PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Making the Jewish community more welcoming

What can we all do to make the Jewish community more welcoming—as individuals, funders, community institutions, and lay and professional community leaders? The solutions listed below are a beginning—and it will take all of us to make these changes a reality. Many of the solutions were proposed by the single mothers themselves.

What we all can do

- Recognize that single parent families are a significant and permanent part of our constituencies.
- Acknowledge that there are different types of family that make up our community.
- Help synagogues and other community institutions outreach to these families, via a caring committee or an individual who can identify their specific needs—whether financial or emotional.
- Simplify and dignify financial aid processes, and consider multi-year scholarships.

What funders can do

- Help make Jewish life more affordable:
  • Provide more preschool and camp scholarships, or reduced fees for single parents, or transportation support to Hebrew school.
  • Provide scholarships to support children in activities outside of the Jewish community to help ease the burden in other areas of life and make participation in Jewish life an easier choice to make.
- Assist women in identifying and leveraging resources:
  • Create a Craigslist, Abraham’s list, or simply a “call list” of trusted resources for needs, including people in the Jewish communities who offer professional services, such as lawyers, health care providers, child care, or home repairs, and who come from a trusted source.
  • Create a clearinghouse or navigator system to help people find broad-based “safety net” resources, such as childcare, transportation, home repairs, or legal help.
- Tap into existing networks broader than single Jewish mothers to create opportunities for single Jewish mothers to find one another in venues that are familiar and convenient.
  • For example, within an internet support group for single parents, create a subgroup for single Jewish moms to connect.
- Create opportunities for children to be exposed to different role models and generations (i.e. a Jewish Big Brothers/Big Sisters).
- Invest in a shared message of inclusivity, including a statement that financial barriers to participation can be overcome.
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What community institutions can do

- Identify ways to be inclusive and welcoming to children as well as the single parents raising them. For example, create opportunities for single parent families, including family friendly camps or excursions where their child is welcomed and they are supported as single mothers.

- Focus on engaging women as welcome participants and establish more equitable ways for them to contribute and participate in Jewish life. For example, institutions could provide opportunities to host a family during the holidays.

- Single mothers need a safety net in the event that they are unable to care for their child. Be aware of unspoken stigma in asking for help. Institute a more formal and active process to reach out to mothers in need.

- Systematize ways to encourage single-parent family engagement, and means of reducing barriers, such as:
  - offering standard membership and event fees for single-parent families that are lower than rates for two-parent families-without each single mom having to ask;
  - including language about resources being provided for child care;
  - including single moms in marketing visuals;
  - providing services at times that are designed to accommodate the needs of single moms;
  - providing transportation or supporting transportation costs; and
  - rotating program locations to increase access for those living in remote areas.

- Ensure that community leadership structures are diverse and include single mothers on boards of directors and other leadership positions.

- Invest in a shared message of inclusivity, including a statement that financial barriers to participation can be overcome.

- Simplify and dignify financial aid processes and consider multi-year scholarships.

*For a copy of the full study or more information, contact Sue Schwartzman at SueS@sfjcf.org.

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1 Partnered was selected by those who are not married and had sole custody of their child.
2 The women in this higher income bracket were included in the study despite their income being slightly above the original parameters for several reasons. First, despite this higher income level, they indicated that they were facing financial challenges due to the extremely high cost of living in the Bay Area. Second, these women indicated that their current income was unstable due to high turnover and/or self-employment, and that they did not know that this income level would continue. Third, they met all other criteria, including feeling disconnected from Jewish life. Last, they were extremely interested in providing input not only from their own perspective, but also on behalf of other single Jewish mothers they knew (including mothers with lower income than themselves) who were facing even greater financial challenges.
7 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s County Health Rankings.
8 Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2009-2013. Table DP03.