

Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA) and Jewish Federation of Greater Washington Agency History



Since its founding in 1973, the Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington (JCA) has had a single and enduring mission: to help older people remain in the homes of their choice and in life's mainstream as long and as independently as possible. Now, as then, JCA develops and runs programs that ensure dignity, self-determination and independent lifestyles for Jewish elders and others in the Greater Washington community.

As an organization of the Jewish community, JCA helps Jews throughout the area. In addition and in keeping with the Jewish tradition of tzedakah, JCA serves older persons of all faiths and from all walks of life. (Mission statement)

JCA and the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, formerly the United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Washington, were founded at nearly the same time, with the planning process that led to the creation of the agency serving as one catalyst for creation of a formal federation. As such, the history of the two organizations is intertwined and JCA's history of its relationship to both the local federation and the larger Jewish community reflects the ongoing fragmentation and complexity of Washington metropolitan area's Jewish population.

Jewish Federation of Greater Washington

Washington DC's Jewish population remained tiny until the growth of the Federal government in 1950s and sixties. Precursors to several now key social welfare and community institutions developed in the late 19th and early 20th century. These includes Charles E. Smith Life Communities (formerly Hebrew Home -- elderly housing), the Jewish Social Service Agency (JSSA), JCC, along with several smaller associations and schools. The community formed a Jewish Welfare Association in 1925 and formed a United Jewish Appeal in 1939, but these institutions did not develop federation structures similar to other Jewish communities and most UJA raised funding went toward Palestine and European Jews.

The growth of Washington DC metropolitan area as the federal government and related support industry expanded after 1950s led to a rapid increase in Jews living in the area to become what is now the sixth largest Jewish community in the country. Until the 1970s, the population consisted of a small multi-generation core and a large, transient population. Although the population has become more stable, given the transience of the Washington DC population and focus on national/international affairs, much of the Jewish community continues to be unaffiliated or has limited associations with community institutions such as the UJA, Jewish welfare and recreation agencies, and synagogues. For example, a 2007 *Washington Jewish Week* article reported a Federation initiative to increase the percent of Jews connected to the organized Jewish community from 51 percent to 65 percent by 2016 (Fingerhut 2007). Elazer (1995: 341) described it as “perhaps the most socially fragmented Jewish community in the United States,” in earlier decades which was only “finding its feet” in the 1990s.

As a result, UJA funding went chiefly to Israel, international and national Jewish organizations into the 1970s. Older community leaders reported that approximately 60 percent went to Israel and major Jewish institutions such as the Hebrew Home and JSSA received funding when it was available. JSSA and JCC primarily were funded by fees and individual community organizations. The Jewish Community Council, focused on the relationship between Jews and others in Washington, along with most other institutions, were funded primarily through other community mechanisms. Although community planning did exist, it remained limited and under the care of UJA. UJA was dominated by the established German Jewish population until the 1960s, when newcomers from elsewhere began to shift the emphasis toward support for community institutions as well as national and international Jewish concerns.

The UJA Federation of Greater Washington was founded in 1976, starting with 19 partner agencies, including a mix of social and senior services, JCC, schools and related institutions. This shift led to increased funding for locally focused organizations, increased planning, and coordinated efforts to promote Jewish education and identity. From the start, the agencies had representation on the Federation board and remain key players in its operation today. Many of the member agencies were established well before the Federation, and the largest community institution, Charles E. Smith Life Communities never became a full member of the Federation.

In 1999, and following the path of many other US Jewish communities, the fundraising and planning arms of the community merged into the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington.

The Federation now includes 40 beneficiary agencies called “partners”, a mix of social and senior services, three independent JCCs and other recreational organizations, Jewish educational initiatives, schools, college campus and youth groups, and national/international causes. The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC - former Jewish Community Council) is also a partner agency. The Federation also manages several government grants and runs programs focused on Jewish identity and education, a centralized volunteer bank, and refugee resettlement. Some of these programs are conducted with synagogues or include synagogue outreach. As detailed on its website (Shalomdc.org), the Federation mission is to:

- ❖ **Care for those in need**
- ❖ **Deepen engagement in Jewish life and Jewish identity**
- ❖ **Create connections among Jews locally, in Israel, and around the world**

Given its historic focus on funding for Israel and other national/international interests and the fact that most agencies pre-date founding of the Federation, Jewish Federation of Greater Washington has faced challenges to become the kind of major planning and fundraising institution for its local Jewish agencies, i.e., to become the kind of Federation that exists in many other cities. Although less overseas focused than in the past, analysis of the Federation’s 2008 allocations statement for this study revealed that roughly 30 percent of funding went to international organizations, 14 percent to national organizations, 10 percent for federation initiatives on Jewish identity and education, 10.5 percent for social services and aging, 9.5 percent for schools, nearly 9 percent for the JCCs, 2 percent for JCRC, and 2 percent for Federation community support initiatives such as the volunteer network, community security, synagogue partnerships, and community engagement. Another 12.5 percent involves managing donor advised funds with the remainder going to other related Jewish organizations.

