



Findings from the LAJTI Evaluation – Years 6-8



Los Angeles Jewish Teen Initiative
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PREPARED BY
Informing Change

PREPARED FOR
Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles



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Introduction

About LAJTI

The Los Angeles Jewish Teen Initiative (**LAJTI** or **the Initiative**) launched in 2015 with the goal of engaging Jewish teens in Los Angeles in activities that promote a healthy, personally meaningful, and fulfilled Jewish life.*

LAJTI applies **three main strategies** to foster a rich, collaborative infrastructure and a diverse mosaic of accessible and affordable Jewish teen opportunities:

1. Expand and create teen engagement programs of excellence.
2. Nurture the teen ecosystem and build community commitment to teen engagement.
3. Support the professional development of educators of Jewish teens.

The Initiative has been funded through a partnership between the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles (**the Federation**) and the Jim Joseph Foundation. It is one of ten community Initiatives in the Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Funder Collaborative, a joint effort of 15 national and local funders committed to learning together, sharing best practices, and investing in community-based Jewish teen education and engagement initiatives.

Informing Change has evaluated the Initiative since it began in 2015. This report covers only the **last three years of the Initiative, from Fall 2020 through Spring 2023**, and draws primarily on qualitative data collected from teens, Jewish educators, parents, and community stakeholders.

Although the data collection for this report focuses on the Initiative's activities during the last three years, many informants who provided qualitative data in interviews and group sessions also commented on changes that were stimulated by Initiative programming throughout the Initiative's entirety, dating back to 2015.

*For the complete LAJTI Theory of Change, see **Appendix A**

LAJTI Background & History

Since its inception in 2015, LAJTI has been continually assessing the effectiveness of its strategies. From that learning, Initiative leaders have adjusted as needed and shifted to focus on things that mattered to or resonated most with teens, their parents, and program educators.

These adaptive practices were even more evident in this evaluation period than in the mid-Initiative years, spurred by the great need to be flexible during the onset of the COVID pandemic and by a strategic review of the Initiative's theory of change.

In 2021, Initiative leaders reviewed and updated the Initiative Theory of Change and reaffirmed their intentions and strategies. The process included identifying which goals had been completed, which strategies had been successful, and what still needed to be accomplished in the final years of the Initiative. Details about the process are included in **Appendix B**.

The Initiative's workplans during this evaluation period (2020-23) reflected key learnings from prior evaluations. Three evaluation findings that influenced this period's program design were:

1. the effectiveness of Initiative strategies in building parents' and educators' knowledge, skills, and awareness of teen wellness;
2. the value of providing teen educators with professional development, peer support, and networking opportunities; and
3. the key role played by parents and their social networks (e.g., synagogues, friends) in connecting a teen to a Jewish teen program.

Constituent input also guided program planning, particularly regarding teen wellness, mentoring teens, parent interests, and educator needs and skill gaps.

Evaluation Questions (2022 & 2023)*

Because the Initiative has a community-wide purpose and community-wide goals, this evaluation examined both the progress of Initiative-supported programs and changes to the broader Jewish teen ecosystem. Thus, we sought information and data not only from participants in LAJTI-run programs but also teens, parents, and educators engaged in the broader array of Jewish teen programs in Los Angeles.



Teen Engagement

To what extent are LAJTI opportunities and supports providing a diversity of Jewish teens in Los Angeles with high-quality Jewish engagement and learning?



Parents' Experiences

To what extent are LAJTI programs increasing or supporting parents' own capacity to support their teens' wellness, including building their knowledge and skills around wellness and connecting them with resources and other parents who have common concerns and interests?



Educator & Mentor Experiences

Across the Jewish teen ecosystem in LA, what do youth educators need to be knowledgeable, skilled, motivated, well-connected, and able to incorporate a teen wellness approach in their work? In what ways are LAJTI supporting the Jewish teen ecosystem to achieve that goal?



Incorporating Teen Wellness

How, and to what extent, have LAJTI wellness activities enhanced Jewish teens' program experiences? How and to what extent does LAJTI support educators and their organizations in understanding and addressing critical wellness issues facing teens?

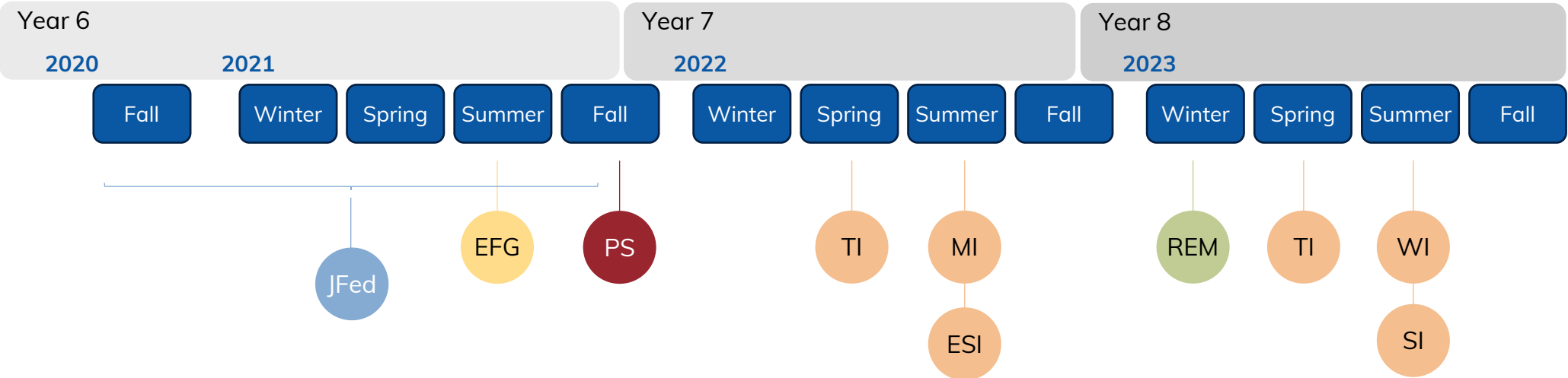


Future Needs & Opportunities

Based on the gains made in the Jewish teen ecosystem during LAJTI, which Initiative elements should continue or expand, either because of likely sustainability or because of unmet needs?

* Evaluation questions evolved over the course of the eight years of evaluation. See **Appendix C** for the 2020 evaluation questions that launched the evaluation cycle addressed in this report.

Evaluation Activities 2020-23



Sources of Evaluation Data - For more details on methods, see Appendix D.

ES

Educator Survey

SI

Stakeholder Interviews

WI

Wellness Grantee Interviews

PS

Parent Survey

ESI

Educator Supervisor Interviews

TI

Teen Interviews

MI

Mentor Interviews

JFed

Federation Event Data*

EFG

Educator Focus Group

REM

Ripple Effect Mapping

Representing the Voices of:

- 34 Teens
- 79 Parents
- 19 Educators (including 11 Wellness Grant partners)
- 29 Stakeholders (including community leaders, mentors, and educator supervisors)

* The Federation supported evaluation efforts by providing feedback data from Federation-sponsored events for parents, teens, and educators. These numbers are not represented above.

