This report is part of the publication series of the Youth Development Project. The project is a joint undertaking of the JCC Association of North America and the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University.

The mission of the Youth Development Project is to strengthen programming and services to youth by enhancing the planning and fundraising capabilities of Jewish Community Centers throughout the United States. The publication series presents information and materials from the training, consultation and research activities of the Youth Development Project.

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INTRODUCTION

Jewish Community Centers have long played a leading role in Jewish youth services. JCCs offer a wide range of teen programs—sports, social events, cultural arts classes, recreational activities, and others. They are, moreover, committed to building Jewish identity and community involvement. Centers are now uniquely poised to make a difference in the lives of Jewish teenagers at a time when communities across the United States are struggling to sustain Jewish identity. To truly make a difference, however, the field must critically examine its current teen programs, allocations to Youth Departments, and prevailing perceptions of teens and attitudes about serving them.

Current Realities

The United States is now witnessing a teen population explosion of unprecedented magnitude, one which dwarfs in both size and duration the teen boom of the 1960s and 1970s. The teen population began to mushroom in 1992 and is expected to peak in the year 2006 when there will be nearly 31 million teens in the United States. The Jewish community is not isolated from this teen population explosion. There are currently close to one million Jewish children 10 to 19 years old and this number, too, will rise.  

Teens in the 1990s differ from their parents' generation in three important ways. First, teens today have considerable economic clout, with purchasing power greatly exceeding that of any previous generation of teens. About 40% work for pay during the school year. Teens have become mass consumers with increasingly deep pockets. They spend some $35 billion per year. They are also discerning decision-makers who view the marketplace—products, services, and programs, including those offered by Jewish organizations and youth groups—with a sense of choice and empowerment.

Second, teens have major decision-making power in their families. The influence they exert over their families' consumer decisions boosts their net purchase influence to $170 billion each year. They are often involved in decisions about major purchases, choice of schools, and other important items. Teens have become the key decision-makers regarding what programs they attend or do not attend, what institutions they join, and how they spend their work and leisure time. Decisions concerning use of the Jewish Community Center appear to be largely in the hands of teens themselves.

1U.S. Census Bureau, 1990
Third, teens feel physically vulnerable to the prevalent crime and violence around them and they feel their personal futures are far from assured.

Today's teens thus pose a great challenge: they represent a large and growing segment of the population and, as a group, their experience differs fundamentally from that of their parents and grandparents. Their needs are serious and complex, their desires hard both to comprehend and to satisfy. Their social and cultural tastes tend toward the new and the outrageous; they demand and thrive on change. Never before has it been so important yet so difficult to attract teens into teen programs, to provide them a quality experience, and to build their Jewish identity.

Jewish youth are also experiencing the effects of changes in the Jewish community and transformations in the Jewish family. Many are being raised in blended families, intermarried families, families in which both parents work outside the home, and single-parent families. Three-quarters of a million children are living in mixed households (with one parent born into or converted to Judaism; the other Christian, another religion, or no religion).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

An effective response to the challenge of serving Jewish teens in the 1990s requires creative thinking and decisive action at several levels: at the departmental and executive level of individual Centers and at the level of the JCC Association/N.A. and national Jewish leadership.

Recommendations in this report are already being implemented by some Centers. We hope that these steps will be followed by more Centers, and that JCCs currently engaging in these practices will be supported and recognized as models in the field. Local initiatives should be augmented by increasingly more time, energy, and resources given to youth services at the national level as well.

**Departmental**

**Human Resources**
Youth Departments should be provided with adequate human resources. These include strong professional staff, lay leadership, and teen leadership.

**Departmental Planning**
Serious departmental planning is necessary. Planning entails crafting a meaningful mission statement for the youth program, clarifying objectives and priorities, and addressing the difficult, controversial issues which are often an undercurrent in the Youth Department.

**Programming**
Programming should be developed which is suited to the needs and preferences of each age group served by the Youth Department.

**Space**
Teens need space they can call their own.

**Marketing**
Programs to attract and retain youth require effective marketing. Marketing includes the continual gathering of information from parents, teens, and others; creation of a distinct identity for the youth program; and outreach to teens who are inactive.

**Total JCC Approach**
JCC Youth Departments need to establish cooperative relationships with other programming and service departments in their Centers and with other JCCs regionally.

**Collaborative Approaches**
JCCs should develop collaborative approaches to youth services by developing functional ties to various other youth-serving organizations in the community.

**Jewish Identity**
JCCs must make concerns with Jewish continuity and the strengthening of Jewish identity more than "buzz words." To do so they must expand the Jewish content of programs and package them attractively.
Agency

Youth as a JCC Priority
Youth must be a priority in JCCs. Centers must create an hospitable environment in which teens have a real voice and representation at the top level.

Financial Resources
JCCs should increase allocations to Youth Departments. A greater financial commitment to youth will require proactive fundraising to support youth services.

National

National Leadership
JCCs should develop national leadership which can set policy, motivate research, oversee the collection and dissemination of information, and ensure that youth professionals receive national recognition for their achievements.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Youth Departments should be provided with adequate human resources. These include strong professional staff, lay leadership, and teen leadership.

