, *JCCs should bear in mind that they often have a greater chance for success if they can show the grantor that lessons learned from the grant can be disseminated to other JCCs through JCC Association.*

*'CC Association, in cooperation with JCCs, should give leadership to this effort by seeking funds that will enable JCCs and JCC Association to further deliver on their Jewish continuity mission.*

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*JCC Association should assist JCCs in meeting their Jewish educational responsibilities by providing information on existing successful programs and by giving leadership to the development and dissemination of new models and prototypes. Centers should strive to develop a warm Jewish ambiance as this creates an atmosphere conducive to greater Jewish educational involvement.*

*JCC Association and JCCs, working with Jewish education counterparts at the continental and local level, should develop more precise assessment instruments as a means of strengthening Jewish education programming.*  
[COMJEE recommendation]

## Obse ation 6

Community visits once again revealed that the Center movement abounds with creative programmatic efforts. At the same time, JCC leaders express a hunger for new ideas.

### Recommendation 6

*JCCs should* consider themselves a part of an interactive continental system where the ongoing sharing of ideas and program models take place.

JCC Association has developed the *Jewish Program Resource Book*. Called "a work in progress," the book encourages JCCs to submit their excellent Jewish programs for inclusion and dissemination to the field. *JCC Association should* enhance this document by reaching for sources beyond JCCs. [e.g. JESNA, synagogue movements]. These endeavors, along with periodic continental and regional training efforts, will further stimulate the JCC system.

*JCC Association should* take the lead in providing the JCC movement the system necessary to share this and other information electronically.



## Observation 7

Despite the many Jewish education programs offered by JCCs, the field has been urged to develop programs of sufficient depth so as to provide service to individuals and families at various stages in the Jewish growth continuum.

### Reco endation 7

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*JCCs should review their programs and develop strategies to help people move to greater in-depth involvement with Judaism and their own Jewishness.*

*JCC Association working with appropriate professionals should take the lead in developing curricula [e.g. Nursery School, Camp] which would foster greater in-depth Jewish involvement. At the same time, care must be taken that such innovations are introduced in a context that preserves the openness and accessibility of the JCC.*

*JCC Association, working with the Jewish Educators Forum, should stimulate discourse and develop a body of literature on how to enhance Jewish education in the Jewish Community Center setting. In that connection, the recently published compendium "Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center," edited by Barry Chazan and Mark Charendoff, and the Symposium-Think Tank developed as part of the COMJEE II process, are good beginnings.*

*JCC Association should take the lead in stimulating evaluative research in individual JCCs and for the field as a whole.*

*JCC Association, through its Israel office, should help JCCs optimize their use of Israel as a training, programming and Jewish education resource. Ongoing contacts with Israeli institutions and regular visits to Israel by lay and professional leaders will help stimulate Jewish educational initiatives.* [COMJEE recommendation]

## Observation 8

It is apparent that there exists the potential for the Jewish community in North America to grow apart from Israel. The founding of the State, the 1967 and 1973 wars were not significant events in the lives of Jews who are under thirty years of age.

### Recommendation 8

*JCCs should* see themselves as leaders in bringing their communities closer to Israel and in fostering greater understanding, appreciation and love for the people, the culture, the language and the land.

To implement these efforts, *JCCs should* consider a range of services that could include:

- trips to Israel.
- investment in Israel.
- ongoing discussion of issues related to Israel.
- an Israel Corner in the JCC lobby which keeps everyone current on events affecting Israel.
- a Board officer with special responsibility of developing and fostering the Israel connection.
- a shaliach on the JCC staff.
- Hebrew classes.

*JCC Association should* give leadership to the efforts described above. Working through its Israel Office and in cooperation with appropriate other continental agencies, *JCC Association should* endeavor to stimulate JCCs to connect their members with Israel and help the JCC movement participate actively in the ongoing Israel-Diaspora dialogue.

*Community perception of the JCC as a Jewish educational instrumentality tends to be uneven and requires the conscious attention of Center Boards. JCC Association and JCC leadership have a responsibility to interpret Commission recommendations to local, continental and Israeli organizations. [COMJEE recommendation]*

## Obse atl

JCC lay and professional leaders often lack the ideas and concepts needed to interpret the JCCs Jewish education enterprise to members and to other community leaders.

### Recommendation 9

JCCs *should* make use of the materials produced by COMJEE II to help lay and professional leaders do a more effective job of interpreting the Center's role in Jewish education and continuity.

*JCCs should* use the marketing monograph to improve their capacity to attract individuals to JCC Jewish programs and services.

JCC Association has developed important material to assist JCCs in their interpretation. These include:

*"What is Jewish Education in the JCC?"*

by Barry Chazan

*"Marketing the Jewish Edge"*

by jay Levenberg

*JCC Association should* monitor JCCs use of this material, assist JCCs where necessary and use the materials to develop continental approaches to interpretation.

