

# THE JEWISH WOMEN'S FOUNDATION OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO:

## A New Model Toward a New Paradigm

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*The Jewish Women's Foundation of Chicago, an independent project of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, aims to make a significant, systemic difference in the lives of women and girls in Chicago. It provides a forum for the empowerment and self-determination of Jewish women as educated funders. Only 18 months old, the Jewish Women's Foundation has already attracted 142 Trustees who to date have committed over \$2.2 million.*

*Creating social change requires not only a commitment of dollars, but also a commitment to targeting those dollars for the most effective impact...challenging old notions about women's lives and insisting on visibility for women-identified solutions. Ultimately, without solutions to women's problems, solutions to all of the nation's social problems are unattainable.*

"Short Sighted" Chicago Women  
in Philanthropy—1992

The Jewish Women's Foundation (JWF) of Metropolitan Chicago is a new concept. Eighteen months old, the JWF is but a toddler, with its first grants yet to be made. However, it is a hearty and robust toddler, sparkling with life and potential as it takes its first steps. Indeed, although still in its developmental stages, the JWF's vision, program, publicity, and outreach have attracted to date 142 trustees who have committed over \$2.2 million to "empower women as funders and decision makers...to expand and improve opportunities and choices in all aspects of Jewish women's and girls' lives through strategic and effective grant making" (JWF Mission Statement, adopted December 7, 1997). These Trustees are a diverse group of women, including business owners, professionals, artists, homemakers, scholars, professional vol-

unteers, and philanthropists ranging in age from their mid-twenties through their seventies, representing every stream of Judaism from the secular to Orthodox. The JWF clearly has touched a chord that the community is responding to. Why?

The enthusiastic reaction to what is in essence a new fund-raising campaign can be explained only in terms of its programmatic context. Who can deny that we are in the midst of social evolution, if not revolution? The roles of men and women are changing, and we have choices today that were not possible a generation ago; we also often have responsibilities thrust upon us that were unthinkable a generation ago. Divorce, single parenthood, elderly women, sexual identity, poverty, abuse, lower pay, lack of adequate child care, breast cancer, anorexia, sexism in education, girls' self-esteem, JAP jokes and date rape, the role of women in religion and in organizational life—these are the issues of our day. Whether we accept or resist these changes, there can be no denying them.

### WHY A SEPARATE JEWISH FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

A recent study of women in Illinois indicates that some of the most critical problems in society have aspects that are unique to

women and girls and require solutions that also are unique to women and girls (Heart Research et al., 1996). However, very little funding from traditional philanthropy goes to women and girls' programs. Less than 5 percent of foundation and corporate grant monies nationwide is awarded to projects specifically serving women and girls.

A fundamental transformation of society cannot be addressed only in a civic or legal context. A Jewish women's fund can be the catalyst for addressing how a profound social phenomenon—the changed role of women—plays out within the Jewish community, involving the Jewish religious, social, and educational institutions that influence the beliefs, values, and behavior of the community and the Jewish social welfare institutions that address the community's problems. Indeed the aforementioned Illinois study (Heart Research et al., 1996) found that women of all ages often turn first to their religious institutions and to women's groups for help and support in seeking solutions to their problems.

Women's issues have been underfunded and largely ignored by Jewish philanthropies (*Voices for Change*, 1995). Although research on American Jewry is abundant, research on American Jewish women is sparse even though it is clear that the aggregated data mask information peculiar to Jewish women. Jewish programs and surveys have been criticized as being male biased, with most findings representing the experiences of both men and women using a male paradigm. For example, no gender lens was used in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey or in most identity and community studies conducted by Jewish communities upon which most Jewish communal programming is being planned. Likewise, research on women does not break out statistics pertaining to Jewish women, even though there are indicators of differences that should signify unique sensitivities in programming for this population group analogous to the sensibilities shown toward the unique concerns of African-American or Latina women.

