



Going the distance with Federation CJA: 100 years of community support

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In 2017, while Canada is celebrating its 150th anniversary of confederation and Montreal commemorates their 375th anniversary, Federation CJA is celebrating their centennial with an extensive program of activities spread out throughout the year.

A century ago, as dozens of thousands of Jewish immigrants fleeing the anti-Semitic massacre in Eastern Europe were arriving in Canada (Linteau *et al.*, 1989b ; Anctil 2017), the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, ancestor of the actual Federation CJA, was just starting up. This federative institution regrouped the principal Montreal Jewish community institutions of the time and had given itself an ambitious objective: collecting enough funds to offer services to Montreal's Jewish families, especially those most in need.

The model of community assistance established a hundred years ago by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies was perpetuated and has developed itself remarkably throughout the years to become the Federation CJA in 1992. This public foundation of the Montreal region distributes donations to different community organizations. Federation CJA is a member of the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), which is comprised of over 148 regional federations across North America and provides services in order to support Jewish communities through local federations. Within this grouping, Federation CJA is classified in the top 10 most important organizations of the continent. As for Montreal, Morin (2017) brought up in 2012 that there are only 12 public foundations in the region that make donations of over 20 000\$ to community organizations of the region. Among them, Federation CJA is the oldest one. How to explain such longevity? To understand this singularity, we interviewed David Amiel, president of Federation CJA.

A strong historical anchorage to become the community reference

The Montreal Jewish population had grown from 7 000 individuals in 1901 to close to 60 000 in 1931 (Shahar, 2011). These families, recently arriving in Montreal from Eastern Europe and Russia, generally spoke Yiddish and were in a situation of great poverty. The Federation of the time aimed at integrating them. Ira Robinson (2017) underlines the differences between the newly arrived families and the members of the Jewish community who were already established in Montreal “*they seemed religiously, socially, and culturally quite distinct from the small, established and largely prosperous English-speaking Jewish community of Montreal*”. This important influx of new immigrants brought up pressing needs for the families that could not be helped individually by each of the organizations attached to synagogues. David Amiel highlights the particular context of Quebec in 1917.

“We have to remember that during that period in Quebec, there wasn’t really a welfare State. There weren’t any of the social services that exist today. It was mostly the religious congregations of monks and nuns that offered services. There was an urgent need for the community to welcome these new immigrants properly and allow for their socioeconomic integration”.

From this migrant crisis, the idea of a centralization of Jewish philanthropy re-emerges. According to Ancil (2006), the idea of creating this type of institutional structure was present amongst Jewish Quebecers from the mid-19th century. The Federation of Jewish Philanthropies was born out of this line of thought, reuniting institutions as diverse as the Baron de Hirsch Institute, the Hebrew Society of Young Men (today the YM-YWHA), the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society, the Mount-Sinai Sanatorium, the Herzl dispensary (later the clinic), the Jewish Women’s Council of Montreal and others. By federating philanthropy, the entirety of the amounts collected to help the needy are reunited under one central administration and redistributed according to a common logic. This is how, in 1917, the first fundraising campaign to fill the coffers of this new Montreal organization was launched.

“The other waves of immigration, the Second World War with the Shoah and the great Russian immigration of the 90s, had their own specific needs. A portion of our world was vulnerable and living under the poverty line”.

The survivors of the Holocaust, traumatized and without any financial means, were in desperate need of help. Federation CJA thus launched an emergency campaign to collect the funds destined to help these refugees.

In 1951, the Montreal Jewish community comprised of 81 000 individuals (Shahar, 2011). The Federation quickly demonstrated their efficiency and won the hearts of the community by adapting their services and “correctly welcoming the new families” in need. The first half of the 20th century saw the foundations of an organisational model appear, one that is at the basis of the Montreal Jewish identity of today and represents an unceasing will to reaffirm and guarantee a form of collective solidarity. *“The Jewish community has participated in the construction of Montreal for the past 300 years. We are very proud to be well anchored and well invested in the global community of Quebec.”* The waves of immigration from the beginning of the 20th century have marked the city, from famous restaurants to large businesses. The Schwartz’s (1928) restaurant, the Pascal hardware store (1901) or even the Steinberg grocery chain (1917) all come to mind. We can also consider the Jewish General Hospital, true reference with regards to health, where over 70% of the patients aren’t Jewish. However, the influence sometimes surpasses this, through the institutionalization of new social practices developed by these organizations in public services. In this spirit, and as part of the program of activities of their 100th anniversary, Federation CJA presents the portraits of 100 Jewish individuals who have marked Quebec’s history on their website. The message of the campaign is the following:

“Discover our heritage through the portraits of over 100 Jews from here. You will most likely recognize a few and will learn about several others. But more importantly, you will learn how each and every one of them has contributed to make Quebec what it has become and how our common achievements have allowed for the province to shine across the globe”.

