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**The History of JACS
(Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others):
An Interview with David Buchholz (Co-Founder) February 12, 2003**

William L. White

Introduction

If there is a definitive chapter in the modern history of addiction recovery, it is the growing varieties of recovery experience. My interest in this subject, stirred initially under the mentorship of Dr. Ernest Kurtz, has grown in tandem with the diversification within and across secular, spiritual and recovery mutual aid organizations. In February of 2003, I had the opportunity to participate in an event sponsored by Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others (JACS). While there, I interviewed David Buchholz, one of the co-founders of JACS. Below are excerpts from this 2003 interview.

William White, September, 2013

The Birth of JACS

Bill White: David, I'd like to hear the story of the birth of JACS and how it has subsequently evolved.

David Buchholz: JACS grew out of the work of the Commission on Synagogue Relations of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. The Federation later merged with the United Jewish Appeal and is now UJA/Federation of New York.

At that time, there was a Rabbi named Isaac Trainin who was Director of the Commission, who was really pretty amazing. He put together, under his auspices, a number of task forces to deal with different kinds of "shandas," (shame) - major problems in the Jewish community. Two of the Task Forces, the one on drugs and the one on alcoholism eventually merged into one. The Federation was trying to feel its way, trying to find a way of dealing with these issues. This was in the mid to late 1970s well before Betty Ford came out publicly about being chemically dependent. Before then, it was just "bad" to be alcoholic and chemically addicted. I mean, if anyone found out about you, you weren't sent to a rehab or to treatment or AA. Everybody just looked and put their heads down. Nobody wanted to deal with a chemically addicted person.

So, my sobriety date is Mother's Day of 1975. When I came in to recovery, I was very lucky because LeClair Bissell had formed the Caduceus group, a few years earlier. They were a really wonderful group of people; mostly doctors, with a few nurses and dentists. When I was just a

couple of months sober the group paid for me to go to an IDAA (International Doctors in AA) convention at the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach. I had studied to be a doctor – and did the third year of medical school three times in three different countries – and never finished because of my addictions. I always thought that if I had become a doctor I would never have become alcoholic and chemically dependent. That convention disavowed me of that notion real quick.

LeClair was very, very important in my life. She was the founding Director of Smithers Center at the time. Early on in my sobriety, I volunteered to work for her. She was doing research on alcoholism in the professions and it was just a wonderful time to be around her. She became my mentor and friend. When IDAA had its convention in NY, LeClair recruited my wife Audrey and I to help with the meetings. She put me on the organizing committee, and put Audrey, also a JACS Co-Founder, to work on registration.

We both learned to spread our wings in service with a group called Pills Anonymous in NY. It was established by Dr. Don Douglas, who we used to call “Dr. Don,” for people who were dependent on prescription drugs. While I was doing service in PA, Audrey started the companion group for families, Pil-Anon, which was about sixty percent parents, and about 75% Jewish. Jews and Italians were also the first ones who started coming into Pills Anonymous. When I tried to persuade a young woman to come to a meeting, she asked “who’s going to be there?” I told her, “single Jewish men.” It worked fine. She showed up at our next meeting. At the time, there was no readily available NA (Narcotics Anonymous) in NY because of the strict Rockefeller drug laws dealing with the sale and possession of "narcotic" drugs. NYC police detectives would infiltrate NA meetings and people were afraid to be seen and heard at meetings so the program fell apart. A lot of people who were cocaine addicts and on other illegal drugs came to PA. Eventually they decided that they really had to start up NA again because they couldn’t talk about their addictions in AA and prescription drug problems in PA weren’t really their thing.