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*Centers tend to be encouraged or constrained in Jewish education programming by the stance of the local Federation, synagogue and Jewish education leadership. As JCC leaders seek to maximize the Center's Jewish educational potential, they must interpret the Center's role, be aware of community history and be sensitive to the interests and capabilities of other institutions. Ongoing involvement of Center leaders in the community's Jewish educational planning process is vital.*

*JCC Association should expand its program of community visits to encourage this joint planning process and stimulate a climate of cooperation.*

[COMJEE recommendation]

## Observation 10

The first COMJEE report pointed to "inter-agency cooperation and support" as a major factor that would enhance the JCCs ability to deliver on its Jewish educational mission.

There is a growing recognition within the Jewish community of the need for cooperative efforts for joint ventures. Centers should recognize that issues as important and complex as Jewish continuity can often best be approached through joint ventures with synagogues, Bureaus of Jewish Education and others. While there are some examples of inter-agency cooperation, more needs to be done in this area.

## Recommendation 10

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*Jewish Community Centers working with their Federations should seek to expand their Jewish identity enhancement impact by reaching to local synagogues, Bureaus and other Jewish educational instrumentalities to undertake joint ventures.*

*JCC Association should support local efforts by recognizing successful approaches and by disseminating the results.*

*JCC Association should undertake a reach-out to the leadership of the synagogue movements and their seminaries in an effort to create a climate that will be conducive to cooperative efforts. Where practical, these efforts should be coordinated with Jewish Education Services of North America [JESNA] and the Council of Jewish Federation [CJF].*

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## Observation 11

In analyzing the results of COMJEE, it is clear that the JCC movement has made significant strides in meeting its Jewish continuity challenges. Nevertheless, some Centers have been more successful than others and some communities do not currently have access to necessary resources.

### Recommendation 11A

*JCC Association, working with CJF, should create a demonstration program whereby the resources of a large community can be shared with smaller communities in the same geographic area. For example, while smaller communities may not be able to afford a quality Jewish educator for their JCC, they might be able to purchase service from the Jewish education department of the JCC in the larger community.*

### Recommendation 11B

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*JCC Association should undertake a model cities pilot project in which JCCs in a similar geographic area would pool resources to engage a Jewish educator who could be supervised by JCC Association's Jewish Education Consultant. JCC Association would bring other resources to bear during this three year project aimed at raising the Jewish continuity service delivery system in each of the participating communities.*

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## Observation 12

In the course of the COMJEE II process, the issues of guidelines and standards were raised. It was suggested that JCC Association give leadership to a process whereby JCCs would periodically have key components of their operations reviewed by a team of professionals.

### Recommendation 12

*JCC Association should* give leadership to the development of guidelines for reviewing local JCC efforts. This could include a review process where professionals and lay leaders from other JCCs periodically visit a JCC, or it could involve a self assessment tool that would encourage local leaders to periodically assess their efforts.

## Observation 13

The Think Tank conducted during the COMJEE II process successfully expanded the horizons of the participants. It also enhanced the Jewish educational possibilities for the JCC movement. The combination of JCC executives, Jewish educators and programmers augmented by Association staff and scholars from outside the field worked well.

### Recommendation 13

*JCC Association should* sponsor a Jewish education Think Tank every year as a means of continuing to stimulate the system. Lay leaders could participate with professionals or in separate endeavors.

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## Observation 14

The COMJEE process benefited greatly by having a Committee on Implementation. This helped assure that the recommendations of the Commission receive the field's immediate and ongoing attention.

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### Recommendation 14

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*JCC Association should* appoint a committee to implement the recommendations of the COMJEE II Task Force.

## **A Final Word**

How to preserve and enhance our Jewish heritage and pass it onto the next generation is a challenge that has confronted Jewish communities over the centuries. The open society in which we live makes our challenge even more formidable. We face this challenge with the knowledge that the Jewish Community Center is uniquely qualified to make an important contribution to the preservation and transmission of our heritage. Working with others, we intend to fulfill our responsibilities as yet another link in the chain of Jewish history.



- B. Assessing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers  
The 1994 Survey – Executive Summary**
- C. Jewish Educational Excellence in the JCC Movement: Study Design**
- D. Think Tank Symposium**



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# CO EE II Study Design

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## Purpose

The purpose of the Task Force will be to:

- a. Assess what progress has been made by the JCC Movement in the area of Jewish identity enhancement and Jewish educational development and reinforcement in the decade since the launching of the Commission on Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers.
- b. Develop a vision and program of action to guide the Jewish Community Center movement's contributions in the area of Jewish identity formation, Jewish educational enhancement and Jewish educational effectiveness in the decades to come. Included should be recommendations for appropriate staff and lay education.
- c. Begin the process of informing JCC and other leaders about the role JCCs are playing and can play in the areas of Jewish identity formation and Jewish educational enhancement.

## Method of Work

To accomplish these purposes, the Task Force will review the recommendations of the first Commission and its subsequent Committee on Implementation. It will, in addition, undertake initiatives designed to ascertain current levels of practice and the issues that need to be addressed. These include:

- commissioning a survey of current Center practice.
- commissioning a study of a select number of JCCs which provide exemplary Jewish education services.
- stimulating focus group meetings of JCC participants to ascertain their perceptions and seek their suggestions.
- undertaking community visits by Task Force members to meet with JCC and community leaders to ascertain their Jewish education needs and priorities and bring to them examples of outstanding Jewish education programs and services.
- hearing relevant presentations by recognized experts.