Unlike Baltimore, the social service, senior services, and education institutions that are the focus of this study have continued to hold independent fundraising campaigns in addition to being Federation partners. Yet while the Jewish housing rehabilitation organization was developed in response to a Federation planning study, Federation chose not to found the organization. The organization remains independent, though broadly supported by the wider Jewish community. Although board members in the partner agencies are required to contribute annually to Federation and agency representatives serve on the Federation board, agencies

have always sought funds independently and their relationship to Federation varies widely. Federation fosters cooperation among agencies through joint committees focused on various topics and provides centralized volunteer recruitment and placement, Jewish education, and other supports. In particular the volunteer center, calendar, IT support, and Jewish education and leadership initiatives are noted positively by many. Nevertheless, some community and agency leaders report competition among agencies. Federation is focused primarily on promoting support for the Jewish community and Jewish causes, leading to concerns by some community leaders and Federation staff about the focus of organizations largely concerned with serving the broader community. These factors influence the relationship between JCA and its Federation.

JCA history

In 1972, two Washington DC Jewish community leaders who attended a National Council for Jewish Welfare Funds meeting heard about plans for the development of a new multi-faceted Jewish agency for the aging in Chicago. Returning to Washington with an idea to develop a similar initiative, they met with key agencies (JCC, JSSA, and Hebrew Home) to develop support for the concept, eventually approaching UJA with a request for a \$5,000 planning study on the needs of metropolitan Washington DC's elderly population. The leaders developed a joint committee on aging from these agencies and others to conduct the study. The study revealed the need for transportation and socialization and housing, programs that none of the existing agencies wanted to take on. JCA came out of this planning process, starting with a grant of \$67,000 from UJA in July 1973, with four staff and office space in the basement of JSSA. Other active community leaders formed the board and offered in-kind support for the organization. JCA leaders claim that the interagency cooperation that led to founding of JCA served as a stepping stone for the creation of the Washington DC area Jewish Federation. JCA became a founding partner agency when the Federation formed in 1976.

With Ruth Breslow-Young its executive director for its first 17 years, the agency focused primarily on the needs of local Jewish elderly. As outlined in the agency timeline, its initial three programs were transportation, social activities in partnership with JCC, and a shared housing initiative. The agency rapidly added programs through a combination of community support and government grants. Key initiatives included senior employment, an adult day care center in conjunction with Hebrew Home, and a variety of other initiatives. Programs were conducted by

a burgeoning staff and volunteers. By 1986, its budget had increased over \$1.6 million and the growing agency had moved into its third rented office space in a Federation building that housed several social service agencies.

While agency materials remained focused on the Jewish elderly through the 1980s, government funding for low income senior employment received initially in 1974 and in every year since significantly expanded the target population beyond the Jewish elderly. Most low income seniors that qualify for these programs are not Jewish. As detailed in the financial history below, 25 to 30 percent of the agency budget has consistently come from various government sources. This grant began a trend of expanding agency activities beyond the Jewish community. However, other programs predominantly remained focused on Jewish elderly.

Stewardship and support for the agency during its entire history has remained within the Jewish community. The board has always been almost exclusively Jewish, due to a combination of social networks, board culture, and requirements that board members contribute to the local Jewish Federation. Federation membership includes expectations that board members also will solicit Federation funds from others and wear “a community hat”. However, the by-laws have never stipulated that board members be Jewish and the current leadership actively seeks board members outside of the Jewish community, albeit with limited success. The agency also receives significant financial and in-kind support from members of the wider Jewish community. Until 1995, the agency remained housed in buildings owned by Jewish organizations. It also collaborates with other Jewish agencies in some of its programs and is an active participant in Federation lay and staff committees.

