

“Furthering the Welfare”: The National Council of Jewish Women of Canada
And Its Effort to Enfranchise Toronto Jews with Disabilities, 1980-1987
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The Canadian branch of The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) was inaugurated in Toronto in 1897, four years after the first NCJW was established in the United States.¹ The Toronto Chapter was brought to the city by Mrs. Mendel de Sola after a failed attempt of convincing Toronto’s Ladies’ Montefiore Benevolent Society to join the Council.² As the first female-lead Jewish organization in Canada, the Toronto section of the Council dedicated itself, “*in the spirit of Judaism... to furthering human welfare in the Jewish and general communities...*”³ The organization’s commitment to human rights established the Council as vital to the advancement, and survival of the Jewish community of Canada.⁴

The National Council of Jewish Women of Canada (NCJWC), Toronto Section, has been operating for over a century. Its advocacy during the late twentieth century established itself as a major force in ensuring equal opportunities for those with disabilities, and defined its role within Canadian Jewish society. From 1980 to 1987, the Toronto section of the Council focused its enterprise on the living conditions, and experiences of Canadian Jews with disabilities.⁵ The

¹ Rogow, F. *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893 -1993*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993, 5-6; Draper, Paula J., and Janice B. Karlinsky. "Abraham's Daughters: Women, Charity and Power in the Canadian Jewish Community." In *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: and Exploration in Women's History*, edited by Jean Burnet, 75-70. Toronto: The Multicultural Society of Ontario Toronto, 1986, 78.

²Volunteer Bureau Select –A- Service Brochures---1963.” The Woman’s Globe and Mail.” *The Globe and Mail*. November 77, 1957. Fonds 38, file 37. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Ontario Jewish Archives, Blankenstien Family Heritage Centre, 13.

³ Vineberg, Ethel. *The History of the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada*. Montreal: National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, 1968, 83.

⁴ Draper, Paula J., and Janice B. Karlinsky. "Abraham's Daughters: Women, Charity and Power in the Canadian Jewish Community." In *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: and Exploration in Women's History*, edited by Jean Burnet, 75-70. Toronto: The Multicultural Society of Ontario Toronto, 1986, 3.

⁵ Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record] – 1980-1984. “Task Force on Jewish Persons on Disabilities. Background and History”. Fonds 38, Series 7-11, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 1.

members of the NCJWC acknowledged that they “were the first ones to work with the Jewish physically disabled in Toronto.”⁶ In 1981, the Council rolled out programming for “The International Year of Disabled Persons.”⁷ The United Nations officially declared 1981 “The International Year of Disabled Persons” to create awareness, inclusion, and accessibility for those with disabilities.⁸ The Council was also influenced by the contemporary local activism aimed at legislating more inclusive human rights policies in Ontario. According to political scientist Brian Howe, Ontario began creating laws in order to “counter discrimination and provide for the social right to equal opportunity” in the 1940s.⁹ Each development in the human rights policy was a result of social activism, which primarily focused on race and religion, however it eventually developed towards inclusive rights for those with disabilities.¹⁰ The social context of the 1980s directly affected Toronto, as the United Nations and Ontario’s human rights policy encouraged developing civil liberties. Subsequently, the fight for and development of fundamental human rights in Toronto, influenced the Council’s activism for Jewish individuals with disabilities, during this decade.

Despite the influential role of the NCJWC, Toronto Section, there is little scholarship that analyzes the relationship between the Council, and the individuals with disabilities whom the Council aimed to serve. However, this relationship mattered. During a remarkably short seven-

⁶ Opening Bathurst-Prince Charles [Textual Record, Graphic Material] -1986-1990. “CJC Holds Survey on Jewish Disabled.” Lungen, Paul. Fonds 38, Series 7-13, File 55. OJA.

⁷ Task Force on People with Disabilities, “On the Move” [Textual Record, Graphic Material]. –1984. *Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 49. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 1.

⁸ “International Year for Disabled Persons. A/RES/31/123.” Presented at General Assembly for the United Nations. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/31/123, 104.

