

**JEWISH SERVICE FOR LOCAL TEENS:
FULFILLING EXPECTATIONS?**

By

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
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JEWISH SERVICE FOR LOCAL TEENS: FULFILLING EXPECTATIONS?

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Abstract

The next generation of Jewish communal leaders lies in the hands of the youth of today. In order to best engage youth and ensure the next generation of community leaders, it is necessary to identify the factors influencing teen engagement in Los Angeles. Existing research shows the positive impact and importance of community engagement in building a strong identity and increasing social capital. Primary research was conducted through interviews with 32 local Jewish teens and 6 Jewish agencies to identify teen motivations. Questions dealt with their reasons for engaging in community service, the process by which they decide where to volunteer, whether or not local Jewish agencies fit their expectations, and characteristics which attracted them to the agencies in which they volunteered.

Teens were primarily found to be looking for eight agency characteristics when choosing to engage with an organization: flexibility, a positive social environment, feeling appreciated/recognized, agency accessibility, receiving substantive tasks, feeling the impact of their work, a universalist mission, and the ability to engage with their personal interests/hobbies. Based on this research, we offer three recommendations for agencies working with teenage volunteers: use active language and communication techniques that entice teens, recognize and appreciate the effort of teens, and give teens substantive projects that utilize their hobbies or interests. In addition, we offer suggestions for the teens themselves, as well as schools and synagogues. Greater civic engagement, positive identity formation, and a stronger connection to the Jewish community can result if agencies engage teenagers in a more significant way.

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Introduction

One afternoon a week, an eleventh grade volunteer walks into a social service agency in Los Angeles. While trying to complete her required community service hours, she also hopes to interact with clients and assist in providing the necessary services offered at this service center. With great anticipation and excitement, she meets with the volunteer coordinator and is given her task of sorting through food and clothing donations made to the agency. The teenager is assigned to work alone in the warehouse, where packages are prepared to be distributed to clients. She leaves at the end of the day feeling disappointed, distanced from the cause she had hoped to help. She has no desire to come back to volunteer at this agency in the future.

How can Jewish agencies who use teen volunteers avoid this type of negative experience? What are teens looking for when they decide where to spend their volunteer hours? This thesis addresses these questions through original research. We provide recommendations that agencies can implement in order to attract teens to volunteer and provide them with meaningful volunteer experiences. The supplemental brochure offers a summary of our findings, giving agencies an informational guide to share with staff.

If Jewish organizations and agencies are unable to fulfill the expectations of Jewish youth, then their ability to maintain future donors, leadership, and a workforce are all in jeopardy. Being able to engage Jewish teens can result in greater future Jewish commitment and involvement. Ultimately, organizations must continually evolve and constantly market themselves in new ways. Additionally they must frame the tasks given to teens to provide them optimal support and the most meaningful experience. Only then will local agencies be fulfilling the expectations of local Jewish teens.

Research has found that civic engagement is important because it increases social capital. Societies in which individuals have communal relationships and are actively working for the good of the community will be better off as a society. Unfortunately, trends show that passive connection is on the rise. Rather than being part of a collective, individuals are now more likely to be paper members of a group (like ACLU or Sierra Club), only paying dues instead of actively working towards the organization's goals and personally taking part in its sponsored activities (Putnam, 1995).

Capturing the interest and attention of teens requires that nonprofit agencies appeal to their preferences for community service, solidifying their civic engagement and thus making them contributing members of society as adults. Furthermore, cultivating teens and engaging them at this stage of their life is essential, as they are shaping their identity. Their involvement may contribute to individual identity formation and a stronger Jewish connection and allow them to refine their value system in a constructive environment.

The teens interviewed highlighted their connections to Jewish values. *Tzedakah* and *tikkun olam* are commonplace in their rhetoric and serve as a foundation for their desire to remain engaged in community service. Teenagers are fundamental to the future of Judaism and Jewish life. Ensuring youth have a connection to the Jewish faith and community solidifies their long-term identification with and dedication to creating a Jewish community.

Four questions guided our research:

1. What motivates Jewish students to engage in community service?
2. What process do Jewish students go through in deciding where to volunteer?

3. Do local Jewish agencies fit Jewish students' expectations for Jewish service?
4. What characteristics attracted Jewish students to the agencies in which they volunteer(ed)?

In order to answer our research questions, we interviewed twenty teens from *Chinuch*¹, a community service group at a local private Jewish high school, and twelve teens who belong to the Jewish Student Union (JSU) group at their respective local public high schools. Additionally, we met with representatives from six local Jewish non-profit organizations. The students and agencies interviewed are all based in Los Angeles.

Teens want to do service with others, either their peers and/or the organization's service recipients. They want to feel that they are appreciated by the organization, for the impact of the work and the commitment they have made. Agencies must capitalize on these characteristics in order to provide teenagers with a lasting connection to their agency and civic life.

¹ Pseudonym used.

Teen Volunteers: Good for Teens, Agencies, and Communities

While non-profit agencies may be staff-driven, it is often the volunteer hours that sustain them. For example, one of the agencies we met with relies on volunteers to provide more than 50,000 service hours annually, effectively doubling the work of the staff. These hours, according to their website, are valued at \$4.3 million. Using those calculations, the 30,000 Jewish teens in Los Angeles would essentially be donating more than \$25 million to the community if they volunteered an average of ten hours a year!

Research shows that community involvement can influence individuals, ethnic groups, private business, and civic society. The networks that are formed can not only provide needed services but also create a mentality of cooperation and mutuality. Teenagers engaged in community service are able to establish social connectivity that will serve as a foundation for positive identity and moral development.