The agency focus began to change from a primary emphasis on serving the greater Washington Jewish elderly to becoming a Jewish presence for innovative programming for all local seniors in 1990 when David Gamse was hired as executive director. David was recruited to the agency from AARP, bringing in a vision of an agency that would both serve the Jewish elderly and become a major presence in senior services locally with national renown. This view was supported by the board, and programming gradually expanded to initiatives for a wider range of seniors. The diverse programs were consolidated into program areas, new initiatives added, and the shared housing program closed. Today, programming focuses on six program areas: 1) adult day services, 2) transportation, which includes both transportation for the elderly and delivery of meals, 3) senior employment, 4) fitness, wellness and productive aging, 5) tech-

nology programs, 6) information services and community affairs. Although the transportation and adult day programs predominantly serve Jews, others predominantly serve non-Jews. This is particularly true of the low income employment programs.

This gradual shift in focus includes several trends. First, JCA's newer programs increasingly provide supports for healthy seniors as well as the initial focus on the frail elderly. Initiatives to promote employment, computer literacy, health and wellness reflect Jewish Talmudic teachings to support those in need to reach their potential. Increasingly, too, program areas partner with non-Jewish initiatives to expand program models beyond the Washington DC Jewish community. Programs are held in a number of locations, including synagogues and Jewish agencies, but also shopping malls and an array of secular locations. The agency moved out of Jewish controlled rental space in 1995 and bought its own building this year. Significantly, extra space in the new building is rented to a secular nonprofit incubator.

Starting with renaming the adult day program to Misler Adult Day Center from Misler Jewish Adult Day Center in 1999, the agency has rebranded to help assure non-Jews that they are welcome in JCA programs too. In 2008, the agency changed its logo to emphasize JCA over "Jewish Council for the Aging" and changed its motto to *Helping All seniors thrive*. The new motto is designed both to convey the emphasis on seniors with a range of needs and strengths as well as welcome seniors from all races and religious backgrounds.

Rebranding represents different interpretations of core Jewish values rather than secularization and it is noteworthy that many other Washington based Jewish agencies, including the JCCs, also have dropped Jewish symbolism from their logos. Although JCA's external program elements are increasingly non-denominational, this shift is based on interpretation of *tikkun olam* to mean healing the entire world, not just the Jewish community, and many JCA leaders take pride in doing so in the name of the Jewish community; although JCA puts its acronym first, every JCA publication and communication piece also lists the organization's full name and does so prominently. Jewish theological teachings are clearly evident in board materials and are embedded throughout agency activities. However, agency key staff and board largely represent reform and conservative Judaism and Jewish elements are largely embedded in its practical theology rather than using explicit forms like prayers or D'Var Torah at board meetings. Jewish theology is evident in board materials and Jewish community targeted documents but largely absent from those for the general public. Likewise Jewish cultural values of professionalism,

supporting individuals to reach their potential regardless of deficits, emphasis on equality and civil rights, and Jewish organizational style are evident in agency governance and processes. The board remains almost exclusively Jewish and the bulk of funds come from Jewish sources. The agency continues as an active Federation partner.

JCA Timeline

1973 Agency starts with \$67,000 from UJA, Executive Director Ruth Breslow. 4 staff

Location: JSSA basement

Programs: information and referral, transportation, socialization (satellite JCC), other volunteer efforts

Target pop: Jewish elderly

1974 New funding: Dept of labor grant for low income senior employment

Programs: Adds: 1) senior employment, 2) thrift shop, 3) Kosher meals for elderly program, later handed over to a JCC to run

Resources: Starts JCA auxiliary (senior volunteers, fundraising)

Target pop: Senior employment brings in non-Jewish elderly

1975 Programs; Adds 1) senior information and referral, 2) senior seders

1977 Programs: Starts 1) Geriatric day care in conjunction with Hebrew Home, 2) Senior employment fair

Location: Office moves to Revitz house (a Hebrew Home property), Geriatric day center housed in Hebrew Home facilities

1980 Programs: Community respite care referral service

1981 Programs: Starts program pairing synagogues with nursing homes, later taken over by Jewish Chaplaincy Service, a program that JCA founded, and then later transferred to Federation which later transferred it to JSSA

1983 Programs Expands senior employment services through CDBG grant. Creates Eldergames, a spin off business run by seniors adopted by United Seniors Health Cooperative