⁹ Howe, R. Brian. “The Evolution of Human Rights Policy in Ontario.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne De Science Politique* 24, no. 4 (1991): 783-802. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/stable/3229307>, 787.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 790-4.

year period, the Council proved itself vital in exposing the challenging realities that Toronto Jews with disabilities faced. The female activists of the Council established the foundations for social services, and programs that enhanced Jews with disabilities' development of their own Jewish identities. The activism from the Toronto chapter of the NJCWC took on a particularly progressive view on disability, on behalf of those with disabilities, providing support for a variety of physical and intellectual disabilities.¹¹ The Council utilized an institutional based model, where each institution created and funded by the Council's women had a particular focus. These various associations were staffed by delegated professionals who resourced those with disabilities around the city.

Three projects reveal how the Council successfully connected those with disabilities to their fellow Jewish brethren: the Toronto Jewish Society for the Hearing Impaired, the Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742[1981], and the Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities. These three ventures illustrated how the Council considered three elements essential for ensuring the social survival of Jews with disabilities, as the projects operated as a vehicle to providing attainable educational, communal and religious services.¹² As a result of their social advocacy, the Council enfranchised those with disabilities, as it connected them to the Toronto Jewish community that originally ignored them.

¹¹ Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record] – 1980-1984. “Task Force on Jewish Persons on Disabilities. Background and History”. Fonds 38, Series 7-11, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA

¹² Volunteer Buerau Select –A- Service Broshues---1963.” Over 250 Attend Jewish Women Council’s Meet.” Matsdorf, S. Wolf. Fonds 38, file 37. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

The Council's first act of commitment to those with disabilities came in 1980, when it established the Toronto Jewish Society for the Hearing Impaired.¹³ During the latter part of the twentieth century, Canadian law had been evolving towards inclusive rights for those with disabilities, however the social attitudes of Jewish Torontonians toward disability did not keep pace.¹⁴ Council member Donna Shenkman discovered the city's temperament while volunteering at a Christian community centre, where she questioned several hard-of-hearing Jews seeking services at the centre. Asking them why did not go to the Jewish community for help, Shenkman was told "no help [in the Toronto Jewish community] existed."¹⁵ Following her discovery, Shenkman approached the Council and they formulated their pilot project, the Toronto Jewish Society for the Hearing Impaired.¹⁶ Prior to this project, those with hearing challenges were left at the margins of the Jewish community, as their "the educational, social and spiritual needs ... were ... accommodated in the non-Jewish community..."¹⁷ These non-Jewish centres were often associated with other religious or cultural practices – most of them expressly Christian – which established the "central organizing factor of life within each disabled group...to be the disability itself."¹⁸ These non- Jewish centres focused solely on the participants disability rather than other

¹³ The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record]. -- 1981. *Press Release: For the Hearing Impaired*. The National Council of Jewish Women. November 6, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

¹⁴ Vanhala, Lisa. 2009. "Disability Rights Activists in the Supreme Court of Canada: Legal Mobilization Theory and Accommodating Social Movements." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42 (4): 981-1002. doi:10.1017/S0008423909990709. http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/00084239/v42i0004/981_draitsmtaasm, 992.

¹⁵ Toronto Jewish Society for Hearing Impaired --- 1981-1982. "Stern Receives Award for Sensitive Reporting". Parker, Andrea. October, 1981. Fonds 38, file 37. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Volunteer Bureau Select –a- Service Brochures---1963." Over 250 Attend Jewish Women Council's Meet." Matsdorf, S. Wolf. Fonds 38, file 37. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Ontario Jewish Archives, Blankenstien Family Heritage Centre.

¹⁸ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object].--1936 -1995, Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record, Graphic Material].--1980 -1984. "They number 36,000 cross Canada, Picture is Dismal for Disabled Jews"

factors apart of their diverse identity, including Jewish interest, culture, religion and social practices.¹⁹ The Toronto Jewish Society for the Hearing Impaired's members acknowledged that the Society was a place of support, where a disability was not the sole bond among its members.

Correspondingly, according to sociologists Karen Bunning and Gabriela Steel, the "ability to be Jewish is a primary factor in identity development."²⁰ Bunning and Steel determine that the only way to develop this Jewish identity is through participation with Jewish culture and religion.²¹ This rhetoric is mirrored by a common understanding that believed the "idea of being Jewish is to do things which are Jewish..."²² These third party centres were not satisfying a Jewish identity because "there was no common denominator other than [their] disabilities."²³ Therefore, the lack of Jewish organizational services available to these Jews before the early 1980s, which forced those Jews with disabilities towards services outside of their community, resulted in barriers to the development of Jewish identity, and a focus on their disability. The Council, through the Society, aimed to remedy this perceived dilemma by creating a forum that connected a community of Jewish individuals with disabilities under one organization. They hoped this forum would facilitate this community to share common interests, customs, culture,

Stern, Beverly. *The Canadian Jewish News*. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 20. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA.

