

OUR JEWISH FAMILY



A CONFERENCE ON
DIVERSITY AND
INCLUSION

Summary Report – Our Jewish Family

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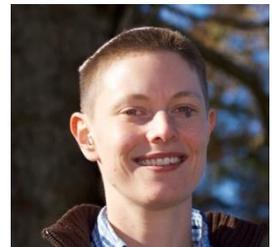
March 21, 2018

On March 12th the Winnipeg Jewish community gathered professionals and volunteer leadership to open their thinking about diversity in community. Several community members shared their personal experiences and identified changes and improvements that could be undertaken to make the community and its institutions more inclusive.

Sessions and Purposes:

1. **Clinical Best Practices for Supporting Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Individuals:**
In-servicing Clinical professionals who work in the Jewish community on the language and challenges of gender non-conformity, and supporting individuals in transition.

30 professionals and interested individuals attended the 3 hour session with **Rabbi Micah Buck-Yael** from St. Louis, who provided definition, an understanding of the challenges, and stressed the importance of language and acceptance.



2. **Workshops:** Open the minds of professionals of all kinds who work in the Jewish community and some of their volunteer leadership on various kinds of inclusion challenges.

60 people from Jewish organizations and the community heard about various kinds of inclusion challenges and benefits: disabilities, gender non-conformity, cross-cultural and intermarried families, and adults who are newly single.

3. **Jewish thought on Diversity:** Provide volunteer leadership and professionals from Jewish organizations with Jewish thought on inclusion and begin to develop thinking about language and action planning.

The evening session focused on Jewish values and changing environment for inclusion with 25 individuals reflecting the breadth of organizations in the community.

The resounding theme from the day was:

Accommodation for one benefits everyone.

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4. **Action Planning for Diversity and Inclusion:** Gather representatives of Jewish organizations to plan for improved inclusion in all our Jewish environments.



Linda Kislowicz moderated one afternoon session and brought the results of the March 12th conference into a planning session the next day. She summarized what we heard.

“Consider the language of forms, public relations materials and web sites. Consider gender inclusive washrooms. Consider ramps and other simple wheelchair accessible changes. Consider family friendly programs that are open to different cultures and religions. Small incremental changes would make a significant difference.”

The 2 day experience ended with a multi organizational gathering of professionals who were inspired to develop a community wide plan that would up their community’s capacity to be inclusive.

Attendance:

- 100 individuals registered or walked in the day of the conference, staff who work for Jewish organizations, board members, and some interested community members
- 17 Jewish organizations were represented reflecting
 - 2 seniors’ programs,
 - 6 youth focused programs,
 - 2 schools,
 - 3 programs that serve people with disabilities specifically,
 - 4 synagogues
 - a whole bunch of family and adult programming services,
 - and JCFS with a breadth of related programs too numerous to list.

The Partners: The conference was a joint initiative of Jewish Child and Family Service, Rose and Max Rady Jewish Community Centre and the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg. The day was generously supported through a grant from the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba.

Conference Planning Group:

Faye Rosenberg-Cohen, Community Planning and Allocations Director, Jewish Federation of Winnipeg
Shana Menkis, Director of Operations, Jewish Child and Family Service
Tamar Barr, Assistant Executive Director, Rose and Max Rady Jewish Community Centre

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What did we achieve? In 2 days the community's inclusive IQ grew exponentially. And a collaborative spirit among all the participating organizations prevailed. Cross agency working teams were tasked with moving the plan forward over the next few months.

Thanks to our presenters and facilitators:

- Rabbi Micah Buck-Yael, coordinator of community chaplaincy with the Jewish Family & Children's Service in St. Louis, Missouri
- Linda Kislowicz, President & CEO, Jewish Federations Canada – UIA
- Yutta Fricke, Disabilities Issues Office
- Marc Schaeffer, community member speaking on cross-cultural family experience
- Laura Sonin, community member speaking on the challenges of re-integrating as a single

Draft Action Plan:

As a result of the summation and action planning undertaken the day after the conference, senior leadership who were present committed to action items and to carrying the conversation forward. These action plans will be included in the Community Forward Action Plan being developed by the Community Planning Committee of the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg.

Steering Group: The Community Planning Committee of the Jewish Federation will act as the umbrella group to gather the cross-section of representation on a regular (perhaps twice per year) basis to ensure progress on inclusion. This may take the form of a standing sub-committee to ensure ongoing attention, with the **goal of continuously improving inclusion in the Jewish community**. Committees will be multi-representational, led by Federation as convener.