Summary of Key Findings from LAJTI 2020-23 Evaluation

1. The Initiative's biggest and most significant contributions to Jewish teen programming in LA have been to **raise awareness about teen mental health** and **increase educators' and parents' knowledge about how to support teens' wellness**.
2. The Initiative's strategies, in particular **peer learning and networking**, have helped create **a greater sense of shared community** among Jewish teen organizations and professionals.
3. LA Jewish organizations currently provide a **wide range of strong programs** for teens that address **diverse interests and needs**. However, many teens and parents feel **uninformed about the possibilities**, even those who receive Initiative announcements or Federation newsletters.
4. Teens consistently report three reasons why they value or enjoy Jewish teen programs: 1) **connecting** with other Jewish teens, 2) gaining a strong sense of **community and belonging**, and 3) **learning** about Jewish life and Judaism.

Teens, parents, and educators frequently highlight **two challenges** facing the overall Jewish teen ecosystem:

1. Teens' ability to participate in Jewish teen programs is greatly **hampered by their overly full schedules** of academic, job-related, and extra-curricular activities. This was more frequently and more strongly stated during this evaluation cycle compared to evaluation cycles during LAJTI's first five years (2016-20).
2. Many **organizations struggle to find and retain skilled Jewish educators** to design and run their teen programs. Teen educators say that low pay, long hours, and difficult work environments prompt teen educators to seek other work.



Findings: Creating a Community of Support for Teen Wellness



Greater attention to and support of teen wellness is the Initiative's greatest contribution to Jewish teen programming in LA and the most evident change in the ecosystem.

LAJTI was at the forefront of prioritizing teens' wellness and helped jumpstart the focus on wellness in Jewish Teen Initiatives in other cities. Interviewees continue to reference the 2018 Wellness Conference that LAJTI organized for parents, teens, and educators—despite it having occurred many years ago (and therefore, technically outside this evaluation cycle's timeframe). Unfortunately, due to the ways COVID shifted how people gather, LAJTI could not get enough traction to host a second in-person conference.

Stakeholders and educators say the LA Jewish community is now more interested in supporting the mental health and general wellness of Jewish teens in LA. They believe the general increase in public awareness and media attention advanced this, as well as Initiative efforts, but it was the Initiative that identified and promoted how Jewish programs for teens and educating parents could be part of the solution.

Those who know of the Initiative's multiple strategies express appreciation for how the Initiative addressed the complexity of teen wellness by providing a mix of programs for different audiences (teens, parents, educators).

LAJTI helped teen programs address critical teen wellness issues in the following ways:

- Provided 6 professional development sessions about teen wellness (2020-22).
- Organized 11 Coffee & Co-working sessions in different parts of the region and one full co-working/networking day to facilitate peer support and sharing among educators (2021-23).
- Provided grants to 10 partner organizations to support wellness programming or wellness program development (2022-23).



LAJTI's investment in parent programming created a community of Jewish parents who are more attuned to their teens' wellness.

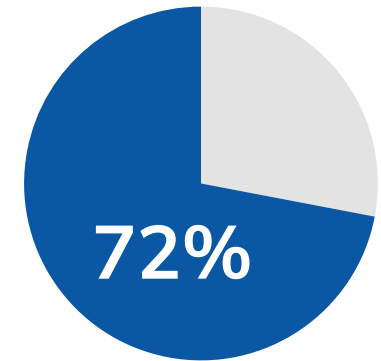
- Stakeholders and educators say parents of Jewish teens are much more **aware of the prevalence of teen depression and anxiety** and better **understand the importance of monitoring their teens' mental health**.
- Parents who participated in LAJTI parent programs say they learned **tools or practices to support their teens' mental health**.
- Educators say parents of Jewish teens are now more **open to talking about wellness issues**. Parents and educators agree that, in terms of programming, parents want to be up to date on teen wellness issues and seek expert advice on topics related to teen development.
- The Initiative's wellness activities **activated many Jewish teen educators to work together with parents** on behalf of what teens need to be healthy and safe.
- **Availability of wellness programs for parents may have reached saturation**. Although parents appreciate the wellness programs and expert speakers offered by LAJTI, schools, and community groups, they also report being **overscheduled themselves** – similar to their teens. They feel **overwhelmed by the number and range** of parenting and teen wellness resources that are now available through schools and community groups.



LAJTI offered programs to increase and support parents' capacity to support their teens' wellness.

LAJTI Parent Programming, Topics Covered (2020-23)

- Youth Mental Health First Aid Training (2021, 2022, 2023), in partnership with BeWell
- Guided Meditation & Reflections for Parents (2020-22, 16 sessions)
- PhD in Parenting, in partnership with Anchored Parenting (2021, 2022, 6-session series)
- Live, Lunch, Learn series (2022-23, 12 meetings). Examples of topics include: Teens & Anxiety, Academic Stress & College Decisions, and Teen Social Activism & Eco-Justice
- Becoming a Soulful Parent (3 sessions), in partnership with Ayeka
- Pandemic Stress in Our Bodies & Brains
- Parenting Through a Reimagined Senior Year
- Gender, Sexuality, & Suicide Prevention Workshop (offered 3 times), in partnership with JQ International
- Journaling Workshop
- How to Be Seen, Heard & Understood (including separate sessions for parents and teens), in partnership with Moving Traditions
- College-Bound Wellness Panel, in partnership with USC Hillel



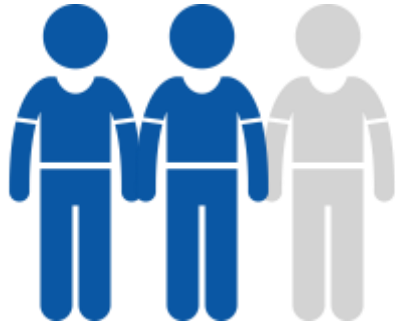
of parents who participated in a LAJTI program report taking away a **new tool, tip, or way to support their teen's wellness***

* From the 2022 Parent Survey



Teens in LAJTI programs increased their confidence and general sense of well-being.

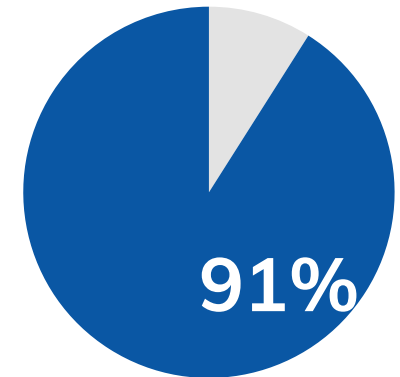
Teens participating in LAJTI's programming....