Psychological Development of Teenagers

Adolescence is a developmental period in which the foundation of individual identity is formed and shaped. Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory focuses on the impact of one's social environment on the way one develops cognitively and morally. In this model, individuals go through eight stages, each with a different demand, or crisis. It is how individuals respond to each crisis that allows them to further develop their identity in a positive and healthy manner.

A crisis connotes an increased potential for development or change; therefore, crises are not unhelpful experiences, rather inescapable events requiring individuals to deal with the given circumstances. In order to respond to each crisis, people utilize any

available resources they have internally or in their external environment. Given that individuals and their environments are constantly changing, they need adaptive behaviors that properly respond to each crisis given one's current set of resources. Adapting routine behaviors during each crisis provides individuals with a comprehensive outlook that draws upon prevalent resources to resolve the core psychological demand of each life stage. Mastery of each stage's psychological crisis is not merely based upon mastering a particular developmental task. It involves a changed attitude toward oneself, others, and the world. Changed attitudes become part of one's sense of self, known as their ego identity. It is possible to advance to the next crisis with adequate but less than optimal resolution of an existing crisis because crisis resolution can fall within a range of best to worst outcome. Better resolution of earlier crises provides the foundation needed to best resolve later crises (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2006).

Adolescents (12-20 years) are at stage five, according to Erikson, and facing a crisis of identity achievement versus role confusion. At this juncture between childhood and adulthood, adolescents are experiencing dramatic physiological changes while exploring who they are. As a result, teenagers seek out new forms of constancy and permanence that reflect who they are and where they have been. This is reflected in their social identity and occupational path. The various roles an individual has (sister, brother, daughter, son, friend, etc.) must be integrated. Without synthesizing multiple roles, adolescents experience role confusion and are unable to properly interact with others. Being able to easily shift one's behavior to appropriately respond to a peer, a sibling, or a parent reflects the extent to which a teenager understands his or her role (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2006).

Alongside identity development in adolescents is moral development. According to social learning theory, individuals learn culturally appropriate social interactions and moral development through observation and reinforcement (both positive and negative). As children grow, they internalize certain moral expectations and standards of behavior. These are learned from parents and other individuals who model these morals and standards. Internalized morals assist adolescents and young adults as they begin to make their own decisions. Learned morals can become the foundation for how individuals behave as adults (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2006).

The significant cognitive and moral development experienced during adolescence, most notably the search for one's personal identity and role, makes it an ideal time to have an effect on teenagers. Engaging teens in local Jewish communities will not only shape their self-image, but also influence their societal outlook and concern for others. As adolescents experience considerable change and grapple to find out who they are, involvement in community service can positively help in identity formation. This is especially important given the influence of social interactions to reinforce behaviors and beliefs that teens will carry with them through life. Developing a strong connection to the Jewish community during adolescence can ensure that teens will continue to be involved with Jewish communal institutions and organizations as they mature and develop into adulthood. Thus, the next generation of organizational leadership will be nurtured, ensuring that Jewish non-profit organizations continue to provide important services to the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

Civic Engagement

American society has traditionally been considered a highly engaged society, but recent studies show that citizens are becoming more passive in their participation in civic life and social bonds. Social capital consists of the networks that create norms and bonds that result in greater collectivity towards communal benefits. Social science research continuously concludes that civically engaged communities achieve greater results in addressing social issues such as unemployment, poverty, crime, and drug control. The most notable areas of civic disengagement have been in religiously affiliated groups, labor unions, school associations, and volunteer organizations. As a result of lowered affiliation rates, American citizens are forgoing important social networks that once existed and are at risk of experiencing greater social ills long-term (Putnam, 1995).

Development of social networks results in individuals engaging in their communities on different levels. Localities with greater voter turnout, newspaper distribution, and club membership indicate engaged communities. Additionally, the social capital developed within various ethnic groups has been directly correlated with economic attainment and job placement within each group (Putnam, 1995).

Strong social capital can have a positive impact on individuals' values and can even lead to tangible outcomes for their families, communities, and governments. Civic engagement, the extent to which individuals are involved with and connected to civil life, increases the value individuals place on reciprocity, social trust, and collectivity. Sharing such values cultivates a society with a deep sense of mutual aid and responsibility instead of individual opportunism. Individuals develop a sense of self that is collective rather than individual. Collectivity results in citizens feeling invested in and maintaining a

healthy, safe, and vibrant society rather than a culture based on personal advancement at the expense of others.

Given the importance of developing civic involvement and societal engagement in order to enhance the greater good, youth must develop a “civic competence.” James Youniss et al. (2002) explain that youth must be able to work with adults in order to not only preserve, but also change, the world in positive ways. International news, specifically information about social ills plaguing distant cities or countries, is quickly and easily accessible via the internet or other technological advances. This results in a need for global engagement, beyond the limits of one’s immediate surroundings. Youth can learn from adults in their communities about the responsibility they have to improve local, national, and international conditions.

As the world evolves and changes, youth can be seen as the future citizens that must blend a social and civil order in an ever-changing environment. In order to help create global stability and local partnerships, the next generation of leaders must acquire civic skills through active engagement. Within this context, Youniss et al. frame civic engagement in the broadest of terms, with the understanding that it can be difficult to differentiate between political and civil participation. Regardless, youth who engage in either way will eventually be more involved later in life. Similar to the conclusions drawn by Putnam, their findings show that formal political involvement, like voting, has declined and that youth feel apathetic towards civic and political life. Yet youth around the globe must forge a new civic union, applicable in the present-day, that can create social change. Development of civic competence comes from family, education, and political participation [in a political movement], and it offers tangible civic skills to those

involved to forge a new political order that will be relevant to an apathetic generation (Youniss et al., 2002).