¹⁹ The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record], -- 1981." Disabled Long for Much Closer Ties to City's Jewish Communal Life" Stern, Beverly. November 26, 1981. *The Canadian Jewish News*. The National Council of Jewish Women. November 6, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 1

²⁰ Bunning, Karen and Gabriela Steel. 2007. "Self-Concept in Young Adults with a Learning Disability from the Jewish Community." *British Journal of Learning Disabilities* 35 (1): 43-49. doi:10.1111/j.1468-3156.2006.00388.x. http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/13544187/v35i0001/43_siyawaldftjc, 44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²² The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record], -- 1981." Disabled Long for Much Closer Ties to City's Jewish Communal Life" Stern, Beverly. November 26, 1981. *The Canadian Jewish News*. The National Council of Jewish Women. November 6, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 1

²³ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

practices and beliefs. In turn, as demonstrated by Bunning and Steel, the members of the Society could internalize Jewish experiences and identify with the Jewish community. Through the Society, those individuals who were hard-of-hearing were able to harvest elements of their Jewish identity, as they could engage with the Toronto Jewish Community. By providing a way to formulate Jewish identity, the Council's women facilitated access to Jewish culture, and religion for those with disabilities. The creation of the Society aided in enfranchising this Toronto Jewish community, as it freed those with disabilities from identifying solely with their disability.

The Council's women wanted to develop their activism to include the diverse Jewish community with a variety of disabilities. In a letter to the City of North York, Patricia Starr, President of the NCJWC, Toronto Section, in 1981, stated that success of the Toronto Jewish Society for the Hearing Impaired initiated a sequence of social advocacy for Jewish individuals with disabilities.²⁴ In 1981, during the United Nation's international year for individuals with disabilities, the NCJWC organized a conference with the Canadian Jewish Congress, entitled "The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742", held at its headquarters.²⁵ The two-day long event included a variety of speakers, programs and workshops, intended as it was "to sensitize and mobilize the Jewish community to the needs of our disabled and ... to advocate on their own behalf."²⁶ The Conference was an arena for communication, as those with

²⁴ Conference on the Disabled [Textual Record]-1981." Letter to the City of North York." Patricia Starr. October 28, 1981. Fonds 38, Series 7-11, File 22. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

²⁵ The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record]." The Jewish Disabled in our Community – Time for Action. *The Canadian Jewish News*. November 12, 1981. -- 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

²⁶ The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record]. -- 1981. *National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Toronto Section Communiqué*. October 27, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

and without disabilities were able to work together to develop programming that would provide the opportunity, for a neglected portion of the community, to act, think and speak in ways that connected with Canadian Jewish culture.²⁷ Their proposed resolutions involved making religious, social, and educational programs more accessible for those with disabilities.²⁸ The meeting also acknowledged the feelings of rejection that many Jews with disabilities felt by the broader Canadian Jewish community.²⁹ Their call for affirmative action aimed to hold Jewish institutional leaders responsible for their ignorance towards those on the periphery.³⁰ The solutions agreed upon during the Conference would mimic the Council's pilot project, the Toronto Jewish Society for the Hearing Impaired, but would also represent those with a variety of disabilities.

The NCJWC, Toronto Section, would come to see this event as the critical wedge program it launched to help promote social change among Toronto Jewry; it would soon add programs that advance in the realms of education, recreation, religion and social services.³¹ Following the Conference, the NCJWC, Toronto Section, struck the Task Force on Jewish

²⁷ The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record]. -- 1981." Disabled Long for Much Closer Ties to City's Jewish Communal Life". Stern, Beverly. November 26, 1981. *The Canadian Jewish News*. The National Council of Jewish Women. November 6, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 1.

²⁸ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object].--1936 -1995, Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record, Graphic Material].--1980 -1984. *Jewish Disabled in the Community –A Time for Action*. October 2, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 20. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA.