“Taking care of each other is part of our DNA”

Voluntarily giving a portion of one’s belongings to those less fortunate than oneself is an integral part of Judaism both as a value and religious practice. The Hebrew term most commonly used to express the necessity of the donation is *tzedakah* (תְּצַדַּק), which doesn’t really have an equivalent in English. We thus often translate it to *charity* or *justice*. The *tzedakah* is not simply one prescription amongst others, as the Talmud designates it as “the commandment”. In fact, *tzedakah* represents a whole, a concentration of Jewish values. Maïmonideⁱⁱ surpasses this perspective by enhancing it even further:

“We have to be attentive to the obligation of the tzedakah more than to any other obligation. In fact, the tzedakah is the distinctive mark of the just belonging to the descendance of Abraham [...]. Never does a man impoverish himself by following the tzedakah, no harm, no damage can result from it.”

(Michne Torah, Law on donations to the poor, X.)

In the past, in the Jewish religion, it was generally considered that the minimal sum to dedicate to the tzedakah was around 10% of your net revenue (the *maser* or tithe). This percentage was modifiable depending on the resources available to each person. This ancient cultural practice is evidently to be differentiated from the philanthropic organizations of today. Federation CJA does not englobe this precept in its valuesⁱⁱⁱ. In addition to the monetary dimension, there is mention, in the writings of Maïmonide, of a hierarchy between the different ways of doing the tzedakah. The central objective rises from the dignity of the beneficiary. The ideal donation is that which allows the beneficiary to become autonomous. Offering work is the most representative example of this intention.

“That which the poor is missing, you must give him, clothes, utensils... You have the obligation to provide him with what he is missing, but you do not have the obligation to make him rich”.

(Michne Torah, Law on donations to the poor, VII, 1.)

Hansel (1998, p.157) affirms that the finality of the tzedakah is not to proceed to a redistribution of the wealth, but to guarantee the satisfaction of the basic needs of all. Since the world is not perfect, these imperfections become a call to the responsibilities of Man. It is the idea of *tikun olam* (עולם תיקון) or of the *repairing of the world*, “*in the larger sense, not only for Jews*”, as David Amiel specifies. We find in this notion the idea of contributing, by small daily actions, to the establishment of a better society. In this way, helping the less fortunate is an act of justice and responding to the divine will. Federation CJA inspires themselves by these two Judaic precepts without however having a religious vocation. Instead, they act more in the same way as an organization invests in a universal mission in the philanthropic sense. In fact, they address themselves before everything else to a community of people reunited by their belonging to the Jewish religion and who wish to support the most vulnerable of their group.

A diversity and proximity of their actions to become inevitable

The initial campaign of the Federation in 1917 was considered a success, collecting 127 000\$ that was then redistributed among twelve specialized organizations. According to Robinson (2017), the main goal of this campaign was “*relieving want and checking pauperism among Jews in the City of Montreal and elsewhere*”. In these first years, the ancestor of Federation CJA concentrated its efforts on poverty relief and offering health services. The priorities of the Federation did not remain set. The needs evolved towards social wellbeing: from charity that “lightens” suffering to preventative “social services”.

The president of the general Campaign of 2017, Jimmy Alexander, announced the results of the last campaign which culminated to a sum of nearly 52 million dollars. This result was the fruit of the generosity of around 15 000 donors and of 600 volunteer fundraisers. The amount collected includes 36 million for the Annual campaign, over 3 million in punctual non-earmarked donations, 5 million in punctual donations reserved for specific ends and nearly 7 million for the fund destined to the survivors of the Holocaust. The distribution of this sum has not yet been decided, in order to have an idea of what it might look like, let's look at how the 2016 annual campaign, which collected 35 million, was distributed. These funds were primarily distributed in four axes of activity.

- Caring for the most vulnerable: 32% of the allocations.
- Consolidating Jewish life and sustainability: 25%.

