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Improving Outreach to Jewish Parents with Young Children in Milwaukee

A Report to the Helen Bader Foundation

Mark I. Rosen, Ph.D.
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Acknowledgements

This project started as a result of a chance encounter with Tobey Libber, Program Officer at the Helen Bader Foundation. I was visiting the Milwaukee JCC in November 2005, and was invited to sit in on a meeting between Tobey and the director. After the meeting, I asked Tobey for a bit of his time, and he listened with interest to my description of a national study that I had undertaken to learn about Jewish programs for parents with children age three and under. With Tobey’s encouragement, I applied for a grant from the Helen Bader Foundation. Its board subsequently provided generous funding for the study, even though the foundation’s focus is local. It was clear that the foundation wanted me to take what I would be learning around the country and apply it to Milwaukee.

Neither the national study nor the document you are reading would have been completed without Tobey’s support. Throughout this project, he provided sound advice and reacted with enthusiasm to my unconventional perspectives. I am deeply grateful to him.

Sue Strait, a lay leader with the Milwaukee JCC and the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, served as liaison, confidante, and political advisor. She helped arrange many of the interviews, accompanied me to them, and debriefed with me afterward. Milwaukee is lucky to have her dedication and skills.

Sheryl Primakow, Planning Director for the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, provided invaluable perspectives on the inner dynamics of Milwaukee’s Jewish institutions and served as a voice of reason. Her support and guidance were much appreciated.

Jay and Susan Roth of the Milwaukee JCC arranged a series of meetings with busy JCC staff members and with volunteers, enabling me to obtain the information I sought. I am grateful for their assistance.
As the first Lubavitch couple to come to Wisconsin, Rabbi Yisroel Shmotkin and Devorah Shmotkin provided a view of Milwaukee’s Jewish community based on nearly forty years of experience. Their dedication to the Jews of Wisconsin is nothing less than awe-inspiring. I can honestly say that no one else who I met with evoked so many smiles.

Rabbi Shari Shamah had already developed a strong interest in Jewish parents with young children by the time we met. Our conversations as Jewish professionals with a common passion were highly stimulating and helpful.

Finally, I wish to thank all of the other professionals and volunteers in Milwaukee who took the time to meet with me or attend one of my presentations. From the impressive quality of these individuals, I can only conclude that parents in Milwaukee are fortunate to have such a rich environment and that it is a wonderful place for children to grow up.
Improving Outreach to Families with Young Children in Milwaukee

*Milwaukee is an ideal place to raise a family.*

Meg McKenna, founder of MilwaukeeMoms.com

Introduction

Perhaps no event in life is comparable to becoming a parent for the first time. The birth or adoption of a child is a joyous moment accompanied by intense feelings. New parents are excited, exhausted, and full of anticipation. There is celebration and wonder, gift giving and baby naming, reorientation and realization. Friends and family reach out. Connections are sought with others who have just undergone the same life-changing experience. Parents naturally begin to seek support and guidance on how to raise their child.

Jewish parents are like any other parents – they want the best future for their children. To shape this future, they seek to become involved with institutions and individuals who will help and guide them. For the most part, Jewish and intermarried parents do not seek out institutions that are specifically Jewish. Rather, what drives their choices are quality and convenience. As highly educated consumers, these parents tend to become involved with secular institutions, especially those parents who have had minimal exposure to Jewish religion and tradition.

Jewish parents do not necessarily have negative feelings about Jewish institutions. Rather, parents choose secular institutions because they may not know that Jewish options are available. Alternately, Jewish institutions may lack the services and information they are looking for, or secular institutions may be perceived as having higher quality services.
Jewish parents who become involved with secular institutions will be much less likely to make Jewish friends. Since Jewish friends lead to Jewish choices, these parents will have little involvement with Jewish tradition during their child’s early formative years. Children raised in households lacking Jewish tradition will probably not attend Jewish preschools or supplementary schools, will not have Jewish friends themselves, and will not be exposed to Jewish holidays and traditions. These children will grow up with a weak or non-existent Jewish identity.

It is thus incumbent upon the Jewish community of Milwaukee to reach Jewish parents as early as possible after they begin a family, when the future religious trajectory of their life is being created, and when that trajectory can more readily be shifted.

Many positive steps have already been taken for Jewish parents in Milwaukee by Milwaukee’s Jewish institutions. This report describes Milwaukee’s strengths regarding outreach to parents with young children, and provides suggestions for building on these strengths.

**Project Description**

In 2005-06, the Helen Bader Foundation provided funding for a national study of programs for parents with young children ages birth through three conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, which resulted in the publication of a 127 page report entitled *Jewish Engagement from Birth: A Blueprint for Outreach to First-Time Parents*. The Helen Bader Foundation subsequently provided funding support for the present study, the aim of which was to apply the findings of the national study to Milwaukee in the hope that Milwaukee might improve its offerings to Jewish parents.