²⁹The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record]. -- 1981." Goodman Calls for Affirmative Action. Puts Onus on Jewish Agencies to Aid the Disabled". Karol, Tommy. December 3, 1981. *The Canadian Jewish News*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 6.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record]. -- 1981. *The Jewish Disabled in Our Community A Time for Action*. The National Council of Jewish Women. November 6, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA

Persons with Disabilities.³² The Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities declared itself committed “to improving the quality of life of all Jewish persons with disabilities.”³³ Housed at Council headquarters, at 4700 Bathurst Street, the Council utilized their position of power and the positive responses from the Conference to leverage the Federal Government of Canada, Wintario, and the Laidlaw Foundation to assist in funding their new project.³⁴ The development of this institution for those with disabilities, illustrates how the Council adopted and practiced the ideology from the Conference, as the Task Force was initiated to fulfill the Conference’s goals. This organization became the representing voice of a marginalized community, with the goal of raising awareness and integration, as well as identifying specific needs of those with disabilities.³⁵

The Task Force encouraged and provided support for the independence of Toronto Jewish community with disabilities, through establishing five major ventures. These five projects included their literature, *On the Move* and the *Task Force Newsletter*, their documentary *A Two Way Street*, the childhood educational tool *Kids on the Block*, and the Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project. The cumulative effect of these five experiments encouraged a dialogue among Toronto Jewry with and without disabilities. These ventures aligned with what Sheva Medjuck, author of an article entitled “Jewish Survival in Small Communities in Canada,” described as methods small town Jewish communities utilized to ensure survival and success. The interests of

³² Task Force on People with Disabilities, “On the Move” [Textual Record, Graphic Material]. –1984. *Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 49. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA ,1.

³³ The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record]. -- 1981. *On The Move*. The National Council of Jewish Women. November 6, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA,1.

³⁴ Task Force on People with Disabilities, “On the Move” [Textual Record, Graphic Material]. –1984. *Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 49. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 1-5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

the Task Force and the Council provided a blueprint for the kinds of strategies used. The Task Force and the Council collaborated to establish organizations as a method for independence, advocacy and change for the Jewish community with disabilities. Through these five ventures, the Task Force connected those disenfranchised Jews to their Jewish identity, which included an association to Jewish religion, customs, and culture.³⁶

The Task Force compiled two bodies of literature, with the goal of educating and connecting the Toronto Jewish community. Their informational tool, a booklet entitled *On the Move*, was extensively researched and composed by the Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities, the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, as well as four university students.³⁷ The booklet strove to “provide information for the disabled on transportation, Jewish education, recreation, vocational rehabilitation and housing.”³⁸ Divided into various sections, the leaflet supplied contact information and summaries on the transportation, education, counselling, social, recreational, and rehabilitation services available to those with disabilities.³⁹ The pamphlet provided critical information about accessing city resources, which would allow those with disabilities to seek support, autonomously fulfill their needs, and encourage their involvement within the Jewish community. In fulfilling these needs, those with disabilities could participate in the Toronto Jewish community and connect to their Canadian Jewish identity.

Through this informational circular, the Council’s women bridged the relationship between

³⁶Medjuck, Sheva. "Jewish Survival in Small Communities in Canada." In *Canadian Jewry Today: Who's Who in Canadian Jewry*, edited by Edmond Y. Lipsitz, 99-109. Toronto: J.E.S.L Educational Products, 1989, 100.

³⁷ Public Relations “Portfolio” [Textual Record]. --1981-1983. “With New Directory Jewish Disabled Are Aid. Kray, Janice. January 20, 1983. *The Canadian Jewish News*. Fonds 38, Box 7, Shelf 35-7, Series 7-4, File 10. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Communication Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Task Force on People with Disabilities, “On the Move” [Textual Record, Graphic Material]. –1984. *On the Move*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 49. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Ontario Jewish Archives, Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre.

Toronto Jewry with and without disabilities, as it afforded those with disabilities information about the accessible ways of participating in the city's Jewish community.

