

A FEDERATION APPROACH TO ISRAEL PROGRAMS: Allied Jewish Community Services and the Jewish Education Council of Montreal

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In Montreal, the federation views Israel programs as an important piece of its community-building effort and Jewish educational agenda. The programs are now included in the operating budget of its Jewish Educational Council and are administered by a full-time staff member. This formalization of structure is similar to what Sheldon Schreter envisions as an Israel Program Department.

The entry of the Montreal federation, Allied Jewish Community Services (AJCS), into Israel programming outside the scope of fund raising must be defined by its central objective: Israel programming serves as a powerful vehicle in the development of Jewish identity. Underlying this approach is a fundamental belief that the continuity of the Jewish people and of the Jewish community in particular is linked to involving young people in active approaches to Jewish life. As Sheldon Schreter's article illustrates, Israel programs are similarly perceived in the State of Israel—as a Diaspora activity instrumental in forming the Jewish self-image of many young people, particularly the nontraditional Jews who comprise the greatest majority of North American Jewry.

The decision of AJCS to house Israel programs largely within the Jewish Education Council (the central board of education) is a reaffirmation of the role of Israel programs as an integral part of the Jewish educational agenda. Whereas various Israel programs of the federation were initially administered and funded through special grants, they are now, in part, included in the annual operating budget of the Jewish Education Council (JEC). Within the context of the federation, this is perceived as a tacit acceptance of program thrust. During the past year, a full-time coordinator

was hired by the Jewish Education Council to administer initiatives linked to Israel in a program center entitled "Living Judaism." The formalization of the structure brings the federation closer to what Sheldon Schreter defines as the Israel Program Department (IPD).

The growth of the federation commitment to Israel programs can, in large measure, be attributed to a generation of leadership that defines Israel as a primary reference point in their Jewish lives. Current federation leadership is constant in its support of Israel as the Zionist ideal, a refuge necessitated by the unprecedented destruction of the Holocaust, and a home for oppressed Jews in the Diaspora.

The Montreal federation is well positioned to promote the concept of Israel programming through a hospitable internal structure. A number of factors, including a highly centralized community, a significant number of young people of primary school age in Jewish day schools (55%), a high level of attachment to Israel as evidenced by the percentage of individuals visiting the country, a strong community campaign, many first- and second-generation immigrants, and a high proportion of Holocaust survivors, have all helped maintain continued support for Israel in many forms.

From the most cynical perspective, one

could speculate that AJCS' entry into Israel programming is directly related to the decline in levels of funding available to the Canadian Zionist Federation that has occurred in recent years. Yet, there was no objective reason why the federation could not have entered actively into Israel programming in earlier years as the financial resources were available to do so. However, that program thrust had not yet been integrated into the community-building approaches of the federation. Only as AJCS assumed a growing responsibility for community organization, Jewish education, and leadership development did Israel programming come to be seen as an important part of its community-building function.

Today, the Montreal Jewish federation sponsors Israel programming of two types: those linked to the annual fund-raising campaign and educationally based initiatives. In all instances, the objective is to ensure that Israel programming, even that directed at young people, extends beyond fund raising, but is not removed from the reality of community requirements.

"LIVING JUDAISM" PROGRAM CENTER

The program information that follows provides an outline of an emerging function similar to what Schreter envisions as an Israel Program Department. While AJCS has entered actively into this area of programming, the Canadian Zionist Federation continues to be a significant partner in promoting the Zionist agenda, as well as being an active sponsor of various educational initiatives. From a functional perspective Israel programming is increasingly being perceived as not the property of one organization, but rather as an integrated part of all aspects of Diaspora organizational life.

The Jewish Education Council in Montreal is closely linked to the federation, both structurally and in practice. This relationship has facilitated the consideration of new programming initiatives within the larger communal context. Currently,

the JEC is involved in a number of Israel programs and looks to develop this area further. Its objective has been to design programs in areas not addressed by other organizations and to focus on the leadership development aspects of Israel experiences. Each program is targeted to a selective audience and is thus not amenable to mass appeals. The Canadian Zionist Federation serves in an advisory capacity in these activities, providing both lay and professional support as required.