## **ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES OF THE JEWISH WOMEN'S FOUNDATION**

A Jewish women's foundation is a second-generation model within the still-nascent women's funding movement. A Jewish women's fund brings new support into both the women's community and the Jewish community. It also engages the Jewish community in a different communal funding process than the traditional allocation model of communal grant making.

In establishing a Jewish women's foundation, a federation cannot simply capitalize on the concept of "women's issues" and hope to harvest a strong communal response. For a Jewish women's fund to be successful in attracting and sustaining new money beyond the first burst of publicity, a federation must enable it to incorporate, carefully and intentionally, a programmatic context for systemic transformation for women and girls. It must provide a forum for the empowerment and self-determination of Jewish women as funders. The way for the Jewish community to accomplish these goals is to reach out beyond its parameters to incorporate the ground-breaking ideas advanced in the secular women's funding movement as well as the grant-making philosophies of the growing foundation community and apply a Jewish substantive and organizational context.

The Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago is being organized in accordance with these principles. The word "women" has a double meaning: Women are the actors as well as the objects in the JWF. The JWF is women—informed, empowered decision-makers funding solutions to problems that women face.

The JWF grew out of the vision of the president of the Chicago Jewish federation, Steven Nasatir, and the collaborative efforts of staff and lay leadership, particularly from Women's Division and Legacies & Endowments. The federation is providing the seed money and operational costs for the JWF.

In effect, the JWF is an independent project of the federation. The Trustees have independent control over the JWF's grantmaking

processes and decision making, as JWF grantmaking is not part of the federation allocation process. The JWF operates like a community foundation and is an independent member of the Donor's Forum, the local Regional Association of Grantmakers (RAG), the Women's Funding Network, the Jewish Funding Network, and several other grantmaking associations. There is no requirement that JWF prioritize or even target the federated agencies in making grants. The only conditions imposed by the federation are strategies designed to avoid conflict with the Jewish United Fund's annual campaign and to develop significant resources to fund the JWF as quickly as possible. These parameters establish a sensible framework for the JWF:

- JWF is set up as an endowment fund restricted to its purposes.
- Grants are made from the income and investment rate of return on the endowment principal.
- An endowing gift of \$10,000, payable over five years, maintains a five-year Trusteeship. An endowing gift of \$100,000, also payable over five years, entitles the donor to Transgenerational Trusteeship for her lifetime and her family through the generations, assuring a place for her, her children, grandchildren, and their progeny in the decision-making process forever. Moreover, each generation of the Transgenerational Family—the donor, her children, and grandchildren—sit together as Trustees on the Foundation. Trustees who make a commitment to the endowment fund through the end of 1998 are being permanently acknowledged as Founders.
- A Trustee is like a shareholder—an empowered decision maker who has a vote, directly or by proxy, on grantmaking and governance.
- Trustees cannot reduce their gifts to the annual federation campaign that provides the daily sustenance of vital social welfare programs. A recently completed analysis

of the giving patterns of the JWF Trustees indicates that no Trustee reduced her gift to the annual campaign after joining the Foundation. Rather, several Trustees increased their pledges, and some Trustees made a gift to the annual campaign for the very first time. The majority of Trustees who joined the JWF had flat annual giving patterns over the past three years. Several Trustees had no previous affiliation with the federation, and many Trustees were new to women's funding.

- JWF dollars are not to be used as substitute dollars, but rather as catalyst funds to expand existing programs or create new initiatives that address problems of women and girls.
- The JWF endowment will be invested, with all the endowment funds managed by the federation, and the JWF Trustees have two representatives on the federation's Finance Committee with a voice in all federation finance and investment matters.

In providing the operational money for the JWF, the Chicago Jewish federation is making a bold statement: It wants to stretch and seek solutions within and without. Although there are a considerable array of programs and services in the community involving Jewish women and girls, the goal of the JWF is different—it aims to make a significant, systemic difference in the lives of Jewish women and girls in Chicago. The JWF's objective is to help the community—with support, respect, and understanding—transform itself to meet the needs of Jewish women and girls.