Impact of Volunteering on Youth

In response to concerns surrounding declines in political and civil engagement, especially among youth, Richard Niemi, Mary Hepburn, and Chris Chapman (2000) discuss the benefits of community service among high school students. Based on a survey of 9th to 12th graders, they found that most students participate in service activities, but only once or twice a year. Sporadic service activity did not have the same positive impact on teenagers' civic concern that regular involvement in community service did. Community service, when done regularly, has the potential to alter civic participation and interest, resulting in changed attitudes of teenagers (Niemi et al., 2000).

The positive impact of voluntary membership groups and societal involvement is evident in communities worldwide. Another added benefit is the positive impact involvement can have on how youth develop. Research on identity development has emphasized the ways in which specific activities that youth participate in influence their attitudes and behaviors later in life. This is due to the fact that youth are in a developmental period in which identities are being formed and shaped. James Youniss, Yang Su and Miranda Yates (1999) explore the aspects of identity that can be impacted directly by service activities, including the development of social skills, political attitudes, and a sense of morality (Youniss et al., 1999). Miranda Yates and James Youniss (1997) explore the long-term impact of community service in creating socially responsible youth, and thus socially responsible adults. Because community service

requires direct involvement in civic life, teenagers are able to explore their social responsibility. Solidifying moral obligations and communal values at a young age has lasting impact into one's adult life and can even be passed on to one's offspring (Yates and Youniss, 1997).

Tikkun Olam

The Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* has changed over time. In Jewish tradition, *tikkun olam* is the duty to act justly as commanded by God. God commands that all people be held accountable for ensuring justice, as stated in Deuteronomy 6:18, "Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord." In the twelfth century, Maimonides believed that the concept of *tikkun olam* should be expanded into a more liberal notion that directly linked Judaism with a moral obligation to repair the entire world, developing the foundation for the Jewish universalist tradition. Rather than focus on the specific needs of the Jewish community (particularists), the universalist perspective of Maimonides expands the Jewish view of *tikkun olam* to a global perspective.

In the mid-twentieth century the modern Jewish concept of active engagement in social issues and civic life became more popularized. The reality that all Jews, not just rabbis, have the capacity to fix the world, served as a means of empowering the Jewish community to tackle humanitarian issues resulting in tangible social ends. Additionally, the growth of the Reform Movement and its dedication to social justice causes, especially within the civil rights movement in the 1960's, was a key influence for the Jewish communities of today to see through a universalist rather than a particularist lens (Dorff, 2005).

Jewish organizations have tried to respond to the changing interests of the Jewish community. Ira Silverman explains the trend of new Jewish philanthropies to “espouse a world view based on what they claim are the tenets of the universalist tradition in Judaism” (1991, p. 205). Well-established agencies with long histories in Jewish philanthropic life are not necessarily the same agencies that will encourage new ideas to surface or engage younger Jews. In order to attract a younger generation, newer agencies with greater flexibility emerged. Well-established agencies can learn from these new philanthropies and develop ground-breaking programs and policies in order to target a younger demographic (Silverman, 1991).

The growth of the youth philanthropy movement within the Jewish community reflects an innovative way to engage youth in community life. In this model, teens distribute funds rather than volunteer with agencies; yet teenagers are still learning about the importance of social responsibility and community involvement. As a result, the teen philanthropy movement provides teenagers with opportunities to develop their sense of self and the moral obligation to remain engaged in their community.

The youth philanthropy movement was forged in the 1990’s to innovatively engage young adults in charitable giving (Schwartzapfel, 2006). Various models of youth philanthropy have emerged that provide bar and bat mitzvah age youths with an opportunity to put into practice the Jewish value of *tzedakah*, or charity. In some communities, an allocation of foundation money, often augmented by teen fundraising efforts, is set aside for a youth board to allocate to agencies of their choice. Much like the actual allocation process of Jewish community foundations and federations, the youth board faces the difficult task of allocating their limited funds to organizations with

unlimited needs. To prepare, participants engage in educational programs that teach them how to evaluate organizations, increase financial competency, and develop a personal philanthropic vision.

Another model is to provide teens with matching funds that double their bar or bat mitzvah charitable gift. This type of program entrusts teens with community funds to donate. This demonstrates to adolescents a community priority to philanthropy and community involvement, while placing an emphasis on giving from a young age. Lastly, developing a personal endowment fund that allows teens to donate their annual interest engages teens in an ongoing process of giving. The benefit of endowments is that they require teenagers to continuously be involved in charitable giving and allow them to develop an ongoing commitment to their community. Regardless of the type of efforts that are made, the youth philanthropy movement provides teenagers with the opportunity to actively participate in the Jewish obligation of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. Teenagers will likely acquire deeply rooted values and a sense of responsibility to engage later in life (Schwartzapfel, 2006).

Methodology

It is in the best interest of the Jewish community, teens, and greater society to maximize the amount of teen volunteering and philanthropic activity. To determine how this might be done, we conducted interviews with students and agency representatives, enabling us to offer data-based recommendations to all stakeholders.