The Council identified education as a major component in battling the prejudice, and neglect those with disabilities experienced within Toronto. The NCJWC also strove to provide the tools needed for those with disabilities to demonstrate their independence, and advocate for themselves. The leaflet was not the Council's only literary piece as they funded an educational quarterly journal.⁴⁰ Beginning in April 1983 the NCJWC, Toronto Section, sponsored *The Task Force Newsletter*, which contained information about available support systems.⁴¹ Operating as a "forum for the Jewish Disabled and those who care," the journal summarized its main goal as self-expression, advocacy, and communication within Toronto's Jewish community.⁴² The quarterly publication contained information about religious, social, and educational programs available to those with disabilities.⁴³ The religious programs advertised in the Journal included Judaics courses, which provided information on topics regarding the Jewish calendar, as well ritual services featuring interpreters and signers.⁴⁴ The publication also advertised workshops developing leadership skills, which were offered by the Task Force and the Council.⁴⁵ The

⁴⁰ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object].--1936 -1995, Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record].--1980 -1984. *Task Force Newsletter*. Vol.1.No.1. April, 1983. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴² Task Force on People with Disabilities, "On the Move" [Textual Record, Graphic Material]. --1984. *Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 49. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 2.

⁴³ The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record]. -- 1981. *Task Force News: A Forum For the Jewish Disabled And Those Who Care*. Vol.1.No.4.1984.. The National Council of Jewish Women. November 6, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 1-17.

⁴⁴Ibid., 1-17.

⁴⁵ The Jewish Disabled in Our Community – A Time for Action 5742 [Textual Record]. -- 1981. *Task Force News: A Forum For the Jewish Disabled And Those Who Care*. Vol.1.No.4.1984.. The National Council of Jewish Women. November 6, 1981. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 48. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 4.

creation of these leadership workshops suggests that the members of the Council, through the Task Force, aimed to create an organization that would allow those with disabilities to achieve independence, and authority to advocate for themselves. The call for leadership reinforced the need for a continuous dialogue among those with and without disabilities to unite forces, in order to promote social change. The literature, prepared by the Task Force, afforded access to the wider Jewish community from which those with disabilities were often excluded.

The Task Force's leaflet and quarterly journal provided avenues of support for those with disabilities. The members of the Task Force and the Council wanted to further the dialogue among those with and without disabilities, which would consolidate the Toronto Jewish community. The Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities produced a cinematic investigative report to illustrate this dialogue, titled *A Two Way Street*.⁴⁶ The NCJWC, Toronto Section, served as executive producer and distributor of the film.⁴⁷ Researched by the same students who created *On the Move*,⁴⁸ the documentary argued for "the need to involve the Jewish disabled in the mainstream of Jewish life."⁴⁹ The film also argued that the "traditional strength of the Jewish community has depended on its unity and sense of identity."⁵⁰ Juxtaposing

⁴⁶ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object].--1936 -1995, Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record].--1980 -1984.*Task Force Newsletter*. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA.

⁴⁷ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object].--1936 -1995, Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record].--1980 -1984.*A Two Way Street*. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada. Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities. 1982. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA.

⁴⁸ Public Relations "Portfolio" [Textual Record]. --1981-1983. "With New Directory Jewish Disabled Are Aid. Kray, Janice. January 20, 1983. *The Canadian Jewish News*. Fonds 38, Box 7, Shelf 35-7, Series 7-4, File 10. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Communication Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA.

⁴⁹ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object].--1936 -1995, Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record].--1980 -1984.. *Task Force on Jewish Persons on Disabilities, Background and History*. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA, 1.

this community ideal with the obvious neglect showed towards the accessibility needs of those with disabilities, as well as the loss of Jewish identity they experienced, the filmmakers hoped to influence” decision makers, administrators ... community leaders... [and] the disabled to become ...active contributors to Jewish life.”⁵¹ The filmmakers of *A Two Way Street* attempted to inform viewers that the only solution to the fragmented unity, and identity of the Jewish community was communication between both parties.⁵² When the Council and Task Force distributed the documentary, they included a learning kit, discussion materials, and additional resources, intended to further stimulate this conversation.⁵³ The filmmakers hoped that these kits would remedy the fragmented identity of those with disabilities. The Council and the Task Force provided a platform for the marginalized community to be heard. Thus, the NCJWC, Toronto Section, equipped the Toronto Jewish populace with the tools to create social change. This change revitalized the Jewish community and identity, as it reconnected those with disabilities to their neighbours.

The Task Force and the Council also collaborated with other organizations on a travelling theatre project titled, *Kids on the Block*, a ”troupe of puppets representing both able and disabled children.”⁵⁴ The Council worked alongside the Junior League, as well as a Toronto based organization for those with intellectual disabilities, and the Ministry of Tourism and

⁵⁰ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object].--1936 -1995, Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record].--1980 -1984.*A Two Way Street* .National Council of Jewish Women of Canada. Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities. 1982. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA, 1.

