

Thirty Years of Professional Development in Jewish Community Relations

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Editor's note: *As the following article makes clear, by its nature, community relations is practiced within and through agency structures. It is not a field for independent individual practice. The history of Jewish community relations from its start is inseparable from the history of sponsoring organizations—of national agencies and councils, local councils and federations, and, importantly, of the very association of professional community relations workers, the AJCRW, itself. This report, researched and written by Dr. Lurie, a past president of both the AJCRW and the Conference of Jewish Communal Service, is in its narrow sense a history of the AJCRW, but it is offered here because, more broadly, it also tells substantively the story of Jewish community relations developments of recent years.*

The Association of Jewish Community Relations Workers (AJCRW) was established in February, 1950, by a group of 80 persons serving in a variety of professional capacities on the staffs of national and community agencies in the field. The constitution adopted at that time specified five purposes: to establish and maintain high professional standards; to provide opportunities for exchange of views; to stimulate analysis of ideas and skills; to encourage cooperation with other communal workers; and to encourage understanding and application of Jewish values. In 1965, a revised Constitution and Bylaws reiterated these and added three further purposes: to improve and extend community relations practice; to bring about working conditions necessary for advancement and security; and to take positions on matters of community relations concern.

This report* is designed to review briefly the professional developments since 1950,

and against this background to assess the role of AJCRW in its thirty years of activity toward the realization of these objectives.

Historical Background

The topic of Jewish community relations (designated in various ways) has been a heated one in Jewish life in all the centuries and centers of the Diaspora, hence long before the process over the last seven decades of professionalization of the fields of Jewish communal service. It would be interesting and valuable to sketch the entire factual and conceptual development of Jewish community relations as such, but unfortunately this is too weighty an undertaking. The present review of necessity concentrates on the growth of Jewish community relations as a professional field in the U.S., and of AJCRW as an expression and instrument of that growth.

The AJCRW story does not comprise Relations as a Professional Field of Jewish Communal Service," in the *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, June 1950, vol. XXVI, no. 4., pp. 538-543, incorporating information to which I had access as secretary of the Interim Committee and then of AJCRW.

The opinions expressed are solely my responsibility.

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* This review and analysis were commissioned in October, 1980, by the Association of Jewish Community Relations Workers, Muriel Berman, President. Her cooperation and that of Joel Ollander and Betty Kaye Taylor, Past Presidents, has been indispensable. I also want to acknowledge the help of the Blaustein Library of the American Jewish Committee. A principal source of data is an article, "Community

the whole record, even in the modern period. In 1940 an organization known as the Community Relations Conference (CRC—the shorthand designation also for the local community relations councils or committees, with which it should not be confused) came into existence. This consisted primarily of the executive directors of the local Jewish Community Relations Councils, meeting three or four times a year with some of the department heads of the large national Jewish community relations agencies, who briefed them on current events and programs. There were only ten communities having full-time professional staff in 1940 (even today there are no more than thirty). The directors of these agencies were isolated and scattered executives of small agencies in a new and difficult field, with no local or nearby peers. These CRC meetings were thus substitutes for regular consultation and supervision, which were not feasible. Some of the CRC professionals also were able to confer with the professional and lay people associated with Mayor's Committees on Intergroup Relations and other non-sectarian voluntary agencies; and in 1948 this group formed the National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials (NAIRO). Of course, NAIRO did not help JCRC executives keep up with trends specifically affecting Jews.

The large national Jewish agencies, which long predated the CRC and AJCRW, have for many years had processes of staff orientation and in-service training, such as calling together their field and headquarters staffs for discussions usually after national conventions. The CRC also predated the establishment of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC, originally NCRAC), which came into existence in 1944. Since its formation, the NJCRAC has sponsored a variety of training processes, including orientation of new workers in the field and seminars of different sorts for community and other professionals. Discussions of

substantive topics at NJCRAC and national agency meetings have been essential elements in the professional development of workers in the field.