Two out of three teens said LAJTI helped them “a great deal” to **connect with adults about wellness topics.***



One out of two teens said LAJTI helped them “a great deal” to **feel good about themselves** or to **feel their lives are healthy and well-balanced.***



91% said TIG gave them a **new wellness tool or tip****

* From LAJTI's 2021 End-of-Program Teen Survey (Teen Innovation Grants or TIG, and JBBBSLA/LAJTI Teen Talk App Teen Advisor Training)

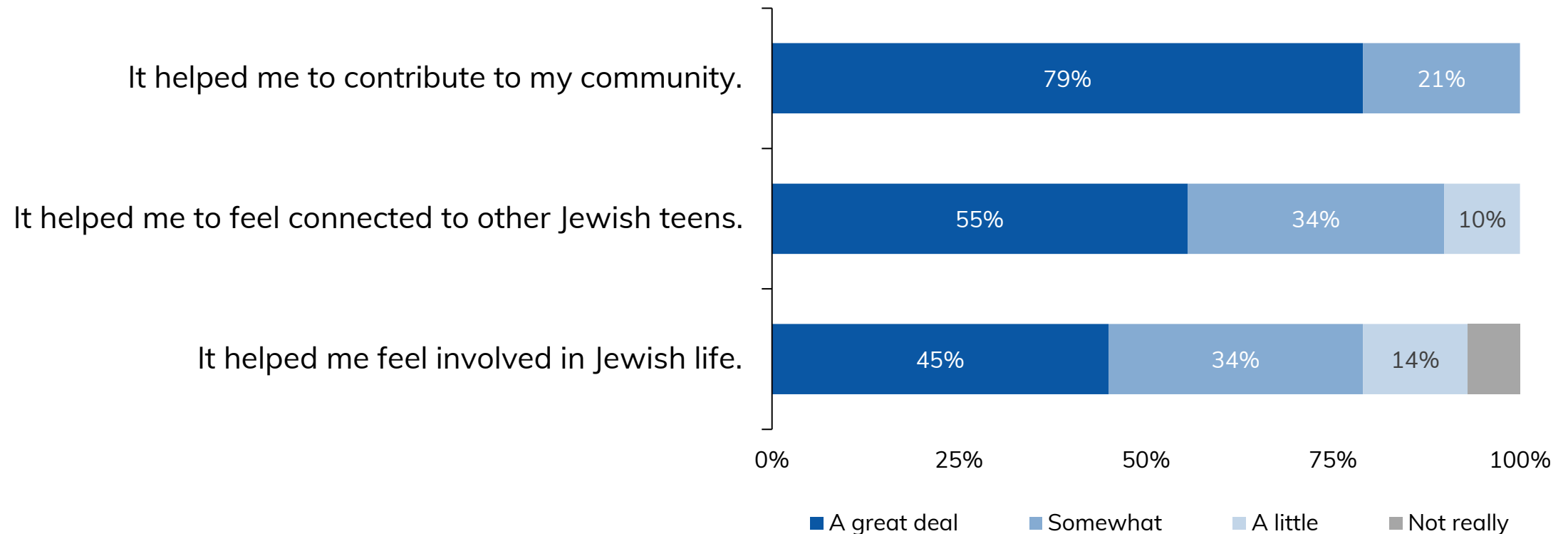
** From LAJTI's 2021 End-of-Program Teen Survey (TIG only)



Even through virtual programs in 2020-21, LAJTI helped teens maintain a sense of connection with others during difficult times.

EXHIBIT 1

Teen Ratings of LAJTI's Online Programs During COVID
n=29



* From LAJTI's 2021 End-of-program Teen Survey (TIG and JBBBSLA/LAJTI Teen Talk App Teen Advisor Training)



Findings: A Coordinated Community that Prioritizes Teens



LAJTI inspired a sense of community among Jewish teen organizations and professionals who now collectively prioritize teens over their own organization's participant counts.

Community educators and other stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation observed that program leaders and organizations have shifted how they work together: there is now **more collaboration and less thinking of "my teens."** Through participation in LAJTI programs, educators seem to have received the message that they are part of a community-wide effort to serve all Jewish teens.

Participants in the 2023 Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) session observed that the Initiative's strategies and program design were implemented in ways that **created a sense of community within and across programs for teens and parents.**

Educators say one of the main ways the Initiative's Professional Learning Community (PLC) supported them was to connect them to one another.

The current moment needs ongoing work to sustain it.

Although there has been an increase in collaboration or coordination, there is an ongoing need for further raising the profile of community offerings to increase programs' visibility.

- Educators and stakeholders have a limited view of all that is out there for Jewish teens in LA; some know a slice or segment of the landscape, but not the full range.
- Further, despite their connection with one or more LAJTI programs, parents attending the REM were not aware of the many teen program opportunities available, including the LAJTI offerings.

Several community leaders said there's still a need to actively work on breaking silos that keep the different types of youth programs separated and unaware of one another's programs. There is concern that the **ecosystem still needs incentives and support for greater coordination and networking across programs**; if the Initiative reduces the level of programming, there is concern the silos will become more separated.

LAJTI's investment in educators created a community of Jewish teen professionals who are attentive to their teen participants' wellness and incorporate wellness approaches into their programming.

Educators reflect that the **awareness of teen wellness has increased greatly over the past few years**. Almost every educator interviewed can describe how their program considers and responds to teens' need for support and healthy activities.

However, with the increased awareness, teen program leaders realize how much more they can do. Half of the supervisors of teen educators interviewed for this evaluation say their staff do not have enough hours or bandwidth to do the kind of one-on-one check-ins with teens they would like to do.

"This year (2022), [we are] just making the decision to say the curriculum is the second most important thing, and everyone's emotional and mental wellbeing is the first most important thing, I don't know that every parent would have agreed with that if I said that explicitly, but it was really clear that that was just a decision we all needed to agree with, and we did."

- EDUCATOR SUPERVISOR

LAJTI regularly gathers Jewish educators for learning and networking through the PLC. Educators and their supervisors who attend say the meetings build a sense of community as well as knowledge and skills.

When it comes to **ongoing learning**, supervisors say educators need information and support on whatever is current in the youth development field. During the COVID pandemic, educators most needed development related to teen mental health, which the PLC provided.

Examples of PLC Topics

- Re-Emergence: Preparing to See Our Teens After a Year of Trauma
- How to Weave Jewish Learning into Teen Programs
- Unpack Privilege, Embrace Diversity
- Storytelling and Brand Strategy for Teen Programming
- Connecting the Dots Between Israel and Gen Z
- Environmental Sustainability in Teen Programming



Networking and professional development can only go so far to keep Jewish teen professionals in the field; their stated needs are a call for well-run organizations and supportive employers.

As in past evaluation cycles, this cycle's data continues to describe a challenging environment for attracting and retaining high-quality teen educators. In interviews, supervisors voiced a shared concern about how to support a good work environment for the educators and offset the many downsides of the teen educator position—low pay, heavy workloads, and irregular and weekend hours.

“We have to figure out what works and what we can provide that does not stretch our staff any more than it can be stretched.”

