

THE JEWISH CHRONICLE

Abrams named first director of Center for Women in Pittsburgh

by [Lee Chottiner, Executive Editor](#)

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Becky Abrams never expected to be changing jobs again so soon, but opportunity has a way of knocking.

Five months after leaving the Squirrel Hill Community Food Pantry to become communications affairs specialist at Highmark, Inc. she got wind of a new position in Squirrel Hill. The National Council of Jewish Women and the Jewish Women's Foundation were establishing A Center for Women (CFW), and they needed a director.

Abrams, a White Oak resident, asked to see the job description, thinking she might pass it on to someone else.

"I decided it was great opportunity for me," she said. "Working at Highmark was great, [but] one thing I've learned about myself is you sometimes need to listen to your heart," she continued, "and my heart really lives and breathes to helps others to reach their goals."

Now, four weeks into her new new job, directing the CFW, Abrams is facing the challenge of building from scratch, a program designed to retrain and empower women at various stages of transition in their lives.

"Those are women going through a divorce, having just lost a spouse, and are going back into the work force after being a stay at home mom," she said.

The CFW also is there for women trying to leave abusive relationships, though Abrams stressed it will be a safe place for women, not a safe house for extended stays.

Based at Anathan House, the NCJW-owned property on Murray Avenue, the CFW will offer women access mentor programs on re-entering the workforce and developing "financial fitness."

"We're going to look to help these women, meet them where they are on their road to financial independence and help them manage their finances better," Abrams said.

Women can also have access to financial advisors, learn about internships and job shadowing opportunities, and maybe even find actual jobs.

Some of those jobs may be in the center itself, Abrams said.

“NCJW already has a history of helping women enter the workforce through boutiques and thrift outlets, and we’ll be looking to broaden that,” she said. “It’s empowering for them to have a part in the operations of the center. It will give them the real life skills they need and the confidence to re-enter the workforce.”

She also hopes to establish a computer lab to support its programs, maybe even a mobile computer lab.

She clearly wants the CFW to be a physical center where women can come, meet others with like experiences, and find help.

The trick, according to Abrams, is not to re-invent the wheel, not to try to do everything by herself.

“We will work with a lot of existing organizations in the community,” she said. For example, “We’re not going to be a career development program, we’re going to make referrals to the Career Development Center [at the Jewish Family & Children’s Service] and partner with them.

“Organizations can’t be everything to everyone,” she added. “This is picking up pieces and building on whatever other nonprofits are doing to help people to succeed.”

While the CFW won’t be up and running until Aug. 1, Abrams can be reached now at 412-421-4400 or at babrams@cfwpgh.org. She said she would be available to help any women who contact her even before the center opens for business.

Though founded by Jewish organizations, CFW will service women from all backgrounds Abrams said.

“We will have a strong outreach in the Jewish community while creating opportunities for service in the broader community,” she said. “That means the center is open to all women not just Jewish women.”

(Lee Chottiner can be reached at leec@thejewishchronicle.net.)

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