Through involvement of the NJCRAC and the national agencies, and with cooperation of the CRC and later of AJCRW, professionalization of Jewish community relations work has been advanced. Various advisory and educational instruments of Jewish community service generally have aided this process. These have included the Training Bureau for Jewish Communal Service in the period just before the founding of AJCRW, the Bureau for Careers in Jewish Communal Service in the early 1970s, the Hornstein program at Brandeis University, the School of Communal Service at HUC-JIR in Los Angeles, the Wurzweiler School of Yeshiva University and particularly its Weiner program with the New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, some courses at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and others. In individual communities, also, there have been training programs sponsored by local Federations. All of these have been designed for the orientation of professionals as Jewish communal workers generally rather than specifically for the somewhat arcane problems and processes of Jewish community relations.

The CRC was made up solely of executive directors. While it was not set up to supply a broad forum for the entire field, and it was averse to converting itself into a general professional organization including national agency personnel and sub-executive staff, in 1948, it established a special committee for the purpose of initiating a separate organization of all professionals in Jewish community relations work. As it turned out, between the AJCRW, which was given birth by this action, and the various other processes described above, by 1958 it became apparent that there was no further need for the CRC as an organization. It quietly disappeared, first exacting a com-

mitment from AJCRW to continue the kinds of meetings the CRC had conducted. The AJCRW did sponsor five rather elaborate conferences from 1958 until 1963.

Among those who participated actively, three people in particular were closely involved in the initial years of the AJCRW. The late George J. Hexter, Assistant Director of the American Jewish Committee, served as chairman of the Interim Committee stemming from the CRC action, and thus presided over the two years while AJCRW was in gestation. Maurice B. Fagan, then Executive Director of the Philadelphia Jewish Community Relations Council, as first formal president gave AJCRW its continuing orientation toward serving the actual needs of its members and achieving acceptance, not general at that time, of community relations as a professional field of Jewish community service. Dr. S. Andhil Fineberg, then director of the Community Service Department of the American Jewish Committee, gave special emphasis to the definition of the field and of the qualifications and skills of the Jewish community relations worker, as well as to the articulation and publication of professional concepts. Many others served effectively, and not only those elected to posts of public leadership. AJCRW is truly the work of many hands.

Since its establishment, the AJCRW has developed by spurts, with periods of high activity and others of relative quiescence. The minimum level of AJCRW action, which has been maintained throughout the period of its existence, has been that of annual meetings and rotation of leadership by means of regular elections. In the first period, meetings were reported in mimeographed "Community Relations Papers," of which ten issues were published from 1950 until 1957; or, in 1954, in an impressive printed "AJCRW Annual." At the initiative of Herman Brown, later a president of AJCRW, an internal bulletin was published for a period (seven issues in 1965, 1966, and

1967). This was called "The Co-Relator," and dealt with changes in the field, personnel, etc. In Muriel Bermar's presidency, publication of a newsletter has been resumed. Since AJCRW's affiliation in 1955 with the Conference of Jewish Communal Service, then the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, the discussions at meetings have dealt with community relations in the broader context of Jewish communal service, and many papers have been published in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*.

In its periods of greater activity, AJCRW conducted regional meetings several times a year. The first one was held on the East Coast in October, 1952 on the topic "The Future of Jewish Community Relations as a Profession in the Light of the Present Crisis" (a reference to the split in the field following the MacIver report, a rift which was healed in 1965). Others were occasionally held in the Midwest or on the West Coast. Statements were issued on professional standards in 1956, and on professional skills in 1959 with Dr. Andhil Fineberg, then AJCRW president, playing a leading role. A statement on personnel standards and practices was issued in 1964, reflecting hard work especially by J. Harold Saks of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and then by Eleanor Katz of the American Jewish Committee. These formed the basis of a project involving discussions with a number of agency executives, to whom a set of standards for retirement plans were also circulated in 1966. A seminar at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara was organized in 1964 by A. Harold Murray, and another was organized in Boston in 1970 by Albert D. Chernin, each of whom was president at the time. A major achievement was the publication during Betty Kaye Taylor's presidency in 1975 of "A Reader in Jewish Community Relations" by Ann G. Wolfe, a past president, and dedicated to the memory of

Jules Cohen, who had also been president. This is a collection of logically organized excerpts of relevant writings, primarily by AJCRW members. In 1976 and 1979 at the initiative of Joel Ollander, now a past president, intensive non-agency-related professional development workshops with expert leadership were held at annual meetings. Participation in the CJCS over the years has also made it possible for AJCRW members to play a leading role in the CJCS Committee on Public Issues, which deals for the most part with community relations questions of concern to all Jewish communal workers.