However, despite these strong organizing principles and ideals, the Jewish Women's Foundation was faced with an opportunity and a dilemma. The opportunity—JWF is intended as a funding vehicle for the interests and concerns of women without restriction. Moreover, as an endowment fund, the JWF is assured a secure, long-term funding impact and program potential for women. The dilemma—in light of the federation culture,

would a program such as JWF be viewed as sufficiently independent both from within and from without? How could a framework for inclusion of community, constituent voices, and expertise be built into the JWF structure? The public image and the internal grasp of this vision were critical to the success of the endeavor.

Thus, in developing the JWF, the first and ultimately perhaps most difficult task has been to build a framework of definition and inclusion. How and by whom would the agenda of the JWF be defined? Nothing less than the legitimacy and effectiveness of the JWF as a women's fund were at stake.

In order to make a significant shift in the funding paradigm, the JWF has consciously sought to attract both progressive and traditional funders to its ranks, including the voices of those from within and without the organized Jewish community and the federated structures. There must be a meld in order to transform. Perhaps describing the vision with which the Chicago federation staffed the JWF will help describe the balance and synergy necessary for a Jewish Women's Foundation to move beyond the walls of the federation and act, and be perceived, as a communal catalyst and systemic change agent. The director is an attorney who is a feminist, teaches gender, law, and politics; and has recognized professional expertise in grassroots and women's rights advocacy both within and outside the Jewish community. Working in collaboration on this project is the assistant director who is a former federation board member and Women's Division volunteer leader who in midlife re-entered the workforce.

The contextual vision that the JWF has developed is aggressive, yet inclusive:

- to promote programs and services that enhance the lives of Jewish women and girls
- to address the specific needs of Jewish women and girls
- to fund organizations or projects that target or are consciously designed for Jewish women and girls

- to help transform the Jewish community to better adapt to the changed role of women in society
- to consider funding requests from any organization, institution, or agency that advances the mission of the Foundation
- to include the voices of Jewish women and girls from all of Judaism's pluralistic streams
- to reach out to Jewish women and girls who are marginalized
- to be empowered women decision makers in terms of financial literacy, economic power, investment know-how, and informed philanthropy
- to become grantmakers within the context of being Jewish women: celebrating our identities, recapturing our biblical and historic stories, and honoring our tradition of *tzedekah*

Most critically, in order to become an effective, strategic grantmaking body, as a new foundation developing a new funding model, the JWF has taken the time to become an educated grantmaker. It has taken conscious steps to transform a large group of donors and philanthropists—many of whom have little experience as grantmakers or knowledge of women's issues—into funders. The challenge has been to create a vehicle that transcends the individual as checkwriter with personal favorite projects into a deliberative body of pooled thinking and resources that has these capacities:

- to understand the partnership of philanthropy created in a grant/grantee relationship
- to understand and wield the power of decision making, giving, and investing
- to take the time to understand, identify, and define what is meant by funding women's and girls' issues in a Jewish context

The JWF reached outside itself to be educated, not just entertained; it developed extensive programming to learn what is meant

by a gender lens and how to internalize these new concepts in the federation and in the Jewish community. At each step of the process, the JWF has involved leading experts, resources, and constituent voices. In its first eighteen months, the JWF has launched these educational initiatives:

- It established the Jewish Women and Girls Resource Center, a repository of information for the Trustees as grantmakers, as well as the community at large.
- It completed a comprehensive survey of the Chicago area, identifying programs and initiatives addressing Jewish women and girls' issues.
- It organized a series of educational workshops with leading authorities in the field to help the Trustees coalesce into a deliberative body of strategic grantmakers. Topics included "What is a Foundation," "Jewish Women and Girls Initiatives," "Funding with a Gender Lens," "Starting the Process, Determining our Missions, Setting our Priorities and Writing our Guidelines," "The How-to's of Grantmaking," "Sh'ma Koleinu: Listening to the Voices of Jewish Women," and "Strategic Grantmaking: How a New Fund Makes an Impact with Limited Dollars."
- The JWF held a special event celebrating its founding. After a dinner buffet, a soprano performed an inspirational medley of classical and popular songs that embody women's aspirations, and prototypes of art pieces specially commissioned for the JWF were on display for the Trustees, their families, and friends to examine and enjoy.