A friend of mine in PA who worked for the State Office of Drug and Alcohol Services was on the Federation Task Force. He told me that what they wanted - and needed - was a couple of what LeClair used to call “horrible examples.” There were a number of professional people on the Task Force who were also “horrible examples” but none of them would say so publicly because at that time professionals just didn’t do that. The Task Force planned a retreat for recovering Jews and family members. They scheduled it for the same weekend as the Bill W. dinner dance in New York ... but nobody signed up and the retreat was cancelled. So they realized they needed someone to connect with the recovery community and begin to try to find people who might actually come to a retreat. That’s when I joined, sometime in 1978.

We really didn’t know what a Jewish retreat was. Federation told us it had to be at a Jewish site, have kosher food and religious services. We held the first retreat in October, 1979 at a Federation camp in upstate NY. There were 45 people, AA’s and AI-Anon, mostly from, NY, with a few from Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Minnesota plus Commission staff. The people there had about 4-5 years sobriety, and range of involvement in Jewish heritage and

traditions. We couldn't find a rabbi in NY who was knowledgeable about our disease. So they brought in Rabbi Barry Woolf, a Chaplain at Hazelden from Minnesota who was the only rabbi we knew then who knew anything about alcoholism and chemical dependency. When I told my mother I was going on the retreat she looked at me and said in all seriousness, "*you must never retreat, you must always go forward, you've been retreating for too long!*"

The weekend was incredible. There we were, with people who looked like our relatives, but spoke AA language. There was a tidal wave of emotions - shame at being Jewish and alcoholic, anger at rabbis they went to for spiritual help who asked if they were really Jewish and resentment at the Jewish community for denying they existed. We asked a lot of questions. Was it OK to go to meetings in church basements? Was it OK to say the Lord's Prayer? Could we get down on our hands and knees to pray? What were we, Alcoholic Jews or Jewish Alcoholics? We sort of modeled the program after the IDAA convention. On Saturday afternoon, after services, we had educational lectures. LeClair gave one, along with a couple of other professionals who were also in AA. If there was one thing we learned quickly, it was that you don't have educational lectures at retreats.

On Saturday night, LeClair sat around with a group of us and said that it was time for us to take the responsibility for forming an organization to keep these retreats going. Since Federation doesn't do programming - it sponsors programming by its member agencies - we either had to affiliate with an existing agency or be our own organization. Federation didn't know where to put us. We knew what we weren't. We didn't do treatment; we didn't do counseling, we didn't provide direct social services. But we really didn't know what we were exactly. We were such a difficult concept to understand. Eventually they worked with us and decided to give us the same status as the NY Board of Rabbis, as a "subvention." This meant that we would get annual funding but we weren't a full-fledged agency like others because we were so new and unique.

Audrey wrote our original funding proposal to Federation. They gave a grant of \$10,000 to get us started. We incorporated in 1980 as the JACS Foundation, created bylaws, got tax exemption status, put together a Board of Trustees, and all that. Federation got us space - rent free- at the NY Board of Rabbis because they thought this was the best place to put us. Our office was really only a desk in a teeny-weeny corner of their library, but it was an office with an address and a phone. I recruited my aunt, who was a former director of a YM/YWHA in Queens, to be our "consultant." She set up our office and files and wrote a brochure and other information materials about JACS. I wound up being the Volunteer Executive Director of JACS because I worked evenings and had the time to help out in the office and to go to daytime meetings, often with Rabbi Trainin, to talk about JACS.

Federation was also very generous to us in many other ways at the beginning. They did printing and mailings, subsidized the costs of retreat sites, paid for rabbis, gave scholarships, and things like that. They introduced us to key people and organizations in the Jewish community. They arranged for us to make presentations to conferences of other Federations to tell the JACS story as a way of encouraging them to start to take action in their own areas. The Board of Rabbis also helped us a lot too. They worked with us to create the first set of special prayer services for Jews in recovery. They arranged informational meetings with local chaplains and

introduced us to the major theological seminaries so we could start to recruit rabbinical and cantorial students for the retreats. They also had a very active media department which arranged many high profile interviews and appearances.