In February, April, and June of 2007, the principal investigator conducted a series of interviews with Jewish professionals and secular parenting experts in Milwaukee, representing a

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1 See [www.cmjs.org/parents](http://www.cmjs.org/parents)
wide range of individuals and agencies. Appendix A provides a list of those interviewed along with their affiliations. The remainder of this report summarizes the information gathered through these interviews and offers recommendations.

**Overview of Existing Strengths**

When compared with other communities that have programs for parents with young children, the interviews revealed that Milwaukee has a number of unique strengths:

- The Harry and Rose Samson Jewish Community Center has been at the national forefront of programming for parents for over 20 years, and has an ever-growing range of programs for parents. There are relatively few JCCs around the country where families with young children have such a prominent strategic role in the business plan.

- Chabad is highly prominent, visible, and influential in Milwaukee relative to almost any other Jewish community in the country. In particular, the reputation of Jewish Beginnings, the Chabad preschool, attracts a number of families who might not otherwise become involved with a Jewish institution.

- The Helen Bader Foundation plays a major role in fostering new and creative programming. Unlike most other federation-driven communities, where change can be slow because of federation committee structures, innovation in Milwaukee is able to occur relatively quickly.

- Milwaukee has many secular institutions that offer sophisticated services and programs to parents, providing expertise that the Jewish community can draw upon.
**Geographic and Demographic Considerations**

Milwaukee has not conducted a demographic study of its Jewish population since 1996, so no current data is available.\(^2\) However, broad trends are readily identifiable.

Milwaukee’s Jewish population is heavily concentrated in its North Shore suburbs of Shorewood, Whitefish Bay, Fox Point, and Bayside, which border Lake Michigan. Glendale, just west of Whitefish Bay, also has a significant Jewish population. Further north is the newer suburb of Mequon, with a somewhat less concentrated but growing Jewish population.

This population density makes it easy for Jewish parents to attend programs. The concentration of Milwaukee’s Jewish population in one area means that unlike many Jewish communities, attendance at Jewish programs does not require a long commute and the community does not need to provide programming in a variety of locations throughout the metropolitan area.

Most of the major Jewish institutions that serve parents are located in the North Shore. These include the JCC, all four of Milwaukee’s Jewish preschools, and the majority of its synagogues.

Given the prevailing non-Jewish environment in Wisconsin, Jews who live outside of these areas are especially isolated from anything Jewish.

Milwaukee’s modern Orthodox community resides in Glendale. More traditional Orthodox Jews are concentrated in the west side of Milwaukee. This group, many of whom are *baalei teshuvah*, Jews who were not raised Orthodox but have become observant later in life, poses a unique set of programming challenges:

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• This community tends to be less affluent, in part because Milwaukee’s school voucher program includes the traditional Orthodox day school, Yeshiva Elementary School (YES). YES attracts Orthodox Jews from other communities who would otherwise be unable to afford Jewish day school tuition for their children. Many of these Jews cannot afford Jewish preschools.

• West side Orthodox Jews do not need outreach programs to strengthen their Jewish identities, but they would benefit from parenting education. These parents are especially inclined to seek help from secular institutions in their neighborhood, partly because there are no Jewish options providing expertise in the west side, and partly to maintain anonymity.

• West side Orthodox mothers are bored at home and looking for programming and friendships. The JCC in Whitefish Bay, a 20 minute drive, offers neutral space, affordable options, and when the JCC café was operating, kosher food.

Milwaukee has a Russian Jewish population of several thousand, which is affluent, very focused on their children, but not connected to Milwaukee’s synagogues. Some, however, do belong to the Milwaukee Synagogue for Russian Jews on Milwaukee’s north side, and others are involved with Chabad. With respect to parenting outreach, this group receives relatively little attention, although there are some targeted services provided by Jewish Family Services.

**General Observations about Milwaukee Parents**

Relative to many other Jewish communities, especially those on the East and West Coasts, Milwaukee has low housing costs. These economic circumstances allow for more stay-at-home mothers than might be the case elsewhere. Professionals who provided broad
generalizations about Milwaukee parents indicated that Milwaukee’s mothers had lots of time on their hands and were looking for a place to go outside the home with their infants and toddlers.

Experience has shown that marketing is a critical factor in whether parents attend programs. Offering a program with a clever, fun, and interesting title potentially doubles or triples attendance. Location of programs is a secondary consideration – parents are willing to drive up to 20 minutes to attend something of interest.

To learn about program options, most parents in the city rely on the monthly Metroparent newspaper and MilwaukeeMoms.com. North Shore suburban parents, however, are more likely to rely on word of mouth because the website and paper do not have extensive North Shore listings.

Opinion makers and connectors were seen as the key to reaching parents. Certain parents are highly influential, and these parents have connections to many other parents. Identifying these individuals and getting them involved with outreach efforts would help to locate parents who are currently uninvolved with the Jewish community. Personal invitations are the best way to get parents who would not otherwise choose a Jewish program to come.