- developing a plan to assist JCCs in marketing Jewish educational services.
- taking testimony from JCCs which may encounter special situations [e.g. small cities].
- examining the role of and contribution of Israel to the Jewish educational effort of JCCs.
- commissioning a "think piece" that will help define what is Jewish education in JCCs.

meetings of JCC Executives, Presidents and Executive Committees on a regional and continental basis.

- convening a Symposium or Think Tank to explore ways to assist JCCs to fulfill their Jewish education mission.

The Task Force will concentrate first on developing a vision that will guide JCC Jewish education initiatives. As issues of major importance are developed, the Task Force may elect to deal with these through the use of sub-committees. Two such issues which have emerged are:

- exploring cooperative efforts between JCCs and Synagogues and other Jewish education instrumentalities.
- ☐ marketing and funding initiatives needed to help secure Jewish educational services.

The Task Force will take advantage of the 1994 Biennial to interpret to JCC leaders and others what JCCs have accomplished and engage Biennial attendees in a dialogue as to where we go from here. To accomplish this, there will be:

- a "happening" on the Wednesday evening of the Biennial which will, in one place, at one time, introduce attendees to some of the myriad of Jewish education possibilities that exist in JCCs.
- ☐ a Plenary will be devoted to engaging JCC leaders in a discussion about future directions for Jewish education in the Jewish Community Center.

The Task Force will undertake a Symposium of JCC and other Jewish Education professionals which will be asked to develop concrete steps to help JCCs to more fully fulfill their Jewish education mission.

The Task Force will produce a Final Report.

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# Assessing The Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers - The 1994 Survey:

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## Executive Summary

In December 1993 - January 1994, the JCC Association commissioned a study of the current state of Jewish educational activity in Jewish community centers in North America. The following highlights emerged in this survey of 126 Centers.

Most JCCs in North America have made adult Jewish learning a key aspect of their programming. Almost all North American JCCs conduct adult Jewish education programs of some sort. Over 50% of the Centers offer some sort of program in Basic Judaism or Basic Jewish Literacy. Half also conduct workshops or lectures for interfaith couples and 37% run programs for the families of mixed married. Three-quarters of the Centers offer Jewish family education and Jewish parenting classes, and over two-thirds of the Centers sponsor speakers' series on Jewish themes. A third sponsor Jewish scholars-in-residence. A third of the Centers sponsor trips to Israel with a Jewish educational dimension.

- II. Most Centers observe some sort of Jewish holiday calendar, through hall decorations, educational programs, and public celebrations. The vast majority (81%-95%) of Centers conduct programs which focus on the following six holidays: Hanukkah, Sukkot, Purim, Pesach, Tu B'Shevat, and Yom Ha'atzmaut. Between a half and two thirds of the Centers conduct programs on five other holidays: Yom Hashoah, Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur, Shavuot, Lag B'Omer, and Tisha B'Av. Over a third of the Centers celebrate Yom Yerushalayim.
- III. Most of the Jewish Community Centers in our sample report that their buildings are visibly Jewish and that they have taken

steps to create some basic Jewish ambiance in their buildings. Over two-thirds reported that there are mezzuzot on most interior doors of the building. Two-thirds maintain a Jewish library; and almost a third have Hebrew signs designating areas of the building. Over 60% of Centers mount displays on Jewish holidays; over half exhibit Jewish art; and over a third sponsor displays on Israel. In the aggregate, over three quarters of Centers sponsor special exhibits or displays on some sort of Jewish themes.

- IV. Almost all (96%) of the Centers report some activity in the area of Jewish arts. As many as 83% of Centers sponsor Jewish book fairs; 80% sell Jewish art and ritual objects, 69% screen Jewish-oriented films; 61% sponsor Jewish dance groups; about half report programs with Israeli performing groups and with Jewish drama groups; and over 40% run Jewish art classes.
  
- V. Centers have introduced Jewish dimensions into the three areas of their world which deals with the young: pre-school; camping; and teenagers. Over two thirds of the Centers that conduct pre-school programs have Jewish educational curricula. Between 85% and 91% of Center pre-schools celebrate Jewish holidays, celebrate Shabbat in some fashion, claim to teach "Jewish values," and teach something about Israel. Almost all (97%) camps celebrate the Sabbath in some way, and 94% include Jewish singing in their activities. Over two-thirds report that their counselors are trained by a Jewish education specialist, and nearly as many claim that the specialist spends a significant part of the summer with the camp. Nearly half (44%) report that Israeli shlichim serve as day camp staff.
  
- VI. As part of the effort to deepen their Jewish educational effectiveness, Centers have made investments in staff development and growth in Judaica. Over half reported that some of their staff engaged in Jewish educational training outside the local community. In the last three years alone, about a quarter of the Centers have sent staff to Israel for Jewish educational training, and 16% said they were planing such a trip for the next year. Over three-quarters of North American JCC's have sent staff to Israel in toto.

