

Community Facilities Utilization Committee

JAHSENA Jan. 29, 2014

1. What brought you to Edmonton, and how long have you been here?

- Born here, has been here for 79 years.
- immigrated from South Africa
- Came as a refugee in 1938
- Born in Alberta
- moved here when four. Loves Edmonton.
- Born here
- Has been here
- here at age 10
- moved here in 1987 for school
- Born in Winnipeg, came at age 10

2. How do you find Edmonton Jewish Community life in general?

Very segregated. Pockets everywhere. Only times pockets came together was at the old JCC. First couple of years, everyone came there. Very segregated. Maybe a community centre will bring people together.

Found South Africans who came beforehand were very welcoming. Community very segmented. If you belong to a Jewish organization, you meet those people, but that's it. Don't have a lot of Edmontonians as friends. Most are South African.

You see the deficiencies when you have had the opportunity to travel to other, larger Jewish Communities. A lot of that is related to the presence of a community centre. First noticed that in University. In Winnipeg, you went to the JCC and it was the most exciting place. You could meet people, have a corned beef sandwich, was very dynamic. It was a great place to just hang out. Early years of the Hillcrest were a smaller scale of that. That feeling was also there during the first three years of the Beth Shalom Synagogue as community centre. I wish there were more activities

now. More talks, lectures and visitors. In Toronto and Ottawa there are tons of things going on. However, this is a function of size. We can't change that. Edmonton does remarkably well for a community of its size.

I am involved with the Senior's Drop-in Centre, and I enjoy that. I am a secular Jew, very seldom attend synagogue, but because of my upbringing, the majority of my friends are Jewish. The community meets my needs. Jewish boys used to meet at the Boyle St. Community Centre before there was a JCC and it was fine.

In general, it definitely meets my needs, always has, My religious needs have always been met. There used to be more to do in the past. We ourselves are not supportive enough of Jewish life.

It absolutely meets my needs. I go to Shul several times a week. I have raised four children through TT, they all attended BBYO, I am on two boards. The Centre was part of my life for 25 years. The downfall was it wasn't kept up, and the place fell into the river. It could have been still a great facility, but we didn't maintain it.

The community more than meets my needs. Sometimes I feel bombarded with activities. If I go out to a new organization, everybody is very friendly. Any organization I have joined, I have found very welcoming. But I think the kids need a space to come together and hang out. The children miss our old JCC. My granddaughter says we need a place for birthday parties.

Yes, the community meets my needs. All you have to do is join one organization and it opens up a lot of other activities. So many things to do just in the Shul bulletin. I go to more things now that my kids are grown up. Just coming to one event opens up others. You can be a part of things if you choose to. This is an exceptional community if you are open to it. There are a lot of opportunities, you just have to look for them. I agree you need somewhere to go, even if it is just offices. You get involved just because you are there.

Community does meet both secular and religious needs. When you have religious functions, each organization does their own, therefore it gets segmented. No cohesiveness. Fundraising is also segmented. We give to UJA, but then each organization also does separate fundraising.

I never really thought about those questions. The community meets my needs because I don't have too many needs. I agree with the comments about fragmentation and the lack of a place like the JCC for younger people to get together in a Jewish context. My two grandchildren go to synagogue occasionally, but don't integrate with the community otherwise.

3. What would you like to see to improve the community? What are the barriers to achieving this?

4. What value might there be in having a central gathering place for the Jewish Community?

I would like to see a central gathering place. The barrier is raising the money, but we can do it. We need a physical place where we can walk in and feel comfortable. It will solidify the community.

This community is very territorial. We are so small, yet we have eight synagogues. A centre that can bring everyone together can be wonderful. If there was a place that was open, where people could come, they would. There should be a welcoming committee. We have to incorporate newcomers like Russians so that they feel part of the community. At the Drop In Centre, they don't integrate, but they have an option to. Generally, it does meet our needs, there is everything here that we need, but we could use a well-run Centre.

Despite the fragmentation, this community has done a good job in terms of the kids coming out of the community, who have a sense of Jewish awareness. The opportunity to have a more central meeting place would enhance that. Especially with a good corned beef sandwich.

I want to see a chart of Jewish organizations, what they aim to do and who is their clientele. A central meeting place would overcome these barriers. A secular community centre would overcome these barriers. Fragmented fundraising is a barrier.

I think we need a JCC not necessarily with offices or meeting rooms. We lost a lot when we closed the pool and lost the exercise classes. There are financial barriers, and people are waiting for someone else to do it.

A JCC is not imperative to me. The old JCC was a meeting place, but not very many Jews there. Before that we went to cubs at the Beth Shalom, hockey at the TT gym. JCC was too big a space to be managed financially and logistically. It became a filthy pigsty that was falling apart and nobody really cared. I can see a small JCC if it was manageable.

I agree. The early days of the JCC were good, but then came the YMCA. Our community is so spread out, they like to have things convenient to their home or their work. When all those clubs and facilities came into being, we suffered. Managing that space was a nightmare. We have to really be careful that we are building a space that people will come to and support. JAHSENA has a meeting space, and if we have a speaker we can use another community facility.

We really don't need a facility to house large community events. We have Beth Israel sanctuary; we have used other venues in town like the Myer Horowitz theatre. We don't need to spend copious amounts of money on something that's not going to be used. Location is a huge thing. Seniors live downtown, others in West End, others in

Sherwood Park. I feel our money is better spent on human resources. You can hire people to stage events anywhere. Others agree.

Group under-served is the younger people, whose lives centre on sports and athletics. That is really lacking in our community now.

There should be a unifying institution.