Students

In our attempt to understand the perspective of local Jewish teens, we selected 32 high school students for the study. Twelve of them belong to local Jewish Student Union groups (JSUs) at their respective public high schools while the other twenty attend a local private Jewish high school. We hoped that the differences in their environments – a full-time Jewish setting versus an extra-curricular Jewish program in a non-Jewish school setting – would allow us to evaluate if the secular environment of the teens impacts their involvement. Similarly, we hoped to evaluate if students who attend a private Jewish day school have different exposure to Jewish opportunities. While our sample size was small, we were able to identify clear trends among the respondents and similarities between the preferences of Jewish teens attending public versus private school.

The mission of the Jewish Student Union is to get Jewish teens attending public high schools to do Jewish activities. While the group's focus is more on building a community than participating in community service, as of March 1999 all Los Angeles public high school students are required to complete a service-learning experience, such as community service, in order to graduate. In addition to completing this requirement, all of our respondents had volunteered in a variety of community agencies.

The high school students at the Jewish day school also have a community service requirement they must fulfill to graduate: 20 hours per week for 9th -11th graders (which can be completed by assisting school programs in Grades 9 and 10) and 30 hours for 12th graders (which they must fulfill at only one agency). Most of the teens we interviewed at the Jewish high school belong to *Chinuch*, a group of students who participate in directing local Jewish and non-Jewish, national, international, and Israel-related initiatives. The participants also take part in a guest lecture series, featuring leaders in the local social activist community.

In both cases, the program facilitators recommended each student be interviewed for this study as a result of their leadership and volunteer commitments. All of the teens we interviewed volunteer, some weekly and others more sporadically. Additionally, most had varied volunteer experiences, as a result of graduation requirements or choice, thus helping to solidify their perspective on local agencies and volunteering through experience.

We interviewed our subjects using three different methods: 1-on-1 interviews, group interviews, and short-form interviews. The diversity of methods was necessary because of trouble recruiting subjects for individual long interviews. The following questions helped to guide the interviews:

- (1) What kind of community service experiences have you had?
 - a. In what ways were they positive or negative?
 - b. How did that impact your involvement with that particular project, program or organization?

- (2) What kinds of agencies do you prefer to commit to in order to fulfill your community service hours?
- (3) When you're trying to find a new organization to volunteer for, what process do you go through to help you decide?
- (4) What social issues are of most interest to you in terms of the kinds of organizations you look to volunteer with?
 - a. Do you feel that there are local Jewish agencies that fit these interests?
- (5) If you were to describe your ideal agency, what adjectives would you use to illustrate:
 - a. The agency?
 - b. The environment?
 - c. How the staff interacts with you?
- (6) Do you plan to donate your time and/or money to the agency you're currently volunteering at in the future?
 - a. To what extent did your community service involvement with this agency influence your desire to donate your time and/or money to it in the future?

For our *Chinuch* respondents, we added the following questions:

- (1) What made you want to participate in the program?
- (2) What was your decision-making process in choosing a service project?
- (3) How has learning in a Jewish environment impacted your view of community service?

We added the following questions when interviewing students involved in JSU:

- (1) What made you want to be involved in community service?

- (2) How has your public school experience shaped your view of community service?
 - a. How has this experience shaped your preferences for organizations to get involved with?
 - b. In what ways do you feel more or less drawn to a Jewish organization rather than a non-Jewish organization to volunteer with?

The goals of the interviews were to examine teen motivations for doing community service, assess what attracts them to do community service at a particular agency, and identify their expectations for the agency in which they volunteer.

Agencies

In order to understand the volunteer environment in which a teen searches for an opportunity, we interviewed representatives of 5 local Jewish agencies and 1 local synagogue. We selected agencies based on their involvement with teens and the community perception of their dedication to teen engagement. Additionally, if a certain agency was mentioned numerous times during our interviews, we attempted to meet with an agency representative.

Each interview was conducted either in the representative's office, giving us the ability to observe the agency environment, or, when necessary, we conducted the interview via email or phone. We used the following questions to guide the discussion:

- (1) What programs do you have for teen community service?
- (2) How do you market to local teens to get them involved with your agency?
- (3) In what ways do you believe this marketing could be more effective?

- (4) What kinds of feedback do you get from teens who have served your agency?
- (5) Describe your teen marketing using up to 5 adjectives.
- (6) To what degree does your agency feel having teens involved is important to your mission?

Interviews were recorded, when possible, and transcribed. Based on those transcriptions, we grouped similar responses and identified trends. Interestingly, the e-mail interviews often yielded more concise answers. We supplemented the interviews by analyzing many Los Angeles agency websites and conducted informal observations during the *Chinuch* meetings and discussions with the student leaders of *Chinuch* and JSU.

While we interviewed enough teens to allow us to identify trends in their expectations for volunteer experiences, we had trouble recruiting participants for the study. Whether it was due to the teens being overwhelmed by the schedules they keep or that they are simply unconcerned with research they do not feel connected to, it was difficult to receive responses from the individuals we initially targeted for the study. We encouraged teens to bring their friends to the interviews, thus allowing us to expand our data while providing them with a more informal and comfortable environment.

While a larger number of respondents would make the sample more statistically significant, the consistency in responses we received gives us a strong sense that a larger number of respondents would only further authenticate the responses we have already compiled. Regardless, one must be aware of the limitation in sample size; it is possible

that a larger sample would include students who had different experiences and agencies with different approaches to teen engagement.

Teen Respondent Trends

The teens we interviewed expressed remarkably consistent preferences in their community service experiences. We identified several characteristics that influence their agency choice and preferences: flexibility, a positive social environment, feeling appreciated/recognized, agency accessibility, receiving substantive tasks, feeling the impact of their work, a universalist mission, and the ability to engage with their personal interests/hobbies.

