

JEWISH FEDERATION AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Host location: Jewish Family Services /

Date: 2014 February 6

No. of attendees: 9

Born & raised in Edmonton: 2

Avg length of time: 32 (but the 7 long-timers avg 41; 2 newcomers avg <1 year)

What brought you to Edmonton? How long here?

- Didn't like Montréal - 44 years
- Followed a lover from Israel – 37 years
- Born here- 60 yrs
- From south Africa- needed a more acceptable passport – 40 years, 39 years
- From Russia- Canada offered us Edmonton – 35 years
- Born here – recent convert – 34 years
- Moved from east Africa- needed roots and family was here – 1 year
- Came for medical study- 5 months

How do you find Jewish community in general in Edmonton

- Here it seems if you don't go to synagogue, you are not part of Jewish community
- Israeli background- there was always a separation between religious Jews and "Israelis". There are a lot of Israelis here who may not feel they have a place to go to be part of the community. There is a disconnect between Israel and Jewish community because community is based on religious observance
- Many feel that they are Israel first, Jewish second
- A lack of place to come together if you are not religious, like the Italian community has the Italian centre, etc., hang out.
- When I first came I avoided the community- did not like politics, felt judged for not keeping up; found a family/connection at JFS.
- Saw many immigrants trying to hide their Jewishness in order to succeed. Their Russian passport said one of Russian, Ukrainian or Jewish. Being Jewish came with a stigma. Youth stuck together when we came to Canada and JCC was hugely important for a sense of community because we could come in for free.
- It took 30 years, but I am now being more involved with non-Russian Jewish community.
- When I first came here, JCC was very important for me to meeting people. Now not involved. But I have a family and married to an Israeli and want our daughter to be connected, but we have trouble getting into the community- been to a few events and did not feel particularly welcome.
- In a same-sex marriage and unsure where my welcome will be- it is not visible.
- Other than my synagogue, I don't find any gathering place for the community in general. As a convert I don't find other places to be in the community
- There are those who are fully integrated and doing all and being all, and it costs a lot and they can afford it; there are those who strive to be part of that full integration, but struggle, often because of cost; there are those not willing or not able to get involved for various reasons- feel disenfranchised.
- I like the small community, feels it is supportive, inviting – been here short time

Aspirations? Challenges and barriers?

- Need places for networking, connecting
- Recent convert- want places to connect
- Need a place to share Jewish identity, for adults and for children, build a sense of community among other Jews – 5 months
- Want to give young daughter a Jewish identity but not religious
- Want a Jewish place that is welcoming and inclusive of diversity
- Want a community centre for people to gather, children & youth
- If a community centre, it needs to be free to access for newcomers so people can feel included
- the old JCC had no welcoming affect- this can be changed
- Would love to have places like an Israeli coffee shop. Would be willing to be involved and take leadership for something like this
- Younger generation needs places to be
- Like a place that mixes generations and religious-non-religious – I feel excluded at the Drop In Centre.
- Want more kindness in the community

What value of a gathering place? Purpose?

- Include people who are not part of some other shul or group
- There is a reason we don't really know how many Jews in our community- there are a lot of people who have no place they feel they can belong- a JCC could make it possible for them to be
- If you want a Jewish life but not religious, neutral place- where else to go but a JCC
- Has to be something that really attracts, that they cannot get somewhere else- something Jewish, something welcoming, exciting programming
- Something for all ages and for families, programs, lectures
- Hebrew language school that is not religious
- 1st & 2nd temple were for everyone- the JCC should be that place
- Multi-generational and Jewish- you don't get this feeling of belonging at the YMCA
- A place to be Jewish collectively in community, meet people
- A space to just be- a social environment not necessarily with organized activity
- Not far to get to – centrally located – often the people who are not now very included are living outside of the west end and have difficulty travelling
- Welcoming, inclusive tone – the approach is of primary importance even above programming
- Main point of contact for a Jewish welcome wagon (for newcomers)
- A place for mixed couples to stay connected with community, also for goyish partner to learn
- A place to celebrate Jewish holidays other than synagogue
- Check out Jewish Outreach Institute approach for ideas