How we got the name JACS is a bit of a story. We really didn't know what to call ourselves. At first we decided to call ourselves what we were. I don't remember the name exactly but it was something like "Jewish Retreats to Help Jews in Recovery from Alcoholism and Chemical Dependency and Their Families." The bank said the name was too long to put on checks. We knew the name was totally unmanageable. So we went back and forth – a lot – Jewish style – and came up with Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others (JACS) for short. So that's the story of how JACS began, from a retreat.

Bill White: David, at that point, were most of the members of JACS members of AA or Al-Anon?

David Buchholz: Yes. Some also went to NA and PA and Nar-Anon and Pil-Anon. You could say that we've always been sort of an addition to AA and Al-Anon. We'd explain that our role was really "before and after." That our purpose was helping suffering Jews find their way to the program, and once in the program, help them find Jewish spiritual resources to strengthen their recovery. We didn't really have any problems with AA itself. Intergroup was really supportive and an excellent sounding board. They made good suggestions and helped us make sure we didn't violate any AA traditions. The law firm who helped us incorporate JACS was the same firm that incorporated AA. The senior lawyer we worked with was a non-alcoholic trustee and past President of AA's World Service's General Service Board.

We had a difficult time in the beginning dealing with Jewish members of AA since many of them thought that what we were trying to do was create a "Jewish AA." It was also a really big problem and we had to work hard to convince them that it was not our purpose. The way we decided to handle it was to go out into the Jewish community and open up AA meetings in synagogues. There were only two at the time in NY: The idea was to say to people "Look, we're not trying to come between you and AA, we're only trying to get the Jewish community to support you by holding AA meetings in their buildings. That was a very effective strategy. As an aside, Audrey and I got married in one of the two synagogues precisely because they had an AA meeting. We eventually joined the congregation. The rabbi was very supportive about JACS. He asked us to speak to the congregation at some Friday night services and also referred a few congregants to us for help.

There was another strategy that we had that was also very useful. Sometimes a synagogue or Jewish facility, like a Y, was interested in helping but they didn't want meetings of "drunks." So we said, "Okay, what about having an Al-Anon meeting where you won't have the drunks but you'll have their significant others? And they're not drunks and they won't cause any problems." And they usually said, "OK." So what happened is once we got the Al-Anon Meeting started and it began growing, then we could bring in the AA meeting. Synagogues are different than churches since they're not used to these meetings and don't understand the concept of "passing the basket" and giving what they can as a donation. Sometimes, the synagogues

thought that if you got say 20 or 30 people at a meeting you could charge them like the group was paying “rent” for the space. This is something that AA groups were not used to and we were concerned they might become offended if they were asked for more than they could give. So we sometimes had to act as a go-between the synagogue and the group to explain the situation and stop any potential problems from developing.

Alcoholism and the Jewish Community

Bill White: What was it like in the early years doing presentations in the Jewish community? What was the community’s response to JACS?

David Buchholz: You could say that we really began making presentations to the Jewish community the day after the first retreat when Rabbi Trainin and I appeared on a Jewish radio station talk show. Our goal was to start getting the word out as broadly as possible. At the beginning we did a fair amount of these types of interviews where we talked “directly” to the larger Jewish community about JACS.

Audrey and I also did a lot of speaking to Jewish community groups at the beginning since there weren’t that many people available to go out and speak and we could present both the personal recovery and family recovery stories in tandem. We changed our names for radio and TV interviews. I was Steve and she was Harriet and keeping with 12 Step tradition, we were always in shadow on TV. Sometimes, jokingly, we’d refer to ourselves as the “Horrible Example and His Wife.” We also started to do programs for agencies and professional staff in the Jewish community, like JBFCs, Ys and Board members, executives and staff of Federation itself. Since we were created thru Federation’s aegis, we fortunately had a significant amount of credibility and were able to get “entre” They were interested and attentive, but it was always somewhat of a shock to see how little awareness they had as a group about the problems of alcoholism and chemical dependency in the Jewish community.