VII. In 1994, 45% of Centers report they have hired a Jewish education specialist. Of these, 30% work part-time and 16% work full-time.

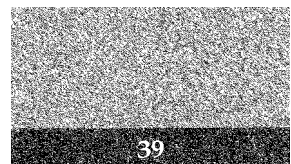
VIII. The typical Center executive in 1994 exhibits a high rate of Jewish involvement as compared with the American Jewish population at large and with Center executives of a decade ago. Today's executive is a member of a synagogue, attends services periodically, fasts on Yom Kippur, and has visited Israel several times. Nine in ten are synagogue members and most claim to attend synagogue services more often than the high holidays, on the order of "every few months." Over four in five Center professional leaders fast on Yom Kippur; over three in five live in households where Friday night candles are lit; and almost a third of their households use separate dishes for meat and dairy dishes. Almost nine out of ten have been to Israel, and most have visited Israel three or more times (most have come on JCC Association sponsored seminars).

IX. Almost all Centers (96%) have a written mission statement and 80% of these statements contain explicit references to Jewish education.

X. The data in our study present an ambivalent picture of the role of the Board in the Jewish education process. More boards than before have introduced some Jewish content in their meetings. However, when compared with other spheres, progress in the area of Board commitment, leadership, and ownership of the Jewish educational mandate seems only moderate.

XI. Five factors were most closely correlated with a high level of Jewish educational activity in a Center:

1. Size of Center;
2. The importance attached to Jewish education by the executive, Board, and Center as an institution;
3. The presence of a full-time Jewish educational specialist;



4. The extent of ongoing study in Judaica undertaken by the staff, especially an Israel study seminar
5. The extent to which board and staff members are selected on the basis of their Jewish knowledge and commitment.

Generally, the 1994 findings show almost universal intensification of levels of Jewish education over those reported in the 1988 study. By looking at the studies from 1982, 1988, and 1994, we are able to discover a revealing picture of the meta- morphosis of the Jewish Community Center into a multi-dimensional cultural and recreational agency which has made Jewish education one of the dimensions of its being. These findings suggest that the most important change in the Center world has been the transformation of a culture whereby "things Jewish" have become more rather than less of a norm in the Center world.

Seven policy implications for deepening the Jewish educational role of JCCs in the coming decade are proposed:

1. The need to adopt a distinctive Judaic philosophy on the part of the Centers;
2. The need for executives to assume responsibility for acting as the principal educational leaders of their Centers;
3. The adoption of an approach which makes Judaic study a basic norm and requirement of work in the Center field;
4. A senior and full-time Jewish educator in every Center;
5. Increased utilization of Israel and the Israel seminar;
6. Commitment and involvement of the Board in supporting Jewish education;
7. Authentic and efficient cooperative efforts with other communal agencies.

If Centers are to capitalize on the gains in Jewish programming they have realized in the last decade, they will need to enrich, and once and for all, unequivocally establish their emerging commitment to Jewish education.



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# Jewish Educational Excellence in the JCC Movement: A Look at Best Practices Study Design

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by Steven M. Cohen & Barry Holtz

The last decade and more has witnessed a remarkable growth in the Jewish educational programming in many Jewish Community Centers. Previous studies have clearly documented the growth and diversification of Jewish educational efforts in the JCC field. Among the key factors associated with these efforts are: commitment at the top; the presence of a full time Jewish education specialist; ongoing Judaic study by the staff; and sheer size.

While much remains to be done, several JCCs have undoubtedly already emerged as centers of Jewish educational excellence. In some noteworthy cases, the entire agency may be said to be infused with a commitment to the Jewish educational mission. In others, particular programs stand out as exemplifying educational excellence.

This study will undertake a close qualitative examination of the better Jewish educational efforts in the Center movement. It will understand, interpret, and convey the character of these efforts, by addressing such questions as:

1. What do we mean by "Jewish education" in the JCC world?
2. How do the components of Jewish educational excellence play out differently in different settings?
3. Who and what are the initiators and pre-conditions for a commitment to Jewish education? Alternatively who and what are the obstacles and opponents to such efforts?
4. What are the inherent advantages and limitations of the JCC as a Jewish educational agency? In the best possible circumstances, to what extent can a JCC serve as an effective instrument of Jewish education?
5. What constitutes excellence in several specific programmatic areas such as: pre-school, day camp, adult education, and family programming?

To address these and other questions, Professors Steven Cohen and Barry Holtz will interview leading experts in the Center movement

and the Jewish educational world, and visit several Centers that house examples of Jewish educational excellence.

The JCCs chosen would represent diversity in terms of geography, size, community type, and areas of particular excellence. In essence, these would be [some of] the "best places" in JCC Jewish education.

The researchers will collect and examine the relevant agency literature - programmatic documents, evaluations, reports, etc. They will interview key players in the drive to upgrade Jewish educational excellence in the Center movement. During their site visits, they will meet with the staff, examine the facility for Jewish ambiance, review the year round programs, and observe programs in operation.