The Steering Group will consider creating advisory groups to ensure legitimacy through community/end user representation; role model the practice of inclusion; perhaps a professional advisory board to help

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Principles:

- Language matters, but the sensitivities are not the same for everyone. Public awareness is needed to ensure language changes with the times.
- The prevailing and newer approach is to offer accommodation and then listen to what is required to support an individual. It is not sufficient to offer a menu of adaptations and expect an individual to fit into the list, with staff anticipating needs and assuming the list will do. The newer service model is to ask: “what do you need/want/how you identify, what do you need from me?” While this won’t take a lot in retraining and retooling, it is a philosophical shift.
- Top down and bottom up – organizations must take the initiative but must listen to the potential users of service.
- Relevant Jewish values:
 - **Tzelem Elohim** – צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים – **image of God** – The foundational principle of Jewish ethics that every human being is created in the image of God and must be treated accordingly (*Genesis 1:27; Genesis Rabbah 24*).
 - **Lifnei Iver Lo Titen Michshol** – לִפְנֵי עֵוֶר לֹא תִתֵּן מִכְשׁוֹל – **do not place a stumbling block before a blind man** – Applied to the sin of keeping someone in ignorance from information that will protect him/her, or to the sin of making it easier for someone else to commit crimes (*Leviticus 19:14; Maimonides, Book of Commandments, neg. 299*).

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Different focus areas were identified for action:

A. Communications: *Improve forms, websites, signage to remove or provide choices and remove exclusions such as gender.*

- Begin with a quick inventory.
- Changing forms to take off salutation, male/female/other or gender and blank space...take out or modify gender language, and accompany with education for the community.
- Add the question about accommodation to make your experience better.
- Also applies to websites, etc.
- Implies changing computer systems.
- Photos on promotional material that reflects the full diversity of the community.

B. Vision and policy: *Develop vision statement and policies that can be used or form the base for each Jewish organization*

- Satisfy the requirements for non-profits by November 2018 in the Accessibility for Manitobans Act; Develop draft Customer Service policies in April.
- Shift our thinking over the long term. When we implement change that benefits one or a few it benefits everyone. Short term action helps us stay on the path, a small change doesn't alienate current population, just adds acceptance for everyone.
- Articulating a community vision will help organizations choose strategies without risk of losing themselves in the task. Each organization's board of directors will need to adopt vision, policies, etc. to raise consciousness, endorsing appropriate principles and guidelines for staff, volunteers, members, etc.
- Employer responsibilities: consider diverse hiring and workplace policies.

C. Education and Training: *Impart the necessary skills and knowledge to staff and volunteers in all orgs to create a welcoming environment.*

- "Upping the Game! In terms of Welcoming-ness", starting at the front door. Everyone needs training in customer service, accommodation, and security.
 - Consider a kiosk at the front door of Campus, staffed by trained volunteers, who will improve the welcome.
- Youth targeted education
- Public Education – e.g. "Can we Talk About", JCFS's annual lecture, will address gender identity in 2018.

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- D. Outreach and Advocacy:** *Create a renewed focus on reaching out and supporting anyone who needs accommodation or guidance through the community.*
- Develop strategy for renewed mentorship of parents by parents who are advocating for their children's' needs.
 - Institutionalize advocacy for improved inclusion in our systems.
 - Work with Jewish Education and Engagement Committee on outreach, Jewish social networking: Ambassadorships, bridging the gaps, teaching the difference between friendly and welcoming, surface manners vs inviting someone to your home or to go with you to an event; need more "West Coast behaviour"
 - Sensitivity to people of colour, and other differences, as welcoming with older kids as with daycare kids.
- E. Physical Plant:** *Identify low hanging fruit and long term planning issues to improve access.*
- Improve signage.
 - Washroom signs – gender neutral, single washroom, now more possible in the building code, like the gender neutral change room/family change room – just a washroom sign
 - New signage for people with disabilities – e.g. like the new symbols ordered for the locker room
 - Plan for gender neutral bathrooms.
- F. Intersection of Jewish practice and inclusion:** *Improve inclusion in Judaism in Winnipeg*
- Intersection of programming and the language in the programming in light of traditional Jewish practice, inclusive in delivery and content;
 - Help community members navigate the Jewish world. E.g. young couple who wants to marry, parents of special needs child of age for bnai mitzvah;
 - Bring rabbis to the table
 - Don't assume denominational differences are the barriers, while respecting differences
 - e.g. Chabad rabbis working with addicts and ex-cons, etc.
 - Ask the right person! Ask them what they **can** do.

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Starting Working Group volunteers from the planning session:

- A. Communications** - Rob to chair, Shana, Sandy, Lauren, Ariel, JCC Rep
- B. Vision and Policy** – Ian to chair, Ran, Al, Danial, Lina/Jonathan
- C. Education and Training** - Tamar, Sandy, Shana, Rob, ask for Asper Campus rep
- D. Outreach and Advocacy** - not identified separately at the meeting
- E. Physical plant** – Tara, Campus rep, Danial, Gray rep, JCC rep, Synagogue reps
- F. Intersection of Jewish practice and inclusion** - not identified separately at the meeting