

FINANCIAL LITERACY / PROVIDING TOOLS FOR INDEPENDENCE

Local Jewish organizations to help women achieve financial literacy

Hillel JUC and Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh join Jewish Women's International on campus programming

By **ADAM REINHERZ**

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Photo by Nenad Stojkovic via Flickr at <https://tinyurl.com/yetn5pn7>

A series of programs is enabling young Jewish women and gender non-conforming individuals to take hold of their finances.

The [seminars and workshops](#), which focus on credit, budgeting, building an emergency fund, understanding debt and investing, are thanks to a partnership between Hillel JUC, Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh and Jewish Women's International.

“This is an opportunity for us to tie in Jewish values and financial literacy while providing these women with insights, structures and resources in a safe space,” Hillel JUC's Assistant Director Kari Exler said. “We want to open the door to these types of conversations and create opportunities for Jewish women to come together and build each other up.”

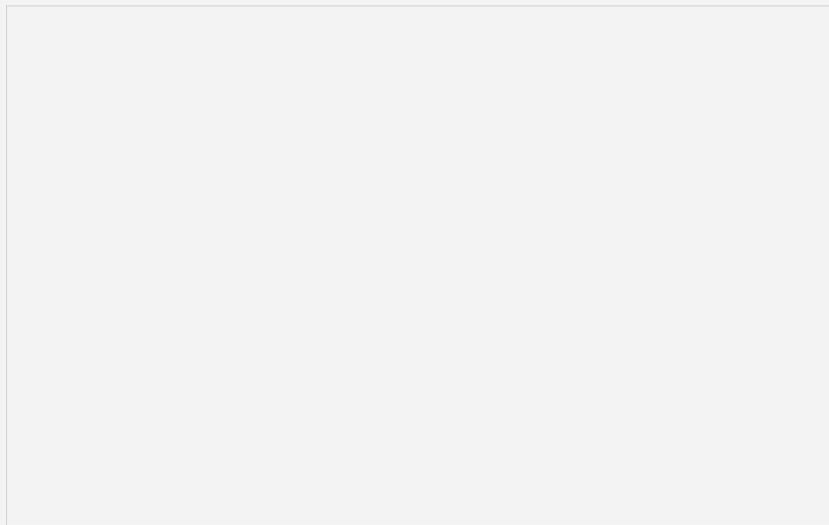
Judy Greenwald Cohen, executive director of the Jewish Women’s Foundation, said the pilot program is “more than just understanding how to balance a checkbook and what it means to have a credit card. It really is about empowering [the students] for their long-term financial security.”

Cohen pointed to a recent report about equal pay from [the Labor Department](#).

As of March 14, women face “systemic inequality,” according to the government. Women who work full time, year-round, within the U.S., are paid only 83.7% as much as men. The loss of nearly 16 cents on the dollar results in a difference of \$10,000 annually. Women of color, and women with disabilities, experience even greater pay disparities.

Cohen said the statistic is alarming, as is the common occurrence of women knowing less about their finances than men.

“We can’t let this happen to women in our community,” she said. “We just have to put a stop to it. And this is one way we can start to make a difference.”



Cathedral of Learning at University of Pittsburgh. Photo by Brian Donovan via Flickr at <https://rb.gy/hc1jow>

Exler said the programming will serve about 75 students, occur at Hillel JUC and benefit from resources and support from JWF and JWI.

JWF is providing a \$15,000 grant and JWI is administering the [in-person workshops and long-term support](#), according to Cohen.

For years, JWI has provided education, advocacy and training for at-risk women and girls, the organization’s officials said.

“We hear time and again that personal financial education is not taught in high school or college, or business school for that matter,” JWI’s CEO Meredith Jacobs said. “That’s what this is all about — giving women the tools to have options and to thrive.”

Cohen called the group’s longstanding work with domestic abuse survivors a critical reminder of the realities faced. Abuse doesn’t only involve physical harm within relationships, she said.

There’s also a financial component.

The [2021 National Needs Assessment of Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community](#) found that 98% of survivors of domestic abuse reported a “lack of financial resources as their top barrier to escaping violence,” according to JWI.

“When a woman controls her money, she controls her future,” Jacobs said.

The financial literacy programming is consistent with Hillel JUC’s commitment to preparing students for post-college life, Exler said. Adulthood requires serious decisions about finances and lifestyle, and finding a place within the Jewish community is a part of those considerations.

Aviva Lubowsky, former director of marketing and development at the Hebrew Free Loan Association of Pittsburgh, [identified those challenges last year](#).

A family of four, with two day school-aged children seeking active participation in local Jewish life, can expect to spend \$44,000 annually on related expenses, she wrote in a 2022 piece for the Chronicle. With the area median gross income for a family of four at \$84,800, hundreds of local Jewish families “need to reckon with forking over somewhere around half their income for participating in religious life and a Jewish education for their children.”

The challenge becomes even greater when considering findings from the [2017 Greater Pittsburgh Jewish Community Study](#), Lubowsky continued. Based on that report, 37% of households indicated “their income was less than \$50,000 a year,” and “one in 10 young adults (ages 18-34) in our community say they are nearly poor or poor.”

Exler said that financial literacy training — like teaching students how to organize, cook and host a Shabbat meal — represents Hillel JUC’s desire to [prepare students for leaving the cocoon of Jewish life on campus](#). For graduates who wish to “continue their Jewish journey,” she said, finding a place for Friday night dinner isn’t the only thing that requires planning. **PJC**

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