- *Summer Camp Caravan*: Two Montreal teenagers visit the summer camps in the area, using creative programming techniques to introduce both staff and campers to Operation Exodus. The particular focus of this educational effort is on the immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel.
- *Am Echad*: This educational program, which was initiated in 1989, brings together an equal number of 16-year-old Israelis from Beersheva (Montreal's Project Renewal community) and Montreal teenagers. It culminates in a five-week seminar in Israel in which the teenagers study, work, and tour together. During the school year leading up to the seminar, the teenagers correspond with each other, and this communication is maintained after the summer experience as well.
- *March of the Living*: The "Living Judaism" program center of the JEC is responsible for organizing the participation of Montreal teenagers in the March of the Living. Teenagers from the Diaspora and Israel march to Auschwitz on Yom Hashoa and celebrate Yom Ha'Atzmit in Israel. In the spring of 1990, 150 Montreal teenagers participated in the March.
- *Leadership training seminar for senior camp staff*: A six-week leadership training seminar to be held in Israel from early May to mid-June is currently being planned for senior camp counselors. Its aim is to provide camp staff with an exciting Israel experience that they will

want to translate directly into dynamic camp programming upon their return.

- *Recruitment for Otzma*: The program center is responsible for the recruitment and follow-up of participants in the Otzma program sponsored by the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF).

STAFFING

The JEC has allocated a full-time professional staff member to the "Living Judaism" program center, along with appropriate secretarial support. It is estimated that that worker spends approximately 50% of the time on recruitment of program participants and the remainder on program development and administration.

Because of the requirement for ongoing interaction with personnel in Israel, as well as those within the federation structure, it is essential that the staff member assigned to Israel programming be familiar both with Israel organizational structures and local community structures. This professional must have a facility in working with young adults as he or she will serve as the major source of front-line recruitment. In addition, the ability to negotiate a variety of community interests and to advocate for Israel programs is essential in order to ensure their financial viability. There is no question that, particularly in these difficult times, Israel programs may be seen as a critical but not essential communal service. Therefore, both the professional and volunteers must be prepared to serve as advocates for these programs in the future.

No formal training program exists for professionals working within a federation structure who are administering Israel programs. This may be an area that the CJF Continuing Professional Education program should explore as a greater number of federations move actively into this area and as the information base and combination of skills required to carry out this mandate effectively are not comparable to existing federation positions.

A major target of this worker's recruit-

ment efforts is those young people who are not in the Jewish day school system and thus do not have the natural communal linkages to the organized Jewish community. In order to gain access to young people in the public and private high school systems, the worker spends a good deal of time reaching out to school administrators and teachers to identify those students who would be good candidates for the Israel programs based on the criteria for each program. It is also important to demonstrate the value of these programs to the schools' administration so that they see them as an opportunity for further development of their students, not as competition for other programs the schools may be promoting.

LAY INVOLVEMENT

Each program undertaken by the JEC is overseen by a lay committee, which is given considerable scope in program planning. In addition, the committee is responsible for planning orientation activities that are considered critical in preparing participants from a "Montreal perspective" for travel to Israel.

The committees are made up of past program participants, members of other organizations involved in Israel programming, teachers and parents of potential participants, and Israelis currently living in Montreal. These committees have proved to be particularly effective vehicles for involving Israelis in Jewish community life.

FUNDING

Program funding comes from a variety of sources, including the operating budget of the JEC, the CRB Foundation, proceeds from the community's annual March to Jerusalem, and, for the March of the Living program, a subsidy from the United Israel Appeal of Canada Inc. Additionally, United Israel Appeal of Canada Inc. has been a funding partner in the Camp Caravan program.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

No hard data have been collected on the impact of the Israel programs, although the JEC has used feedback from participants as a basic indicator of success. As feedback has largely been positive, the programs have been considered as such. However, it is clear that a more refined approach to evaluation will be required in the future.

Another important indicator of the long-term success of these programs is the duration of community involvement of participants upon completion of the Israel activities. The notion of follow-up has been an integral part of program recruitment since the JEC first organized programs that included travel to Israel. Young adults participating in these programs are expected to become involved in voluntary service to the Jewish community upon their return. As all programs are subsidized by communal funds, this level of voluntarism is seen as a continued part of the cycle of Living Judaism.

To date, this expectation has been fulfilled by many participants. Many have joined planning committees responsible for overseeing the programs in which they participated; they are perceived as "informed

graduates" by these committees. On campus, many of these participants are now Israel activists, involved in political action or Hillel.

The tie between these JEC programs and the federation's Project Renewal involvement in the Northern Negev is considered as essential and is incorporated within the program elements. In this way, the participants develop a commitment to Project Renewal and see it as a tangible means of assistance through which they can direct their future volunteer involvement.

CONCLUSION

Although Montreal is only in the early stages of developing an Israel Program Department, the enthusiasm and creativity evident in all aspects of this planning indicate that the decision to proceed in this area was correct. Without a doubt, Israel programming is an area of considerable potential within a federation. We have yet to initiate programs that would target families and special interest groups, which are an important consideration on the JEC's agenda. The federation considers the current direction of Israel initiatives as a manifestation of a partnership that will serve the Jewish community well into the twenty-first century.