Current Realities

A successful teen program requires an adequate number of professionals devoted exclusively to the service of youth. Most Youth Departments are led by an individual designated as the youth director. The title can be misleading, however, because this individual is apt to be assigned to a multitude of service delivery areas within the Center. Very often youth directors are pulled in several directions, so that their actual dedication to youth programming can be limited. Moreover, youth professionals have heavy workloads and they work unusual hours. In some instances, they have not built strong lay committees to support their efforts. In other instances, they have not yet developed teen leaders to assist in the design and implementation of teen activities.

Response

Professional Staff
Youth professionals require adequate time to do their jobs well. They also need sufficient rewards to maintain their enthusiasm and commitment. Rewards include not only pay and benefits, which are critical, but also praise and recognition, opportunities for development, and chances for advancement.

Professionals need ongoing opportunities for growth and development, opportunities to learn and to improve their skills in Jewish communal work. Training should include, for example, the art and science of departmental planning, program development and implementation; building and working with lay committees; establishing collaborative structures within the agency and among youth-serving organizations; and advocacy for youth in the Center and in the wider community. In addition, professionals should have frequent opportunities to upgrade their knowledge of today's teenagers and their service needs—the particular health, personal, familial, social, political, and religious issues which now face Jewish teens. Although such training has taken place under the aegis of the Youth Development Project, advanced training for youth professionals needs to be a continual priority in the field.

Youth Department professionals live with the expectation that they will move "up or out" within just a few years of taking employment in the JCC. If they stay in their jobs "too long," they remain burdened with a low income (which is increasingly difficult to sustain as they get older) and the system begins to look at them askance. After three to five years, managers begin to assume that there is something "wrong" with the youth worker who is still in a direct service role. Since there are limited opportunities for advancing in the JCC hierar-
Teen Leadership

Teens want control over their own programming. Programs are most likely to succeed when teen participants are part of the planning process from the earliest stages and when they play a central role in promoting, organizing, and running activities. Youth Departments with strong programs for teen leadership development report enormous benefits. These programs give teens a voice in the Department and the kind of control over their own programming which they desire. They develop a cadre of committed, knowledgeable teens who can work with staff in enhancing the Department's image, creating more effective communications, and reaching out to inactive teens. These programs also afford JCC teen leaders the opportunity to work with their counterparts in other teen groups and Jewish youth organizations. They promote teen ownership of their own programs, an essential ingredient of success.

Lay Leadership

In many Centers, the Teen Committee of the board needs to be recreated, reinvigorated, and empowered. A vigorous Teen Committee is necessary for thorough discussion of the serious and difficult issues which emerge in departmental planning, for the development of action plans and for the implementation of change efforts. The Committee can bring energy, hard work, advocacy, and diverse talents and perspectives to the task. Properly constituted, it can take on the challenges of departmental planning, marketing, assessment, and fundraising.

DEPARTMENTAL PLANNING

Serious departmental planning is necessary. Planning entails crafting a meaningful mission statement for the youth program, clarifying objectives and priorities, and addressing the difficult, controversial issues which are often an undercurrent in the Youth Department.

Current Realities

Most Youth Departments are not currently equipped to engage in planning beyond that which is required to provide material for next season's program guide. Some professionals feel that planning is a "luxury," an "academic" activity which, although interesting, interferes with their ability to deliver programs in the near-term. They express concern about the costliness of gathering marketing and needs assessment information and the impossibility of finding sufficient time for carrying out the hard work of planning.

Response

JCCs need to engage in more sophisticated long-range and program planning for teen services. Such planning involves crafting a meaningful mission statement, establishing goals and priorities for the teen program, and conducting needs assessment, marketing and feasibility studies which will inform departmental decision making.

Table 1: Long-Term Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Jewish Community Centers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(n=124)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In planning programs and services for youth (grades 4-12), to what extent has your Center...</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little/some</th>
<th>A great extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>crafted a mission statement?</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>set goals and objectives?</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>established priorities among programs &amp; services?</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Personnel and Practice Survey (1994)
Mission Statement

The Youth Department should undergo the serious self-examination necessary to develop a meaningful mission statement. The Youth Department must clarify its identity and greater purpose. What is the department’s stance with regard to Jewish identity, diversity, adolescent development, community service, quality programming, and so on? Why does the department offer its particular selection of programs? What are the principles which guide decision-making in the department? In answering such questions, lay, professional, and teen leadership arrive at a mutual understanding of the reason for the department’s existence and a shared vision of what the teen program should be.

Priorities and Objectives

The Youth Department should also clarify its priorities and objectives. Individual Centers will differ in the questions which frame this discussion. For example, they might ask themselves: "Are we satisfied with the percentage of teen members currently being served on a regular basis? Which groupings of teens do we most want to reach this year? Which kinds of programs are most important for the department to offer?" Establishing priorities and objectives may also lead the department to consider quality versus quantity of programming; inreach versus outreach efforts; focus on 7th and 8th graders, versus 9th and 10th graders, versus 11th and 12th graders; focus on athletics versus other kinds of activities; emphasis on major, short-term, high impact programs versus smaller, ongoing programs; and so on.

The Youth Department needs a plan which charts its course not only for the next season but also for the next year or two. The plan should motivate professionals and teen participants and it should help the Youth Department flourish and achieve its maximal level of performance. An effective plan, however, will emerge only if the department engages the serious and often difficult work of defining its fundamental purpose and its vision for the teen program.