Overall, it was not about whether the teen volunteered for a Jewish or non-Jewish cause or the population being served, but rather about teens feeling that they were making a difference. It is also important to recognize that teens' choices are influenced by the information they receive. Jewish public school teens seem to be more inundated with Jewish organizational opportunities, a quality which limits the exposure of public school teens to these same agencies and experiences.

Flexibility

Teens are busy; aside from their normal coursework, they are preparing for SATs and other college prep. In addition to these time-intensive activities, they are trying to manage their regular schoolwork and participate in after-school activities. Needless to say, their free time is really limited. As one female eleventh grader told us, "I am heavily impacted by [school] work which prevents me from doing as much volunteer work as I would like to." Those without a drivers' license or car are also reliant on their parents to give them rides, which further limits their mobility. As such, it is not surprising that

flexibility was defined as a key characteristic in identifying prospective agencies at which to volunteer.

Teens are looking for agencies that are flexible in scheduling volunteer time. Because their commitments to school vary from week to week, it is important for agencies to be flexible. Teens reported that they are much more likely to participate in a volunteer activity for a few hours, rather than a full day. Similarly, agencies that require teens to volunteer on Jewish holidays, after school, or on other non-preferable times or days may be less likely to attract teens. While some of these options may be attractive to some teens, it is the agency's expectation that frustrates teens. One eleventh-grade male respondent remarked, "Sports make it really inconvenient to do community service. Places should be more flexible with their scheduling after school. It feels like if you're doing sports you're penalized."

Providing various scheduling options may make it easier for teenagers to participate in volunteer opportunities. This includes offering volunteer opportunities that vary from a single Sunday to a weekly or bimonthly commitment, as well as varying lengths of time for each opportunity (Raskoff and Sundeen, 2000).

Social Environment

Susan Jones and Kathleen Hill (2003) explain that socializing with peers often entices teenagers to get involved in a particular community service activity. Also, those involved tend to influence their peers to engage in other clubs or organizations with a service component. High school students most often learn about a volunteer opportunity by being directly asked to participate. If a friend or family member is already involved, it

increases the likelihood of involvement. Without the information about possible volunteer opportunities, teenagers are unlikely to get involved (Raskoff and Sundeen, 2000).

Teenagers are greatly influenced by their peers; social networks impact their attitudes and opinions. Additionally, it is during the teen years that people begin to form their individuality, often looking to those around them for positive reinforcement (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2006). For these reasons, it is evident that the social environment of an agency will impact one's desire to volunteer there and be committed to it, whether financially or otherwise, in the future.

Responses from our interviewees reinforce the findings of previous research. As one twelfth-grade female told us, "I feel like as a teenager, I am more motivated to join and do things when it is a social event [and] when I am with people my own age." An eleventh-grade female explained why a social situation is motivating: "It's just more interesting and fun when the environment is filled with interesting people and friends that make it more entertaining." A tenth-grade male concurred that he "prefers to work with teens my own age because it gives the environment a more positive vibe." Additionally, the ability to work with other teens makes the experience more meaningful. As one eleventh-grade female remarked, "Doing community service with people I know or are my friends makes [the opportunity] have a greater impact." Volunteering with friends made this opportunity more meaningful for the teenagers involved because the peer group reinforced a shared group value of serving the community.

Feeling enthusiastic about a volunteer experience can help to attract more teenage volunteers. Considering that word-of-mouth is the most frequently used method for

finding out about volunteer opportunities (Merrill, 2000), it is important that teens have positive experiences so that they provide an agency positive publicity. As one female twelfth-grade respondent shared with us, “If we love [the opportunity] we just get more people to join. If there are more of us, we put more into it and the organization.”

Appreciation/Recognition

Considering that teens volunteer without pay, and often have very little time to offer agencies as a result of their school and extra-curricular commitments, it is essential that they feel as though their work is appreciated. As one eleventh-grade male told us, “When places aren’t appreciative of what you’re doing for them, it’s a real turn-off and makes me not want to go back.”

Teens realize the day-to-day environment of the agencies at which they volunteer is hectic. They don’t expect to be closely supervised or their volunteer efforts to be the top priority of an agency, but they do expect to be appreciated for their time and effort. When teens sacrifice the little free time they have to volunteer at an agency and they do not feel appreciated, it is unlikely that their perception of the agency will be positive. As one eleventh-grade male said, “Opportunities are better when you are recognized for what you are doing and get something more for the hours you are putting in.”

When teens feel appreciated, they are more motivated to complete their assigned tasks, and they come to feel a greater connection to the organization. For example, one twelfth-grade female told us about participating as a member of the teen council at a community library, which helped promote literacy and education to young children. She emphasized that one of the most rewarding aspects was that “the volunteer coordinator

would make the one hour a week we spend there seem like it was the most important thing in her library duties, when we clearly knew it wasn't. Because she cared about the program itself, we cared more about it." This level of recognition motivated the teens to feel more committed to the opportunity. While they may have been completing insignificant tasks, staff appreciation made them more excited to complete whatever they were assigned.

Volunteer hours greatly assist the impact of nonprofit agencies. In order to maintain an active and dedicated volunteer base, staff and volunteers must appreciate the contributions of one another. Considering the amount of volunteer opportunities available, if volunteers do not have a positive experience while volunteering with an agency, they are likely to choose to work somewhere else that values their time and energy. Furthermore, if agencies emphasize that that it is the result of both staff efforts and volunteer hours that lead to an agency fulfilling its mission, it can serve as a basis for a positive volunteer program (McCurley, 1995).

