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NCJW to open Center for Women with \$225,000 JWF seed funding

by [Lee Chottiner, Executive Editor](#)

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A future Center for Women, based in Squirrel Hill, is being touted as a critical resource in Jewish Pittsburgh for women in search of tools to achieve “financial and workplace readiness.”

The National Council of Jewish Women, Pittsburgh Section, and the Jewish Women’s Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh have jointly announced the project, which is being financed through a three-year \$225,000 grant from the JWF.

The Center is slated to open this fall in the NCJW space at Anathan House.

“The Center for Women will play a critical role in our community,” according to a joint NCJW-JWF statement, “providing support and services to help women in need achieve financial and workplace readiness toward the ultimate goal of economic independence.”

The Center will house educational programming, provide access to internships and mentorships, and make referrals to area agencies with which it partners.

“We’re not looking to reinvent every program,” said NCJW President Hilary Spatz. “We want to make use of all resources in this very rich community.”

She hopes the new Center will address “gaps” in services for women in the community, while establishing partnerships with existing agencies that have services their clients can use.

“Referrals are very important,” she said.

Initially, the Center will target so-called “women in transition,” who, because of separation, divorce, job loss or death of a spouse, need support as they change their lives.

To help with those changes, the center will:

- Provide confidence- and skill-building measures needed to re-enter the workforce;
- Offer “financial fitness” — skills needed to make informed financial decisions;
- Pair professional women with volunteer services to assist women in transition; and

- Refer women to support services at partner organizations.

The idea for the Center took root two years ago when the JWF trustees decided to make a “signature grant.” Typical JWF grants range from \$5,000-\$13,000.

The only question was, for what?

They heard of another Center for Women run by the NCJW in Essex, N.J., and brought its director and two volunteers here to meet with them and NCJW-Pittsburgh leaders.

“We were excited about the work they were doing,” said JWF Executive Director Judy Greenwald Cohen. “We liked their core concepts. It was gender focused — for women and girls — very much volunteer driven, and they were filling in gaps in the community.”

So the JWF approached NCJW and asked for a proposal, then it asked for more details. By November, Cohen said the trustees had approved a three-year, \$225,000 grant to develop the Center.

The need for transition services for women in the Pittsburgh area is clear. According to the 2011 Annual Report of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County, there were 9,128 original support filings, 2,831 divorce filings and 3,849 initial petitions for Protection from Abuse.

In addition, Spatz, an attorney, concentrating on family law, including divorces, said she has seen firsthand the need for special services for women in transition.

“I see many of my clients who need a support system,” she said. “There are women who work and do not understand family finances. There are women who work, but haven’t had the opportunity to be responsible for family budgets or tax returns.”

She hopes the internship and mentorship components of the center will address that problem. Internships, she said, will give women the chance to “learn work skills, to get up, get dressed and have a place to go and find work.

“We’re talking about self-confidence,” she added. “We have so many women who for so long haven’t felt confident to go to a place where you know you’ll be nurtured.”

Mentorships, she said, will give the 1,200 members of NCJW-Pittsburgh, and JWF members, many of who have skill sets women in transition need, opportunities to volunteer.

“We have a lot of members who own businesses who are professionals, who have been teachers — who are still teachers — and we think this will be attractive to them.”

One of the first steps in building the Center will be to hire a director. Cohen said that should happen soon.

“And not necessarily a Jewish woman,” she said. “We’re looking for someone who knows how to create a startup. She needs to be smart and understands how to create partnerships and work with volunteers.”

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

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