Professionals indicated that outreach efforts needed to be sincere – parents can immediately detect whether interest in them is genuine. One on one contact is essential to build relationships and inspire parents to take further Jewish steps. Professionals also suggested that parents needed to be given important volunteer responsibilities to get them invested.

Parents do not want to find themselves in situations where they feel ignorant about Judaism. Professionals pointed out that it is important to be sensitive so that parents never feel Jewishly inadequate.
Milwaukee’s Non-Jewish Institutions for Parents

Milwaukee has a well-developed and pervasive network of secular programs for parents offered by a variety of organizations and agencies. Interviews were conducted with professionals at medical and secular institutions that serve parents in Milwaukee, including Children’s Hospital, The Parenting Network, MilwaukeeMoms.com, the Milwaukee County Department of Human Services, and St. Francis Children’s Center. Metroparent Magazine declined to be interviewed.

Without exception, these professionals indicated that they served a number of Jewish parents, but their organizations had little or no contact with the Jewish community.

Utilizing Milwaukee’s Medical Community  Since expectant parents visit obstetricians’ offices on a regular basis, and new parents invariably choose a pediatrician, one of the very best ways to identify Jewish parents who are not connected to the Jewish community is through the medical community. While regulations prohibit physicians from providing names, physicians are not constrained from giving parents brochures or otherwise telling them about Jewish programs. The issue of religion is raised by obstetricians with all patients since they need to screen for the possibility of Ashkenazi genetic diseases.

Secular Agencies and Websites Serving Parents in Milwaukee  A number of nonprofit agencies serve parents in Milwaukee, providing classes, support groups, helplines, school-based programs, and home visits. The Milwaukee County Department of Human Services provides consultation to childcare centers and preschools.

Jewish parents approach these secular agencies when their children have developmental problems or when they have questions about parenting. Several professionals indicated that some Jewish parents came to them instead of Jewish Family Services because JFS was “too close to
home” and parents want anonymity. The west side Orthodox community is a major user of these services.

Several of the professionals interviewed, who were Jewish, expressed a willingness to serve on advisory committees for Jewish organizations.

Although as noted earlier, MilwaukeeMoms.com is not used as extensively by North Shore parents as it is by parents in the city, it is nevertheless a heavily trafficked website that publicizes events and provides a central clearinghouse of information. Its online discussion groups are highly popular and it offers an e-newsletter with wide distribution. Meg McKenna, the site’s founder, has considerable knowledge of what Milwaukee parents want and the marketing tactics that are most effective in reaching them. Although the JCC lists its programs on the MilwaukeeMoms.com website, this valuable resource is otherwise underutilized by Milwaukee’s Jewish community.

Professionals at non-Jewish preschools were not interviewed for this study. Anecdotally, it is clear that Jewish parents send their children to these schools. If findings from other communities are applicable to Milwaukee, then these parents choose non-Jewish preschools based on factors such as location, hours, quality, or cost, which are more salient to them than Jewish sponsorship.

Programs for Parents at Milwaukee’s Jewish Institutions

Relative to other Jewish communities its size, Milwaukee has a very rich array of programming for Jewish parents. Each of its major institutions will be examined in turn.

Jewish Preschools  
Milwaukee is currently one of two communities in the country (the other is Denver) that are participating in a community-wide initiative for preschool directors
conducted by the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative (JECEI). Preschool directors meet regularly to develop their skills with the assistance of a JECEI consultant, and interactions between preschools have been strengthened. Previously, each of the preschool directors operated independently.

Gan Ami, the JCC preschool at its main campus, directed by Pnina Goldfarb, is highly focused on creating a sense of community among its parents. Parents at the school come from a wide variety of backgrounds and perhaps a third of the children enrolled are from families where neither parent is Jewish.

Parents generally choose the preschool because of its location and reputation for quality. Some interfaith families that haven’t yet decided whether their children will be raised as Jews choose the school as a compromise.

The preschool’s parent committee is quite active. Over the past few years, Gan Ami has noted that its parents have changed. There are more dual-income families, parents have a greater interest in becoming involved in the preschool, and there is more of a desire for social events. The preschool is also trying to provide more of an educational component for parents over and above its primary mission of educating young children. Gan Ami reports that despite these interests, its parents are reluctant to provide their email addresses.

The JCC-sponsored preschool in Mequon located at Beth El Ner Tamid synagogue adheres to a similar philosophy.

Jewish Beginnings, the Chabad preschool, is located a short distance from Gan Ami in the same building as two Jewish day schools, the Milwaukee Jewish Day School and Hillel Academy. Established 32 years ago, it offers a stronger Jewish focus than Gan Ami, and does not enroll non-Jewish children. There has always been a historical competition between the two

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3 For information about JECEI, see www.jecei.org.
schools. Both are highly regarded, with state-of-the-art facilities. Jewish Beginnings has accreditation from NAEYC, a national accrediting body for preschools.