Accessibility

Most teens are reliant on their parents for transportation. And those who have licenses and cars may have limitations in how far they are able or allowed to drive. This is especially relevant in the sprawl of Los Angeles. The location of an agency is an essential component in one's decision to volunteer there. This applies not only to the agency itself, but also to where events and meetings take place. Additionally, the increased commuter time that comes with extended hours (such as a half-day volunteer activity lasting an hour or two more than planned, especially if the activity goes into rush

hour) must be taken into account. Teens can often resent the increased commitment that agencies do not realize they are expecting.

While it is important to be mindful of all of the aspects of accessibility for teens, agency location is one of the most significant components in deciding on an agency to volunteer for. As one eleventh-grade male told us, “Location and schedule are key. Even if I’m interested in the cause, if the place is far or if the timing isn’t convenient, I won’t do it.” If the location of an agency can be the dealmaker or breaker for a teen, it is essential that the agency recognize the impact of their location. To increase accessibility, agencies should recruit teenage volunteers that live or attend school in the neighborhood surrounding the agency or consider offering reimbursement for transportation if the agency is far away.

Communicating Details and Expectations

Teens like to know in advance about the volunteer opportunity they will participate in and the tasks that they will be assigned. When a teen volunteers to work the Israel Festival, for example, he may become frustrated when the only detail he is given is that the festival will last from 11 am to 6 pm. The teen might wonder, “Do they expect me to be there the entire time? Where am I expected to go once I arrive? What will I be doing? Is there a certain dress code?” Organizations and organizers should be specific in their expectations and communicate them beforehand.

Imagine that instead of the scenario above, the teen is emailed or called a few days before the festival to find out if he has a preference for a two-hour shift on that day. He is then assigned his booth, told what he will be doing, when he should arrive, where

he should park, and given his supervisor's contact information in case he has any problems or questions. A stressful and complicated process on the day of the festival has been averted with simple and clear communication. When the teen is given clear details about what is expected of him, he feels better prepared to begin his volunteer responsibilities.

At the same time, agencies should be wary of over-informing teen volunteers. Given the amount of email teens receive on a given day, their instinct is to delete a long, over-stimulating email, rather than read it. As one female respondent expressed, "When I get most agency emails, there is so much going on visually that I delete it. It's hard for students, we have so much else going on, but we do want to be a part of it. So make it really simple and very easy to comprehend. That would entice us more to go and be involved. Something very simple, that would be refreshing!"

Substantive Task and Impact

As McLellan and Youniss (2003) found, community service and engagement must be framed in the proper context in order to fully facilitate growth and identity development in teenagers. Opportunities that do not provide a clear connection with the social or political issue can lead to an insignificant experience for or a negative evaluation by the teenagers. One study noted that teenagers engaging in service without guidance or structure often select "functionary work," which includes filing, shelving, or stuffing envelopes. Functionary work does not challenge teenagers intellectually or provide them with the same impact as teenagers engaged in opportunities that expose them directly to social problems (McLellan and Youniss, 2003).

In their daily lives, teens see results in almost everything they do. A teenager studies for a test and receives a good grade or is grounded for missing a curfew. In essence, understanding the implications of one's actions helps one to realize the significance of his or her choices. Teens feel more grounded when they see the results. If for no other reason, this is why explaining the outcome of one's tasks and framing the work in ways that will excite the teens is so important.

Framing is not about changing the tasks of what the teen is given, but about communicating a tangible impact for their work. As one eleventh-grade teen explained, "Everyone that does something for someone wants to see the result and how it affected that person. Just explaining, even with pictures or statistics or a piece of evidence, that this is going on and your work today will make it like this." Making the outcome of the teen's tasks more transparent and explaining how he or she helped the overall mission of the organization makes the community service, and his or her role, feel important.

According to survey data, volunteers seek experiences that involve helping people directly (Clark, 1996). Working directly with those in need provides volunteers with an understanding of the impact their service has. Agencies that do not provide volunteers with direct service opportunities must make a greater effort to impart the meaning and impact of their work (Merrill and Safrit, 2000).

The majority of teens interviewed felt that experiences working directly with people made the impact of volunteering more understandable. Whether assisting seniors at an old age home or feeding people at a soup kitchen, volunteering directly with those being serviced provides teens explicit outcomes of their involvement. After volunteering at a camp, a tenth-grader experienced first-hand the positive impact he was able to have

on his campers. He summarized this sentiment by saying, “When you feel an impact the experience means more...I really felt like I made a difference.”

The majority of teens we interviewed expressed a desire to have opportunities that fulfilled them. As one teen expressed, “Paperwork is not particularly fulfilling. I like hands-on stuff, where you are interacting with other people.” Another teen said, “I want to get something out of my volunteer experience, whether it be learning something new or sharing my passions with other people.” Having the ability to learn new skills, gain insight into new service areas, and sharing interests with others makes volunteering more meaningful for teenagers. Agencies must also realize that if they don’t frame the task well, that individual may not want to do future community service. As one tenth-grade teen explained, “Past experiences where I was given useless busy work made me feel like the experience was useless and didn’t make me want to do community service.”

Additionally, many of our respondents remarked that they would donate (time and/or money) to those agencies in which they had a positive experience. Thus, the impression an agency leaves in one’s teenage years may be permanent.