- Together, we promote the interests of the community: 14%
- Israel, national and international responsibility, representation: 20%^{iv}

The first axis, *caring for the most vulnerable*, is at the heart of Jewish values and is part of Federation CJA's activities since its beginning. *"One out of five Montreal Jews lives under the poverty line. We give access to emergency services for those in need, from the youngest to the elderly, some of whom are survivors of the Holocaust"*. This axis namely includes immigration and work, community funds for the fight against poverty, scholarly grants, and activities of distribution of hot meals in "The café". *"We are seeking to lighten the financial burden of parents concerning education"*. The second axis, *consolidating Jewish life and sustainability*, aims at ensuring a dynamic future for the Jewish community and works towards identity reinforcement through education and culture. Funds are mainly redistributed to the CSUQ (United Sephardic Community of Quebec), to the BJEC (Bronfman Jewish Education Center), Segal Center, to access to Jewish education or even to summer camps. The third axis, *together, we promote the interests of the community*, is meant to protect the vitality of Jewish life in the heart of the small communities of Canada, by fighting against, for example, antisemitism. Finally, the fourth axis, *Israel, national and international responsibility, representation*, embodies the collective Jewish responsibility through an extensive network in Canada, in Israel and in 70 other countries. This redistribution of funds is achieved through the intermediary of international (52%) and national initiatives, including CIJA (48%)^v. It is on this axis that we find the funds attached to situations of crises and emergencies.

Federation CJA gives themselves as a mandate to use the collected amounts in an efficient manner while maintaining the ideal spirit of the tzedakah. By acting on several levels of activity, Federation CJA accentuates their central and inevitable character within the community. While Federation CJA addresses themselves first and foremost to the Jewish community of Montreal, they extend their activities to all in numerous domains while also enlarging their geographical horizons. Let us be reminded of the principal of the "repairing of the world" in the larger sense as the propeller of many of Federation CJA's actions. Two examples illustrate this value. The first concerns an affiliate agency, the Ometz agency^{vi}, which extends a part of their services to all and this, no matter the religion of the person in need. The second is an initiative stemming from Federation CJA itself, the neighborhood service "The Café" is by definition accessible to any person in a situation of poverty. *"After the crisis, we created a social service called 'The Café'. We serve hot meals twice a week to the neighborhood residents. We don't ask their religion at the door. Our volunteers serve 25 000 meals a year to all. Our priority is our community, but we also know how to respond to external needs, because 'generosity' is a primary value for us"*.

Hence, several of the organization's interventions affect a diverse population and allow the establishment of philanthropic intervention standards for all of Quebec. *"We also invest in the cultural and health domains with programs open to all. Such is the case with the Segal Center, where we have programs that are addressed to everyone"*. Federation CJA collected 100 000\$ for the victims of the train tragedy of Lake Megantic, an action that David Amiel explains in the following manner *"we are very proud to present ourselves as Quebecers and Montrealers. Yes, it is obvious that some of our services are directed towards our community, but we are part of the global community"*. Federation CJA overlaps areas of activity and of intervention starting from local, national and international projects, and this, through the axes of intervention proposed by the JFNA (responding to crises, investing in the future of Israel, consolidating Jewish life, committing oneself for the next generations and helping the most vulnerable).

The *Jewish Federation of Winnipeg* is in this sense comparable to Federation CJA of Montreal. Now 80 years old, this foundation plays an important umbrella role for Jewish non-profit organizations of Winnipeg. The total amount of allocations is less since it was around six million dollars for 2016-2017. Notwithstanding organizational models that repeat themselves in North American cities, the federations distinguish themselves through regional specificities. In this way, Federation CJA distinguishes itself by partnership projects aimed locally and internationally, for example the "France Initiative" with the Ometz agency, to help the Jewish French who would like to inform themselves or immigrate to Quebec.

Creating privileged connections with partners and measuring the impacts

Today, Federation CJA is at the same time an organization that collects donations through their annual campaign of great magnitude that starts at the end of August (called the Combined Jewish Appeal), and a service center through their partnerships. It is impossible for a public foundation to act in the field without the presence of adequate partners. Federation CJA maintains strong relationships with organizations that directly provide personal assistance services. *“This is the central office of Federation CJA, but we also find the offices of our affiliated agencies for issues of proximity. This creates a campus effect and an interesting dynamic. We have to be able to respond to all the needs of our members. We can find, for example, the Ometz Agency in the offices to respond to the need of finding employment”* (David Amiel).

Certain agencies are recognized by the Federation as affiliate agencies (eleven partners in 2017). The latter receive significant financing. They received, in 2017, over 25% of the allocations of the Federation. The Federation also finances certain community organizations that are not constituent agencies, but are intimately associated to the organization (twenty eight partners). These organizations have less significant global allocations at their disposal and receive around 17% of the budget allocated by the Federation. A third type of relationship is maintained between Federation CJA and other associated organizations without financing (thirteen partners). Finally, national and international partnerships linked to representation work received around 20% of the allocations distributed in 2017.