⁵¹Ibid., 1- 4.

⁵² Ibid., 8.

⁵³Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object].--1936 -1995, Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record].--1980 -1984. *Final Report on Research Findings and Applications for The Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities*. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA, 3.

⁵⁴ Kids on the Block Troupe (Re: Disabled Children) [Textual Record, Graphic Material].—1983 1996. *Kids on the Block*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 51. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

Recreation.⁵⁵ The parties involved hypothesized that if they “teach today’s children that the disabled are just like them, they will accept ... more readily than [their] generation is doing.”⁵⁶ This project was unique in comparison to other Task Force and Council initiatives because its intended audience included Jewish and non-Jewish students, as the troupe performed in secular public schools.⁵⁷ Despite the lack of a specified ethnic or religious audience, the Council contributed funds, volunteers, and their headquarters, for training the puppeteers.⁵⁸

The creation of the troupe signalled a change in the Council’s focus, as its members realized that proactive solutions would outperform retroactive care. The Council’s members, through the puppet troupe, attempted to prevent further creation of social prejudices and unwritten laws against those with disabilities at adolescence, rather than adulthood. In addition, the *Kids on the Block* performances further debased Torontonians’ stigma through portraying those with disabilities in a positive light, as they focus on their abilities, which advanced a positive self-image.⁵⁹ This affirmative likeness was intended to promote an identity formation beyond the realms of the prejudice towards disabilities.

⁵⁵ Kids on the Block Troupe (Re: Disabled Children) [Textual Record, Graphic Material].—1983 1996. “Puppet Troupe is Helping Children Understand the Disabled”. Agoston, Cheryl. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 51. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

⁵⁶Ibid.,

⁵⁷ Kids on the Block Troupe (Re: Disabled Children) [Textual Record, Graphic Material].—1983 1996. “These ‘Kids’ Really Tell it Like it is”. Loulee, Betty. April 22, 1983. *The Spectator*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 51. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, A7.

⁵⁸ Kids on the Block Troupe (Re: Disabled Children) [Textual Record, Graphic Material].—1983 1996. “Puppet Troupe is Really Helping Children Understand the Disabled.” Agoston, Cheryl Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 51. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

⁵⁹ Kids on the Block Troupe (Re: Disabled Children) [Textual Record, Graphic Material].—1983 1996. *Kids on the Block*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 51. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

The last collaborative project of the NCJWC, Toronto Section, and the Task Force was the development of a housing community, in 1984.⁶⁰ Prior to the construction of this building, the Council and the Canadian Jewish Congress developed surveys that were advertised in local newspapers to identify the needs of those with disabilities.⁶¹ Their study exposed the need for attendant care, partial independent living suites, and accessibility to the Jewish community, which dictated the direction of the building's execution.⁶² The building project was a joint venture between the Council, the Task Force, and Tridel Corporations, a Canadian based real estate developer, builder, and property manager.⁶³ The Council convinced Tridel Corporations to make all the units available for those living within the margins, and acquired funding through the Provincial Government, Canada Mortgage, and the Housing Corporation.⁶⁴ The housing project, located at the corner of Bathurst and Prince Charles Street in Toronto, included 160 units "designed to provide affordable and accessible housing for the elderly, the disabled and families."⁶⁵ In order to provide accessible housing, the Council and the Task Force established

⁶⁰ Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record]. -- 1984. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 52. "Special Housing Studied." May 24, 1984. *The Canadian Jewish News*. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

⁶¹ Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record]. -- 1984. *Housing Needs of Disabled*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 52. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record]. -- 1984. "Families, Seniors, and Disabled in Project, NCJW, Developer to Create Integrated Housing." Rucker, Patricia. May 23, 1985. *The Canadian Jewish News*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 52. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 5: "Welcome to the Tridel Group of Companies." *Tridel Group of Companies*. <http://www.tridelgroup.com>.

⁶⁴ Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record]. -- 1984. "Families, Seniors, and Disabled in Project, NCJW, Developer to Create Integrated Housing." Rucker, Patricia. May 23, 1985. *The Canadian Jewish News*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 52. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 5.