When it came to community groups like synagogue Sisterhoods and Brotherhoods, Hadassah and B’nai B’rith, we usually got really warm responses. But the idea that a nice Jewish boy like me, for example, was an alcoholic was a really difficult thing for them to understand. They looked at us sort of like their own sons and daughters. I’d tell my story first. Then Audrey would tell her Al-Anon story which was very different than mine. After we spoke, invariably people would come up to her, especially women, and ask what happened to her husband and how was he doing. She’d point at me and say, “there he is.” They were really surprised but were so happy to see real life examples of recovery it gave them “nachas” (good feelings.) Sometimes, people came up and whispered to us about a son, daughter, sister, brother or another close relative who had a problem and asked what they could do to help them.

As far as Jewish institutions go, broaching the subject of alcoholism and chemical dependency met with significant resistance in some settings. Jewish schools, for example, were really hard. Early on, we tried to do a program for the schools. There were programs for the public schools and the Catholic schools (like a project called DARE). But the Jewish schools had nothing, and not a clue that this was an issue. They were invited to come to the Federation Task Force and I’ll

never forget this. They said "What we need to do is a survey. We need to survey the schools and find out if it's a problem." And I remember getting up and saying, "You cannot survey the schools. This is an illness whose hallmark is denial. If you survey the schools without bringing in education first, then you're basically going to survey an invisible illness. You have to bring education in first and then survey." We wound up doing programs in individual schools. Generally it was after we were approached by a teacher or administrator in the school who had problem in their family. At the time it was a very brave thing to have a JACS presentation in a school because the thinking in the Jewish school community was that if you invite someone to talk about alcoholism and drug dependency in your school, it means that you have a problem with it in your school.

There are some wonderful and wondrous stories of the responses that individual JACS members got when they went out into the Jewish community. One of my favorites was the time a retired high school Principal was at a self-help fair in Riverdale NY where he lived. He was giving out literature and answering questions. A middle aged woman came up to him. She said that anybody who would talk about Jews this way had to be a member of the PLO. And that all we were doing was simply giving them an opportunity to slander the Jews! I myself remember going to arrange for printing of a JACS retreat flyer and this woman looked at me and said "Jewish alcoholics?" and she started to laugh, like it was so freaky. And then she thought for a second and started to tell me about her husband's best friend who drank too much. I said, "Why don't you take one of these flyers and give it to him?" Her expression was like "Oh, no, no, no. I don't wanna go there. I don't wanna deal with this at all."

We also got what were really strange responses from people you'd think would know better. The first one was at Federation when we made a presentation to the top echelon of Federation about JACS as they were giving us a start-up grant. One woman kept asking us, do Jews really drink; are there really Jewish alcoholics? She really wasn't convinced but she voted for the grant anyway. It took a lot more time, and many other grant requests later before she finally "got it." Audrey also had a weird experience, which probably fits into the "believe it or not category." In the late 1990's, she had a job interview with the Director of the local Alcoholism Council. In talking about her knowledge and qualifications for the job, she talked about her work with JACS. After she finished speaking and answering questions, he turned to her and asked, earnestly, and in all sincerity, "are there really Jewish alcoholics?"

Bill White: And all of these responses were simply for acknowledging the reality of alcoholism inside the Jewish community?

David Buchholz: Yes. Absolutely. When you talk about acknowledging the problem in the Jewish community, I think you also have to talk about failure of researchers and academics across the board - in the Jewish community and the greater public - to address the problem of Jews and alcohol. The professional literature of the day, in 1980 or so, was still focused on why Jews were sober and had immunity to alcoholism. One important exception was a groundbreaking study by Dr. Sheila Blume where she found that Jews had the same family histories as other groups and didn't drink any differently than the people around them.

