

JCSA: THE PROFESSIONALS' ASSOCIATION

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The federation movement and the professionalization of services to the North American Jewish community arose and evolved in concert over the past century. Both phenomena are historically linked and functionally interdependent. The Jewish Communal Service Association serves as the professional address of the Jewish community, playing a leadership role in defining and addressing the communal Jewish agenda and enhancing professional competence in the development and delivery of services. It has reversed a recent decline in membership through outreach to a variety of professional entities and the development of a mechanism to enable cross-field consultations among leading agency executives.

The vast network of Jewish social support systems throughout North America is administered and safeguarded by a cadre of highly educated, well-trained, deeply committed practitioners, linked together for professional growth and nurturing by the Jewish Communal Service Association of North America (JCSA). The Association serves as a forum for the discussion of communal and professional issues, the examination of social trends, and the exchange of experiences designed to improve the quality of service provided to the Jewish community by its members.

THE FEDERATION MOVEMENT AND THE PROFESSION

The federation movement and the professionalization of services to the North American Jewish community are historically linked and functionally interdependent. Both critically important developments in the life of the Jewish community arose simultaneously in the 1890s as an outgrowth of our rich tradition of *tzedakah* and in response to the need for a coordinated and thoughtfully planned system of raising and distributing charitable funds to the thousands of Eastern European Jewish immigrants arriving at America's shores (Senior, 1900).

The federation movement began in 1895 in Boston, with the establishment of a com-

munity-based, independent, centralized system for raising and distributing charitable funds. However, it was not until 1932 that the Boston federation—and other local federations that were formed in the interim—joined together to coordinate their activities.

During the intervening years this important cooperative function was undertaken by the National Conference of Jewish Charities (NCJC), organized in 1899 by volunteer leaders from local communities. The organization's major function was the convening of an annual nationwide conference. The initial conference was held in Chicago in 1900, chaired by NCJC's first president Max Senior, a federation leader from Cincinnati (Penn, 1980).

THE EVOLVING PROFESSION

Although NCJC continued as a lay-directed entity until 1932, the increasingly important role of professionals in Jewish communal service led to significant changes. In 1919, the organization was renamed the Conference of Jewish Social Service, and a journal written by and for the practitioner was established in 1924 "to stimulate careful study and organized thinking on the part of workers" (Waldman, 1924, pp. 1-2). The first article to appear in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Jewish Social Service* was authored by Maurice B. Hexter, executive director of the Federated Jewish Charities of

Boston, and the first professional elected as president (1923) of the Conference of Jewish Social Service (Hexter, 1924).

Recognizing the need for both a volunteer-led national entity to coordinate the policies designed to raise and distribute charitable funds and a professionally oriented association responsive to the realities of dramatically increasing specialization and the training required to administer these programs, the NCJC evolved into two separate, yet closely related organizations. In 1932, the National Conference of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (NCJFWF, now Council of Jewish Federations) was established among the existing local federations and welfare funds. It was directed primarily by volunteers with the significant involvement of professionals (Romanofsky, 1986). Shortly thereafter, in 1937, the professional community established the Conference of Jewish Social Welfare (CJSW), an outgrowth of the Conference of Jewish Social Service and forerunner to the Jewish Communal Service Association (Penn, 1980).

In the late 1930s, CJSW, now entirely made up of practitioners, moved as did the larger Jewish community "from service to one segment of the Jewish community—the poor, the immigrant, the sick and disabled—to the concept of concern for the entire Jewish community" (Penn, 1980, p. 1534). The magnitude of the problems to be confronted was such that, "Jewish leadership reluctantly (pressed) for government funding of relief services" (Penn, 1980, p. 1535).

These developments set the stage for the full engagement of the Jewish community in responding to the effects of a devastating economic depression in the United States, the rise of fascism in Europe, the dislocations caused by World War II, the horrors of the Holocaust, and the realization of the age-old dream of the rebirth of the State of Israel. This engagement with the larger community came at a time of greatly increased Jewish affluence and political influ-

ence in the United States, encouraging the community to assert its social agenda and to help finance an impressive array of social service activities. As the Jewish agenda lengthened, the relatively small professional cadre in place by 1937 had to be augmented greatly, required increased training in the delivery of social services, and developed areas of specialization.

The first specialized field of service to be organized was the Jewish Centers, establishing the Association of Jewish Center Professionals (AJCP) in 1918. AJCP was followed by these associations: the Council for Jewish Education (1926), Association of Jewish Community Relations Workers (1950), North American Association of Jewish Homes and Housing for the Aging (1960), Jewish Family & Children's Professionals' Association (1965), Association of Jewish Community Organization Personnel (1969), and Association of Jewish Vocational Service Professionals (1979) (Penn, 1980).

