



Final Report

March 2017

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Introduction



Gender equality has long been an issue in the Jewish community. From 2011 to 2015, a multitude of people, mainly but not exclusively women, undertook to systematically identify and define the underlying causes, to develop practical ways of driving change and to ensure that these were implemented. No-one thought that this project, run and managed almost entirely by volunteers, would fully solve the issue, but in a wider world where gender equality is one of the key issues of the day, and in a community with so many educated, professional and dynamic women, we believed that change could and had to happen.

To be clear, the people behind the project always knew and intended that its work would be for the benefit of the whole community not 'just' the women. We all recognised that the Jewish community could not afford to exclude the skills, the energy and the expertise of its women. We knew too that diversity of leadership improves organisations and that female role models are essential for the next generation. It was also recognised that of course, gender inequality is discriminatory, outmoded and unlawful.

Initially established as a commission (the Commission on Women in Jewish Leadership) to examine the underlying issues affecting the lack of women in leadership roles and make recommendations to address these, it later became a project, Women in Jewish Leadership (WJL) to drive real, tangible change. Five years on the difference in the community is palpable with gender issues firmly on the map and with systemic change clearly visible. However, the evidence is that gender equality remains a thorny problem in the Jewish community, and we still have a long way to go before gender equality is evident in its leadership roles. In addition, whilst WJL has achieved a great deal, including some ground breaking initiatives (particularly the Gender Equality Plan), it has also faced some considerable challenges which stem from attitudes and behaviours which are deeply entrenched.

After five years, and having implemented the recommendations from the CWJL, the work of WJL is complete. WJL was set up to implement the recommendations of the Commission and in particular, to identify ways in which communal organisations could accommodate

and encourage more women at senior levels and women could strengthen their skills and be supported within such roles. WJL was not set up to be a communal organisation or a permanent fixture. It set itself goals and has more than met them.

Many of our achievements are a direct result of the work of WJL and, particularly, our dedicated volunteers. However in several cases, other individuals, communal organisations and initiatives have worked with us to develop their own projects and have contributed to the growing pressure to improve what was formerly the status quo. Furthermore, and crucially, our ability to make such progress was only possible due to the determination of earlier groups of women, who demanded a voice, and upon whose shoulders we stand. We are endlessly grateful to them.

In this report, we have documented our work ready for the next phase. With a great deal of the 'heavy lifting' now well under way, we invite others, the next generation, to engage with this issue in their own way. We offer them, now through the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and others who may wish to engage with this issue, this report as a solid building block and as a record of five years of work. Crucially, this report confirms the need to continue work on improving gender equality in the community and the need to sustain momentum to enable long-lasting, systemic change.

Laura Marks OBE

Norma Brier OBE

Joint chairs, Women in Jewish Leadership

Five years of activity

Phase One – the Commission (2011-12)

In 2011, Jeremy Newmark, then CEO of the Jewish Leadership Council, convened a group of women who had, in their own ways, been campaigning on the issue of gender equality. He recognised the need for change and called the meeting which launched the five year programme of the CWJL and then WJL.

The first step of the process was a commission, chaired by Laura Marks, with a diverse steering group of communal leaders and professional support provided by JLC staff. This involved a large-scale piece of quantitative research, desk research, some qualitative research and a consultation never seen on this scale in the Jewish community with over 1600 people feeding into the work. We needed to understand the extent to which gender inequality actually existed in the community, how we compared to wider British society and what were the reasons for this which were specifically Jewish rather than societal. The full report is cited in the bibliography section below.

The report identified ten reasons why gender inequality is a particular problem in the Jewish community. These included a lack of interest in this as an equality issue by Jewish organisations, the substantial family responsibilities of Jewish women, the lack of willingness of women to stand up and demand change, the often deliberate misinterpretation of halacha (Jewish law), lack of responsiveness to the growing prominence given to gender equality in non-Jewish, wider society and a particularly dominant male culture outside the home. The report then went on to make key recommendations which fell into three categories.

The first category of recommendations was based on the belief that women need to drive change themselves and to be willing to take on communal leadership roles. To do this, women needed to be skilled up, to become more confident and to take on more responsibility for community organisations.

The second category of recommendations was based on the finding that organisations were not striving to achieve better ratios of women in senior roles and were barely meeting their statutory requirements on gender equality, let alone, in most cases, demonstrating best practice.

The third category focussed on the need to keep the issue alive and current, and to engage people in it, in order to help drive change. There were several other, both broader and less deliverable categories of recommendations.

The report was published in 2013 and celebrated with a reception and a celebration hosted by top London advertising agency, Engine.