- EDUCATOR SUPERVISOR

“The cost of living in LA is becoming a major problem, not just for teachers, but for all mid-level employees and Jewish organizations.”

- EDUCATOR SUPERVISOR

“I think that I'm bad at modeling [self-care], and as a result have created an environment where people don't do things that they should be doing, like taking the time off that they should be taking off. I also feel like people just feel like there's so much work on their plate they don't have time to think about it. They're just always playing; they're always being reactive and catching up.”

- EDUCATOR SUPERVISOR



Findings: Engaging LA's Jewish Teens



With support from the Initiative, LA Jewish organizations are offering teens a wide range of strong programs that address diverse interests and needs.

There is now a **wide variety of Jewish teen programs** available in LA's Jewish teen ecosystem. A strong cadre of programs offers opportunities including programs focused on social justice, community involvement, LGBTQ community, and more.

In recent years, educators have rolled out newer “**niche**” **programs** that are designed to match the interests and needs which teens identify. This may be a continuing influence from the Initiative’s **user-centered design training** for educators during 2016-19. These niche programs tend to serve smaller numbers of teens than the larger general interest denominational programs.

In the 2022 Parent Survey, most expressed satisfaction with the variety and quality of Jewish programming available to teens. However, a meaningful percentage (27.8%) was dissatisfied with the quality of the programs. A similar percentage (28.9%) was dissatisfied with the types of Jewish activities available to teens.

LAJTI’s own programs for teens had to be curtailed with the onset of COVID pandemic restrictions. Initiative leaders shifted their programming and reorganized during 2021-23 to offer a carefully curated set of teen programs:

- **JBBBSLA/LAJTI Teen Talk App Teen Advisor Training:** Teens become advisors on the Teen Talk App to provide free, anonymous, and safe peer support to teens seeking it.
- **Julie Beren Platt Teen Innovation Grants:** Teens receive financial awards and are paired with mentors in the Jewish community to turn their ideas into a reality.
- **Teens for Tikkun (2021):** In partnership with local Jewish nonprofits, teens learned about critical issues facing the local LA community and the world, while developing advocacy skills, learning how to impact change, and creating meaningful connections with others. This virtual program ran during COVID and filled the need for meaningful engagement in place of the Community Internship Program, which was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Teens value the opportunity to connect with other Jewish teens and report great benefits from their participation in Jewish programs.

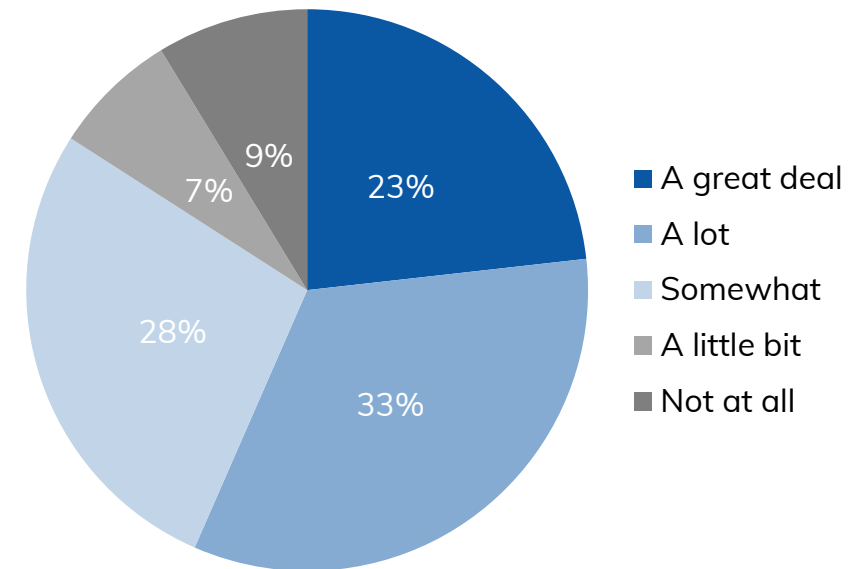
Teens say they...

- Experience a **sense of belonging and community connection**, and they enjoy being with others with shared values and heritage.
- Learn new **skills and obtain new knowledge** both useful in the world at-large and that they perceive will be useful for their future.
- Value the **Jewish elements of their programs** and learning about Jewish life and Judaism.
- Find **support in their programs** no matter what is going on in their lives; more recently, they have found support there when they encounter anti-Semitism. Educators say they strive to adapt their programs, even meeting by meeting, to meet teens where they are. Educators also try to connect individually with each teen between meetings (but often struggle to find time to do this).
- Want **unstructured time** in their programs to hang out with their friends. Educators know this, strive to include it, and understand this is one way to support teen mental health.

“[Jewish programs give me a] stronger connection to Judaism and my family history. We do shabbat at home, but not as intensely as at [program]. It’s a nice way to celebrate with others and it’s culturally enlightening and brings a sense of community.”

- TEEN

EXHIBIT 2
In your opinion, to what extent has/have your teen(s) grown Jewishly as a result of their participation in Jewish activities?*
(n=69)



“I can see my children taking more ownership of their Judaism and their personal relationship with our texts and traditions.”

- PARENT

Teens and parents appreciate and seek Jewish content in teen programs.

Teens and parents say the **Jewish content of programs is important** to them for multiple reasons:

- Providing opportunities for teens to be with other teens in a Jewish environment;
- Generates and supports Jewish outcomes that both teens and parents desire, including outcomes related to Jewish knowledge and positive attitudes about being Jewish; and
- Forms or adds to a foundation for future Jewish actions, including continuing to choose to participate in Jewish programs.

Parents say they **want more information** about Jewish programs not just for keeping their teens informed, but also to help them guide their teens in choosing a few programs rather than trying to participate in many. To help teens and parents make informed choices about where to invest their time, program leaders could **better articulate the Jewish outcomes** of their programs to help differentiate the benefits of LA's many programs.

At least 40% of parents surveyed said the following were “extremely important” for their teens:*



Teens feel a strong connection to their **Jewish heritage**



Going to Jewish activities makes teens **feel they belong** somewhere



Teens make **really good friends** in Jewish activities



Teens are inspired to **make the world a better place**



Teens feel a strong sense of **connection to Israel**

* From the 2022 Parent Survey:

“When thinking about your teen’s connection to ‘things Jewish,’ how important is each of the following?”

Recruiting teens as participants continues to be the main challenge for programs.

Teens' ability to participate in Jewish teen programs is greatly hampered by their overly full schedules of academic and extra-curricular activities.

Parents, educators, and teens themselves all recognize this conflict. In general, teens report they are **overscheduled with activities and under high pressure to succeed in school**. Due to overscheduling, many teens are not consistently attending programs, which frustrates both parents and group leaders, who recognize regular attendance is necessary to achieve program goals.

“There’s a lot of retention issues with teens. Just trying to keep teens engaged as they hit that adolescence time.”