What was kind of amazing, though, is that two decades later, things hadn't changed much at all. When we did a Chaplaincy Training Program in 1997 we asked Dr. Stuart Gitlow, (son of Dr Stanley Gitlow), to go through the literature on Jews and addiction. What he told us was "Frankly, you don't exist." So we decided that we needed to do our own research and writing. We put together one of our JACS members, Susan Vex with Sheila Blume. They surveyed something like 2500 people from our data base. We called it the JACS 1 Study. It was a significant picture of alcoholic and chemically dependent Jews that never existed before. The study was very well received. It was presented at the annual meeting of the prestigious American Psychiatric Association and published in the Journal of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM).

By the time I was a finalist for the Robert Wood Johnson Innovators in Substance Abuse Awards in 2001 and 2002, there was still no new literature of significance. There were something like 60,000 reference works on file at the Rutgers Alcohol Studies Center. But there were only 40 on Jews, alcohol and drugs! Most of those were JACS and Federation related, including the three books that the Federation produced on drugs, on alcoholism, and on addictions - in the Jewish community. A sort of ironic side note about the Robert Wood Johnson nomination. I lost twice. I came in 6th in a field of 5 finalists. I was the only volunteer ever nominated for the award – and the only one dealing with Jews and addiction. And I got beat out by professors and researchers to boot!

Bill White: Was there an awareness of problems other than alcohol?

David Buchholz: Yes. Actually the first of the Federation Task Forces focused on Drugs. One of the things they did was suggest that Family Service agencies offer programs like drug free outpatient counseling, long term residential treatment communities and substance abuse prevention and early intervention for Jewish teens. There's a wonderful statement of purpose in the book they wrote, *Judaism and Drugs* which was published in 1973, which highlights the cautious but changing tenor of the Jewish community's attitudes. Can you wait while I get the book? I'd like to quote it exactly. (PAUSE)... Here it is. *"Regrettably, the Jewish community has for too long ignored the danger (of addiction), trusting it would simply go away. Some Jewish leaders chauvinistically refused to acknowledge that Jews use drugs or are alcoholics. Others were simply too ashamed to concede that we have a dilemma... The American Jewish community has finally shed its reticence and is prepared to do battle. And battle we must ...For the crisis of (addiction) is now an American problem; it is a rich man's problem as well as a poor man's problem. It is a Jewish problem too."*

When it comes to things like prescription drug abuse, that's a little different story. I think when Betty Ford came out and talked about her prescription drug abuse and when chemical dependency became part of the lexicon, it was really significant for the Jewish community. It made it easier for nice Jewish women – and men - to realize they could have a problem with prescription pills and seek help. It also seemed to carry less of a stigma than alcoholism because it was more of a medical problem. It has also always been quintessentially Jewish to go to a doctor and get medication for their health problems. Because of that it was hard for Jews to imagine that they could become addicted to this medicine. I remember a woman at

one of our early retreats saying “I didn’t know I was addicted. I only took medicine the doctor prescribed for me. He wouldn’t prescribe this medication if I didn’t need it. How could I be a pill addict?” We found early on that we were well ahead of the curve in terms of multiple addictions. And that alcoholism was usually mixed in with everything else. But not anymore. Now, the rest of the population has caught up to us.

JACS Growth and Evolution

Bill White: When did JACS begin to experience real growth and when did you feel that you were making an impact?

David Buchholz: I think it’s fair to say that on one level JACS made its impact the moment that we began. The fact that we even existed made a statement. The fact that the Federation was behind us made us mainstream and we weren’t considered crackpots or nuts to say that Jews could be alcoholics. We were the only game in town. We were extremely proactive in going out to speak in the community, finding rabbis, and helping Jews in recovery one on one. So we were able to make a big impact in a lot of areas at the same time. I would say it was probably about five years or so till we hit our stride. It was about that time that our retreats doubled in size and more people from other places were coming to see how we did what we did so they could go home and do the same. One of the ironies – and difficulties we had - was that we really didn’t have time to build a program, we were “born” with a program. It meant that we had to be up to speed almost from the get go. JACS members, all volunteers, were doing all the work of the organization. We were handling all retreats and the membership events, doing the community speaking, and taking care of all the administrative, financial and fundraising functions to keep an organization going.