Membership

While growth of membership has not been spectacular, undoubtedly because the number of full-time professionals in the field has not increased greatly, it has been substantial. Probably no more than one-half the eligible professionals have belonged to AJCRW at any one time, however. Meanwhile there has been a great expansion of the number of part-time community relations professionals, mostly Federation staff in smaller and intermediate cities without full-time JCRCs. These have general community organization training and experience and have had to acquire community relations skills on the job. Most of them affiliate with the National Association of Jewish Community Organization Personnel (NAJCOP), rather than with AJCRW.

In 1950, it was reported that there were 80 charter members. A comparative analysis of lists for selected later years shows the following:

Year	Members
1951	110
1956	126
1967	156
1977-79*	207

*Total, including some members not active in all three years.

(Representing:	National Agencies	Local Communities)
	5	22
	8	22
	11	22
	13	30

The criteria for eligibility at the time AJCRW was founded were: "Membership in the Association shall be open to any person engaged professionally in community relations work by a Jewish community relations organization" None of the terms was defined, and the membership lists contain names of persons working for Federations and for various types of Jewish organizations not generally regarded as specifically community relations, as well as a sprinkling of government employees, probably former Jewish community relations workers, who wished to keep their affiliation while going on to nonsectarian community relations employment. A category of Associate Members was provided in the 1965 revision of the Constitution, to provide for qualified professionals not full-time employees of Jewish community relations agencies. The word "Jewish" in the definition modifies the employing agency, but, is applied neither to the term "community relations worker" nor to the word "person." It was explicit at the time that non-Jewish persons working professionally in community relations, of which there were and are some, would be eligible. It is obvious also that the framers of this document thought of "community relations work" as a generic field addressing similar goals, needs, and problems of Jews and of other groups.

In 1950 it was observed that there was no uniform pattern of background and training among the membership. An analysis of the first fifty applicants for membership in AJCRW showed 40 with some type of graduate or professional training, but a

great diversity. The most frequent professional degree was LL.B., with 14, but rabbis, social workers, social scientists, and journalists were also represented. This diversity of background was found still to be the case at the time a study was made for the Bureau for Careers in Jewish Communal Service in the early 1970s, and an inspection of the later membership lists would suggest that similar diversity still flourishes. This is a reflection of the complexity of the community relations program and the variety of modalities required to effectuate it. In the substantial and growing group of persons with community relations responsibilities in smaller city Federations, however, there is a predominance of social workers with MSWs in community organization and of people with master's degrees in Jewish communal service. These are still sparsely represented in AJCRW. Some of them have become fascinated with the field and have moved into full-time community relations positions.

Progress toward Realization of AJCRW Purposes

Each of the original purposes can be examined against the historical background to determine which aspects are still relevant and what progress has been made.

1. To establish and maintain high standards for those engaged professionally in community relations.

In the 1965 revision of the constitution, this was spelled out further in added points, as follows:

6. To improve and extend our practices: (a) by developing a body of knowledge and skill; (b) by setting standards and establishing criteria for sound practices; (c) by influencing the nature, context, and extension of professional education; (d) by publishing experience in new and established areas of professional practice.

7. To help bring about working conditions necessary for stability of employment opportunities for advancement and ultimate security,

by establishing:

- An ethical code for practitioners
- Sound principles of administration in agencies
- Acceptable personnel standards and practices, including salary standards and retirement plans
- The qualifications for practice in the field, methods of placement, tenure and advancement.

In the early work of the organization the three significant statements on standards and skills and personnel practices were developed and called to the attention of agency executives systematically. These efforts were then incorporated in the general activity of AJCRW. There are Committees on Personnel Practices, Standards and Training, and Professional Ethics, which have been called on from time to time. The professional workshops at annual meetings and the drafting of a code of personal practices have been recent forms of action in pursuit of these objectives.