Address Difficult Issues in the Youth Department

Every Youth Department has an undercurrent of difficult issues which need to be brought to the surface, examined carefully, and dealt with in an open manner. Focus groups, surveys, and interviews with parents, teens, and key informants in the Center and in the wider community can reveal the arguments and feelings which fuel these issues. The Youth Department will then be able to move into a problem-solving mode to arrive at clear and thoughtful resolutions commensurate with the mission and goals of the Youth Department. These resolutions need to be communicated to parents and teens, who may not necessarily agree with them, but can at least appreciate the department’s position and its rationale.

PROGRAMMING

Programming should be developed which is suited to the needs and preferences of each age group served by the Youth Department.

Current Realities

Teens commonly complain that they do not find Youth Department offerings attractive. In communities where children “grow up in the Center” there is the added likelihood that the teens will outgrow Center activities, tire of them, or associate them with activities for “kids.” Teens respond to ever-changing cultural and social fads. They are generally predisposed to the rapid adoption and abandonment of trends and ideas, to contrariness for its own sake, and to experimentation. Youth-serving organizations must struggle to remain on a constantly shifting cutting edge to be in touch with this group. Moreover, youth workers’ experience tells them that specific groups of teens can differ widely from one another in their programming interests. As a result, a program which fails one season may succeed quite well the next. Likewise a success with one year’s group of 9th graders, for example, does not guarantee success with the next year’s group. Teens, thus constantly strain Youth Department programming resources.

The Practices and Personnel Survey revealed that most JCCs do not engage in systematic planning for youth programming. For example, only 16% of Centers

Table 2: Program Development for Grades 9-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Jewish Community Centers</th>
<th>(n=124)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In developing programs and services for youth, how effective has your Center been in...</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conducting needs-assessment studies?</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generating ideas?</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing ideas—conducting marketing and feasibility studies?</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making the best use of talents of professional staff?</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivating a volunteer corps?</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>systematically evaluating programs and services?</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

have been very effective in conducting needs assessment studies of teens in high school and only 10% have been very effective in conducting marketing and feasibility studies with this age group.

Much of the program planning for teens is haphazard. If only 16% of the Centers have conducted needs assessment studies, are Centers fully in touch with what teens need or want?

**Response**

Teens are extremely busy people. They fill their time with school, homework, and jobs. “Free” time is occupied by sports, youth group, extracurricular clubs and classes, television, hanging out with friends, and a variety of other activities. Some families belong to facilities such as pool or tennis clubs where they can engage in many of the same activities as those offered by the JCC. Their children go to school dances and to a series of bar/bat mitzvah parties. The lives of the JCC teens are not vacuums waiting to be filled. Rather, the question is how to make the Center a priority for them so they will choose the JCC from the myriad choices they have.

The Youth Department should allocate resources, make programming decisions, and create publicity in a way that is most likely to attract teens to JCC programs. Four elements are necessary for effective teen programming: relevance, diversity, age-appropriate activities, and narrow age groupings.

**Relevant Programming**

Simply stated, Centers need to offer programs relevant to teen interests. If teens are more concerned with “rock ‘n roll and concerts and malls,” as one JCC representative observed, then perhaps the Center should be offering rock concerts or providing hang-out places similar to malls.

Research with JCC teens consistently produces the same finding: teenage interests revolve around sports and friends. Teens are drawn to competitive sports, fitness, hanging out with friends, and perhaps meeting teens from other cities. The Youth Department must address these interests. As noted below, an effective and creative response may involve, for example, closer collaboration with the Health and Fitness Department, better “hang-out” space, and/or a regional approach which builds connections to other JCC, synagogue, or community teen programs.

**Diverse Programming**

Programming for Jewish teens should satisfy the personal, social, intellectual, and recreational needs of this age group. Adolescence is marked by the need to interact with peers and to have productive outlets for the immense physical energy characteristic of the teen years. Beyond these social and physical needs, the tasks of adolescence include, among others, gaining experience in decision making, defining the self and formulating a personal value system and philosophy of life, making a significant contribution, enlarging horizons by sharing experiences with different people, and having real adventure by exploring and taking physical and interpersonal risks.

JCC programming should respond to the full range of needs associated with healthy adolescent development. To do so, Youth Departments must understand adolescent development, assess how well it is doing in providing relevant opportunities for this age group, and consider the kinds of programs and services which it might offer to deal with the totality of the teen experience.

**Social Action Programs**

Centers should consider a variety of social action programs that nourish teens’ commitment to social change, their interest in new ideas, their developing sense of right and wrong, and their growing concerns with personal and social justice. A national survey of Jewish teenagers probed the societal issues of interest and concern to Jewish teenagers. The survey presented a list of 15 major problems related to disease, poverty, prejudice, threats to the environment, and other quality of life issues. Respondents were asked to check the three problems which they would most like to help solve. The most important social issue for these teenagers was AIDS, followed closely by antisemitism and the related issue of crime and violence. National studies based on a general population of teenagers also show the social ills of AIDS and violence to be focal concerns for this generation.

JCCs might connect with AIDS action groups to develop programs to educate Center teens and give them an opportunity to have an impact on their peers and on the wider community. Centers could collaborate with groups concerned with antisemitism to develop materials and programs for stimulating, educating, and offering action outlets to JCC teens concerned with antisemitism in their personal lives, in their community, or in society at large.

Centers can work through public and private schools to offer volunteer opportunities related to hunger, homelessness, threats to the environment, and other social or political issues. They can offer course credit for these activities as a means of creating additional incentives and rewards for participation. Such programs combine the self-interest of teens with the wider concerns of the JCC, school, and community. In this way, the Center cooperates with educational and communal institutions, linking rather than competing with the other spheres of the teen’s life.