1985 Location: Moves to rented space created for Jewish agencies - Lehrman Community Services Building

1988 Programs: 1) Transportation, 2) Information, referral, outreach hotline, 3) Jewish senior day program, 4) respite care referral service, 5) employ-

	ment services, 6) Kosher meals on wheels, 7) shared living program
1990	Staff change: Ruth Breslow-Young retires, David Gamse hired as Executive Director Location: Jewish senior day care is renamed Misler Jewish Senior day and moves to Ring House (a Hebrew Home assisted living facility)
1992	Programs: Starts SeniorNet computer learning centers with senior volunteers as teachers
1993	Programs: Establishes JCA home care
1994	Programs: Links senior employment program with ABLE - a national network of senior employment services and expands programs to include job coaches and other services Resources: Establishes Annual Productive Aging Award dinner, fundraiser
1995	Programs: Starts 1) targeted job training for seniors, 2) affiliated program National Center for Productive Aging - consulting service on aging, 3) expands range of transportation program with government help Location: Moves to rental space in non-Jewish office building
1996	Programs: Adds senior wellness program Fitness 55, Expands senior employment fair into Senior expo
1997	Programs: Continuing 1) Senior Helpline (I&R), 2) Misler Jewish Day Center (expands to include respite care), 3) Transportation services, 4) Connect- A-Ride Transportation Resource Center, 5) Fitness 55, 6) SeniorNet Computer Learning Center, 7) Senior Aides (on-the-job training), 8) Operation ABLE Senior Employment Services, 9) senior home care, 10) Retirement planning Target Pop: Misler Center and Federation funded transportation predominantly Jewish, Senior employment/training primarily non-Jews, other programs mixed
1998	Resources: Campaign for Forgotten Elders has raised \$2.4 million of a projected \$3 million to provide subsidies for lower income seniors to use agency programs and upgrade the bus fleet Collaboration: JCA takes full management responsibility for Misler Center, still housed in a Hebrew Home facility
1999	Rebranding: Misler Center changes name to Misler Adult Day Center in

order to not discourage non-Jewish elders from using the facility.

2004

Programs: 1) Opens Bethesda Vital Living Center in Bethesda, MD, 2) Publishes “All About Aging” guidebooks on Jewish topics and other general aging topics. Other programs remain the same, but some (particularly the computer programs) have expanded to new and additional facilities

2005 Strategic plan: 2005-2007 strategic plan changes mission to help older adults remain in their homes of their choice and in life's mainstream as long and as independently as possible.

Programs: 1) Transportation adds smooth riding program for people living in Montgomery County in collaboration with Community Partners (a federally funded Federation program), 2) Senior employment program expands, 3) Active living courses provided by Active by Life Center for National Capital region via a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Other programs stable or expand.

Target pop: Older adults who live in the homes of their choice and their family caregivers, both Jewish and non-Jewish

2008

Location: Buys own building, raising significant funds from its board and key donors before economy crashes

Rebranding; Changes logo to de-emphasize the words Jewish Council on Aging. Motto: Helping All Seniors Thrive

Financial History

Table A details JCA budget percentages from annual reports from selected years for the last twenty years of its history. This table reveals both continuity in funding sources over time as the agency grew and shifts in some funding strategies and funding sources. As with many large nonprofits, JCA has mixed revenue sources including government, program fees, individual and foundation donations, Federation and United Way funding. Government grants and contracts have consistently provided between 25 and 30 percent of agency funding for most of its history. This includes a mix of federal, state and local government funders as well as occasional private foundation grants. Many private grants come from Jewish foundations. Program and membership fees have also consistently provided nearly 1/4th of revenue, although the percentage dropped after an agency capital campaign to subsidize lower income seniors.

Program fees include payments for the adult day care, transportation, and some other services.

Other revenue sources have shifted over time. While the agency started out entirely funded by UJA/Federation, the percentage of agency budget directly from Federation has gradually decreased to between 11 and 13 percent in recent years. This drop follows a national trend among Jewish agencies as the amount of available funding from Federation campaigns does not increase at the same level of agency budgets. The allocation does drop by 5 percent a few years after the executive director change, perhaps reflecting changes in agency priorities away from primarily Jewish seniors. Federation allocations are currently targeted for programs that primarily serve Jewish elderly. Also following national trends, United Way allocations dwindled in recent years from a steady 4 percent down to nearly nothing.

Changes in private sources reflect growing agency sophistication over time. Individual donors have always provided a proportion of agency budget, but this amount has grown over the years to nearly 30 percent. Agency development staff notes that most private contributions come from Jewish donors. The agency also shifted from the thrift shop and auxiliary group funding to \$300 per ticket annual award dinners. Also, by 1994, a more sophisticated accounting of volunteer support and other in-kind donations showed that such support increased from 3 percent to 16 percent as a percentage of the budget.