The first statement, on qualifications, in 1956, deals with a definition of the field and an analysis of training, experience, and Jewish background necessary for a professional Jewish community relations worker. The 1959 statement elaborated further and more specifically on these points, and outlined the basics of sound professional practice in a section called "Skills in Action," covering analysis, treatment, and prevention techniques. The 1964 statement and 1979 outline followed up in terms of the obligations of agencies to their professional staff for working conditions and personnel practices.

Not only did the statements of the early years have an impact at the time that they were developed, but they were useful thereafter in such settings as the Bureau for Careers in Jewish Communal Service and in the planning of community relations sequences at centers for training in Jewish community work. These also had a significant impact indirectly on professional understanding, attitudes, and conduct of

the membership and on continuing AJCRW activities, particularly meetings and publications. While it is natural because of the character of Jewish community relations work that much of the stimulus for professional development should come from individual national agencies, AJCRW along with the NJCRAC has served as a brake on partisanship, and to some extent has stimulated professional development.

In sum, then, it can be said that there has been a reasonable, but perhaps not optimum, movement toward the realization of these purposes. Not all of this movement has been mediated by the organization, but AJCRW did follow up aggressively on its initial efforts, and has from time to time resumed its activity regarding these matters. AJCRW has most definitely played a positive role with regard to standards.

2. To encourage and provide opportunities for the exchange of views and experiences on problems, programs and trends in Jewish community relations work.

This was supplemented in 1965 through point 6d, quoted above.

This objective and the next, with which it is closely linked, have been realized perhaps more completely than the first. Through the years AJCRW has maintained a regular schedule of annual meetings and an extensive program of regional meetings in the New York City area, the latter drawing wide participation of practitioners from the entire East Coast, where there is a heavy concentration of employment in the field. These meetings have succeeded in serving as a forum through which workers in different agencies have been able to meet each other and to learn about activities in a non-partisan setting. In the earlier years, the publications flowing from these meetings were also a significant medium for exchange of views. By the time that the AJCRW publications were discontinued, members were taking full advantage of the affiliation with the CJCS and were

publishing frequently in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*.

3. To stimulate the development, presentation, and analysis of ideas, concepts, skills and techniques in community relations work.

There is a paradox in Jewish community relations work: the professional must exercise a high order of skill to bring about a favorable outcome in every type of situation or project, yet he or she can apply this skill only through the structure of an agency and the utilization of its resources, contacts, and lay leaderships, rather than as an individual practitioner operating independently. Many of the discussions of concepts dealing with policy and strategy for community relations work have therefore necessarily been held in agency settings, rather than in the professional organization. AJCRW members have often played a key role in these discussions.

Despite the special character of the field, a very wide range of issues has been dealt with most productively in the setting of the AJCRW, as shown by a listing of topics discussed at AJCRW meetings and in AJCRW publications. Ann G. Wolfe's *A Reader in Jewish Community Relations* further indicates the range and extent of communication among workers in this field. Furthermore, as the following examples show, AJCRW has offered a setting for the discussion of questions of professional role and development that could be addressed in no other forum.

The following selection of topics discussed at meetings or in publications of AJCRW is illustrative of this point:

1950 (Community Relations Papers): Community Relations Work—Its Roots in Jewish History; The Profession of Community Relations; Trends and Challenges in 1950; Legislation and Litigation; The Crisis in Political Rights; Making Civil Rights Work at Home Base; Why Jewish Community Relations; Promoting Better Human Relations via Hollywood and Vine.

1951 (Community Relations Papers): Integration and Separatism; Interreligious Ten-

sions; Freedom of Expression; Internal Security and Individual Rights.

1952 (Community Relations Papers): Is Community Relations a Profession? Trends.

1954 (AJCRW Annual): Counteraction against the Bigot; Supervision for Jewish Community Relations Workers; Discrimination in Advertising.

1956 (Community Relations Papers): The Respective Roles of Laymen and Professionals. (Annual Meeting): Religion and the Public Schools; Discrimination in Higher Educational Institutions; Recruitment and Training of Professional Personnel; Use of Public Funds by Sectarian Agencies.