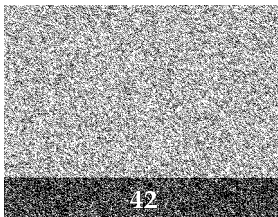
The final report will begin with a synthetic essay that will describe various aspects of best practice in the JCC world. This essay will collect, systematize, and analyze extant professional wisdom and experience in the Center movement and draw extensively upon the researchers' field observations and site visits.

Another section will describe specific JCCs. These would be mini-portraits of about 10 pages in length. A third possible section may describe specific outstanding programs, if they are not otherwise theca roughly explored in the second section.

The report will address two key audiences. First, it will aim to inform and inspire the Center field itself. Center executives, Judaic specialists, and lay leaders should find this report engaging and instructive. This study hopes, ultimately, to spur forward efforts to enhance the quality of Jewish educational services in the Center movement.

Second, the researchers intend to address the wider field of Jewish educators and other Jewish communal professionals. The study will aim to engender a greater appreciation for the possibilities for Jewish educational excellence in the Jewish Community center.

This project is co-sponsored by the JCCA and the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CUE). The resulting publication will be part of the CIJE Best Practices series and be issued and released jointly by the two agencies.



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COMJEE  
 Trask Force on Reinforcing  
 Effectiveness of  
 Jewi Education in JCC'

Hamilton Park Conference Center,  
 Florham Park, NJ, August 7-9, 1994

by Richard Juran

## Context

Ten years into the process of maximizing the Jewish educational effectiveness of JCC's, the North American Jewish Community Centers movement embarked on a second decade long effort to transform JCC's into agents of Jewish education. The first decade witnessed a remarkably swift and dynamic move to embrace Jewish education through professional training, revised mission statements, programmatic ingenuity, and the appointment of many Jewish educators and programmers to the ranks of Center staff. [As one presenter noted, in 1984, the notion of Jewish education in JCC's would have been perceived as an oxymoron; ten years later, we speak of JCC's as "Jewish neighborhoods."] In taking stock of what has already been accomplished, the leadership of the Center movement has declared that the next decade will be dedicated to the further reinforcement of Jewish educational effectiveness in JCC's. As part of this process, a group of 23 professionals gathered for an intimate, animated three day symposium in August 1994. Their mandate was to flesh out two main parameters for the coming decade of activity: defining what is meant by Jewish education in Jewish Community Centers; and moving beyond vision to begin the development of tools for the practical operation of JCC's as an agent of Jewish education in the

community. This article is an attempt to capture the prevailing winds during those three days of reflection and deliberation.

The symposium format included presentations about central components of the educational process in JCC's, with time allocated for group discussion; several small group meetings in which specific recommendations were hammered out, for later consideration by the entire group of participants; an extensive sequence of high level Jewish study sessions taught by participants; and free time for informal networking and for processing the ideas under discussion.

Their ostensible diversity notwithstanding, the twenty-three participants quickly found a common language for discussions and exchanges which took place throughout the symposium. The predominant professional identity of almost half the participants was that of Jewish educator, whether from the Center field [eight] or beyond. Eight participants serve as executive directors of Centers or related agencies, and five are members of the continental jCC Association staff. Perhaps even more significantly in terms of the symposium process, four of the participants are well known and highly regarded Jewish professionals outside the Center field, from the world of academia and continental Jewish organizations. Many participants from the Center world commented on helpful perspectives and insights offered by those who began as "outsiders" [even though they too quickly became insiders within the symposium group]. In the concluding session, it was noted that lay leadership had not been invited to the symposium; based on the positive experience with the outside professional participants, it was suggested that the deliberative process be expanded to include lay leadership as well on future occasions. This remark was particularly poignant in the context of the feeling shared by many, that on the local level, the professional Center staff is often ahead of the lay leadership in grappling with this Jewish educational transformation.

# Jewish Educational Challenges for JCC's During the COMJEE II Years:

Generally speaking, Jewish education has already become an intrinsic part of many North American JCC's, but in the COMJEE II decade, Centers will have to transcend this transitional stage; it has become imperative to define more carefully and specifically what Jewish education in a Center really means. In a rather striking formulation of the difference between the two decades, it was noted that COMJEE I focused on changing the Center, whereas COMJEE II will be devoted to changing people Jewishly. From this perspective, many questions come to mind: Who are the target populations for education in JCC's? Now that Centers have experimented with a broad range of educational possibilities, are they ready to seek greater depth in the Jewish education, knowledge and experiences they provide? Can a move to more substantive education be orchestrated? How many professional Jewish educators does a Jewish Community Center require, how should they be trained, how can their appropriate status in the professional hierarchy be secured, and what should their priorities be [as resource for staff and leaders, in-house teacher, or programmer for membership]?