- EDUCATOR SUPERVISOR

““It would be so amazing if [schools] would adjust their curriculum and homework load to practice what they preach. ... If [kids] go home at 8:00 PM after soccer practice and have to do five hours of homework, their developing brains and their emotional capacity are going to struggle.”

- WELLNESS GRANTEE

Program leaders who have been Initiative partners for many years understand reaching unengaged teens first requires identifying individual adults or other teens who can invite, encourage, and transport the unengaged teen to a program matched to their interests. **Increasing participation of unengaged teens requires personal contacts; it is not related to changing the types of available programs or adding programs.**

Educators believe **levels of engagement and participation must be measured differently** than only counting enrolled teens and comparing the number of enrolled teens year over year. The ecosystem needs to recognize the trends of fewer children (lower birth rates) and declining synagogue membership has shrunk the pool of potential teens to engage.

In interviews, several parents and program leaders noted two other trends beginning to impact program enrollment: 1) families say they can't keep up with increasing program fees across multiple programs, and 2) parents seem to be less inclined to drive teens to program locations.

Teen Voices

Across 18 months in 2022 and 2023, Informing Change interviewed 32 teens about their experiences in Jewish teen programs.* The teens spoke openly about what they gain from attending the programs and why they continue to participate. Their experiences represent a mix of Jewish teen engagement programs (e.g., Diller Fellowship, various temple-based events, JQ International, Holocaust Museum, and USY events among others) as well as LAJTI-run programs (e.g., Teen Innovation Grants, Teens for Tikkun). Many teens brought up the importance of Jewish camp in their lives and how it continues to be a major influence in how they formulate and express their Jewish identity.

In the next 3 slides, we summarize the major themes in the teens' descriptions of their program experiences with quotes:

Connection and community

**Expanded thinking and
broadened perspectives**

Wellness

Jewish learning

Developing life skills

**Safe and intellectually
stimulating space**

* Interviews with teens were not recorded for privacy reasons. The quotes on pages 24-26 are paraphrased from interviewer notes, taken as close to verbatim as possible.

Teens recognize and appreciate how Jewish teen programs create connections and community. Programs create a dedicated space grounded in Jewish heritage and values for teens to connect. For teens, that experience feels different from being with other teens in school, other extracurricular activities, or other locations.

Teens receive wellness support both directly, by learning skills and knowledge, and indirectly, through a strong and stable support net to which teens feel they can turn for anything going on in their lives. Even just knowing a safety net of friends and an adult program leader exists is enough to make teens feel supported. For some, practicing “life skills” also supports their wellbeing.

“The coordinator for [program]—though it ended almost a year ago—still reaches out. I still talk to him ... The [program] group is like a family. I can go to these people and rely on them.”

- TEEN

“Going to synagogue has been a really good thing. ... I have depression [It] gave me something to look forward to every week. This probably saved my life because I was connected to others who wanted to go to synagogue and were involved in their culture and practicing of Judaism ... That always made me really happy.”

- TEEN

“At our [program] retreat, we talked about how the retreat was helping us mentally and calming us down. I try to bring those connections into my daily life ... All the program events promote safety and wellness. They support you in the day to day. Having that safe space helps me move through the hard things more easily.”

- TEEN





Teens acknowledge and value how programs provide opportunities to develop life skills—personal, academic, leadership—which also supports their sense of well-being (e.g., communication skills, time management, and ways to fight procrastination).

“My Jewish identity relies on ethics and morals ... I am interested in medicine, so learning ethics of how to handle certain situations ... in a medical setting is helpful. Also, I run [a school] club, so [learning about ethics] helps me with that.”

- TEEN

“[I was] very much a perfectionist, a hard worker. Sometimes I didn’t know how to stop until I was about to pass out I prioritized my school work, then social, then rest. I have learned that that order needs to change.”

- TEEN

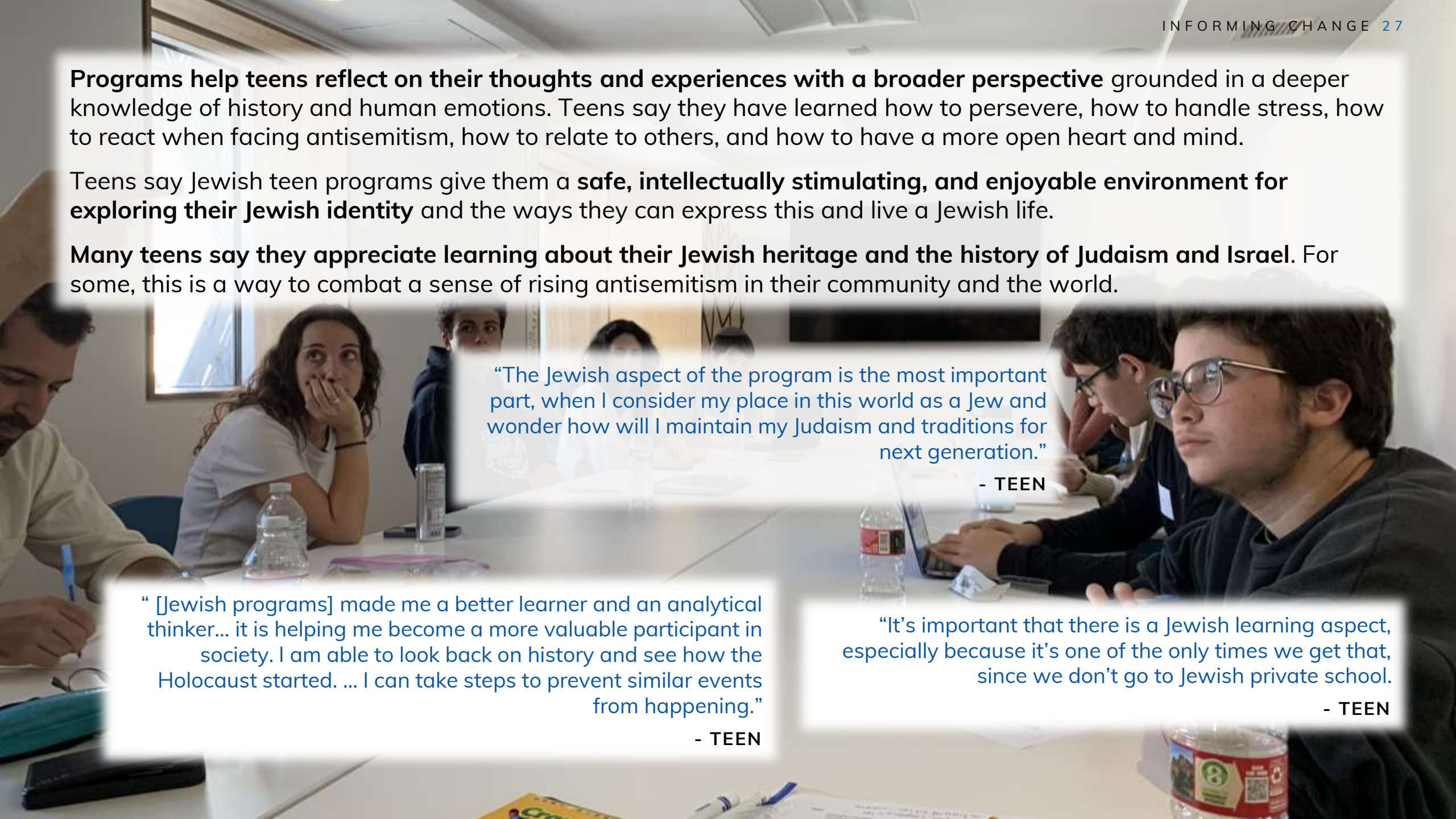
“I was not great at public speaking before. I would freeze up in front of large groups. I have a lot more confidence now, and I can stand in front of people and talk.”