⁶⁵ Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record]. -- 1984. "Families, Seniors, and Disabled in Project, NCJW, Developer to Create Integrated Housing." Rucker, Patricia. May 23, 1985. *The Canadian Jewish News*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 52. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 5: Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record]. -- 1984. *Toronto*

their own committee to develop programming for the building's residents, which included classes on meal preparations, life skills, and other services.⁶⁶ It was also important for the Council and Task Force to develop the housing community near the Toronto Jewish community, which meant access to kosher butchers, synagogues, as well as Jewish cultural and recreational centres.⁶⁷ The location of the housing community allowed for a direct path to Jewish communal life, through the proximity of Jewish cultural, religious and recreational centres.

The impact of the Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities, and its five mid-1980s ventures, neatly illustrates Medjuck's typology for how small Jewish communities strategized to maintain Jewish identity. The Task Force ventures align with Medjuck's theory of survival, and also transposes these small-town strategies from the geographic margins to social ones, within a major metropolitan Canadian Jewish community. According to Medjuck, "[Jewish] ethnic life has two major components: one that revolves around the...religious institutions and...the communal, non-religious life..."⁶⁸ The components of religious and non-religious life vital to maintaining a Jewish identity, she wrote, included the home, the synagogue, the state of Israel, institutional support, and friendship.⁶⁹ The creation of the Task Force, *On the Move, Task Force News, Two Way Street, Kids on the Block*, and the Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project fulfilled all but one component needed in maintaining a Jewish identity. The Council did not

Section Breaks New Ground. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 52. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

⁶⁶ Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record]. -- 1984. *Toronto Section Breaks New Ground*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 52. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA.

⁶⁷ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object]. --1936-1995, Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record, Graphic Material]. --1984-1987. *Needs and Demand Study. Bathurst and Prince Charles*. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 24. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA, 2.

⁶⁸ Medjuck, Sheva. "Jewish Survival in Small Communities in Canada." In *Canadian Jewry Today: Who's Who in Canadian Jewry*, edited by Edmond Y. Lipsitz, 99-109. Toronto: J.E.S.L Educational Products, 1989, 100.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 102-5.

emphasize Zionism or the State of Israel during their activism. The lack of focus on the State of Israel may be a result of the Council's tunnel vision on reconnecting those with disabilities to the larger Jewish community in Toronto.

The Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities, *On the Move*, *Task Force News*, *Two Way Street*, and *Kids on the Block* are ventures that afforded those with disabilities a connection to communal institutions beyond the home, or the synagogue. Medjuck states that communal organizations bind "the communities together and provid[e] a sense of common identity..."⁷⁰ Despite the author's focus on Jewish camps, the Task Force, its literature, its documentary, and puppet troupe also provided those with disabilities the opportunity to share a cohesive sense of identity.⁷¹ The Task Force's ventures illuminated how those on the periphery of Toronto Jewry were able to participate in the broader Jewish community's social, and religious life. Through participation, individuals with disabilities developed an overall common sense of identity. As a result of this shared sense of identity, the marginalized group experienced a cohesion, which enfranchised those Jews with disabilities as they connected to the Toronto Jewish community at large. Therefore, the Council, through the Task Force, provided an opportunity to develop a cohesive Jewish identity through creating, funding and exposing accessible Jewish communal organizations to those with disabilities.

Correspondingly, Medjuck also identifies the Jewish home, the synagogue and the role of friendship as vital components in identity development. The author suggests that the Jewish home, "has...played a...crucial role for the maintenance of Jewish identity."⁷² The domestic sphere is a place where Jewish religious and cultural practices, like kosher diets and holiday

⁷⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁷¹ Ibid., 105.

⁷² Ibid., 102.

celebrations, are executed.⁷³ Subsequently, Medjuck views religious practices and the synagogue as a,” focal point for organized Jewish life.”⁷⁴ The community housing project, located on the corner of Bathurst and Prince Charles Street found itself near the heart of Toronto’s Jewish community.⁷⁵ As a result of the building’s location, the Council, through its housing project, connected individuals with a variety of disabilities to the Jewish community, which allowed participation in Jewish religious, cultural and social practices. The opportunity to participate within the Jewish community resulted in an identification with it, and an enhanced identity associated with being Jewish. Furthermore, the community housing project also encouraged friendship among the Jewish community, which Medjuck establishes as a final factor in Jewish identity formation. Medjuck believes that the role of friendship, as an “informal community...promotes group cohesion.”⁷⁶ The community housing encouraged the development of friendship, through the inclusion of 160 mixed units for various incomes, ages, and disabilities.⁷⁷ The buildings mixed demographic resulted in a diverse socialization within the Jewish community, which encouraged friendships. These friendships allowed those with disabilities to engage with others and share common customs, culture, values or beliefs. Through participating in Toronto’s Jewish community, the individuals with disabilities are able to develop a strong identification with Jewish culture. Thus, the Council, with its five initiatives through the