1957 (Community Relations Papers): The Jewish Component in Community Relations; Professional Status and Job Security. (Annual Meeting): Moral and Spiritual Values in the Schools; Desegregation; The Changing Labor Market; Community Relations Implications of the Situation in the Middle East; Changing Neighborhoods; Ethnic Group Identification in the U.S.

1962 (Midwinter Conference): National-Local Relationship; The Radical Right; Research on the Nature and Extent of Anti-Semitism; Church-State on the Local Level; The Sociology of the American Jew; Working with the Negro Community. (Annual Meeting): In-Service Training; The Role of Jewish Agencies in Educating about Communism; De Facto Segregation in the North; Changing Prospects in Metropolitan Centers.

1963 (Midwinter Conference): Overt Anti-Semitism at Home and Abroad; Changing Patterns of Race Relations; The U.S. Supreme Court Decision on Reapportionment.

1977 (Annual Meeting): Interpreting Israel—New Perspectives; A Jewish Presence on Capitol Hill; Does the Jewish Community Understand Community Relations?

1979 (Annual Conference): Report of Task Force on Personnel Practices and Professional Standards; Jewish Community Relations Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow; Transcultural Allegories.

Table of Contents from *A Reader in Jewish Community Relations* (1975) by Ann G. Wolfe: A Search for a Definition of Jewish Community Relations; The Early Days—The Beginning of Jewish Community Relations; The History, Continued; Fighting Anti-

Semitism; Civil Rights; Civil Liberties; Inter-religious Relations; Church-State Relations; Jewish Identity; Israel; Soviet Jewry; A Look Ahead—Coming Issues.

4. To encourage cooperation between Jewish community relations workers and other communal workers and between the Association and other professional associations in related fields.

In 1950 when this was written, two sets of cooperative relationships had approximately equal weight in the minds of the founding members: those with communal workers in the Jewish community who were not specifically engaged in community relations and their organization, the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service (now the CJCS); and those with other community relations workers in non-Jewish settings, such as Mayor's Committees, Fair Practices Committees, the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People, Catholic Interracial Council, etc., and their organization, the National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials (NAIRO). For a variety of reasons, the former set of relationships has flourished, while the latter has languished.

The emphasis on Jewish identity, which relates to the fifth point in the statement of purposes, has increased steadily since 1950, and this has been a major factor. Other elements have been: the greater concentration in Jewish community relations work on issues of maximum concern to Jews, such as interpretation of Israel and of the plight of the Jews in the Soviet Union and other lands of hardship; the simultaneous concentration of work by those in the general intergroup area on problems of "racism" and "minorities," both redefined in such a way as virtually to exclude consideration of problems of Jews; the lack of interest in professionalization among many other groups, with emphasis rather on attaining and publicly wielding political clout on the tactics of confrontation; and the assumption after pro-civil rights legis-

lative victories and court decisions of almost full responsibility for implementation of programs by public rather than voluntary agencies. While some old-timers retained individual relationships, therefore, the divergent patterns of professional development prevented closer association between AJCRW and NAIRO, now the National Association of Human Relations Workers, the general organization in the intergroup relations field.

Early in its existence, AJCRW entered into an association with the NCJCS (now CJCS), first informally, then through affiliation, initiating a relationship of great mutual benefit.

In addition to the extensive participation of AJCRW members in CJCS programs, publication in the *Journal*, and service as officers and on committees, a special aspect of this relationship has been AJCRW's contribution of expertise to the CJCS Committee on Public Issues. This has in effect been an implementation of the final objective added in 1965 to AJCRW's original purposes:

5. While not primarily an action body, the Association may take official positions on matters within the general scope of community relations concern.

A recent article in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* (Fall 1980, Vol. LVII, No. 1, pp. 4-8) lists topics of resolutions adopted by the CJCS from 1974 through 1980. These include:

1974: Jewish community campaigns and the UJA; Diaspora and Israel; civil rights, civil liberties, and the constitutional crisis; social welfare; criminal justice; Jewish education; opportunities for women in Jewish communal service; the Jews of Syria; the Genocide Convention; Soviet Jewry; peace in the Middle East.