Phase Two – Women in Jewish Leadership (WJL) (2013-2016)

2012-13 were difficult years for the project with no organisation keen to continue to fund the ongoing work. Having established the commission to make recommendations to improve the equality of women within the Jewish community, the implementation of these, whilst tangible, seemed demanding to implement, and finding a home for the work was a challenge.

In 2013 the JLC agreed to fund the implementation phase project for a year to try to ensure that the recommendations were carried out – no small task. Laura co-chaired the new WJL, with Norma Brier OBE as her partner. Lead, the leadership development division of the JLC, under Nicky Goldman implemented many of the recommendations relating to training and mentoring whilst a group of volunteers, led by Dr Helena Miller, started the ground-breaking task of developing a system (the Gender Equality Plan) to drive change within Jewish organisations.

It was at this stage that we had the most funding, and subsequently the most people actively working on the project as volunteers using their professional skills or communal experience to drive the project forwards. The energy and enthusiasm were palpable and we felt the climate starting to change in a positive way.

In the second year, The Board of Deputies of British Jews agreed to take over most of the funding of the WJL and the third year was fully funded by them. We are very grateful to the Board of Deputies for its support but regret that finding communal resource for this very modestly costed project was so difficult, given its importance.

The legacy (2017 and onwards)

After five years we look back on our legacy and can identify several key projects which made a substantive difference. Some of these are on-going, some are new and some have faced challenges, which make their continuation unlikely. It is important to name these and to identify, in brief, their strengths and weaknesses.

1. The Gender Equality Plan (GEP)

Developed over more than a year of research and development, needing to learn rapidly on the job and using the experiences and guidance of such luminaries as the Cranfield School of Business Studies, McKinsey study of the FTSE 100 in 2008, The Institute of Physics Juno Project, and Close to Parity, we developed a system which addresses governance, best practice and gender equality within organisations. We piloted the GEP over a year,

with three enthusiastic communal organisations that each reported positive changes within their organisation. These were in relation to encouraging more women to take on senior roles, improving gender ratios in senior and lay positions, and a wider organisational awareness of equality issues that were a spin-off from making the changes and focussing on the issues involved. After a year, we ran the project with another three organisations, again willing participants who reported similarly positive experiences. The participating and ground breaking organisations were: Masorti Judaism, Jewish Living and World Jewish Relief, in 2015 and The Jewish Museum, New Israel Fund and Nightingale-Hammerson in 2016.

Our work on the GEP reached a wider international audience in November 2016, when GEP panellist Professor Margaret Harris presented a paper at the Association for Research on Non-Profit Organisations and Voluntary Action (Arnova) conference in Washington. Co-authored with Dr Helena Miller, and entitled ***Towards gender equality in small and medium non-profits: lessons from an action research project***, the paper was based on the development and work of the GEP.

Following the positive outcomes recorded by the 6 participating organisations over two years, it became clear that relatively simple systemic changes could positively affect gender equality but that it required a willingness to make this matter a central focus of organisational governance and a target for change. It was therefore disappointing that the GEP, which used highly professional and trained volunteers to mentor organisations at board level, was not taken up by more of the major charities and organisations despite positive feedback from those who went through the process. The opportunity offered a no fee form of consultancy and a relatively low bar for achievement for the organisations, yet very few actually agreed to run the programme in house with some of the larger ones excusing themselves on various grounds. We attribute this, ultimately, to the very issue the GEP was designed to address, insufficient determination by many Jewish communal organisations to systematically address the issue or regard it as fundamental.

“Working on the Gender Equality Pilot programme has been for me, one of the most significant and impactful of experiences in my years of communal involvement. The initiative has not only proven its worth to the organisations who stepped forward to be part of the pilot process but, has also and importantly, demonstrated itself to be an excellent model of cross communal working, superb leadership ... and a fine example of how to achieve transformational improvements in governance and gender equality awareness for Jewish communal organisations.”

Debra Fox, Vice-Chair Jewish Care

2. Networks

We know that networks for women are a powerful way to create peer support and, ultimately, to creating stronger women leaders within the community. WJL developed several networks, the most successful of which are ‘Aitza’ (a network for professional

women working outside the community) and the Jewish women's CEO forum. Both are peer led, with a clear sense of purpose and strong leadership. Others, like the Women in Academia Group, still require more work in order to flourish.