Teens are not always aware of their own limitations when volunteering with agencies. While teens should not expect to supervise a fundraising event, teens expect to be given tasks more substantive than photocopying. If photocopying is the extent of what is available for the teen at that agency, the agency then has to communicate a context or tangible outcome for the teen’s work. For example, instead of telling the teen to make 100 copies, tell the teen that these 100 forms will help Holocaust survivors receive reparations from the German government. One respondent agreed with this sentiment, saying, “You want to see that you are making a difference. I would be fine sealing

envelopes if I saw that it was for an event and it was raising lots of money. It is not about the task, it is about the result.”

A volunteer experience in an area a teenager is interested in is more meaningful and encourages him/her to make a stronger commitment. If the activity can have some relation to hobbies that the teen enjoys, it makes the teen feel like he or she is doing something meaningful. An example is a basketball player teaching kids with special needs how to shoot a basket. This was the case with one female teen who expressed that since she liked sports, volunteering with kids and playing sports would feel as though she was having fun while doing something good. Often when teens volunteer doing activities they already enjoy, it makes them more engaged. As one teen explained, “I like to work at camps because when I am working with little kids it doesn’t feel like I’m working; I’m going on trips and enjoying the company.”

An agency willing to accommodate teenagers’ interests can result in a more valuable volunteer experience for the teens involved. One of our respondents talked about her work with the American Cancer Society (ACS). She felt that the variety of tasks, from picketing at a local shopping mall to trying to institute a higher tax on cigarettes, gave her a better understanding of the organization, made her more vested in the cause, and motivated her to continue to pursue ACS-related initiatives.

It is evident that agencies will not give a teen a professional responsibility, such as writing a grant or managing an annual fundraiser. Yet, how an agency frames the work that is assigned to teens often correlates with the relative meaning the teens feel and their perception of how their work impacts the agency’s mission. As one teen expressed, “The more connection I feel, the more I want to stay involved with the cause.” The long-

term impression one agency can have on a teen's long-term engagement with the specific cause or community service in general, should not be underestimated.

In short, it is all about how the tasks are framed. Agency staff should quantify work for teens (i.e., these 100 copies = 100 clients). They should also try to accommodate individuals' varied interests. When teens come to an agency to volunteer, have them fill out a background questionnaire about their hobbies and try to keep these in mind as tasks become available. For example, if the agency is working on programming or outdoor activities and the teen is interested in soccer, have the teen help plan – with the staff – a soccer tournament as part of the activities. Or if the agency is hosting an auction, have the teen sit-in on a phone conversation securing some of the donations. Understanding how the agency is related to the larger community will further validate the student's agency experience.

Publicity and Responsibility to the Jewish People

Two main differences emerged from our interviews of day school students and public school students. First, the way in which their school encourages community service as a component of their education differs. Public schools frame the experience as community service, while the Jewish school uses the term *tikkun olam*. Second, the students differ in their knowledge about Jewish agencies. It appears that Jewish agencies are more likely to recruit at a Jewish day school for prospective volunteers than at a public school. Whereas Jewish agencies come to speak at the Jewish private school's community service days, they are absent overall from similar opportunities public schools

make available. As a result, Jewish students at public school are unaware of volunteer opportunities within the Jewish community.

Students in both groups learned about community service options from friends or relatives, in addition to those advertised at their schools. Because of the importance of word-of-mouth, agencies should advertise widely – in schools, on the internet, and in newspapers – but, more importantly, should also understand the impact one student’s experience has on the future of securing volunteer participation.

Most of the students in both the Jewish and public schools feel less drawn to opportunities serving Jewish agencies than general ones. They are more interested in helping agencies because of their work, rather than their affiliation. Students interviewed have volunteered at a multitude of agencies including Jewish agencies serving only Jewish constituents, Jewish agencies serving non-Jewish constituents, as well as non-Jewish agencies. Some of the non-Jewish causes they’ve served include Habitat for Humanity, Hurricane Katrina relief, AIDS/HIV, and gay rights. These topics are not Judeo-centric, but rather the students understand their importance as part of the bigger community picture.

While several of the public school students we interviewed did serve at Jewish agencies, they had to seek out the opportunities themselves. Whether because of their small numbers or the fewer occasions to present, Jewish agencies make less of an effort to harness the volunteer hours of public school students. One public school teen, who previously attended Jewish day school, expressed, “I don’t think that I am as aware of volunteer opportunities within the Jewish community as I was when I was in the Jewish private schools. I feel that the Jewish agencies don’t try as hard to reach out to Jewish

public school students compared to private school students.” While public school respondents did not believe that they avoided Jewish opportunities, they did not feel as though they seek them out either. But, they believe that if they had a greater level of awareness of local Jewish volunteer opportunities, they would consider them.

Despite these differences between public and Jewish school students, we found consistency in volunteering preferences: local Jewish teens want to volunteer at agencies where they believe they are making the greatest impact, often leading them to opportunities supporting the community-at-large, rather than just helping the Jewish community. Many local Jewish teens have less of a sense of responsibility to the Jewish people than their parents’ generation – a common feeling among Generation Y Jews, as we learn from studies like Greenberg (2005). Teens will not volunteer at an agency simply because it is Jewishly affiliated or because it is helping the Jewish community. Like Americans more generally, they are a generation of individuals who believe that people should do their own thing and express their faith in highly personalized ways, rather than only through faith-based institutions (Greenberg, 2004).

Young Jews’ identities are multi-faceted, and they operate in diverse social networks. Since “being Jewish is part of a larger identity mosaic for today’s Jews,” (Greenberg, 2005, p. 7) day school and public school teens alike do not feel the same near-sighted allegiance to the Jewish community. Many feel that they do not have anything in common with the people who run today’s Jewish institutions and therefore feel as though organizations that reflect their American values are more appealing. However, this trend does not mean that they will not give their time to Jewish agencies at

all. If agencies appeal to teens through a universalist lens, they may be more likely to attract them.