Parents are attracted to Jewish Beginnings because of its staff, curriculum, and reputation for providing detailed feedback to parents. In many cases, when first considering whether to enroll their children in the school, parents have no objection to its Jewish nature but do not see Jewish sponsorship as a deciding factor. Most are not looking for a Jewish experience for their children.

The school’s philosophy is to educate parents about Jewish tradition through their children. Children come home and share what they’ve learned with their parents, which generates a sense of Jewish curiosity among parents. The preschool finds ways to include parents in the learning environment. For example, on one Saturday night, the school holds a Havdalah program attended by two-year old children and their parents. The children make a Havdalah “kit” that is used in the event and then taken home. A similar family Shabbat event is held for 3 and 4 year-olds. The school also celebrates children’s Jewish birthdays, which teaches them about the Jewish calendar, and gives them a gift of a tzedakah box. The overarching goal is for families to acquire a complete set of keepsake Jewish ritual objects.

Jewish Beginnings also offers a parenting class to parents. Teachers send parents regular notes about their children’s progress which contain feedback about both Judaic and general learning.

Mequon Jewish Preschool, another Chabad preschool, is highly focused on attracting unaffiliated families who would not otherwise make Jewish choices. The director, Rivkie Spalter, recognizes that parents have fears about putting their children into a Jewish program and
need a place where they feel known, accepted, and cared for, a safe place where they don’t feel judged.

Mequon Jewish Preschool places a strong emphasis on education for parents and offers Baby University for parents of newborns to teach parenting skills, instill positive habits, and teach Jewish routines.

In February 2008, Jewish Beginnings, Gan Ami, the Mequon Jewish Preschool, Hillel Academy, Milwaukee Jewish Day School, and Jewish Family Services co-sponsored a “first-ever” Jewish Parenting Conference, held at the JCC facility and funded by the Helen Bader Foundation. The keynote speaker was Dr. Wendy Mogel, author of *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, and speakers included local Jewish educators, medical professionals, and mental health professionals. Over 250 parents attended. Another conference is planned for February 2009.

*JCC*  According to the JCC Association, the national umbrella organization for Jewish community centers, the Harry and Rose Samson Jewish Community Center is considered to be one of the top JCCs in the country in its offerings for parents. The JCC is viewed by most parents as “neutral territory” and parents who might not be comfortable going to a local synagogue tend to be more comfortable at the JCC.

A quick glance at the Harold and Terry Nash JCC Family and Parenting Center list of course offerings reveals more than ten different programs any given day of the week. About half of the users of the Parenting Center are not Jewish. A fee is required to join. The Parenting Center uses sophisticated marketing to attract parents, posting flyers on bulletin boards around Milwaukee and leaving them at doctor’s offices. They also list programs on MilwaukeeMoms.com. Recently, the Parenting Center and Gan Ami have been collaborating more extensively on programs. Previously, although each was located at the JCC, there was little
coordination between them. The Parenting Center is the single best feeder to subsequent enrollment in Gan Ami.

Rabbi Shari Shamah is the Jewish Family Specialist at the JCC and teaches Ethical Start in the Gan Ami preschool. She also teaches Aleph, Bet …Baby, a class for expectant parents co-taught with a licensed doula (childbirth expert). With the hiring of Rabbi Shamah, connections between the JCC and local synagogues have been strengthened. Previously, synagogues had not been very receptive to JCC overtures.

Dana Emold spends 15 hours a week as the Jewish Outreach Coordinator, drawing heavily on outreach models developed by the Manhattan-based Jewish Outreach Institute. Although the program is funded as a program for the community, it is based at the JCC and viewed as a JCC program.

Dana conducts programs such as Hanukah in the Aisles and Passover in the Aisles at local supermarkets outside the North Shore, arranges concerts, and runs programs in shopping malls. She sees herself as a “Jewish ambassador” who finds unconnected Jewish families where they already are, instead of hoping they will show up at the JCC. Results, according to Emold, are mixed.

Diane Boland spends 20 hours a week running the PJ Library, a national program created by the Massachusetts-based Harold Grinspoon Foundation, which sends free children’s books and CDs with Jewish content to families that self-identify as Jewish. The program starts when children are six months of age, and runs through age 6. Currently, 370 families subscribe to the program, with several outside of the Milwaukee area. Anecdotally, parents and children are very pleased with the program, but efforts to invite them to JCC events yield mixed results. Diane has

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4 For more information about the Jewish Outreach Institute, see www.joi.org.
5 For more information about the PJ Library, see www.pjlibrary.org.
conducted a number of public readings but has met with some resistance in arranging readings in non-Jewish settings. The program attracts some families who might not otherwise attend events with Jewish sponsorship, both because the books are attractive and because they are sent directly to private homes.