3. Mentoring

Clearly, mentoring can play a major role in supporting women in a work environment. Lead developed and ran two sets of mentoring for WJL, one for women working in the community professionally (a 'speed' mentoring event which brought together ten pairs of mentees and mentors) and one for women deputies at the Board of Deputies (ten female deputies were matched with more experienced female Deputies). We saw the value of these programmes with several examples of change attributed directly to the programme. To ensure that mentoring is more widely available, money needs to be found for more mentoring training and monitoring time. WJL was unable to run further mentoring programmes due to severe budgetary restraints and consequently Lead used its own resources to provide many additional valuable opportunities for women in the community during this time and hopefully will be further supported to be able to continue this vital work.

4. Training

At the very heart of change is training for women. Envision 2015: a new landscape for women leaders was set up by Lead, to develop leadership skills in women as recommended by WJL. Sixteen senior, professional women from 11 communal organisations participated in a 2 day leadership development programme, followed by a Skills Day which included workshops in negotiation, equality, leading change, social media, advocacy and fundraising – skills highlighted by the Commission as key for development. This was then extended to a broader group of women, and 45 lay and professional female leaders from 26 organisations took advantage of the opportunity. The core Envision cohort have continued to engage as a network.

Finding eleven Jewish organisations willing to specifically send women on a leadership course was difficult even though Lead and WJL made it clear that the programme content was relevant regardless of gender. The course was a great success but running it again in its entirety would need careful consideration.

5. Campaigns

We have become acutely aware that a positive attitude and enthusiasm are central to any movement for change, WJL ran several campaigns. The first was Ordinary/Extraordinary Women (which had a dual aim of acknowledging the contribution that leading women made to the cause of gender equality, and raising funds for WJL). A second campaign was to raise awareness of All Male Panels, which have been widely identified as a negative way of representing the Jewish community at any level. Such panels do not include a female perspective and are therefore exclusive and unrepresentative of the whole community.

There would seem to be no reason at all for not inviting women to engage in all communal debates. In order to draw attention to this issue, we started with over 50 men signing up to a pledge not to take part in an event where all the speakers are men. This was met with enthusiasm and surprise (that it was even needed) and has allowed the issue to remain alive. The campaign is hard to sustain without renewed commitment from the men of our community and it requires constant policing.

6. A changed climate

As mentioned above, many of the changes which took place in the community from 2012-16 were not only projects of WJL but happened concurrently. We believe that the climate of change, created by WJL (and by others) generated several initiatives which, hitherto, could not have happened. These include:

- An increase in the number of female professionals leading major communal organisations¹
- Greater efforts made by organisations to recruit women onto their boards²
- Greater interest in and engagement with women's roles in ritual participation, particularly in the Orthodox arena³
- The monumental achievements of US Women in their work towards gender equality in the United Synagogue; women are now able to become chairs in their synagogues and are trustees of the US
- A diverse cross-section of the community abstaining from participation in all-male panels⁴
- The establishment of Jewish women's networks across the community for aspirant leaders, such as Jewish Women Mean Business in Leeds
- Significant media coverage of the work of WJL, other communal women's organisations such as US Women and JOFA, and a greater understanding that this is part of the 21st Century communal agenda.
- A greater absorption of women leaders into the communal landscape. Most recently this has been demonstrated by the JC Power 100 2014⁵

¹ Based on JLC organisations; 2013-2014 has seen the recruitment of female CEOs to the Board of Deputies and Nightingale Hammerson and a new female UJS Chair

² Based on informal conversations with WJL

³ Based on participant figures and media coverage of JOFA events and partnership minyanim

⁴ Based on over 50 individuals supporting WJL's campaign to limit all male panels in 2013

⁵ 29% of the JC Power 100 2014 list are women, compared to 19% - the highest figure from previous years

The Future

Over 100 volunteers have spent many years working on this project for change. In some ways we have made significant progress and we have clearly witnessed changes and growing levels of communal awareness concerning gender equality within its institutions and organisations. WJL had to establish itself as a force for change in a relatively conservative community and we believe that we have raised awareness and made a substantive difference over a short period of time. We recognise, however, that the issues affecting gender equality identified in the commission, five years ago, are deeply embedded and don't change overnight – or indeed over five years and for that reason it is essential that the work is able to continue into the future so that the gains made are not lost.

WJL completed its allocated task with notable success but for gender equality to become firmly embedded within the Jewish community it will need to be recognised as a serious issue by the current, predominantly male leadership and one worthy of continuous commitment by of our organisations. Until then, changes will remain limited.

Every project runs to the end of its time and this is the time for WJL to celebrate all it has achieved and hand over to enable new ideas, new energies, new people and new funders to take this forward. We are delighted that the Board of Deputies has committed to taking up the issue of gender equality and we urge both women and men to engage with them, and with others, and support this work on its continuing journey.