- TEEN

Programs help teens reflect on their thoughts and experiences with a broader perspective grounded in a deeper knowledge of history and human emotions. Teens say they have learned how to persevere, how to handle stress, how to react when facing antisemitism, how to relate to others, and how to have a more open heart and mind.

Teens say Jewish teen programs give them a **safe, intellectually stimulating, and enjoyable environment for exploring their Jewish identity** and the ways they can express this and live a Jewish life.

Many teens say they appreciate learning about their Jewish heritage and the history of Judaism and Israel. For some, this is a way to combat a sense of rising antisemitism in their community and the world.



“The Jewish aspect of the program is the most important part, when I consider my place in this world as a Jew and wonder how will I maintain my Judaism and traditions for next generation.”

- TEEN

“ [Jewish programs] made me a better learner and an analytical thinker... it is helping me become a more valuable participant in society. I am able to look back on history and see how the Holocaust started. ... I can take steps to prevent similar events from happening.”

- TEEN

“It’s important that there is a Jewish learning aspect, especially because it’s one of the only times we get that, since we don’t go to Jewish private school.

- TEEN



Implications & Considerations for the Future



Looking Forward – Suggestions from the Field

Sustain LAJTI-Supported Gains for Teens

Advocates for teen programming say LAJTI's work over the past eight years has heightened awareness of teen needs and strengthened the Jewish teen ecosystem. The role of the Federation as the leader in this development is undeniable; thus, teen program leaders are concerned about how to maintain the LAJTI processes that have supported this stronger ecosystem. Evaluation participants' recommendations for future Federation action include:

- Providing grants and incentives to **support high-quality programs and the continuation of an interconnected teen ecosystem** (e.g., educator networking and mentoring, cross-program teen events or leadership opportunities, and Youth Mental Health First Aid training).
- Helping teen program leaders and their organizations stay up to date on research about teen development and emerging teen issues
- Facilitating ways for educators to be aware of one another's programs
- Choosing roles for the Federation that make best use of its staffing, its expertise, and its position as a leader in the Jewish community writ large, beyond the teen ecosystem

See **Appendix E** for suggestions from Wellness Grantees.

Use Future Resources Strategically

Most adult informants (educators, grantees, stakeholders) understand the Federation will have less funding designated for teen programming in the next few years and gave thoughtful suggestions about how to make best use of the funding that will be available.

A common suggestion was that the Federation should be **a convener and an educator**, rather than run direct programs for teens.

- Convene **program leaders** for the purposes of sharing information and facilitating networking and relationship-building.
- Convene **organizational leaders (i.e., program heads, CEOs)** to ensure they understand emerging teen issues and program needs

Considerations for Future Programming

Teen Engagement

Jewish teens in LA have a wide variety of Jewish teen education and learning opportunities to choose from, many of them created new or newly adapted within the last five years. To some degree, this array of opportunities has been influenced by LAJTI over the last eight years, through LAJTI's training and networking opportunities (e.g., Accelerator and other professional development opportunities) and through modeling innovation and high-quality LAJTI programming (e.g., Community Internship).

- Consider ways in which LAJTI and the Federation can **maintain this atmosphere of innovation and attention to quality.**

We heard about successful 'niche' programs designed around teen needs. Educators note that teen norms are changing. One educator stressed, "It is important to ask teens what they need and want."

- Consider a **convening or listening tour specifically to hear teens'** needs and interests and share the results with program partners.

Parent Engagement & Support

In this evaluation period, LAJTI programs for parents were conducted while the strictest COVID restrictions were in effect. Still, those who participated reported gaining skills, knowledge, or awareness that increased their capacity to support their teens' wellness.

- Consider how to **continue supporting parents already connected to Jewish teen programs**, such as co-sponsoring parent programs with partner organizations and sharing what LAJTI staff have learned about what works and what doesn't in parent programming.
- Review results from Wellness Grant projects that **brought together multiple synagogues** to deliver shared wellness programming. Consider this model for delivering future parent programs in specific geographic areas.



More Considerations for Future Programming

Educator & Mentor Support

Stakeholders and educators say LAJTI's resources and training in the years prior to the COVID pandemic positioned educators to respond to teens' mental health needs in the crushing first 18 months of the pandemic. However, according to educators, the most important thing they need to support teen wellness is time – finding the time to connect with teens on an individual basis while also handling their existing workloads. In future programming:

- Continue **offering networking, training, and celebration opportunities** for Jewish teen educators. Encourage them to share ideas and support one another in working through the challenges and frustrations of their job.
- Offer training or a speaker about whether and **how quick electronic communications (e.g., text messaging) might help educators stay connected** with and support individual teens.
- Continue to **offer Youth Mental Health First Aid** training for Jewish teen educators, mentors, and parents.

Community Awareness and Support

Community stakeholders are proud of how the Initiative raised awareness and knowledge about teen wellness for the benefit of teens and their families. In the REM session, the mix of participants agreed that the Initiative's program methods were able to create a sense of shared community across ages, roles, and organizations.

- Consider organizing and convening **a Teen Summit** once or twice in the next two years to maintain the attention in the Jewish community generated by the Initiative. A summit could continue the theme of wellness or address an emerging issue affecting parents and teens. This would also be a good way to lift up teen voices, engage program partners in cooperative work, and reinforce among educators and their supervisors the concept of “all our Jewish teens,” not just the teens in “my” program.”

Conclusion: Lasting Impact on the Jewish teen ecosystem

Over the past three years, LAJTI has applied a mix of strategies to build and strengthen the ecosystem of programs that engage and educate LA's Jewish teens. In addition to providing direct programming to teens, LAJTI supported parents and educators via programming that reflected the unusual needs and logistics forced by the COVID pandemic.

The Initiative was a forerunner in focusing on teens' wellness, and LAJTI's strong set of wellness programs and programs for teens, parents, and educators continue to inform how teens think of their own wellness and mental health, how parents support their teens, and how educators design programs with teens' wellness in mind.

In addition, the Jewish teen ecosystem developed some new strengths despite and, in part, because of the COVID pandemic:

- There's a wide range of Jewish teen programs available, many developed in recent years in response to listening to what teens say they want.
- More program leaders are seeing themselves as part of a broad community effort to match teens with the programs that are right for them, not just recruiting teens to meet their own program's enrollment goal.