Shoshanah Bruesewitz spends 10 hours a week as the Interfaith Family Coordinator. She teaches the Mother’s Circle on Sunday afternoons, which is a program developed by the Jewish Outreach Institute to help non-Jewish mothers raising their children as Jews. She also organizes Shabbat dinners and a Havdalah gathering.

The Jewish family specialist, outreach, PJ Library, and interfaith positions at the JCC are all funded either fully or partially by the Helen Bader Foundation.

Individuals from other organizations observed that with the JCC’s increased number of professionals, lay involvement has decreased. It was also mentioned that JCC brochures describing programs are only sent to members, and that membership fees can be a barrier.

**Synagogues** With regard to parents with young children, synagogues offer both a more intimate environment and a more Jewish environment. Milwaukee’s synagogues, however, have lagged behind the JCC in offering programming for parents, although that situation is now beginning to shift. In general, rabbis have other priorities than parents with young children and it usually the case that regular synagogue services are not family-friendly. Milwaukee’s synagogues have increasingly been offering services specifically for families with young children as well as programs targeted for them.

Appendix B lists area synagogues that offer programs and services for parents. The list was generated by Rabbi Shari Shamah at the JCC and is given to parents who participate in JCC programs. No Orthodox synagogues are listed.
Rabbi Shamah spends 25 percent of her time doing outreach to synagogues to help them develop programming for young families. Prior to joining the JCC, she served as associate rabbi at Congregation Shalom, where she developed a successful program called Bagels, Books, and Babies.

The JCC recognizes that further growth is likely to come from families who are affiliated with synagogues but who are not JCC members. Having a former pulpit rabbi who has good relations with local rabbis has created more positive interactions between the JCC and local synagogues.

**Milwaukee Jewish Federation** The Women’s Division of The Milwaukee Jewish Federation offers a Shalom Baby program, one of 30 or so such programs around the country. When the Federation is notified about the birth of a baby by someone in the community, a volunteer brings a gift basket to the new parents. Word of mouth appears to be the best way to learn about new births. The program delivers approximately 50 baskets a year. The Federation also offers playgroups for Shalom Baby mothers every few months.

Interviews with volunteers in the program indicated that the program needed to do a better job of finding new parents. The program’s primary focus, according to Evy Garfinkel at the Federation, is to add names to the Federation’s solicitation lists. Over the past year, there has been greater communication between Shalom Baby and the JCC.

**Recommendations**

There is no Jewish community in the United States the size of Milwaukee that has a comparable level of programming for parents. Hence, the recommendations offered below are primarily refinements of existing efforts rather than bold new initiatives.
1) Milwaukee’s Jewish institutions need to work more collaboratively with secular institutions.

One of the clearest trends identified through the interviews was the Jewish community’s insularity relative to the larger Milwaukee community. Although the JCC does make use of cultural experts in music and theater, the Jewish community as a whole underutilizes local parenting experts, institutions, and resources. In particular:

- Jewish physicians who have already demonstrated interest in the community could be recruited to help the community make connections to obstetricians and pediatricians. For example, Dr. Robert Kliegman, Chairman of Pediatrics at the Medical College of Wisconsin, is well-connected throughout Milwaukee’s medical community and has trained many of Milwaukee’s pediatricians. When interviewed, he expressed a willingness to help the Jewish community network with physicians if approached.

- MilwaukeeMoms.com has a mailing list of 5,000 parents that could be utilized in a variety of ways to reach Jewish parents. With access to this list, and through collaboration with MilwaukeeMoms.com, it would be relatively easy to conduct a web-based survey of parents to identify interests, needs, and obstacles to involvement with the Jewish community.

- Jewish professionals employed by secular agencies that serve parents have indicated a willingness to contribute their expertise, but have not been approached.

2) Several groups of Jewish parents in Milwaukee are underserved.

- Orthodox parents on the west side rely primarily on secular parenting services and some are uncomfortable with the lack of Jewish content at JCC programs. Specific programs tailored to this group should be offered in conjunction with west side Jewish institutions,
not just for geographic reasons, but also because their concerns and interests are different than those of non-observant parents. In addition, some are unable to afford Jewish preschools and would benefit from tuition assistance.

- Milwaukee’s Jewish institutions have not yet found a way to engage its Russian Jewish population. To determine this group’s needs, a needs analysis could be performed. Jewish Family Services already serves this population and would be the best entry point.
- There appears to be little programming specifically for fathers.

3) The Milwaukee Jewish community needs to do a better job of finding babies and parents.