By 1952, the same factors that led the National Conference of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds to act as a coordinating mechanism for local federations, also persuaded CJSW—now renamed the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service (NCJCS)—to play a similar role for the profession. The individual associations representing specific fields of service—known as Affiliated Professional Associations (APAs)—coalesced within the coordinating umbrella of the NCJCS, paying per capita membership dues in support of the parent body (Penn, 1980).

A PROFESSIONAL ADDRESS

NCJCS, through its Annual Conference, and quarterly publication—retitled the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* in 1956—became the professional address for interdisciplinary study and exploration of problems and opportunities that went beyond the focus of the individual fields of service. In addition to its coordinating and cooperative functions, NCJCS instituted a

series of low-cost, high-quality insurance/retirement programs for its membership. It also took on an advocacy role—both to the general community on social issues and within the Jewish community on professional concerns. In 1986, the Association published a landmark compilation of guidelines for the profession entitled *Rights and Responsibilities of the Practitioner: Goals for the Field of Jewish Communal Service*. The document included a Model Code of Ethics, a Model Personnel Practices Code, Goals for Retirement Program Standards, and Guidelines for Grievance Procedures (*Rights and Responsibilities*, 1986).

As more agencies throughout North America were established and organized to better serve the Jewish population, the profession grew rapidly—in numbers, influence, and geographical distribution. Over 200 federations and many more local service agencies were established in communities throughout Canada and the United States, along with a plethora of Israel-oriented and other special interest national agencies. The collective staffing requirements of these numerous new agencies dramatically increased the size and specialization of the profession.

NCJCS's unique role as a value-neutral entity for cross-field collaboration and networking became a valuable benefit for its membership. Practitioners from Vancouver to Miami, and from family service to Jewish education, now had an address to turn to, and a unified "table" at which to make professional and personal contacts, thus enabling them to explore their professional commitments more fully.

A Professional Profile

To develop a profile of the professional during this period (1950–1985) of rapid expansion, NCJCS undertook extensive surveys in 1973 and 1982 of its total membership. The studies revealed that most professionals were highly educated, deeply committed to and personally involved in Judaism, and leaders in their local Jewish communities.

The following are statistical highlights of the 1982 survey, which was analyzed by Jonathan Woocher (1986).

- Total membership—3200 persons
- Gender—40% female; 60% male
- Age—39 years or younger: 40%; 40 years or older: 55%
- Position held—Executive: 80% (director/assistant director: 42%); line worker: 11%; other: 9%
- Educational level—Postgraduate: 80% (Ph.D.: 10%; MSW: 49%; MA: 27%); BA: 12%; no degree: 5%
- Jewish education—Some: 86% (Hebrew school: 36%; graduate/rabbinical: 30%); none: 14%
- Congregational affiliation—Yes: 80%; no: 20%

As the Jewish community is concerned with fostering Jewish commitment and identity, it is comforting to note the high level of Jewish education and continuing religious involvement of an overwhelming portion of the profession. In an analysis of the 1982 survey, Woocher (1986) wrote,

Note the high levels of Jewish identification among the respondents. Nearly four-fifths are affiliated with a congregation (12% Orthodox, 36% Conservative, 22% Reform, and 3% each Traditional and Reconstructionist). This high level of current involvement may well reflect the fact that over 70% of the respondents were members of Jewish youth or student organizations at some point, and over half attended a Jewish-sponsored summer camp. Involvement with Israel was similarly high; 82.7% report having visited Israel at least once. Over two-fifths have participated in an organized program in Israel, which includes three-fifths of those under age 35. Based on this data, one could conclude that the respondents indeed *represent a pool of active and committed Jews who work for the Jewish community, not merely a group of communal workers who happen to be Jewish* (emphasis added)" (pp. 238–240).

Need for Research about the Professional

The information about NCJCS members gained from these surveys was helpful, but fell short of presenting a complete picture of the Jewish communal professional. In addition, the studies revealed nothing about the many practitioners who are not members of the Association (variously estimated at between 3,000 to 6,000 persons). There was—and still is—an urgent need to develop, fund, and implement a continuing research component for the profession, much like the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey and other quality research efforts that probe the general Jewish community.