The participants agreed that Jewish education, in Centers and in other contexts, should aspire to be transformational. It should be an intellectually stimulating and emotionally satisfying experience which helps people grapple with meaning, connectedness and discipline in their lives, with "ultimate concerns and issues." The scope of the symposium did not allow for fleshing out all the substantive ramifications beyond this general premise. Some wondered what the focus and direction of "Jewish continuity" ought to be, whether Jewish, Jewish experience, Jewish distinctiveness [but not to the extreme of a ghetto mentality], or the content of a more classical Jewish education. One participant labeled the very notion of Jewish continuity as problematic, pointing out that the educational objective can hardly be the continuation of Judaism as it has come to express itself at the end of the twentieth century. In arguing for an educational strategy based on transmission of tradition through life experiences, another participant noted that

the issue is to move from identifying to practicing, learning "what Jews do," regardless of whether or not one does so out of a sense of commandment; in this regard, a more old-fashioned approach to Jewish education ["schooling"] was deemed inappropriate. Still others identified the central issue as one of world-view and message, rather than that of Jewish behavior. While the time available did not permit exhaustive discussion, it provided a helpful common language and set of parameters for small group discussions, in which more specific recommendations were formulated.

Participants also grappled with a basic paradox inherent in a Jewish education within the JCC; in the years of COMJEE II, lay and professional leadership will undoubtedly be required to confront this head on, in search of some operative answers. This challenge can be formulated in terms of the Center's modus operandi: the JCC is a consumer driven provider of service, whereas education is fundamentally value driven. How can a Jewish Community Center aspire to help its members advance along a predetermined continuum of increasing Jewish knowledge and greater participation in Jewish living, when by definition the Center exists to serve its customers' needs as they define them? How can Jewish education succeed when the learners are ultimately consumers who by definition do not make commitments, but rather shop around for the best or most economical provider of the service they seek?

One participant suggested that the answer may lie in striking a balance between operational inclusiveness and ideological exclusivity; in other words, reaching out to all Jews, encouraging them to find their place in the Center and in its activities, while advocating an agreed upon set of values and norms as opposed to merely affirming the relative validity of every individual's current comfort level. In this sense, while respecting a broad range of personal situations and lifestyle choices, the Center would articulate a preference for some over others, in the interest of Jewish continuity and the fostering of greater content and quality in Jewish life. Indeed, given the prevalence of less observant and nonobservant Jews among many Center members, some wondered whether the JCC's might not be uniquely positioned to help this more secular segment of the Jewish population achieve greater substance that

may enrich their not-so-traditional Jewish lifestyles. [For the record, others expressed a bit of skepticism about this, pointing out that Judaism devoid of the transcendental may ultimately not be sustainable, in which case a Center-sponsored effort to help non-observant Jews define a new, more secular "denomination" would not really be of service to the Jewish community.] Seeking the elusive balance between operational inclusiveness and ideological exclusivity will surely test the versatility and skills of those involved in Center education during the COMJEE II decade. The contradiction between the JCC as a consumer-driven provider of service, and the value-oriented world of education led another participant to suggest that the only viable strategy is for Centers to apply the basic rules of consumerism to their educational planning: Jews cannot be moved forward along the desired continuum unless the educational process addresses their own needs as Jews. In this regard, the Center needs to create opportunities for Jewish experiences, with learning grounded in Jewish texts, so that Center members can become more familiar with "what Jews do." If this process meets the members' needs as Jews, it will benefit from their consumer loyalty to value and service, as it advances them along the Jewish continuum.

In addition to the internal challenges facing those involved in the Jewish educational transformation of JCC's, symposium participants also discussed some external challenges. These included the serious issue of funding for educators and education in JCC's [with some advocating funding assistance from the continental level, and others preferring to leave this to local priorities]; the need for better publicity of Jewish Community Centers' educational successes [particularly in the face of a general perception of JCC's as rather superficial and insignificant players in the world of education]; and the need for JCC's to find their unique position on the community-wide Jewish educational map. Virtually all participants referred to Center-synagogue turf conflicts over Jewish education as the most critical external challenge of the day. Many spoke of the crisis pervading the synagogue world as it struggles to remain relevant to its members and their needs; in this context, the perceived encroachment by JCC's into the realm of Jewish education is particularly threatening. No one felt this ought to curtail

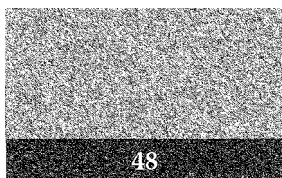
current Center forays into new educational endeavors, but most agreed that in communities where the synagogue response to Center-sponsored education has been one of criticism and confrontation, Centers should attempt to defuse this dynamic and begin building whatever bridges are possible. [One participant wondered whether Centers ought not continue their educational work in quiet, without further publicity on the assumption that the synagogues' unfortunately competitive response represents an unbridgeable gap; by and large, however, this approach did not reflect the prevailing point-of-view.]

## On the Agenda for COMJEE

In the context of the aforementioned Jewish educational challenges, JCC's will need a long-range plan for Jewish education, based on a lay-professional partnership essential for its implementation. Jewish education needs to be taken seriously, with proper planning and careful implementation; it must have an appropriate status in the eyes of Center staff, leadership and membership. One participant emphasized the importance of incorporating Jewish education into the Center's overall management style and philosophy.