These are examples of mindset shifts that occurred during the course of the Initiative and now hold potential for keeping the Jewish teen ecosystem strong, collaborative, and able to adapt to future challenges.



Appendices



LAJTI Theory of Change

PURPOSE: To dramatically increase the number of post-b'nai mitzvah Jewish teens engaged in effective and compelling Jewish experiences throughout Los Angeles that support them in leading healthy and fulfilled lives.

ISSUES ADDRESSED

- Decline in teen involvement in Jewish life
- Prevalence of overextended and stressed teens
- A lack of diverse, appealing Jewish youth opportunities
- Absence of systems for recruiting Jewish teens into Jewish communal life
- Insufficient opportunities to expand Jewish teen education and engagement programs to impact more teens
- Low awareness of the range of programs and opportunities for Jewish teens
- Financial barriers for teens to participate in Jewish short-term immersive experiences
- Lack of a region-wide, cohesive ecosystem that honors and supports Jewish teen educators
- Minimal collaboration among programs and organizations

TARGET CONSTITUENCIES

- Middle and high school Jewish teens, particularly those who have been under-engaged
- Educators of Jewish teens
- Jewish organizations serving teens
- Current and future donors
- Parents of Jewish teens

STRATEGIES

Expand and create high-quality teen engagement programs

- Develop an Accelerator that will scale currently successful programs and launch new programs
- Pilot new programs from the Teen Leadership Council
- Develop a teen micro-grant program

Strengthen teen ecosystem and build community commitment to teen engagement

- Develop an online platform to share opportunities
- Develop a Teen Leadership Council
- Deploy Social Media Fellows to generate a social media presence around Jewish teen opportunities
- Expand need-based scholarships and incentive grants
- Develop approaches that integrate wellness in Jewish teen programs
- Develop capacity for reflective learning and evaluation among Jewish organizations and professionals

Nurture educators of Jewish teens

- Facilitate a professional learning network among educators of Jewish teens
- Offer a mentoring program for teen educators
- Subsidize teen educators' enrollment in relevant academic courses and certificate programs
- Expand Jewish service-learning consulting and provide micro-grants for organizations
- Support educators of Jewish teens to integrate a holistic, wellness approach into their work

LAJTI Theory of Change

OUTCOMES

Engaged Jewish Teens

- Increase in the number of teens involved in Jewish opportunities and the depth of their involvement
- Increase in the diversity of background of involved teens, including under-engaged Jewish teens and teens on the margins of Jewish life
- Teens and parents find it easy to connect with programs that match teens' interests

Attractive, Innovative, Sustainable Teen Programs

- Increase in the number and diversity of Jewish opportunities available for teens, including teen-initiated opportunities
- Improved ability of program providers to effectively design, scale, and sustain programs that resonate with Jewish teens
- Teens and their parents find program fees affordable, either directly or because of available scholarships
- Programs have integrated Jewish service-learning components

Jewishly Identified Teens

- Find Judaism and Jewish living personally relevant, meaningful, and enjoyable
- Recognize being Jewish as one aspect of identity
- Have positive feelings about being Jewish; can articulate what being Jewish means to them; understand there are a myriad of ways of expressing Jewish ritual, culture, and values
- Identify and draw upon Judaism to enhance social, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing
- Appreciate diverse ways Jewish tradition enhances wellness and supports a healthy, balanced life
- Have access to, and relationships with, Jewish youth professionals who encourage teen wellbeing

Jewishly Literate Teens

- More aware of and utilizing Jewish resources
- Increase "Jewish literacy" of Israel and connection to Israel
- Increase literacy in Jewish areas of interest
- Interest in ongoing Jewish learning and growth experiences

Jewishly Connected Teens

- Increase involvement and connection to Jewish communal life
- Have a sense of belonging to the Jewish community—local and global—and feel they have a "Jewish home"
- Feel a sense of responsibility for the Jewish community
- Contribute to community and understand service as a Jewish value
- Identify with and act on the values of tikkun olam
- Connect with, experience positive interactions with, and expand community of Jewish peers
- Expand knowledge of diverse Jewish communities
- Develop meaningful and valuable relationships with Jewish adults

Professional Jewish Teen Educators

- Jewish teen educators receive high-quality, relevant, and targeted professional development that supports a focus on teen wellness and enhances their ability to continue working in the field
- Increased capacity of teen educators to support healthy teen development and engage with a wide range of teens
- Increased capacity of Jewish teen educators to connect teens to Jewish opportunities

Community Commitment to Support Teen Engagement

- Increased funding to support Jewish teen education and engagement
- Increased ability of institutions to raise funds strategically
- Increased community leadership to actively support Jewish teen engagement
- Strengthened infrastructure that enriches local networks serving Jewish teens
- Greater community awareness and commitment to develop and build Jewish teen programs that integrate teen wellness

ULTIMATE IMPACT: Through a rich, collaborative infrastructure and a diverse mosaic of accessible and affordable Jewish teen opportunities, Jewish teens in Los Angeles engage in activities that promote a healthy, personally meaningful, and fulfilled Jewish life.

Addendum to the LAJTI Theory of Change, November 2021

INTRODUCTION

In November of 2021, Informing Change convened staff and leadership of the Los Angeles Jewish Teen Initiative (LAJTI) to review the Initiative's Theory of Change, which was developed at the start of the Initiative in 2015. Many stakeholders gave input into its creation. Given that six years had elapsed since then, and the extreme changes in the community context caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the conversation served as a useful moment to review the strategies, tactics, and outcomes articulated in the Theory of Change and assess whether the document accurately reflected the current Initiative or whether updates were necessary.

Participants in the conversation were Shira Rosenblatt, Reuben Posner, and Lisa Ellison from LAJTI and Tina Cheplick and Evan Gattozzi from Informing Change. Shira and Tina have been involved in the Initiative and its evaluation since 2015.

PURPOSE OF THE CONVERSATION

During the conversation,

- We reviewed the Initiative's history, dating back to original conversations with funders and community stakeholders.
- We reviewed the Funders' Collaborative evaluation requirements (the Cross-Community Evaluation or CCE requirements) and the reasoning behind them.
- LAJTI staff highlighted prior years' tactics, activities, and learnings.
- We looked for and drew connections between the Theory of Change as articulated in 2015 and the current direction of LAJTI.

This document, a summary of that conversation and its conclusions, is a complement to the 2015 Theory of Change, providing the Initiative's updated thinking and useful points about changes in community context.