This concern with better information and knowledge about the profession was echoed by the highly respected Wexner Foundation in its 1995 report entitled *Expectations, Education and Experience of Jewish Professional Leaders*. In its introduction, Wexner Foundation President Maurice Corson states:

It has been evident to us that we lack definitive data about professional leadership on the American Jewish scene. For some time there has been a broad consensus that, while North American Jewish professionals play a major role in shaping the capacity of the organized Jewish community to respond to pressing religious, educational and communal challenges, we have little knowledge about the backgrounds, Jewish commitments, or motivating factors that determined the career paths of these professionals. What are the personality traits most often associated with the successful Jewish professionals? What kind of graduate training and on-the-job experiences increase the likelihood of success and retention? (Corson, 1995, p. i).

Our professional association is in a unique position to facilitate and coordinate such research and to publish and widely disseminate the results through the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*. To establish and finance such an undertaking—and give it the high status and visibility it requires and de-

serves—a consortium of parties interested in and concerned with the future health of the Jewish community should be developed. The research team could include foundations, schools of Jewish communal service, national agencies and organizations, and dedicated volunteer leaders—with JCSA acting as the coordinating mechanism. In addition to vital information that would strengthen the profession and improve its service to the Jewish community, such regularized research would act as an early warning system for detecting problems, opportunities, and trends in a timely fashion.

DECLINE IN ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

Such an early warning system may have been useful to the profession and the community in spotting a variety of factors that led in the mid-1980s and early 1990s to a decline in Association membership and, not at all coincidentally, mirrored a crisis in Jewish communal life.

A 1994 JCSA membership survey—along with a review of APA membership rosters—revealed a striking similarity to the picture of the professional that emerged from the earlier studies (Boeko, 1994). However there were two major differences—females outnumbered males within the profession by 55% to 45% (1982 figures were 60% male and 40% female), and total JCSA membership had declined to 2,400 (from 3,200 in the mid-1980s). Factors within the profession and Jewish community played reinforcing roles in reducing the organization's membership.

Jewish Communal Factors

The economic malaise in North America in the mid-1980s and early 1990s severely undermined federations' general-purpose fund-raising efforts. Annual campaigns turned flat—at best—just as tremendous additional financial burdens were being placed on Jewish resources: the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union, Operation Moses for Ethio-

pian Jews, and special assistance to Israel during and immediately after the Gulf War.

During this same period, the levels of state and federal funding for social services and immigrant resettlement programs were also reduced. The combination of lower governmental outlays and diminished funding available to Jewish agencies from the federation system—just at the time of increased global Jewish needs—forced many agencies to downsize their staff and severely restrict spending for training, education, and travel.

Deprofessionalization

When agency budgets are reduced, professional salary levels and benefits, including opportunities for training and enrichment, are diminished. Agencies are encouraged to seek prospective staff members who are willing to work for lower wages and are less concerned with profession/career goals and growth. Often these newer staff members are women returning to the workforce after successfully raising a family. Unfortunately, women are frequently hired as part-time or contract workers, are not free to relocate for career advancement, and some may view their late re-entry into the workforce as limiting their career potential. Practitioners—whether women or men—who view their position primarily as a job can and do work effectively, but lack a wider vision of involvement in the larger Jewish profession.

Affiliating with and becoming active in a professional association flows from practitioners' sense of commitment to career, along with their agencies' encouragement of staff training and development. During this period, fewer persons were affiliating with JCSA/APAs and less frequently attending general-purpose conferences. These phenomena—known as the deprofessionalization of the field—are explored at length in the Fall, 1994 issue of the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* ("The Deprofessionalization of Jewish Communal Service," 1994, pp. 6–28).

Annual Conference

The hallmark of our professional association since its inception in 1899 has been the Annual Conference, much as the General Assembly is the key gathering for the federation movement. Indeed, the term "Conference" was integral to the name of the organization for over 90 years. From 1950 to 1985, it attracted an average of 750 attendees and was *the place* for professional enrichment.

The conference was also the major arena for staff development and training within individual fields of service. The meeting—a four-day event—blended plenary sessions on overarching issues of Jewish concern with equal time periods for discussion, skills enhancement, and specialized training for APA members. Developments in the mid-1980s and early 1990s conspired to reduce average attendance to 500 persons per year from 750 in the previous two decades. Thus through 1994, JCSA/APA membership was in decline, and the power to attract large numbers of practitioners to the Annual Conference no longer existed.