1975: Peace in the Middle East; Arab investments in the U.S.; Soviet Jewry; social welfare; Jewish education; retirement planning.

1976: The Middle East; Jews of Syria; Soviet Jewry; social welfare; the U.S. Bicentennial.

1977: The Middle East; Soviet Jewry; social welfare; energy; the Genocide Convention; Jewish education; women in Jewish communal service.

1978: U.S.-Israel relations; aliyah; neo-Nazis in the U.S.; Soviet Jewry; Ethiopian Jewry; women in Jewish communal service; Arab petrodollars; social welfare.

1979: Israel; Soviet Jewry; immigration to the U.S.; energy; Social Security benefits; federally supported services for the elderly.

1980: Soviet Jewry; Ethiopian Jews; the Camp David peace process and the autonomy negotiations; Jerusalem; proposals for a balanced U.S. budget.

Obviously, most of these resolutions are in areas of Jewish community relations practice. Most of them were initially drafted by AJCRW members.

6. To encourage among Jewish community relations workers the fullest possible understanding of Jewish life and values and the application of Jewish ideals of social justice and human dignity.

Maurice B. Fagan, in his 1952 AJCRW presidential address, said: "Jewish community relations is charged essentially with bringing about a maximum realization of Jewish life." The 1956 *Statement of Qualifications for Jewish Community Relations Work* says that the Jewish community relations worker "shares with other Jewish communal workers the duty of strengthening the democratic Jewish community and improving intra-Jewish relations . . . must have respectful regard for all forms and expressions of Jewish life." This has been a guiding principle at all times. The pursuit of this objective is inherent in the field of Jewish community relations, and has characterized the work of the agencies, as well as that of the professional organization as shown in the materials cited above.

Discussion

In sum, then, there has been substantial development in terms of professional activity, Jewish identity, conceptualization, training, and definition of qualifications, skills, and standards since the formation of AJCRW in 1950. Not all of the professional growth has taken place through AJCRW as such, but there is little doubt that it has been a contributing factor. Affiliation with the CJCS has been a key step in the integration of Jewish community relations work into the entire field of Jewish community service.

National agencies and, in fact, also local agencies have remained prominent in professional training and conceptualization. This continuing activity may reflect some agency unwillingness to entrust the essential responsibilities to a new instrumentality without resources. It also indicates the need agencies feel to combine general professional development with their own specific ideological and program orientations and operating structures. There has been a quite ongoing debate within the field, more by way of the implications of actions than of overt disputation, concerning the utility and the desirability of non-partisan professionalization which would be uniform for the field of Jewish community relations and not linked to specific agencies or groupings in the field.

Through the years there have been some skeptical voices questioning whether this field really has the character of a profession: whether there is a definable body of knowledge at its core; whether all the diverse kinds of workers in all the different agencies practice a common discipline; whether there is a specific set of skills that can be

transmitted in any way other than trial and error, sink or swim. There are those who see the prominent role of agency structures as antithetical to professionalization and even doubt the transposability of skills from one agency setting to another. Even the lively game of musical chairs of community relations professionals moving from agency to agency has not fully set these doubts to rest.

Another kind of question arises regarding the separation of Jewish community relations work and the non-sectarian field. The 1959 statement on skills, in point I, speaks of the Jewish community relations worker's "commitment to the broad goals of all intergroup relations work." Is this a time for the Jewish community relations field to seek to reestablish ties, or has a permanent parting of the ways taken place? And in this matter, as in many others, are agency policy discussions decisive, or is there a role for deliberations among the professionals through AJCRW?

Then there are more practical questions of an organizational nature: Why are there so many workers in the field who do not become members of AJCRW? What can, and what should, AJCRW do about the part-time community relations professionals? Why has AJCRW growth and activity fluctuated so much from year to year?

Against a background of solid achievement, AJCRW need not flinch from examining all these, and other, challenging questions. There may not be any readily available answers, but they can be resolved little by little, as so many other problems have been, through the processes of AJCRW's ongoing activity.