

THE JEWISH CHRONICLE

Center for Women provides much-needed help, boost to community

by [Toby Tabachnick, Senior Staff Writer](#)

06.10.14 - 10:35 am

After moving to Pittsburgh from Iowa last August, Sarah Burke was having difficulty finding employment. Despite having a bachelor's degree in English, and a master's of fine arts in creative writing and environmental studies, the 29-year-old was finding herself "a little stuck" in her hunt for a job, she said.

But, thanks to a Google search and some good luck, Burke stumbled upon the Center for Women — a project of the National Council of Jewish Women, Pittsburgh Section and the Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh (JWF).

Now, things are most definitely looking up.

Busy with a communications internship at Lawrenceville United and helped along by a knowledgeable mentor, Burke is optimistic about her future.

"I'm feeling very grateful to having found both," Burke said. "I'm so incredibly grateful for the help I've received and excited to see what the next year will bring."

After contacting Lindsey Miller, mentor and internship manager at the Center for Women, Burke — who is looking for work in communications or development — was matched with mentor Beverly Brinn, director of development at the Jewish Association on Aging, and a volunteer with the center's mentorship program.

Brinn's role is to meet with Burke once a month to provide guidance on her job search, suggestions about resources in the community, and moral support.

Getting matched with Brinn was "instantly having someone on my side," Burke said.

"Beverly provides a listening ear, and even invited me into her workplace so I could see what a development office looks like," Burke continued.

"So far, I'm just a sounding board," said Brinn. "But I am giving over some of my knowledge and experience. I'm hoping it just helps Sarah to have someone who is at a totally different place in her career to talk to. And I am always keeping my eyes and ears open for any positions for her."

Burke, who is not Jewish, said the NCJW and the Pittsburgh Jewish community have been pivotal in helping her become established in Pittsburgh.

“The Jewish community in Pittsburgh has just treated me so well,” she said. “I have been so impressed with what the Jewish community has to offer.”

The NCJW launched the Center for Women’s Mentoring and Internship programs in December 2013 to help women in transition — those who are re-entering the workforce after an extended absence, or those who are finding themselves on their own after the death of a spouse or a divorce.

“Sometimes, when you are going through transitions, you need an objective opinion, or a different perspective, a support system,” said Becky Abrams, the director of the Center for Women.

And the Center’s mentors are trained to provide just that.

Each session at which the mentor and mentee meet offers an opportunity for the mentee to focus on her personal and professional goals, according to the Center’s Miller.

“They focus on things like confidence, how to navigate the life transition, and how to network and increase support,” Miller said.

Mentors help with everything from working on job readiness skills, mock interviews, and creating pro/con lists about potential jobs.

The mentees, for the most part, range in age from upper 20s to mid-50s, Miller said. They find their way to the Center from referrals by agencies such as the United Way, word of mouth, or, like Burke, simply from Internet searches.

So far, the Center has matched up 10 successful mentor/mentee pairs, and has helped find internships for eight women.

The internship program is unique, Miller said, in that it is offered to women who are not enrolled in a college-accredited program, although all the Center’s interns do have college degrees.

The Center has placed interns at locales such as the City Theatre, Standing Firm, the Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation of Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and Thriftique, as well as at Lawrenceville United, and the Center for Women. The Center would like to welcome more businesses and organizations to its roll, Miller said, and is also looking for additional mentees and mentors.

“I think it’s a nice way for a volunteer to give back,” Miller said. “It’s just like being a cheerleader for a time, providing encouragement to other women.” Brinn agrees.

“It’s just a great program,” she said.

“It’s nice for Sarah, and it’s really nice for me. If I could be of help to someone, what could be better than that?”

(Toby Tabachnick can be reached at tobytab@thejewishchronicle.net.)