The Foundation has created many resource materials to help achieve its goals:

- An award-winning brochure evoking imagery of the biblical foremothers and depicting the inclusion of three generations of women usually absent in the communal refrain, "Sh'ma Koleinu: Hear our Voices" was designed with the input of a focus group comprised of women rabbis

and cantors in the Chicago area.

- A *matzoh* cover, "Until All Are Free," which recalls the parting of the waters of the Red Sea emanating from Miriam's Well, was specially designed for the JWF by a Jewish feminist artist and commissioned for each Trustee. Three generations of women within the Foundation's emblem stand under a bower of oranges, recalling the "orange on the Seder plate" and the symbolism of the *chupah* of Jewish life. The linen pocket on the reverse alludes to the cloth in which Miriam and Yochobed wrapped the infant Moses, thereby saving the Jewish people.
- A painting, entitled "Our Mothers, Our Daughters, Ourselves," has been developed for the Foundation by a Judaic artist for presentation to each of our Transgenerational Families. It shows an image of a timeless woman, authoritative, compassionate, and looking into the future. A special rendering of the painting including a listing of the Founding Trustees will be permanently displayed at the federation office.
- The JWF Trustee Manual includes articles from *The Voices for Change* (1995) and studies on women board members of major American Jewish organizations, Chicago women in philanthropy, corporate funding for women's issues, corporate foundation giving to women's and girls' programs, a grantmaker's guide to using a gender lens, Jewish women's philanthropy, and feminist philanthropy.
- A JWF handbook on the Grantmaking process has also been prepared.

The JWF has established a comprehensive grants process, administrative procedures, and democratic governance mechanisms. The JWF funding guidelines are being distributed this summer, and JWF will engage in proposal review, grant recommendations, site visits, and evaluations during the fall of 1998. The JWF will distribute approximately \$73,000 in its first funding cycle, with the allocations to be announced during Hanukkah 1998. The initiatives to be considered for

funding address such concerns as women and girls in Jewish education, spirituality, Jewish women studies programs, Jewish women in the arts and in sports, economic security, lifestyles, advocacy, health, violence, and abuse. While the Foundation prioritizes funding initiatives in the Chicago area, it will also consider making grants to projects in Israel, the Former Soviet Union, or other international or national programs addressing Jewish women and girls. As the JWF distributes income from an ever-increasing endowment principal, the distribution amount is expected to increase exponentially over the years.

### CONCLUSION

A Jewish women's fund is a way for the Jewish community to apply a gender lens to how Jewish women and girls live their lives and care for their families. Within the Jewish community, we need to identify new safety nets and springboard so that women and girls can participate fully in community, family, and work. Their traditional roles as mother and caretaker remain a prominent part of most women's daily lives, but require support services that address the diverse environments in which women are now found. A Jewish women's fund can (1) be a catalyst for better and affordable child care programs, (2) help link women with available services, and (3) provide basic information and sup-

port about parenting and parent support programs. The specter of physical violence, from battery to forcible rape, is a factor that isolates women. A Jewish women's fund can be a catalyst for domestic violence programs and programs that assist female victims of crime. A Jewish women's fund can be a catalyst for initiatives that target role modeling, mentoring, skill building, and retooling and create an environment for full participation of women and girls. A Jewish women's fund can be a catalyst for helping organizations that serve women and or girls fill significant information and service gaps, such as projects dealing with the needs of breast cancer patients or those suffering from eating disorders. A Jewish women's fund can be a catalyst for fair and equitable treatment for women within all major institutions of our community.

### REFERENCES

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