Around the fifth year or so we were frankly exhausted. By then, there were a few really strong JACS groups, in Boston, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. They started to make presentations with us at major Jewish functions, do their own publicity and make solid inroads in their own Jewish communities. We were so tired at one point that we told the Boston JACS group that if they couldn’t help us run the next retreat, there wasn’t going to be a next retreat. They took over most all the responsibilities, and created a terrific system of computerized registration that we never had before. We worked together with them on the next few retreats. By then we realized we had to add more office staff but also a Director to take over a lot of the administrative load we were carrying so we could do what we did best.

We added programs between retreats. We began to hold Spiritual Days which were like mini retreats where rabbis addressed topics like “The Lord’s Prayer and Judaism. We opened these to other 12 step groups, rabbis, cantors, Jewish communal workers and members of the public. We started to give courses we called “Stepping thru Judaism” and “Stepping through Jewish Spirituality.” We sponsored a Havurah – study group for about six years, led by Rabbi David Steinman, which Audrey and I belonged to. We read Jewish texts (in English) and discussed everything and anything about Jewish theory, practice, and philosophy. We also helped develop what we called a Jewish Spiritual Dictionary, giving Jewish backgrounds to AA program concepts.

One very special thing we did that also raised the bar for JACS. It was our mission to Israel. We went on the traditional bus tour of the country – Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, Safed, Dead Sea, Masada, Holocaust Museum and the Old City - Western Wall, Temple Mount, Church of the Holy Sepulcher and more. What made the trip unique was that we also had a special “Recovery Itinerary.” We went to AA meetings – including one that was in a bomb shelter- and we also hosted an AA meeting for JACS members living in Israel. We visited a recovery kibbutz in Galilee and a halfway house in Beersheba. We visited a halfway house and talked with residents. Two of our “JACS” rabbis went with us on the trip, Ilan Feldman of Atlanta, and Motty Twerski (Abe Twerski’s nephew). Both of them had come to JACS retreats several times before and were also working with JACS groups in their areas. We also gave a seminar at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem on “Spirituality and Substance Abuse.” Your good friend and ours, Dr. Ernie Kurtz, was the keynote speaker. Ernie asked Motty and I to tell our stories also. It was a really emotional thing for me since the last time I was in Israel was at the height – and depth - of my disease. It was when I was studying medicine at Tel Aviv University, doing the third year of medical school for the third time. That was when my life finally fell apart. It was when I was hospitalized in a sanitorium that I was told that I needed to go home “because Israel was killing me.”

Speaking of “JACS Rabbis,” Audrey and I used to pick up rabbis from the airport and drive them up to the retreats. We talked, and we asked questions about all kinds of things in Jewish beliefs and religious practice we didn’t know about. Why do Jews do this. Why don’t they do this – and on and on. Most of the rabbis from out of town we had never seen or met before. We never knew what they looked like. So meeting Rabbi Abe Twerski in person was well, a surprise. In all honesty, I have to say that when Rabbi Abe and his beloved wife Golda (who passed away some years ago) came to our house, we weren’t exactly ready for the vision of who was before us. But as soon as he started talking, we knew he was really “one of us.” Another time, we were supposed to pick up a rabbi, Rabbi Jim Goodman of St. Louis in front of his hotel. He was another of the rabbis we had only talked to but never met. So, now we’re looking for someone who looks like Rabbi Abe. But we don’t see him. Audrey says the only person there was “this guy with jeans, a pony tail and a guitar.” After a while she goes up to him and asks if he’s Rabbi Goodman and sure enough he’s our guy. He talked a really “really good program too.” We always like to have as many rabbinical and cantorial students as possible at retreats to give them a chance to meet people in recovery. At one retreat, at the Sunday summing up meeting, one of the students said *“coming to this retreat to learn about alcoholism and chemical dependency is like learning to bowl by being a bowling pin!”*

Bill White: How would you describe the spread of JACS from those early developmental years to the status of JACS today in 2003? How has it changed in other ways?