Overall, the ongoing funding picture for JCA reveals a mix of funding from Jewish, government and a few non-Jewish private sources. This mix also is increasingly reflected in the JCA volunteer corps as more recent volunteers include non-Jewish seniors teaching the computer courses as well as an increased cadre of both Jewish and non-Jewish volunteers in other capacities. Funding for the new building is just one example of the interplay of Jewish and non-Jewish funding sources. Key initial funding from the building came from several sources. First, state and local grants provided key anchor funding, but JCRC and Jewish board members played a key role in obtaining this funding. Likewise, the agency obtained a mortgage and bridge funding from a secular bank, but the board president and Jewish community leaders brokered the loans. The board raised over a million dollars in less than a month, much from among its members. Most capital campaign outreach has been to the Jewish community. While funding dwindled after the economy crashed and the Madoff scandal impacted Jewish donors in late fall 2008, the agency still plans to continue outreach first to the Jewish community and then other sources to complete this capital campaign. Although the agency is feeling the

same economic challenges caused by economic conditions as other nonprofits, its strong community ties in both the Jewish community and with local government provides a favorable picture in comparison to many other organizations.

Relationship to the Jewish Community History

JCA's relationship to its founding community is complex and multi-faceted. On a positive note, the organization enjoys strong support from portions of the Jewish community as evidenced through board support, donations and volunteers. The agency has continually drawn resources and guidance from the wider Jewish community. The agency has consistently had a strong relationship to JCRC, the arm of the Jewish community that provides interface with government and the non-Jewish community.

The agency's relationship to its Federation and other Jewish organizations is more mixed. The organization has always been an active Federation partner and appreciates supports such as Jewish education training for board and staff and the volunteer program. Yet while the organization was founded by people active in the local Federation and its development helped generate the current Federation, one JCA leader explained, "We started out with a group that was very involved with UJA, but they were also very opposed to much of what UJA did; they were the inside rabble rouser group." Due to differences in personalities and philosophy, JCA had tense relationships with the Federation until recently. The relationship has improved in recent years although the Federation's adoption of a multi-million dollar community engagement effort may strain that relationship in years to come. Designed to build Jewish community connections, current community engagement efforts exclude seniors in favor of serving children and young adults and skew resource allocation to JSSA, the JCCs and Federation itself.

The same mixed picture is true for relationships with other Jewish agencies and synagogues. The agency has continually partnered with both synagogues and other Jewish agencies, particularly JSSA, Hebrew Home and JCC, though JSSA in particular has from time to time disputed the need for particular JCA programs while seeking the transfer to JSSA of other JCA operations. There has been significant board overlap with some of these agencies, particularly JSSA; and the first executive director was a former JSSA employee. JCA programs have been housed in both Hebrew Home and JSSA facilities over the years. The transportation system mostly serves JCCs and other Jewish institutions. Some synagogue collaborations come from

informal social networks. For example, one synagogue that hosts programs has several board members and key staff as members.

However, the agencies disagree among themselves and report competition for programs and other resources. The Federation tries to serve as facilitator in relationships among the agencies. For example, all of the agencies working with seniors are required to belong to a joint committee on aging.

Differences with the Federation and parts of the wider Jewish community stem from disagreements regarding who the agency should serve and its role in the Jewish community, not the brand of Judaism it represents. Although the agency carefully creates a welcoming atmosphere for seniors from diverse backgrounds, part of this involves strategically using religion in specific programs based on target populations. For example, the Misler Center serves Kosher meals and has a Friday Shabbat service yet it also honors non Jewish seniors on its bulletin boards through pictures and secularized symbols for a wide range of religious holidays. Agency fundraising events, on the other hand, are not kosher. The agency publishes guides for Jewish rituals for seniors as well as an array of secular pamphlets.

Disagreements focus on the fact the JCA consciously serves the wider Jewish community, not just Jews. This focus concerns some Federation staff and community leaders, though others point to JCA programs as evidence of the larger community's cultural sensitivity and interfaith work. The JCRC often highlights JCA programs as it seeks public funds for JCA and many other Jewish agencies. Nonetheless, Federation would prefer that the agency target its referral services toward Jewish agencies rather than JCA's policy to refer an individual seeking resources to the best possible provider for his or her needs regardless of the religious background of the agency.

JCA has consistently remained a Jewish organization reflecting Jewish values and supported by the community and its institutions while considering itself on the fringe of the "mainstream" Jewish community as represented by Federation and certain parts of the wider community. This outsider stance comes from JCA representing a brand of Judaism designed to create a positive Jewish presence in the wider world. Conflicts over whether the Jewish community should remain insular or share its values through service to the wider world are not unique to JCA or Washington DC. Our pilot study found them in Philadelphia and they are reported throughout

U.S. Jewish communities. Instead, these debates focus on the interpretation of tikkun olam and other core Jewish teachings. As such, they represent communities and organizations redefining practical theology instead of losing their religious values and culture.



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