Although accurate data on the number of annual Jewish births in Milwaukee is unavailable, it is possible, using recent statistical analyses, to estimate that there are approximately 200-250 births each year in Milwaukee to families where one or both parents are Jewish. The Shalom Baby program only delivers about 50 baskets annually, which suggests that despite all of the community’s outreach efforts, a number of Jewish and intermarried families remain invisible to the community. The following suggestions might help the Shalom Baby program find more babies and parents:

- The program should learn from other successful programs around the country.
- In general, the program needs to be more widely publicized and would benefit from more dedicated staff time.
- Incentives could be provided to those who provide names to the program.
- Pulpit rabbis should regularly announce the program in synagogues and it should be publicized in synagogue newsletters.
- Preschool and day school parents represent a valuable network of potential “informants.”
• Once connections are made to obstetricians and pediatricians, program brochures could be placed in their offices.

• Secular agencies have contact with Jewish families and could potentially publicize the program.

• The PJ Library lists and Shalom Baby lists should be compared to see if any PJ Library recipients were missed by Shalom Baby. Also, the PJ Library could be offered to parents during Shalom Baby visits.

• If parents perceive that the program is at core a fundraising device, they will lose interest in providing names to the Federation. The program needs to shift away from its present primary focus.

4) Barriers to cooperation among organizations and agencies in Milwaukee need to be addressed.

Consistently throughout the interviews, individuals pointed out that Milwaukee’s Jewish institutions did not have a history of working together successfully. Recent developments appear to be very promising – the JCC and synagogues are developing better relationships, and through the JECEI initiative, preschool directors are in regular contact with each other.

However, until there is a greater degree of cooperation and trust, the ideal scenario – a central information clearinghouse – cannot be implemented. Milwaukee’s Jewish parents would benefit the most if they received publicity via email about all program offerings in the community. Currently, JCC programs are publicized primarily to the JCC list, synagogue programs are publicized primarily to each individual synagogue’s list, and Federation programs are publicized to those on the Federation list. The most comprehensive list of Jews in Milwaukee
belongs to Chabad, and this list is used to publicize Chabad programs. There is no single source for information about programs.

If all lists were pooled into a centralized database, more parents would receive information about more programs. If the number of options brought to parents’ attention were to increase, they would have more opportunities to engage with Jewish life.

For this to happen, the database would need to be “owned” by an agency or organization that is trusted by all. Such an organization does not yet exist in Milwaukee. An effort to create such a database as described in Appendix C was not successful. Ironically, the “Milwaukee model” described in Appendix C is now being considered by several communities around the country.

Until this model is embraced in Milwaukee, Milwaukee’s parenting options will always be characterized by competition for parental allegiances. Parents vote with their strollers but can’t make an informed choice if they don’t have complete information. Putting the needs of Jewish parents and their children ahead of specific institutional agendas should be the community’s top priority.
## Appendix A: List of Interviews/Presentations and Affiliation

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Interviewees or Attendees at Presentations</th>
<th>Title (at time of interview)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Hospital</td>
<td>Dr. Robert Kliegman</td>
<td>Professor and Chair of the Department of Pediatrics, Medical College of Wisconsin</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Parenting Network</td>
<td>Jan Buchler</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.milwaukeemoms.com">www.milwaukeemoms.com</a></td>
<td>Meg McKenna</td>
<td>Founder</td>
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<td>Milwaukee County Department of Human Services</td>
<td>Liz Kraniak</td>
<td>Birth to Three Program Coordinator</td>
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<td>St. Francis Children’s Center</td>
<td>Debby Berg</td>
<td>Program Manager, Birth to Three/Early Intervention Program</td>
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<td>Coalition for Jewish Learning</td>
<td>Eve Joan Zucker, Dr. Sherry Blumberg, Rabbi Roxanne Shapiro, Samara Sofian, Amy Kazilsky</td>
<td>Synagogue-based family educators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mequon Jewish Preschool</td>
<td>Steve Baruch</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<td>Shalom Baby</td>
<td>Hannah Sattler, Amy Gelfman, Kimberly Abrams, Sandi Cayle, Samara Sofian</td>
<td>Volunteers and participating mothers</td>
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<td>JCC Gan Ami Preschool</td>
<td>Julie Lookatch, Jennifer Saber, Rachel Greenspan, Wendy Cohen, Jill Sandler, Pnina Goldfarb, Rixanne Lefco</td>
<td>Chair, Gan Ami Lay Committee, Parent, Infant/Toddler Coordinator, Teacher, Assistant Director, Director, Director (Mequon)</td>
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<td>JCC</td>
<td>Jean Bernstein, Jay Roth, Rabbi Shari Shamah</td>
<td>Early Childhood Chair, Director, Jewish Family Specialist</td>
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<td>JCC Parenting Center</td>
<td>Susan Roth</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<td>Michelle Lafferty</td>
<td>Participating mother</td>
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<td>Laura Peck</td>
<td>Participating mother</td>
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<td>Yoni Schlussel</td>
<td>Participating mother; representative of the Orthodox community</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dana Emold</td>
<td>Coordinator, Jewish Outreach Initiative</td>
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<td>Kelly Ramsak</td>
<td>Assistant Director</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Diane Boland</td>
<td>Coordinator, Interfaith Outreach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congregation Shalom</td>
<td>Susan Angel Miller</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jewish Family Services</td>
<td>Sylvan Leabman</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hirsh Larkey</td>
<td>Clinical Social Worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Milwaukee Jewish Federation</td>
<td>Idy Goodman</td>
<td>Women’s Division President</td>
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<td>Evy Garfinkel</td>
<td>Women’s Division Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congregation Beth Israel</td>
<td>Rabbi Jacob Herber</td>
<td>Rabbi and Chair, Wisconsin Council of Rabbis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth El Ner Tamid</td>
<td>Rabbi Yitzchak Berman</td>
<td>Rabbi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chabad-Lubavitch of Wisconsin</td>
<td>Rabbi Yisroel Shmotkin</td>
<td>Rabbi</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Shul</td>
<td>Rabbi Shmaya Shmotkin</td>
<td>Rabbi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Milwaukee Kollel</td>
<td>Rabbi Pinchas Avruch</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judaism Without Walls</td>
<td>Rabbi Michael Stern</td>
<td>Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Beginnings</td>
<td>Devorah Shmotkin</td>
<td>Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: JCC Handout to Parents with Information about Local Synagogues