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5For descriptions of interesting and useful programs in the Center movement, the reader is referred to the Source Book on Youth Activities: Starting Points for Creative Programming by Simon Glaser, Amy Sales, and Carolyn Meyer (1995). This publication, developed by the Youth Development Project, presents a wide range of inventive, successful programs from JCCs across the United States.

Programming Related to Work and Career. The national survey of Jewish teens further showed that the predominant personal concern of this group relates to their future—to college and career. This finding holds regardless of gender, grade, religious denomination, or family type. Many teens work part-time during the school year, and some look for summer employment as well. Jewish organizations, however, rarely provide job counseling, training, or placement for Jewish youth, although such programming would be highly relevant and valuable to today’s teens. If the Center is to claim a central place in the lives of Jewish teens, then it should address teens’ work needs and career interests.

Planning for Diversification in Programming. Offering an extensive range of programs which touch on the diverse needs and interests of teens satisfies those who argue that the Center needs to reach all teens and not just the athletes. The more programs there are, the more likely it is that teens will find something which interests them at the JCC. But diversity in programming worries those whose eyes are focused on the bottom line. The more programs offered, the more likely it is that registration at any one program will be low. Given a finite population of JCC teens, particularly in intermediate and large/intermediate Centers, the “numbers game” appears relatively straightforward and restrictive. Centers need to negotiate this issue with care. Serious, professional planning will help the Youth Department determine the optimal level of diversification it can reach each season.

Age-Appropriate Activities
The teenage years are a transition period between childhood and adulthood. Teens want to practice being adults and “don’t want to be treated like kids anymore.” Teens may be attracted to coffee houses, for example, because these are places where they are safe and passively supervised, but where they feel like adults. The teens say that they will not attend programs that are not right for their age.

The mandate to the JCC Youth Department is clear. It must create an environment in which teens are in control and able to feel and act adult. Professional staff need to be skillful in providing passive supervision; they must be available but unobtrusive. The teen program should be located away from younger siblings and away from parents, both of whom are likely to make the teenager feel more juvenile than mature.

Narrow Age Groupings
JCCs must be sensitive to age groupings. Teens do not want to be grouped with their “kid” brothers or sisters. Eighth graders do not want to be with sixth graders. Twelfth graders do not want to be with ninth graders. Teens and pre-teens choose not to be with others they feel are too young. Some Centers feel caught in a “Catch 22” with the need for more exact age groupings. They say they have to put together various age groupings in order to get sufficient numbers for a dance or other activity. When different ages are put together, however, teens are less likely to want to attend and numbers suffer.

Current wisdom in teen programming suggests that Centers should err on the side of closely delimited age groupings. Youth Departments need to take a close look at their current age groupings. They should think about which ages are most likely to be compatible with one another and consider offering programs targeted to narrower age ranges. Certain activities should be available for certain ages. Teens and pre-teens need special programs to look forward to and special privileges which acknowledge when they have reached a new level of maturity.

Program Issues

Jewish Versus Non-Jewish Programming. The Jewish identity of the JCC teen program is complicated, taking on a unique flavor in each community. For example, the teens in one community say their Center is “Jewish enough.” They are not interested in more Jewish programming at the Center nor in incorporating Jewish practices into their activities there. They appreciate the mix of people at the Center and feel that much is gained by having non-Jewish teens spend time at the JCC. Parents and leaders in the Jewish community, however, do not necessarily agree. Many believe that the JCC can do more to enhance its Jewish content—socially, ethnically, religiously, and with regard to Israel. They struggle with both how much Jewish content to include, and how open they should be to non-Jewish teens at JCC-sponsored events. Some balance is necessary if teens are to feel positive about the JCC.

JCC Location. Some JCCs are located in the midst of a Jewish neighborhood. Others are on the geographic periphery of its Jewish neighborhood. In one such community, parents in the suburbs report feeling isolated and in the minority. Teen programming at the Center is inconvenient for them, both in terms of transportation and schedule. At the same time, they feel acute needs for their children to socialize with other Jewish children and they thus feel they need the Center more than those who live close by the JCC. The need for geographically dispersed services is strong.

Serving JCC Members Versus Non-Members. In one community teens and their parents differed on the issue of whether or not JCC events and activities should be open to non-members. On the one hand, teens want to be with their friends. If friends are not members and therefore barred from the Center, members will not choose to go to the JCC. By having a policy that excludes non-members, the Center may lose its own youth. On the other hand, some
parents expressed concerns about equity. Why, they asked, should someone who does not pay dues be allowed to spend a few dollars and then have access to the same programs and activities as those who pay substantial sums of money and regularly support the Center? Some events must be more open, but the concept of dues cannot be entirely abandoned.

SPACE

Teens need space they can call their own.

Current Realities

The favorite pastime of teenagers is "hanging out" with friends. "Hanging out" refers to unstructured, largely unsupervised time in a youth-friendly environment. Teens are more interested in socializing than in classes and supervised programming. The JCC, therefore, must make certain that teens feel there is a place for them in the Center. Youth Directors often mention having to share space in the Center. Teens meet in a preschool classroom and sit on infantilizing miniature chairs surrounded by colorful pictures of the alphabet. Or they meet in the board room and sit on over-sized chairs at a table which must not be scratched, surrounded by pictures of the Center's past presidents, those eminent adults with whom the teens have no identification.

