

JCC Movement & JCCA Background

About JCC Association

JCC Association is the continental umbrella organization for the Jewish Community Center movement, which includes more than 350 JCCs, YM-YWHAs and camp sites in the United States and Canada. JCC Association offers a wide range of services and resources to help its affiliates provide educational, cultural, social, Jewish identity-building and recreational programs for people of all ages and backgrounds. JCC Association supports the largest network of Jewish early childhood centers and Jewish summer camps in North America, and is also a U.S government accredited agency for serving the religious and social needs of Jewish military personnel through JWB Jewish Chaplains Council.

The History of the JCC Movement

The JCC movement started in 1854 when the first Young Men's Hebrew Association opened its doors in Baltimore to provide support for Jewish immigrants, help ensure Jewish continuity and to provide a place for celebration. Similar associations opened soon after serving as libraries, cultural centers, and settlement houses.

As immigration swelled in the late nineteenth century, YMHAs and Jewish Community Centers helped immigrants adapt to North American life by teaching them English, assisting their acculturation to new customs and mores, and helping them to participate fully in the civic responsibilities and opportunities of their new democratic home.

The Council of Young Men's Hebrew & Kindred Associations was founded in 1913 to coordinate and promote the efforts of the independent centers. It was the first permanent body to which the individual centers could turn for networking, guidance and support.

Responding to the First World War, YMH&KA secured funds to enlist rabbis for service at military posts and called a conference of several Jewish bodies, giving birth to the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) in 1917, which developed a comprehensive infrastructure for attending to the welfare of Jewish military personnel.

JWB took over the responsibilities of YMH&KA when the two organizations merged shortly after the war. The new JWB continued to serve Jewish Americans in the armed forces both at home and abroad, and became the national association of JCCs and YM-YWHAs.

Newfound prosperity propelled many Jews to the suburbs in the nineteen fifties and sixties. With more leisure time and disposable income, Jews sought recreational Opportunities and other new pursuits. JCCs built large, modern facilities to serve the suburban populations. A host of new offerings included day camps, teen travel camps, fine art and performing arts, nursery schools, athletics and sports, services to the elderly and informal education. Additionally, other organization began to be housed within JCC walls.

With the heightened pride in Israel and Judaism in the aftermath of the Six Day War of 1967, JCCs flourished with Jewish celebrations and cultural events, including book fairs, film festivals, communal Hanukkah parties, and rallies for Soviet Jewry, and Israel Independence Day extravaganzas. Many JCCs recruited Israeli shlichim and sent delegations on trips to Israel.

In order to explore our role in Jewish education, the Committee on Maximizing Jewish Education and Effectiveness (COMJEE) was initiated by JWB in 1982, under the leadership of the Mandel Commission. Together with COMJEE II in 1995, the process has led the way for the JCC also to become a significant institution of Jewish education, as reflected in programming, adult education, ambiance, staff training and leadership.

In 1990, JWB changed its name to Jewish Community Centers Association of North America to better reflect the agency's evolved scope and mission.

Today

JCC Association serves more than 350 JCC, YM-YWHA, and camp sites. Together, they represent a movement of vital importance to individual communities and to the larger North American Jewish Community. From its New York headquarters and its Southern and Western Region and Israel Offices, JCC Association has provided leadership in the areas of staff recruitment and training, lay leadership development, field research, professional conferences and workshops, consultation, publications, and specialized programming, enabling each constituent JCC to better serve the needs of its members and community. JCC Association has facilitated reshaping of the goals of the Movement, creating standards of quality throughout the field, maximizing the use of telecommunications, and facilitating the cross-fertilization of ideas by enabling leaders of JCCs throughout North America to share resources and to collaborate on common concerns.

The JCC Movement is leading the way to a vibrant future by establishing cooperative ventures with local and national Jewish organizations, by supporting Jewish culture, community, and education, and by encouraging and enabling Jews of all ages and backgrounds to engage in the joys of Jewish living.

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