RESPONDING TO CHANGE

A series of dramatic programmatic redirections, both planned and instituted, are reestablishing JCSA's leadership role and attracting large numbers of new members. In view of the diminished role of the Annual Conference, JCSA is experimenting with a variety of innovative meeting formats. In 1993, two regional conferences—in Washington, DC and in Los Angeles—were undertaken successfully and attended by a total of 650 persons. In a related move, NCJCS was renamed the Jewish Communal Service Association in 1991, removing the term "conference" from the title in order to emphasize the fundamental purpose of our organization as a year-round, fully programmatic and professional association.

The CEO

The forces of rapid change, economic un-

certainty, and the pressure to achieve socially directed goals within bottom-line economic restrictions have led to significant agency downsizing of staff and budget. Although these factors affect JCSA and all of its practitioners, their impact is most forceful on the chief executive office (CEO) of each agency—executives who comprise a significant percentage of JCSA membership.

Despite opportunities provided by various organizations for discussions by professional leadership of this changed landscape, no mechanism exists across the various fields of service that allows for candid, open, and noninstitutional sharing of concerns and the development of positive strategies to better respond to the Jewish world we face today.

To provide just such a cross-field examination and analysis of the issues facing our profession, JCSA is convening a Professional Leadership Seminar. Using the theme, "Management Systems Under Pressure: A Cross-Field Executive Consultation," a seminar for top management will be held in December, 1995. Its program will explore the realities of Jewish communal service as they affect executive leadership. The seminar should also enhance and highlight the unique role of our Association among the very executives whose support is so vital to our success.

Outreach

JCSA has begun to systematically reach out to a variety of professional entities beyond the APAs, inviting participation by national organizations and Local Groups. As a result, JCSA's membership base has increased significantly, and there is now potential for much greater membership affiliation.

Local Groups are autonomous professional associations that bring together Jewish communal service practitioners within a defined geographical area. Each engages in a variety of programs designed to clarify issues, strengthen skills, increase Jewish

commitment, and offer opportunities for interpersonal exchanges between members. Thus they perform a valuable service in their communities by being a professionally unifying force, much as JCSA does on a continental level.

Recent negotiations for affiliation with JCSA have been concluded successfully with Local Groups in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and New Jersey. In addition, affiliation has been agreed to with the Hillel Directors Association, and discussions are in an advanced stage with the National Association of Jewish Chaplains, two important national organizations of communal professionals.

These new arrangements and linkages to a large number of practitioners bode well for the renewed growth and vitality of the Association. In addition, AJCP has increased its rolls by 150 persons and AJCOP has recruited 100 new members this year. Taken together, JCSA/APA total membership has already increased to 2750 and could potentially reach 3000 in early 1996.

THE ASSOCIATION

The Jewish Communal Service Association remains *the* professional Jewish organization in North America dealing with issues of social welfare, communal well-being, and professional concerns related to the entire field of Jewish communal service. It continues to play a leadership role in defining and addressing the evolving agenda of the Jewish community and enhancing professional competence in the development and delivery of the broad range of programs and services to the Jewish community.

JCSA has faced and is overcoming the problems related to its former Annual Conference and is regaining membership at a rapid pace. Over half of its members are enrolled in one or more of its excellent insurance/retirement programs, and its *Journal* is highly respected by colleges, universities, libraries, scholars, and agencies—Jewish and nonsectarian—in the United States, Canada, Israel, and other countries.

While strengthening JCSA's coordinating function and its cooperative relationship with APAs, the Association is bringing the concept of a unified continental professional instrumentality to many heretofore unaffiliated national membership agencies and local groupings of practitioners.

In a unique way, JCSA is also addressing the serious problems confronting agency executives while maintaining needed services to its total membership. This dual track of responsiveness to line workers and middle-management personnel, as well as to top management personnel—along with the addition of a serious research component—represents the future of the Association. Therein lies the best hope for a continued meaningful contribution to the profession and to the Jewish community it serves as JCSA approaches its 100th anniversary.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The far-sighted and energetic leadership of Bert J. Goldberg, first as chair of the JCSA Strategic Planning Task Force (1992–94) and now as JCSA President (1994–96), has been instrumental in setting a new, more relevant agenda for the Association.

The *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* has grown in stature, reputation, and usefulness to our membership and to the many subscribers to this high-quality, refereed, professional quarterly. New features, special single issue editions, and a revised format have greatly improved the content and appearance of the *Journal*. Many of these improvements were instituted by *Journal* managing editor, Gail Naron Chalew, helping immeasurably to enhance JCSA's contribution to the field of Jewish communal service.

Finally, to our leadership—particularly those who actively supported JCSA over the past few difficult years—my professional and personal “thank you” for keeping the flame burning brightly as we prepare for the 21st century.

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