Concerning fundraising, Federation CJA carries out fundraisers where the costs are the lowest possible. The idea is to increase the portion of the funds distributed directly to partners to accomplish their actions in the field. For example, the cost of the annual fundraiser of the Combined Jewish Appeal of 2016 represented 6.1% of the amount collected and 4.4% were attributed to the development of financial resources and the acquisition of future incomes. To obtain these results, Federation CJA depends on financial partners by putting in place a significant sponsorship program, while also counting on the support offered by numerous volunteers. The sponsorships of the 2016 campaign totaled over 1.3 million dollars^{vii}.

Society is evolving and so are its needs. Federation CJA is conscious of this and is searching to, in concert with their partners, anticipate these needs. The privileged method is the accountability of partner agents for the committed funds to reach the desired results.

“We must emphasize the results more than the achievements. Our donors want their contributions to have a tangible impact. This is why we work efficiently with our partners. [...] Impact measurement is a strength that our Federation possesses. Before, we worked on the outputs, now we evaluate ourselves on the outcomes. We are looking to establish responsible facts. [...] We don't find any institutional constraints that would permit us to work efficiently. Our donors are professional and informed. They want to know where their money is going and see it as an investment for the future of the community. It is for this reason that we try to be as transparent as possible through our impact reports, for example.” (David Amiel)

As with other organizations, the *charity* of donors is not the only motivation; sustainable investment is also taken into consideration. As Robinson (2017) specifies, since the between-two-wars the Federation CJA turned towards “scientific charity”^{viii}. Still today, if we follow David Amiel’s reasoning, the legitimacy of the actions is due to the ensuing results.

At Federation CJA, the community’s succession has always been a priority. Youth represent the future of the community and of the philanthropic organization that represents them. David Amiel and his teams are betting on the future. How to be attentive to this generation and how to help them succeed? Programs are created to help young adults to have access to attractive professional opportunities.

“The Montreal Jewish community of 2017 is quite different of that of a century, half-century or even thirty years ago. If Federation CJA has been successful throughout an entire century, it is because it knew how to respond to the community’s needs”.

Indeed, examples of public foundations that follow the centuries in Montreal are not numerous. What more can we wish Federation CJA if it is not a happy anniversary and yet another century of support and commitment for the community?

“There are certain unique characteristics to 1917. There are also continuous facts, constants. We were already investing to help vulnerable people and to consolidate our culture. It is still the case. To invest in the future, we must always look into the past. There are things that will change. However, being part of the success of Quebec for almost 300 years now allows us to look to the future with confidence. Montreal, Quebec and more largely Canada are well positioned to offer a quality of life for future generations.”



David Amiel, actuel président de la Fédération CJA est entré en poste en septembre 2017. Préalablement, il a agi pendant deux ans comme premier vice-président du conseil d’administration, dont il était membre depuis 2013. David Amiel est un acteur particulièrement actif de la communauté juive de Montréal, y ayant occupé diverses fonctions de leader et dirigé de nombreuses initiatives. Son engagement remonte à 2009, alors qu’il présidait la Marche vers Jérusalem. Par la suite, à la Fédération CJA, il a également présidé la Campagne du jeune leadership en 2011 et la division YAD Montréal en 2013-2014.

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Pour aller plus loin

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ⁱ Canadian Hockey Club Foundation (2000), Roaster, Enfant Soleil, Federation CJA, Centraide, Foundation of Greater Montreal, Bon départ de Canadian Tire, Ultramar, Homeless Recouse, Elderly Recourse, Rona, The Cardinal's Partners (léger)

ⁱⁱ Maïmonide lived in Spain (Cordoue) and in Egypt during the 11th century of our era

ⁱⁱⁱ The values displayed by Federation CJA are : « Chesed (Kindness), Tzedakah (Justice/Charity), Klal Israel (Jewish Peoplehood), Tikun Olam (Repairing the world) ». Source : <https://www.federationcja.org/en/who/>

^{iv} The rest of the amount is dispersed into campaign costs, administrative fees, financial resource development and the acquisition of future revenues.

^v Representation agent of Jewish Federations of Canada, mandated to insure a better comprehension of the issues affecting the Jewish community.

^{vi} Ometz is a social service agency affiliated to Federation CJA. “ It is a Montreal agency, accredited by the Minister of Immigration, of Diversity and of Inclusion, that offers a vast array of services in the areas of teaching, of employment and of immigration. Each year, over 13 000 people profit from our intervention, prevention and support services, as well as our other programs that aim at improving the quality of life” (Source: Ometz website)

^{vii} Partial list of the campaign's sponsors: BMO, RBC, PearTree, TD, Bell, Scotiabank, Richeter, KPG, Loblaw's, Vision, Canada Life, Pharmascience, etc.

^{viii} This concept means that the most vulnerable need monetary support but also sustainable constructive solutions.