Looking for a Synagogue?

Beth El Ner Tamid Synagogue  
2909 W. Mequon Rd.  
(262) 242-6900  
[www.bethelnertamid.org](http://www.bethelnertamid.org)  
Rabbi Yitzhak Berman  
Cantor Jerry Berkowitz  
*Offers family services  
(Conservative)

Congregation Beth Israel  
6880 N. Green Bay Ave.  
(414) 352-7310  
[www.cbimilwaukee.org](http://www.cbimilwaukee.org)  
Rabbi Jacob Herber  
*Offers family services, Tot Kabbalat Shabbat and Tot Shabbat  
(Conservative)

Temple Menorah  
9363 N. 76th St.  
(414) 355-1120  
[www.templemenorah.com](http://www.templemenorah.com)  
Rabbis Isaac and Gil-Ezer Lerer  
(Conservative)

Congregation Emanu-El B’ne Jeshurun  
2020 W. Brown Deer Rd.  
(414) 228-7545  
[www.cee bj.org](http://www.ceebj.org)  
Rabbi Marc Berkson  
Cantor David Barash  
*Offers TotPalooza, and Yoffee (young family) events  
(Reform)

Congregation Emanu-El of Waukesha  
830 W. Moreland Rd.  
(262) 547-7180  
[www.waukeshatemple.org](http://www.waukeshatemple.org)  
Rabbi Steve Adams  
*Offers family services  
(Reform)
Congregation Shalom
7630 N. Santa Monica Blvd.
(414) 352-9288
Rabbis Ron Shapiro, Joe Prass and Roxanne Shapiro
Cantor Karen Berman
www.cong-shalom.org
*Offers Kiddush Club, Bagels Books and Babies and Temple for Toddlers
(Reform)

Congregation Sinai
8223 N. Pt. Washington Rd.
(414) 352-2970
Rabbi David Cohen
www.congregationsinai.org
*Offers family services, musical service, and minyan katan
(Reform)

Congregation Shir Hadash
(414) 297-9159
Rabbi David Brusin
www.cshmilw.org
*Offers family services
(Reconstructionist)
Appendix C: Proposal for Birth to Three Community Coordinator

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to make the case for the creation of a new position in Milwaukee’s Jewish community with the title Birth to Three Community Coordinator. This position would engage in outreach to parents with young children, expanding upon the existing part-time Shalom Baby program while working closely with all of the community’s institutions – Federation, Jewish Family Services, preschools, synagogues, day schools, the Jewish Community Center, and other Jewish organizations involved with young children and families. The main responsibilities would be to:

- locate and identify parents with young children who are not connected to the community, and help them to make initial connections, while strengthening the connections of those who are already engaged;
- coordinate the community’s program offerings for parents with young children;
- increase membership and enrollment in the community’s institutions.

This document describes the position and outlines proposed steps to implementation.

A Position That Serves the Entire Community

Although accurate data on the number of annual Jewish births in Milwaukee is unavailable, it is possible, using recent statistical analyses, to estimate that there are approximately 250 births each year in Milwaukee to families where one or both parents are Jewish.6 The current federation-based Shalom Baby program reaches only about fifty of these births, suggesting that a large percentage are unknown to the community and are not being reached. Experiences in other Jewish communities have demonstrated that the single most effective way to locate and identify these births is through social networks.7

To find the missing babies and their parents, the Birth to Three Community Coordinator would facilitate the creation of a community-wide baby-finding infrastructure that would consist of parents in all of the community’s various institutions and geographic areas. These parents would be encouraged to use their social networks to identify Jewish and intermarried families who are expecting or who have young children. Networks could include relatives, friends, neighborhood contacts, playgroups, health clubs, non-Jewish preschools, workplaces, or professional associations. Names and contact information would then be passed along to the Birth to Three Community Coordinator, who would make the initial phone call. Parents would be contacted using the name of the person making the referral so that they would not assume the call was from a telemarketer.