Everyone understands the need to share space in crowded Centers. Various groups have their designated space which others use periodically. The problem is that teens often have no space which, even though shared, clearly belongs to them.

Response

Centers should closely examine space needs and space usage to provide teens adequate room to "just hang out" and meet other teens. The amenities in the teen space—whether video games, pool tables, coffee house facilities, and so on—should be selected and designed with serious input from the teens themselves. Unless teens have a substantial say in what these facilities look like and provide, they are not likely to congregate there. Furthermore, given the proclivity of teens to rapid change, innovation, and experimentation, no JCC should assume that a teen center created in 1995 will still be "cool" in the year 2000. Teen centers by their nature might have to change every two years or so to keep up with the rapid pace of change in teen culture. JCCs must make an ongoing commitment to provide appropriate and adequate space where teens will feel comfortable and at home.
MARKETING

Programs to attract and retain youth require effective marketing. Marketing includes the continual gathering of information from parents, teens, and others; creation of a distinct identity for the youth program; and outreach to teens who are inactive.

Current Realities

One hundred and thirty JCC youth professionals were asked in a recent survey, “What are the two most important issues—personal, professional, or institutional—that you face in developing programs and services for youth?” Over one-third of the respondents referred to attracting and retaining teen program participants.

Marketing entails finding out about the target audience (who are the teens in the community? what do they need and want?) and developing mechanisms to link them to programs and services at the JCC (how can these teens be reached? what will bring them through the door?). JCC youth professionals describe difficult challenges with all aspects of marketing.

Response

Information Gathering

JCCs need to establish an ongoing dialogue with parents and teens. Focus groups and other forms of systematic information gathering provide valuable information about the needs and interests of JCC parents and teens. Information gathering generates a storehouse of data which has relevance to the Youth Department's efforts to market its programs and services, to involve teens at the JCC, and to reach out to those who are inactive. Moreover, experience shows that people appreciate being asked their opinions and being given a forum for expressing their views. Focus groups, interviews, and surveys serve as vehicles for communication and involvement.

Research consistently shows, however, that information gathering is most successful when participants receive some form of feedback from such an effort and when they see that results of the study are being put to use. Centers must establish lines for broad-based, meaningful input into the design and content of the Youth Department, but they must also be prepared to acknowledge that input and act upon it where appropriate.

A Distinct Identity

It is important for any teen program to have its own identity distinct from the rest of the JCC. Teen programs, therefore, not only need their own space and their own professional staff, they also need their own stationery, logos, newsletters, and other forms of commu-
nication that distinguish them from the rest of the Center. Teens are more likely to read mail when their peers, not parents or the JCC board of directors, are listed on the letterhead.

Focus groups reveal that teens rarely read the Center’s program guide. They are often unaware of the programs and services offered to their age group, of the hours during which teen facilities are available, and of the registration deadlines for special events. The program guide does not necessarily present information in a manner that is appealing and useful to teens. Therefore, the Youth Department should develop a schedule for flyers, newsletters, and other communications so that teens will receive program information in a timely fashion and in a form they can appreciate.

Centers should solicit input from teens on what the Youth Department’s image should be and how best to present it to teens. All of the Department’s communications should be presented in such a way that the teen audience can readily identify with them.

**Outreach**

Centers often find that they have two very different groups of teens: the “active” teens (those who are involved at the JCC, hang out in the teen lounge and/or make use of the JCC facilities) and the “inactive” teens (those who are rarely if ever seen at teen programs or on JCC premises). The tendency is to direct the vast majority of Youth Department resources—time, energy, programming—toward the active teens. To the extent the staff solicit input from teens, they generally spend their time talking with the active teens, those most available and most forthcoming with their views and opinions. Unfortunately, active teens are usually a small minority compared with the total JCC teen population.

Teen programs need to reach out beyond the obvious population of active teens. They should develop plans to connect with other groupings of teens: students in private or day schools, teens with special interests or special needs, those who use the Center only for summer camp, unaffiliated teens, and so on. Inactive teens are a large segment of the market who are not necessarily easy to reach. They may require a special approach and extraordinary effort.

**TOTAL JCC APPROACH**

JCC Youth Departments need to establish cooperative relationships with other programming and service departments in their Centers and with other JCCs regionally.

**Current Realities**

Youth directors often see their purview as limited to the teen lounge and the special activities and events offered through the teen office (dances, trips, weekend activities, teen nights at the Center, etc.). They are in touch with the teens who come to these activities and they develop programs to serve those with whom they have the most contact. Many more teens or different groups of teens, however, also come to the Center to play sports, take music or art lessons, swim in the pool, or work in the preschool program. There is, however, little connection between these teens and the Youth Department.

**Response**

The Youth Department needs to work collaboratively with other programming departments in the Center—Health and Fitness, Cultural Arts, Jewish Education, and so on. The concept of “teen program” has to be expanded to include all arenas of youth activity at the Center. When the teen program cuts across existing functional lines in the Center, professional and lay leaders from different departments can work together in planning how to attract teens to the JCC and how to optimize the Center’s contact with them.

Moreover, Youth Departments should build closer collaborative relationships with the various service departments in the JCC—Membership, Development, Public Relations, and other administrative units.