David Buchholz: There is really a big difference compared to the way that JACS grew in the early days. Then, almost every JACS group grew out of our New York retreats. They grew member by member, group by group, and community by community. At retreats, the nucleus of new JACS groups would gain momentum. They would talk to each other, listen to each other and realize the power they had to bring about change. They’d go home energized and excited and begin the process of creating a JACS group of their own. Though our mandate was to work

in the NY area, we adopted a national outlook almost immediately - out of necessity. We needed to encourage, support and mentor JACS groups as they formed to help them succeed. At the same time, we also had a highly visible national profile ourselves. We were the ones that people turned to first, from all over the country, for information and guidance about alcohol and drug dependency in the Jewish community. We became the leader and linchpin of the growing Jewish Recovery Network which, in essence we created.

Today, the Internet has significantly changed the way we do business" insofar as it gives us the ability to communicate with a vast, wider audience than we ever imagined 25 years ago. We can tell stories of our members, provide spiritual insights from rabbis, preview our events, provide meeting information and updates on activities of JACS group activities across the country. But our retreats are still the heart of our program, where we come together to share our experience, strength and hope in a welcoming Jewish setting and explore ways to integrate our Jewish values, heritage and experience with our recovery.

Another thing that has changed is the nature of our membership. Since we began JACS there have been significant changes in the makeup of our membership. At the beginning, most people tended to come from Reform, Conservative or unaffiliated backgrounds. There were very few Orthodox or Hasidic Jews. They were proximately in a greater state of denial than others. They came from very insular communities so if someone were to actually acknowledge a problem with alcohol or drugs in themselves or in a family member, they were frankly terrified to be found out and ostracized. When Rabbi Abe came into the picture, things started to change significantly. What we say, quite simply, is that he made it "kosher" to be Jewish and in recovery in AA. This was a very important threshold to cross, especially for the very Orthodox. For a long time we were really the only place where they could talk openly. Eventually they started to go to meetings – even in church basements – for their recovery. Today, the Orthodox represent somewhere between 25 and 30 % of JACS members. And when word gets out that Rabbi Abe is going to be at a JACS retreat, the number increases significantly.

We were all a lot younger when we started JACS and were still trying to work through our own issues. The big "children's issue" we were dealing with then was how to handle babies and nursing mothers! At the time we really didn't envision the idea of involving teens and young people the way we do today. I think we also never expected that we'd have the number of "second generation" JACS members that we do. The JACS babies have grown up and some of them share their parents' alcoholism and chemical dependency. It's not really unusual these days to see a JACS "old-timer" sitting next to their son or daughter at an AA/ NA meeting. Then, taking turns at Al-Anon/Nar-Anon meetings to help work out issues they have with each other.

Bill White: What literature is available about JACS?

David Buchholz: As I mentioned, our website has a lot of basic facts and information about our program activities. Our greatest success, however, has been in fostering the development of a library on Jews, alcohol and chemical addiction, principally, through the writings of our JACS rabbis. They have probably written upwards of 150 articles and archived written presentations.

Our greatest and most prolific success has been Rabbi Abe Twerski. When he first came to JACS, he came more as a psychiatrist than a rabbi. We said that there were now a bunch of psychiatrists and psychologists starting to write about addiction. We said “we need you to do something different in order to really help us.” We convinced him to stop writing as a psychiatrist and start writing more as a Rabbi. And that’s exactly what he did. He started with AA/Al-Anon type volumes like *Living Each Day and Living Each Week*. He’s since written about 50 or so books focusing on self help, spiritual guidance and the congruence of AA and Jewish tradition. I always tease him and tell him that part of the reason he came to so many retreats was because he wanted to get material ideas from JACS members for his next books. Abe also recruited rabbis, like Hirsch Chinn, and his son Benzion Twerski, to help us in our spiritual search, while teaching them more alcoholism and chemical dependency.