As an important first step, the executive director and staff of the Center must be Jewish role models, conveying a sense of Jewish authenticity [in its many, diverse forms]. Jewish educators in Centers must be helped to transform the internal culture of the Jewish Community Center, lest they remain peripheral or anomalous to the ongoing operation of the agency. In attempting to incorporate Jewish educational content into its activities, Centers must move beyond simulated rituals and discussions of ritual policy, to genuine Jewish learning, and to issues of Jewish relevance [vis-a-vis the Centers' members].

Participants devoted extensive discussion to the roles and responsibilities of lay leadership in this regard. It was noted that Center leaders have been uniquely empowered to make sweeping policy decisions regarding the Jewish educational transformation





of Jewish Community Centers, without necessarily possessing the prerequisite Jewish backgrounds for doing so. This situation warrants executive directors with strong Jewish backgrounds, and lay leaders who have benefited from meaningful educational Jewish experiences and learning, who understand the Centers' educational mission and implement it through their decision making. Some wondered aloud whether there ought to be criteria for being a board member of a JCC, such as being Jewish, endogamously married, giving a minimum gift to the community campaign, or participating in a designated course of Jewish learning. Aspiring to more than positive Jewish attitudes on the part of leadership may require criteria for competence for Jewish knowledge and commitment among the ranks of those exercising Jewish responsibility.

In addition to these more general formulations, participants in the symposium also proposed many very specific recommendations for the COMJEE II years of Jewish educational activity in JCC's. The more detailed group reports are available as a separate document; some of the more easily homogenized ideas are summarized here for a sense of the prevailing thoughts.

## Selections from Group Recommendations:

### **Jewish Learning for Executive and Staff Development:**

The executive director, and probably department heads as well, should be Jewishly literate, Jewishly committed role models, engaged in ongoing learning, able to articulate the Jewish mission of the agency, and able to develop a board compatible with the agency's mission. The staff should have Jewish knowledge, be engaged in Jewish learning [perhaps in accordance with a minimum threshold of required hours of study, or by benefiting from designated perks in return for participation in a recommended program of Jewish learning], and they [both men and women] should be role models to the members. Israel Seminars should be a regular part of staff and board learning, in addition to local programs, even to the extent that this be included as part of the Center's mission statement.

**The JCC Jewish Educator:**

He or she should be supervised by the executive director, and should be a member of the Center's senior management team. The educator should engage the staff on all levels, serving as a resource for policy making, as a facilitator, and as a teacher. As such, a Center educator should preferably have an advanced degree or ordination, scholastic achievements, experience in teaching and other educational capacities, and an ability to develop educational programs and to work with the entire community.

Some wondered whether one educator can possibly create the desired culture in an agency, or whether a full department of Jewish education might be required. Conversely, there were participants who favored a more integrated approach, fearing the drawbacks of isolating the Center's Jewish educational pursuits in a separate realm. In either case, all felt it was important that the JCC Jewish educator not be responsible for doing all of the Center's Jewish programming, but rather serve as a resource to the entire staff in developing and implementing their programs; everyone on staff at a Center ultimately needs to be involved in the JCC's attempt to provide Jewish life experiences.

Many participants underscored the importance of further professionalizing the position of Jewish educator in JCC's during the years of COMJEE II, and the need for executive directors and lay leaders to lead the way in championing the educators' work in the Center field. The seventy or so Jewish educators currently in the Center field are a diverse group. In terms of their recruitment, training, supervision and support, some felt it was important to distinguish between those who are actual Jewish educators with substantial backgrounds in Judaica and education, serving in senior positions in the agency, and others who are more aptly termed Jewish programmers [not all of whom are Jewish educators by training and vocation]. Ultimately, Center educators should be those who command intellectual respect as scholars in residence while also providing program leadership to the agency.

### The JCC as a Jewish Neighborhood for All Jews:

The Center should actively welcome all Jews, from all parts of the community and all Jewish lifestyles, into its facilities and programs. People who enter the JCC should feel as if they are entering Jewish space and Jewish time, in terms of the ambiance, decoration, art, music, food and general activity. The Center should aspire to be a Jewish neighborhood where Jews can meet and mingle with one another, with space that invites them to remain there, "hang out," and spend time together. Signs and other visual and audio aspects of the Center's ambiance should attempt to include Hebrew and elements from Israel as part of their Jewish repertoire.

### Forging Alliances with the Broader Jewish Community :

Centers must not limit their efforts to their own intramural activities. Rather, a Center's Jewish educational strategy must take into account community-wide needs, in an attempt to work together with synagogues, federations, Bureaus of Jewish education, Hillel Houses, and local organizations in reaching the maximum possible number of Jews with the broadest array of educational opportunities. [To a certain extent, a Center that is successful in outreach and education might well produce new members or "customers" for synagogues and other community agencies.] Rather than taking a competitive approach, Centers need to find ways of enhancing and strengthening the community educational network, in hopes of reaching greater numbers of Jews with innovative, responsive Jewish experiences and Jewish learning. This attempt to forge alliances on the local level must be paralleled by a similar effort on the continental level, particularly given the weight of such messages and examples when encouraged by the continental agencies on the local level.