The Membership Department has a great deal of information which could be highly beneficial to the Youth Department in reaching out to teens and in developing special programs to meet their needs and interests. For example, the Membership Department should inform the Youth Director whenever a new family with teenage children has joined the Center. The Membership Department can also provide simple demographic information to the Youth Department. How many teens in each age group are there in the Center? How many are male, how many are female? How many are affiliated with a synagogue? How many are in public, private, or Jewish day school? This information is vital to planning teen programs.

On the surface, these recommendations seem simple and reasonable. However, teen directors often indicate that membership information systems are limited and that there is little if any information flow between the Youth Department and Membership. Unless the agency expects these units to work together and unless structures and processes are set up for such collaboration, sharing of resources—so obviously needed—will not take place.
The same holds true for the Development Department. The research shows that grant proposals submitted by Centers having a youth director on staff have a higher success rate than those submitted by Centers with no designated youth director. This finding suggests that youth directors can help their Centers develop fundable proposals for youth services. Collaboration in grant writing is thus mutually beneficial to both the Youth Department and the Development Office.

Public Relations can also be of valuable service to the Youth Department. The wealth of experience, knowledge, and connections in the Public Relations Department can help the Youth Department establish itself as a key player in teen services in the community. Teens and teen programs need publicity and recognition. These needs can be readily met through good cooperation and communication between the Youth Department, the source of news about teen activities, and the Public Relations Department, the link to the public.

**Collaboration between Centers**

Over the past two years, the Youth Development Project has conducted a series of regional training institutes for youth professionals. These conferences invariably demonstrate a great thirst for networking among participants, who tend to work in isolation from each other, and an immediate recognition of how much they have to offer and to learn from each other. Great possibilities exist for joint programming, exchange programs, resource sharing, mutual assistance in the conduct of planning studies, sharing of materials and program ideas. There are also excellent opportunities for peer professional development in a variety of areas related to supervision, advocacy, and career counseling. Youth professionals can derive much needed support from one another. Teen programs can be significantly strengthened if teen workers seek opportunities for regional collaboration and create ties to colleagues and teen programs in other Centers.

**COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES**

JCCs should develop collaborative approaches to youth services by developing functional ties to various other youth-serving organizations in the community.

**Current Realities**

Teens have complex and demanding schedules and the JCC faces serious competition from other service providers. Teens have a wide variety of options to choose from in the marketplace of youth organizations, recreational activities, and peer groups. In this regard the JCC must either be competitive, offering the most interesting and appealing activities, or it must be collaborative, cooperatively planning joint programs with other youth-serving organizations.

Community leaders often consider some magical number of participants as the measure of a successful teen program. In some communities, the JCC competes with Jewish youth groups (NCSY, USY, NFTY, BBYO, and others) for active teens. In other communities, individual Jewish organizations may have their own small number of teens, making it difficult for them to efficiently offer high-quality, relevant and diverse programs. In either case, cooperative programming could provide the critical number of participants necessary for a successful teen activity or event.

**Response**

Collaborative planning, programming, and fundraising between the JCC Youth Department and other Jewish organizations is advantageous for the growth and development of teen services in the 1990s. Collaborative efforts should embrace synagogues, day schools, Jewish Family and Children’s Services, youth groups, and other Jewish organizations offering services or programs for teens. For example, is there a role for Hillel students working with JCC teens? Are there social action projects which would benefit from the efforts of various groups and agencies? JCCs cannot afford to shun such possibilities. JCCs should build community structures that serve the social, recreational, and cultural needs of Jewish teens rather than engage in competition with other Jewish organizations and agencies for the teen market.8

---8 Building Community: A Simulation Game by Amy Sales and Simon Klarfield (Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and the JCC Association/NA, 1994) contains a set of materials for training Jewish communal professionals in collaborative programming.
JEWSH IDENTITY

JCCs must make concerns with Jewish continuity and the strengthening of Jewish identity more than "buzz words." To do so they must expand the Jewish content of programs and package them attractively.

**Current Realities**

The 1990s are a decade in which Jewish identity and community involvement are defined by the following: 1) high rates of intermarriage; 2) assumed personal liberty to redefine Jewish law to suit the individual; 3) low levels of Torah study among the vast majority of American Jews; 4) a seductive social climate characterized by secularism, and consumerism; and 5) general acceptance of Jews as fellow club members, coworkers and marriage partners. The Jewish Community Centers, as a vital element in the community's institutional structure, cannot afford to ignore these changing conditions. JCCs must understand their niche in building Jewish identity and must dedicate themselves to providing the highest quality Jewish programming for teens.

**Response**

Centers must, therefore, expand the Jewish content of programs, especially for post-bar/bat mitzvah age youth. Such expanded programming might include an increased number of trips to Israel, weekend and vacation retreats combining recreational and social activity with Jewish content, and ongoing forums for discussion of moral and ethical issues of concern to Jewish teens. The packaging of these programs must be skillful: It cannot be too heavy-handed, nor can it have the aura of being, as teens would label them, "totally lame." Too often programs associated with Jewish Community Centers or other Jewish organizations are perceived by Jewish teens as outdated, irrelevant to their concerns and/or unrelated to their conceptions of what is exciting, interesting or worthwhile. The successful design and implementation of Jewish content demands extensive knowledge and creativity, resources and commitment.

YOUTH AS A JCC PRIORITY

Youths must be a priority in JCCs. Centers must create an hospitable environment in which teens have a real voice and representation at the top level.