JACS is currently working on a Jewish Women’s Book, a kind of a mini Big Book, with first person stories by JACS women AA/NAs, and significant others. JACS members are doing all the editorial work from start to finish. We are really looking to forward to publishing it soon. As soon as word started to get out about the Women’s Book, there were rumblings from the guys that they wanted a Men’s Book too.

Bill White: Has there been an effort to do the history of JACS. Is there a “JACS Comes of Age” book in the works?

David Buchholz: Your question is really timely. JACS is about to celebrate its 25th Anniversary and we’re planning to celebrate with a major event. So we’re writing – actually Audrey is writing – the history of JACS chronicle. We have had such a rich and full history and documenting it will give us the chance – and the pleasure - of taking a look back to see everything we have accomplished. We haven’t yet gotten to the idea of a “JACS Comes of Age” book. But at some point, after we’ve done our history what we might do is a “Stories of JACS” with vignettes, like the ones I’ve shared with you in this interview. I think it’s something that our members could really get into. I know everyone has a favorite JACS story to tell.

JACS Identity

Bill White: Has JACS experienced any strain regarding its fundamental identity?

David Buchholz: In some ways, Yes. For instance, one of the biggest problems we’ve had is a tendency for some new JACS groups to want to open themselves up to all addictions as a way of growing their groups quickly. You can successfully do JACS with drugs and alcohol and pills, but adding OA and GA and SA and all the other issues can cause real problems of identification. We’ve seen several cases where JACS groups have fallen apart when members of these other fellowships became leaders of the group, and the alcoholic and chemically addicted members start to drift away.

Like AA, we’ve found that keeping to our core tradition and primary purpose, the reason we were created in the first place, is truly the best and wisest course to take. By including all other addictions, we confuse the message we’re delivering. For newcomers, it is essential that the

message be clear so they know they have come to the right place to get the help they need. One of the best ways we found to engage Jewish communities is by presenting “horrible examples” who tell their personal stories of addiction and recovery. So how can an OA go out and talk personally about the experience of alcoholism and chemical addiction if they’ve never experienced it. There are also some quarters within the Jewish community that are still wrapped in the denial and stigma attached to alcoholism and chemical dependency. It’s been really tough trying to break through their layers of denial. So if you mix other problems with alcoholism and chemical dependency, the life threatening nature of our addiction can be muted and lost. That said, what we do see on the horizon are groups that are trying to find creative ways and models which can adapt to the new needs of their members and their communities while preserving the primary purpose, goals, and values of JACS.

One thing that’s clear is that after all these years we’ve found the answer to the question that people asked at our first retreat. Am I a Jewish alcoholic or an alcoholic Jew. There are only alcoholic Jews. The same way there’s no such thing as a Catholic alcoholic or a Protestant alcoholic. Jews are just like any other run-of-the-mill alcoholics, recovery works for us just like it works for everybody else.

And speaking for myself, I am a profoundly grateful alcoholic Jew who has been blessed by the gift of a 12 step program which helped to save my life and my involvement with JACS which has helped me explore the essence of Jewish beliefs and traditions that have strengthened my spiritual life and enhanced my recovery from my addiction.

Bill White: Thanks David, this has been very helpful.

David Buchholz: Thank you Bill for the chance to talk with you and relive some of our memorable experiences in the early years of JACS. I’ve really enjoyed it. We’re looking forward to seeing your new book real soon.

Note: *In 1999, JACS merged with Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services (JBFCs) and became a program of its Rita J Kaplan Division of Jewish Community Services.*

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