KEY POINTS

- LAJTI staff reflected that trial and error in the Initiative's early years provided a unique opportunity for the Federation to test strategies and tactics. Current tactics are built on lessons learned from strategies and tactics tried in earlier years. For example, LAJTI strategies for nurturing the teen ecosystem were developed, implemented, evaluated, and revised. Consider the Accelerator program, which strengthened many teen programs, built collaborations, and led to more inclusive and diverse opportunities, but in ways that the original program design had not anticipated.
- Other lessons from early experimentation include understanding the importance of a young person having someone within their close circle to connect them to or introduce them to Jewish youth activities. This lesson has led to LAJTI programming that incorporates parents and families of teens.
- At the start of the initiatives, there was consensus across the 10 communities that the decline in engagement in Jewish life after the b'nai mitzvah years must be addressed. This commitment still

holds today. However, over the years of the Collaborative and the 10 communities have learned about, and now acknowledge, the difficulty of reaching new teen participants. Some of the underlying assumptions about how to engage new populations of teens have proven to be incorrect.

- Teen wellness, which appears throughout the Theory of Change, has become a central component of LAJTI. Given the ongoing traction wellness has gained in the U.S. – prior to and through the Covid-19 pandemic – LAJTI has also increased its focus on wellness. For example, LAJTI engages speakers and trainers and offers activities designed to enhance teens' wellbeing (as well as the wellbeing of their parents). LAJTI is now well-positioned to support teen wellness and sees this as a major strategy for achieving the Initiative's outcomes.
- The Initiative Theory of Change does not articulate outcomes for parents. However, parents have become an important audience for the Initiative's work on teen outcomes. LAJTI staff have developed a concise set of outcomes for this audience and use these to guide their wellness programming decisions.

LAJTI Teen Wellness Intended Outcomes for Parents - Developed 2021

Parents will...

- realize that they are not alone in their concerns
- find resources that can guide them in addressing issues related to teen wellness.
- identify and realize they have access to local Jewish institutions and programs that address their concerns
- be empowered to advocate on behalf of their teens towards health and balance
- begin to connect with other parents who have common concerns and interests

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, we determined that the LAJTI Theory of Change articulated in 2015 accurately represents LAJTI's current intentions, assumptions, and strategic approach. Therefore, a revision is not necessary. However, given what has already been learned and the need to plan for post-Initiative activities, Initiative leaders hope the last two years of the Initiative evaluation will focus on assessing the strengths, gaps, and likely sustainability of the Initiative's strategies, rather than the original evaluation questions developed from the outcomes in the Theory of Change.

We recommend that, going forward, this addendum be included with the LAJTI Theory of Change whenever it is being reviewed or shared.

Evaluation Questions (2020-21)

The 2020 evaluation questions that launched the evaluation cycle were worded slightly differently than the evaluation questions that guided the final two years of the evaluation:

Teen Engagement

To what extent are LAJTI opportunities and supports providing a diversity of Jewish teens in Los Angeles with high-quality Jewish engagement and learning?

Parents' Experiences

How, and to what, extent is LAJTI increasing parents' own capacity to communicate with and support their teens around critical teen wellness issues? What motivates and supports parents to get involved with making teen issues and teen engagement a priority in the Jewish communal landscape?

Educator & Community Stakeholder Experiences

To what extent are LAJTI professional development opportunities supporting educators in delivering high-quality programming to teens? How, and to what extent, is LAJTI increasing the awareness, knowledge, and capacity of teen educators, their organizations, and parents and community stakeholders around the critical wellness issues facing teens?

Incorporating Teen Wellness

How, and to what, extent do LAJTI wellness programs enhance Jewish teens' program experiences, including changing the conversations teens have with adult advisors and parents? To what extent are LAJTI wellness programs contributing to Jewish teens' sense of positive self-worth, supportive relationships with others, and overall resilience and wellbeing?

Future Needs & Opportunities

Based on the gains made in the Jewish teen ecosystem during LAJTI, which Initiative elements should continue or expand, either because of likely sustainability or because of unmet needs?

Evaluation Methods (2021-23)

Year 6 (2021) required us to work with the limitations of the COVID pandemic restrictions and adjust the evaluation to reflect the limited programming that ran during the pandemic. We worked closely with Federation staff to design short **feedback surveys** that the Federation embedded into existing virtual programming for **educators, teens, and parents**, including Teen Innovation Grant (TIG), JBBBSLA/LAJTI Teen Talk App Teen Advisor Training, Teens for Tikkun, and Wellness Wednesdays. Instead of producing a comprehensive annual report, we reported on these feedback surveys quarterly.

In **Year 7 (2022)**, we returned to evaluation activities more aligned with prior years than 2021 and the pandemic allowed. We worked with LAJTI staff to carefully plan data collection activities that would answer evaluation questions most pertinent to the evolving needs of the Federation and updated the timeline to better suit the Federation's calendar. We conducted and analyzed **interviews** with six **mentors** of teens from the Teen Innovation Grant program, eight **supervisors of educators** working Jewish-teen serving organizations, and 12 **teens**.

Later in the year, we developed and administered a **parent survey** distributed to all parents in the Federation's mailing list and received responses from 77 **parents**. Throughout the year, we engaged LAJTI staff in making sense of the data collected.

In **Year 8 (2023)**, we collected qualitative data collection methods to answer the evaluation questions. Most of the data collection occurred via three sets of **interviews**—with 20 **teens*** (including teens who participated in programs run by LAJTI, partner organizations, or wellness grantees), 13 **stakeholders**, and 10 **wellness grantees**. Protocols used questions based on those from prior years for teens, stakeholders, and educators, to track trends and assess change over the arc of the Initiative. We also conducted one **Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)** session on February 1, 2023 with seven participants (including teens, parents, and community stakeholders).

* Includes one teen who participated in an interview in Year 7 and Year 8.

Suggestions from Wellness Grantees

Educators from 11 of LAJTI's Wellness Partner organizations were asked during their interviews to name one change they would like to see in LA's Jewish teen ecosystem. The individual responses were diverse and thought-provoking. There were no discernible themes, so we share all the Wellness Partner responses here.

- Fund religious schools
- Take Jewish teens to places other than Israel
- Have synagogues and nonprofit program partners do programming together
- Offer Jewish youth opportunities and use media that match the quality of other secular opportunities
- Centralize resources and other participation opportunities in a single location more convenient than the Federation
- Practice the wellness we preach about reducing stress on teens
- Bring kids together across geography
- Integrate LGBTQ+ teen support into all programs that receive Federation funding

"It may not be cool to fund religious schools. ... At the same time, we're being told religious school [is] so boring and our teachers aren't that great, and there's so much turnover ... If we want our religious schools to get stronger and to draw more people and have kids graduating from our programs who are Jewishly knowledgeable and have a strong Jewish identity, we need money."

- WELLNESS PARTNER

"There is a larger Jewish world out there, and a lot of our teens have a complicated relationship with Israel ... It's important that they know there are other places where Jews are living lives, and how those lives are hard and how they're easy. [It's important to have] those nuanced conversations, especially with the rising global antisemitism."

- WELLNESS PARTNER

"Every single Jewish institution in Los Angeles has [LGBTQ+ teens] who either need support or ... community ... But it's often not until it's too late that [institutions] show interest in how to support LGBTQ+ teens, which is unfortunate."

- WELLNESS PARTNER