**Current Realities**

Teens are often a lower priority in JCCs than are seniors, pre-schoolers, and other groups. Their low status is reflected in the Youth Departments' budgets, in the low levels of staff time allocated to teens, in the limited availability of Center resources for teen services, and in the lack of available and/or appropriate space for teen activities. Although some Centers have teen lounges, others do not. More importantly, Centers may be reluctant to open up other spaces for teen activities and programs. Both lay committees and professionals are afraid that teens will leave a "mess" behind them or damage Center property. Some professionals and lay leaders will admit that they sometimes find teens noisy, disruptive, unruly, and overall not very good "guests" at the Center.

These negative responses to teens' presence in the Center can depress teens' willingness to participate in JCC activities. When teens feel under-valued or overly monitored and disciplined, they seek other places to go. Being unwelcome at the JCC may make them feel unwelcome by the Jewish community. At the same time, the limited resources allotted to the teen program (staff time, money, and space) coupled with high demands for successful, cost-conscious programming can ultimately produce significant burnout among teen professionals, even among those who come into the field with a great deal of enthusiasm for serving young people.

**Response**

JCC leadership may claim that youth are a priority for the Center but their actions frequently belie this assertion. Many of the recommendations in this report therefore refer to concrete steps Centers can take to emphasize the importance of teens: provide an adequate budget for the Youth Department; support and reward Youth Department staff; encourage a strong teen lay committee; provide relevant, diverse, age-appropriate programs; make certain that teens have space they can call their own; actively market to teens; cultivate teen leadership; reach out to inactive teens; bring the talents and resources of other units in the Center to bear on the teen program.

Other, less concrete action steps involve changing the climate of the JCC to be more open and hospitable to teens. Centers need to examine the specific behaviors of professionals, parents, and other adults that make teens feel unwelcome at the JCC, and they must sensitze adults to the teens' feelings.

Moreover, teens should be given a real voice in the JCC. Teen representatives should sit on the Youth Committee. Only in this way will they have full say in teen
programming and in the decisions which directly affect their experience at the Center. Inviting teens onto this committee translates into action the espoused value of teen leadership and it acknowledges teens’ ability to contribute to the development of their own department.

The board of directors of the JCC should consider teen representation. Some Center executives argue against this recommendation. They say that no other age group has a designated place on the board, that the work of the board and the discussions which take place at board meetings do not concern teens, and that the Center’s youth are unqualified to contribute in this forum. These arguments are refuted by the experience of Centers which have broken with entrenched notions of what the board should be and created a place for teens in the board room. These Centers have found this to be a highly advantageous move. They have truly given teens a voice in the Center and have found that the teens’ contributions inform and enrich many of the board’s deliberations. Importantly, they have sent a powerful message to the entire community that teens are valued participants in communal life.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

JCCs should increase allocations to Youth Departments. A greater financial commitment to youth will require proactive fundraising to support youth services.

Current Realities

Participants in training seminars for youth professionals were asked to define a “successful” program and to specify the criteria they use to determine whether or not a teen event or activity has succeeded. They were also asked to answer the same question from the perspective of their Center’s executive or board. The two sets of answers were strikingly discrepant. Teen workers measure success primarily through the reactions of participants. They also tend to look at the program’s impact participants and the extent to which the program has met their own goals and expectations. In contrast they believe that the board and the executive look primarily at the “bottom line”—how many people came, how much money was made.

Emphasis on the bottom line has far-reaching effects. Teen programs tend not to be “money makers,” and indeed, many have deficits. The belief that teens do not bring money into the Center contributes to their low position on the Center’s list of priorities. It also makes it more difficult for youth professionals to advocate for significant changes or increases in programming. Moreover, the need to produce “numbers” often inhibits creativity, innovation, and risk-taking in programming. “Funding is an obstacle to developing new programs,” wrote one youth professional in a recent survey. “It is difficult to break out of the programs that have proven successful year after year and take a chance on a new, exciting, unproven program or idea.”

Finally, working with teens often involves building programs over time. Youth professionals indicate that programs are sometimes judged too quickly based on enrollment, rather than on the quality or intensity of the experience which they provide. The result is that worthwhile programs may be prematurely terminated when large numbers do not attend at the outset.

Centers generally do not provide an adequate budget for their Youth Departments nor do they actively attempt to generate outside funding for youth services. The JCC Personnel and Practices Survey showed that only 26% of Centers provide an adequate budget for the Youth Department, and only 7% do a good job of identifying potential sources of funding for teens. Some 3% say they do well at cultivating major donors for programs for youth, and 15% say they are strong in writing effective proposals for youth programming. It is impossible to develop quality programs for teens with this low level of financial resource development.
Table 3: Budgeting and Revenue Enhancement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How well does your Center ...</th>
<th>not at all</th>
<th>a little/somewhat</th>
<th>extremely well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>provide an adequate budget for the Youth Department?</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identify potential sources of funding?</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write effective proposals for youth programming?</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultivate major donors for programs for youth?</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involve lay leadership in fundraising efforts?</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The same survey indicates that of all the dollars received from Federation, on average only 14% are targeted specifically for youth. Thus, while Federations claim that Jewish continuity has moved to the top of their agenda, this move is not reflected in the monies earmarked for youth.

Response

The Youth Department needs to have its own firm financial base. Resources cannot be so scarce that youth workers are inhibited from experimenting with interesting, innovative programs or that they are unable to give nascent programs a chance to grow. Centers must allocate monies to their Youth Departments at a level that acknowledges the importance of teens and their special programming and service needs.