6 Based on data from the National Jewish Population Study 2000-01, the total number of annual births in the United States to families in which both parents are Jewish is roughly equal to 1 percent of the estimated national Jewish population. Assuming a Jewish population estimate of 25,000 for Milwaukee yields 250 annual births.

No single community institution has a sufficiently large network to find Milwaukee’s Jewish babies and their parents. Identifying and contacting the greatest possible number requires a collaborative effort among all of the community’s institutions.

**Initial Steps for Creating the Position**

Given the requirement that the proposed position work with all of the community’s institutions, it can only be situated within an institution that is perceived by all as neutral, without an overriding agenda of its own that would minimize or exclude the participation of other institutions. To decide upon the institutional home for the position, key stakeholders must meet face-to-face and come to an agreement. Once the decision is made, the person who directs this institutional home would supervise, provide administrative support, and oversee the budget for the Birth to Three Community Coordinator, making the position part of its operations.

Once the institutional home is decided upon, a Birth to Three Coordinating Body would be appointed consisting of one representative from each of the key stakeholder institutions. This body would establish policies and procedures as necessary to ensure fair participation and representation. It would also ensure that the new position would be coordinated with existing professionals in the community who work with parents.

Hiring would be the primary responsibility of whoever directs the institution in which the position would be located. This individual would work closely with the Birth to Three Coordinating Body to identify the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) required for the position and would evaluate candidates for the position based upon these KSAOs.

Initial funding for the position would need to be provided by a combination of the Milwaukee Federation, The Helen Bader Foundation, and local donors. Matching foundation and philanthropic support from outside of Milwaukee would then be sought. The novelty and compelling logic of the proposed model, which brings all of the community’s institutions together with a common goal of outreach to an underserved but vitally important population, should prove attractive to philanthropists with interests in outreach, early childhood, or the Jewish future.

**Position Description**

The position would have the following responsibilities:

- To encourage the development of a Jewish identity among parents and their young children.
- To create an ongoing awareness of the importance of outreach to parents with young children among all of the community’s institutions, through personal contacts with key community professionals, ongoing community publicity, and presentations to parents who participate in various community institutions.
To develop relationships with non-Jewish institutions in the larger Milwaukee community in order to pursue all means of finding Jewish parents with young children (e.g. obstetricians’ offices, real estate agents, non-Jewish preschools, Milwaukee County Department of Human Services, Betty Brinn Children’s Museum, Metroparent Magazine, The Parenting Network).

To oversee the training of volunteers recruited through the Women’s Division of Federation who would visit families with young children, inform them about community resources, collect relevant information from them, invite them to community events, and introduce them to each other.

To serve as a central resource person (“concierge”) who can answer questions for parents over the phone or by email.

To ensure that greeters are present at community events so that introductions among parents are facilitated.

To facilitate intimate, informal social gatherings in parents’ homes through the creation of Jewish playgroups for new mothers and Shabbat dinners for families.

To enter information obtained from parents into a database and use the database to track parents’ participation in various programs; to maintain the database so that information remains current. Policies regarding access to the information in the database would be established by the Birth to Three Coordinating Body.

To maintain a website that would list community offerings and resources and that would have links to other websites relevant to parents.

To obtain information about upcoming programs for parents with young children from all of the community institutions, and to help them develop new programs.

To publicize these community events on a regular basis (e.g. bi-weekly or monthly) through emails.

To work with Jewish preschool directors on recruiting to enhance preschool enrollment in all of the community’s Jewish preschools.

To encourage community professionals to spend one-on-one time with parents and develop personal relationships with them.

To help coordinate community-wide events specifically for parents with young children (e.g. baby fairs, outdoor festivals) that would be co-sponsored by a number of community institutions.

To serve as an advisor to community organizations so that events are designed to be more family-friendly and attractive to parents with young children (e.g., by arranging child care).

To maintain regular contact with the Birth to Three Coordinating Body and call meetings as necessary.

To convene and consult with an advisory committee of local experts in child development and parenting (e.g. obstetricians, pediatricians, doulas/midwives, lactation nurses, birthing instructors, child care providers, parent educators, social workers, occupational and speech therapists, family therapists, owners of retail establishments that cater to new parents, academic scholars).

To learn about new initiatives and ideas from national Jewish organizations with interests in early childhood (e.g. Shalom Baby directors, PJ Library, Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE), Partnership for Excellence in Jewish...
Education (PEJE), Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative (JECEI), Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), JCC Association, Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI)).

- To learn from national secular early childhood organizations (e.g., Zero to Three, Mommy & Me, The Parent Review, Parents Action for Children).
- To evaluate and continually improve Milwaukee’s programs for parents with young children.
- To raise funds that would sustain the position and strengthen the community’s offerings.