Testimonials

“Although a small part of the JLC's Report on Women in Leadership focused on ritual participation, it was pivotal in raising awareness of the issues and creating the need for a platform to debate the issues and the areas in need of change and gave impetus to the launch of JOFA in the UK. I feel strongly that the work of WJL is critical in ensuring that the issue remains high on the communal agenda.”

Dina Brawer, UK Ambassador for JOFA (Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance)

“I think that the major change that has taken place is in the perception of women by women – leading to the realisation that an organisation can and should change, bringing increased confidence from the knowledge that many women feel the same way and perhaps, most of all, that if we all act together we can effect a transformation. It seems to me that the inspiration of the Commission/WJL is in bringing women together to support one another for common goals and articulating and defining that purpose.”

Jackie Naftalin, Board of Deputies of British Jews Women's group

“The establishment of the Women’s CEO forum by WJL has created welcome comradery and professional learning space. We share experiences and knowledge and it does not replace any other network, rather as women’s’ groups tend to do, it creates a different empowering and nurturing environment.”

Jude Williams, Chief Executive, Tzedek

“I feel that the campaign has raised consciousness; encouraging a better gender equality has empowered the female voice to be appreciated and represented. Most importantly I feel that the difference in female insight and approach in meetings has a subtle but impactful effect on outcomes. I feel more confident and my contribution valuable and I have more female colleagues to discuss things with.”

Ruth Green, Trustee, UJIA and Jewish Leadership Council

“WJL sends an important message that the community values and benefits from female leadership. The networking, mentoring and training opportunities positively affect the Jewish religious and professional environment, where discrimination continues to exist. I find it particularly beneficial spending time with female role-models whether they are professional or lay leaders of community.”

Lauren Hamburger, CEO, PJ Library

“It was definitely serendipitous that when WJL launched, US Women was also striving to effect change within the United Synagogue. The work that both groups were doing at this time both complimented and encouraged redefining perspectives of both men and women within the Jewish community at large. This shared work, with its research and final recommendations, helped to build a ground swell of knowledge, empowerment and support which resulted in the amongst other successes, the changing of the Statutes and Byelaws of the US to enable women to stand as Chairs of the Shuls and as Trustees of the US. We are both proud to be part of the movement for change in the community and see the positive impact WJL and US Women have made so far, we still believe that there is more to be done.”

Dalia Cramer, Past Co-Chair, US Women and Leonie Lewis, Vice-President United Synagogue

“With careful coaxing and assistance from the Gender Equality Plan specialists and by applying creative and transparent recruitment processes, we have successfully doubled the number of women on our Board within 2 years. These changes are possible and hugely beneficial to the health of the organisation. But it takes time, commitment and adherence to good governance practices that might not be possible or even palatable to all within our community”

Paul Anticoni, CEO, World Jewish Relief

Acknowledgements

It should be very clear that this project owes many people a huge debt of gratitude. We have already acknowledged the support of the JLC and the Board of Deputies in the report but we would like to repeat our thanks to them both for providing core funding over the five year period.

We also pay tribute to many other organisations that helped us particularly the UJIA, the six organisations who took part in the GEP and Lead and we are hugely grateful to them. It would be disingenuous not to also record that the intransigence of parts of the community and some of its organisations, was disappointing to those of us engaged in the project and to note that there is still a long way to go.

We were blessed with some wonderful staff members and want, most specifically, to thank Sam Clifford, Eve Freeder, Helen Myer, and Jeremy Newmark for their professionalism and hard work from start to finish. Staff members at the Board of Deputies have also made a significant contribution to the project, most recently Marcelle Palmer who professionally took over for the past few months. Leah Warren deserves a special mention as a driving force, a true professional and a real friend to the project.

Our core group in WJL, Nicky Goldman, Helena Miller, and, more recently Gillian Merron have taken the brunt of the project and we need to thank, in particular, the women who have served as volunteer expert panel members for the GEP; Sam Clifford, Sara Cormack, Margaret Harris, Andy Kelmanson, Helena Miller (Chair), Deborah Nathan, Danielle Silverstin, Debra Fox, Jo Greenaway and Suzanne Jacobs.

The women who worked on the Commission are listed in the Commission Report⁶ and we want to formally thank all those who have engaged with WJL over the past three years. Finally, a thank you to Ros Preston OBE, whose earlier team of volunteers inspired our work. We hope that WJL, similarly, inspires the next generation.

⁶ Inspiring Women Leaders: Advancing Gender Equality in Jewish Communal Life (Report of the JLC's Commission on Women in Jewish Leadership 2012)

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