The Youth Department, along with the Development Office, also must become proactive in identifying potential sources of outside funding, writing grant proposals for youth programming, cultivating major donors, and involving lay leadership in various fundraising efforts for teen services. Economic realities make such revenue enhancement efforts essential. Pairing fundraising with the communal need for youth services can be a productive approach which will ultimately benefit the Youth Department, the Center, and the Jewish community at large.

4Fund Raising for Youth Programs in Jewish Community Centers by Marvin Ciperon, Gary Tobin, and Joseph Harris (Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and the JCC Association/N.J.A., 1994) has complete and detailed information on how to conduct effective fundraising for JCC Youth Departments.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

JCCs should develop national leadership which can set policy, motivate research, oversee the collection and dissemination of information, and ensure that youth professionals receive national recognition for their achievements.

Some institutional change efforts are most successful when they are driven from the top down, others when they rise from the grassroots. Placing teens high on the communal agenda requires a dual approach. Individual Centers need to assess their current teen services and consider how to implement the preceding action steps at the local level. At the same time, the need exists for leadership and coordination at the national level. While local efforts can inform deliberations at the national level, national initiatives are necessary to motivate and support change in local communities.

National leadership cannot and should play a vital role in setting policy; collecting and disseminating information; and directing training, research, and program development. When prominent national leaders make issues concerning youth a top priority, these issues will quickly ascend to the top of the national Jewish communal agenda.

Policy Setting

Effective planning for teen services requires a national commission comprised of JCC leadership and representatives from other youth-serving organizations. Members of the commission should be familiar with cutting-edge, progressive approaches to teen programming in both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities and open to new possibilities. This group will set priorities for youth services in the JCCs and in the broader Jewish community. It will build bridges between the Center movement and other institutions and agencies. And it will generate information and ideas about sources of funds and ways to raise monies for youth development. The Youth Commission’s work will serve to provide direction, coherence, and purpose to JCC teen services.

At the same time, a prestigious and productive national commission will lend credence to the claim that the JCC movement is serious about providing teens with the very best programs and services.

Research

Research on the needs and interests of Jewish teens should be carried out on a regular basis to measure trends and document changes in the teen population. A national data base on Jewish teens could provide insight into demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal trends—a National Jewish Population Study for Teens. In addition, issues-oriented studies (e.g., research on teen leadership or on teen views and experience with antisemitism, sexuality, and other such topics) could provide the
Center movement with knowledge directly relevant to Youth Department planning.

Individual Centers may also choose to carry out their own teen surveys. The framework for this research, however, should be coordinated at the national level. In this way, local studies will enjoy greater credibility, there will be a ready context for the analysis and interpretation of local data, and it will be possible to compare findings across communities.

Collection and Dissemination of Information

There is, as well, a need for a national clearinghouse of information related to youth services. Valuable information is currently closeted in individual Centers and in other agencies, available for use by a limited number of people. Ideas and materials on teen programming, budgeting, outreach, Jewish education, fundraising, public relations, marketing, planning, and other topics of vital interest to all Youth Departments should be assembled and disseminated to the field at large.

Rewards and Recognition for Teen Workers

The Center movement is blessed with a cadre of talented and hard-working professionals who have dedicated themselves to the JCC Youth Department. These workers deserve a platform for displaying their achievements and successes and for receiving recognition and appreciation at the national level.

CONCLUSION

Evidence abounds that adolescence today is a more troubling passage than it has been in the past and that American Jewish youth are not immune to its difficulties. The necessary ingredients for revitalizing youth services in the JCCs currently exist, but they must be pulled together for action. Methods have been developed for identifying teen interests, for assessing program, facility, and service needs, and for selecting public relations strategies to attract teen participants. American Jewish leaders appear ready to confront contemporary challenges to Jewish identity and community involvement. Funders are increasingly interested in supporting the healthy development of today’s youth, tomorrow’s adults. The Center movement has a long tradition of building community and serving the needs of diverse populations. JCCs have dedicated and talented professional staff and lay leaders. And Jewish teens themselves have great leadership potential. Given these components, it is time to move toward the future. The Jewish Community Centers must now engage in creative thinking and undertake decisive action to revitalize teen programming and youth services.
APPENDIX

Sources of Information and Ideas

The ideas and information presented in this report are the result of two years of extensive and in-depth work in the Center movement undertaken under the aegis of the Youth Development Project supported by a grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Readers’ Digest Fund. Our sources include the following:

- Prototypic planning projects at several model sites (including the JCCs of Boca Raton, Dayton, Pittsburgh, Staten Island, and St. Louis). These have involved interviews with JCC professional staff, lay leaders, and interested members of the community; focus groups with teens and parents; teen needs assessment questionnaires; and inventories of teen programs and activities.

- A series of training seminars for youth professionals throughout the United States

- Focus groups with youth workers in New York, Boston, and Southern California and interviews conducted with youth workers in individual Centers in a variety of communities


- The Personnel and Practices Survey, a nationwide survey of JCCs which dealt with planning, budgeting, and fundraising for youth programs. A report of survey results is available from the JCC Association/N.A.


- A survey of 1113 American Jewish teenagers who took part in the 1993 regional JCC Maccabi Games. A report of this study is available from the JCC Association/N.A.