### Develop Programs and Curricula for Center Departments and Age Groups:

Jewish education in the Center field must be established as a serious discipline, with serious attention devoted to early childhood education, adult education, education for youth, and for other population groups which meet under the Center's auspices. Whether as general programs or more systematic, detailed curricula, appropriate materials need to be developed for all these

various age groups and departments [perhaps with a separate track specifically designed for the training of early childhood educators]. One participant identified key categories of educational emphasis as community, meaning, spirituality and values, noting that the educational strategy should include identifying needs, developing staff and lay leadership, developing resources, and creating alliances and partnerships. Among the building blocks of Center-based Jewish education, participants identified the land and State of Israel, Jewish language, the Jewish people, the Torah, and mitzvot.

It was felt that Centers have made great strides in programming about the Jewish life cycle, the Jewish calendar and Jewish values. During COMJEE II, these should be strengthened and expanded; more importantly, Centers should try to transcend the realm of vicarious experience [simulations in the Center in advance of the event's "real time", to help families shift these experiences into their homes, incorporating them as their own events, rituals and values in their private Jewish lives. Participants also encouraged Centers to consider detached programming beyond the walls of the Center, in malls, parks, and homes, through opportunities for Jewish travel, and via the Internet. Perhaps the common denominator of all the recommendations in the realm of program was a strong accent on greater substance, an expansion of current efforts to include unconventional venues and methods, and a commitment to empower members to find ways of incorporating meaningful Jewish experiences into their lives outside the Jewish Community Center.

## Recommendations to the JCC Association:

As the newly appointed executive vice-president of the JCC Association noted, both the continental Association and local JCC's need to function as a movement, while realizing that it is a heterogeneous one; the JCCA will have to be more activist, finding new ways of being helpful to individual Centers. The core issue, it was noted, is the management of Jewish education, rather than Jewish education *per se*.

Participants charged the JCC Association with the task of professionalizing the field of Jewish education in JCC's: determining suitable qualifications for Jewish educators in jCC's; recruiting and then preparing these educators in pre-service or inservice training, on continental, regional and local levels. One group urged consideration of a system for accreditation of JCC's which achieve designated Jewish educational standards. In general, it will be necessary to develop an entire methodology for the training of Jewish educators in JCC's as the field evolves into an ever more sophisticated profession. Some proposed satellite Jewish education programs at local universities, and the establishment of ties with North American Jewish educational training programs and with the Jerusalem Fellows in Israel. It was recommended that the JCC Association help smaller communities in close proximity to one another band together in sharing a Jewish educator.

The JCC Association was encouraged to establish a department of Jewish education, directed by a member of the executive staff. Some suggested that there be more than one Jewish educator, given that consultation is needed not only for Jewish educators in the field, but for area specialists as well. The Association was also encouraged to develop a resource library and program bank by collecting examples of good programs and curricula from the field, and to facilitate performances and exhibitions of Israeli art and culture in North American JCC's. Many also remarked about the importance of developing the potential of Internet communication in the interest of Jewish educational projects in JCC's, noting the relatively low investment required for this purpose.

As the representative of local JCC's on the continental level, participants encouraged the JCC Association to work with other continental organizations. This was seen as an important means of reaching other agencies on the local level with a positive message about the Centers' interest in an integrated, community-wide approach to Jewish education. Participants also recommended that the JCC Association work to secure funding from continental foundations, which are reluctant to fund local agencies.

## Conclusions

This mandate of this symposium embraced two key objectives for COMJEE II: defining what is meant by Jewish education in JCC's, and developing some of the tools for moving from the vision of COMJEE I to the more practical, operative phase during the second decade, COMJEE II. The symposium itself was an intermediate phase in the year long work of the continental task force, and as such, was not preoccupied with the need for real closure. Speaking for but one participant [albeit with a sense that the feeling was much more pervasive], these three days of deliberations succeeded in posing some critical questions underlying our need to define the meaning of Jewish education in the Center world; keeping our eyes and our thoughts focused on these issues and challenges will surely guide the Centers on a rich and productive course during the years of COMJEE II. The deliberations also produced a useful first inventory of some important tools for the task ahead. It is by no means exhaustive, nor are all the items fully fleshed out, but together they comprise an insightful and reflective approach for Centers and Center educators to consider as they formulate their own and priorities for the next decade of Jewish education in JCC's.

In the concluding session of the symposium, some of the participants who had begun as "outsiders" asked to share some parting observations. Central among their remarks was their sense that the Center field has not properly publicized the Jewish educational revolution beyond the confines of the Center world. They were full of praise for the quality of Center educators, and the educational work being done. Their advice to those already consumed by the momentum of the Jewish educational transformation taking place within Jewish Community Centers: In light of the current demographic trends in North American Jewish life, this is a time for aggressiveness rather than humility, so Centers should proceed "full steam ahead," redoubling their Jewish educational efforts, and their attempts to publicize this very important work.

## NOTES

## NOTES



ewish Community Centers Association N/A

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