⁷³Ibid., 102-3.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁷⁵ Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record]. -- 1984. “Families, Seniors, and Disabled in Project, NCJW, Developer to Create Integrated Housing.” Rucker, Patricia. May 23, 1985. *The Canadian Jewish News*. Fonds 38, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, Series 7-13, File 52. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 5.

⁷⁶ Medjuck, Sheva. "Jewish Survival in Small Communities in Canada." In *Canadian Jewry Today: Who's Who in Canadian Jewry*, edited by Edmond Y. Lipsitz, 99-109. Toronto: J.E.S.L Educational Products, 1989, 105.

⁷⁷ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object]. --1936-1995, Bathurst-Prince Charles Housing Project [Textual Record, Graphic Material]. --1984-1987. “Revolutionary Seniors Home Planned.” Evasuk, Stasia. August 26, 1985. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 24. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA, C2.

Task Force, allowed for a unified sense of community, and Jewish identity for those with a variety of disabilities.

As the Task Force grew and successfully reconnected those with disabilities to their Jewish community, the Council released the institution from its leadership.⁷⁸ The Council entrusted the local community to facilitate Task Force services.⁷⁹ The NCJWC only funds pilot projects, and when these initiatives reach its peak growth it is turned over to the community.⁸⁰ The Task Force was passed along to the Jewish Community Centre, which made changes during this transition to create accessible services and access to them.⁸¹ The Council still supports the *Kids on the Block* troupe but it is now referred to as *Teaching Awareness Through Puppetry*.⁸² The Council has also progressed their activism towards other marginalized communities, within Toronto Jewry.⁸³ However, despite releasing the Task Force to the Jewish Community Centre, the NCJWC, Toronto Section, developed an “increasing level of responsiveness in a community that was largely unresponsive.”⁸⁴

Ultimately, the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Toronto Section, successfully exposed the reality and experiences of those with disabilities in the Toronto Jewish

⁷⁸ Service Portfolio [Textual Record, Graphic Material, Object].--1936 -1995, Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record].--1980 -1984. *Task Force Newsletter*. Vol.1.No.1. April, 1983. “Task Force Meeting After Blizzard Brings Positive Directions.” Tilly, Lindsay. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Service Portfolio Sub-Series. OJA, 4.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "About Us." *NCJWC Toronto*. <http://www.ncjwctoronto.org/about/>.

⁸¹The Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record] -1980-1984. “The Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities. The Development of an Ethnically Based Advocacy Movement for and of the Disabled. A Pilot Project of the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Toronto Section. Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 12.

⁸² "Teaching Awareness Through Puppetry" *NCJWC Toronto*. <http://www.ncjwctoronto.org/our-projects/teaching-awareness-through-puppetry/>.

⁸³ "About Us." *NCJWC Toronto*. <http://www.ncjwctoronto.org/about/>.

⁸⁴ The Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities [Textual Record] -1980-1984. “National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Toronto Section.” Fonds 38, Box 9, Shelf 38-6, Series 7-11, File 19. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada Fonds, Toronto Section Series, Toronto Section Archival Material Sub-Series. OJA, 7.

community of the 1980s. They revealed the separation, within the city's institutions, among those with and without disabilities. Furthermore, the Council successfully remedied this obstacle through establishing organizational support systems for this marginalized Jewish body. Despite receiving support from various outlets, the Council demonstrated their dominance, as they often initiated these avenues of support. Their advocacy reconnected those with disabilities to their Jewish brethren, culture, and religion. Through revitalizing this mutual connection, the Council enfranchised those with disabilities by helping them develop their Jewish identity. Thus, an analysis of three main initiatives, the Toronto Jewish Society for the Hearing Impaired, the Jewish Disabled in Our community –A Time for Action 5742[1981], and the Task Force on Jewish Persons with Disabilities, reveals the integral role of the matriarch in consolidating the Jewish community. The National Council of Jewish Women defied gender role stereotypes through their professional volunteerism, which contributed to the ever growing and diverse definition of Canadian Jewish identity.