Recommendations

The trends we identified in our interviews translate into practical recommendations for non-profit agencies to attract and retain teen volunteers more effectively, thereby easing their workload significantly. The importance of volunteer hours should not be underestimated. In this section we offer suggestions for agencies, teens, and other stakeholders, including synagogues and schools.

For Agencies

Providing positive experiences for teens can increase an agency's effectiveness long-term and increase the potential for the teens to be civically and Jewishly engaged adults. How agencies appeal to teens is directly related to their success in securing teen volunteers. Furthermore, the more communication channels agencies use to appeal to teens, the wider the net will be to harness potential volunteers.

Communication / Marketing

- **Understand the power of word-of-mouth.** Market research shows that word-of-mouth advertising is the most effective way of building awareness of a product. Word-of-mouth has the ability to catapult the agency as well as taint it. For example, the popularity of G-mail came out of a purely recommendation-based organic approach – one could only receive a G-mail account if someone “referred” them. Similarly, we found in our interviews that most teens found out about their volunteer opportunities from friends or family. Teens have the ability to positively portray their experiences with an agency and attract other potential volunteers. Conversely, negative experiences will result in

negative advertising of the agency. This will taint recruitment efforts, and influence teens to go elsewhere for volunteer opportunities. In a practical sense, agencies and their staff must be acutely aware of the ripple effect of one negative or positive portrayal.

- **Integrate technology.** Today's teenagers reflect a generation that has grown up with computers. As a result, they tend to rely on e-mail and the internet for information and communication. An agency must be vigilant about responding to teens in a timely manner. E-mail is often the best, and sometimes only, way for teens to communicate with an agency. If teens do not get a prompt response, they will feel as though they are not needed or valued by that agency and may look elsewhere for a meaningful experience.

Likewise, in order for agencies to better capture this generation, they must be able to integrate technology into their communication strategy. This includes maintaining a website that appeals to a more web-savvy audience: one that is sophisticated, easy to navigate, visually stimulating, and regularly updated. Giving teens on-line access to view prospective opportunities makes them feel as though the agency is at their technological level. Of course, contact information should always reflect staff or structural changes. Lastly, the website should list not only what has gone on or what is currently happening in the organization, but also future opportunities in which the teen can be involved. In other words, agencies must regularly update their websites!

- **Appeal to a wider teen base.** Teens we interviewed told us that how an agency frames an opportunity impacts their eagerness to get involved. Staff members in charge

of communicating with teens must be aware of the language and visuals they use. Agencies should describe the opportunities they offer as fun and innovative. They can also use language about making an impact or working on meaningful projects, but it should sound up-beat and exciting, rather than laborious or overly idealistic. According to our research, images that are stock photos do not create the same impact as actual pictures. Seeing constituents and reading their stories is important, but agencies should also have quotes from past volunteers. Lastly, images from past events with the message that “this year, you can help make this event a success” are extremely positive.

Similarly, where an agency advertises their opportunities limits the audience of message recipients. The majority of our respondents found out about the agency they currently volunteer with through friends and family or through school. Agencies should advertise in school papers at locations near their agency (such as Santa Monica High School for agencies in that vicinity). Some schools, such as the private Jewish high school we highlighted, have approved lists of agencies at which students can volunteer. We suggest that agencies contact public and private schools and register their agency for inclusion. Moreover, in order to capture the largest and most diverse audience, agencies should not only advertise in local school newspapers, but also display posters where teens congregate (like the mall) and use the networks available to them to get the message out. For example, agency employees can have a link at the bottom of their email that refers people to their volunteer opportunities and/or use their donor base to solicit help when needed for large events. Also, given teens’ reliance on the web to obtain information, volunteer matching sites such as www.idealists.org or www.sulamcenter.org are likely to inform and captivate this audience.

Agencies should also use language that is wide-reaching and all-encompassing. In other words, an agency's message should appeal to every teen from the punk to the prep, such as using slang to seem more hip – having the volunteer coordinator read an MTV blog or ask a younger relative what's "in" will give him or her a better sense of the lingo. More effectively, agencies should enlist young people to help with the marketing directed to teens. Likewise, the images that the agency uses to market to these potential volunteers should reflect the diversity of the agency (including dress, age, background, gender, etc.) and the uniqueness of the opportunity. If teens feel as though the agency welcomes diverse perspectives, situations, and identities, they are more likely to feel that the agency will provide a meaningful volunteer experience.

Recognition

If teens feel valued, they will be more receptive to stay involved. While recognition should be constant, agencies should also consider forming a youth advisory group, sponsoring a youth leadership day, or having a speakers' bureau for teens. These types of activities give teens a leadership role in the organization and make the teen feel that their place in and impact on the agency is significant.

- **Be immediate and personal.** Frequent recognition of teen efforts should be a priority for agency staff members working with a teen volunteer. Acknowledging the work of teen volunteers on a regular basis makes them feel that their work is important. After teenagers assist in a project, or complete a volunteer opportunity, thank them for their time and energy. This verbal acknowledgement will validate their work and encourage

them to continue to volunteer. More importantly, this type of appreciation directly acknowledges a teen's individual efforts, something he or she does not receive from recognition at an annual event. Also, because teens will often be working on a variety of projects, thanking them as a group loses some level of appreciation for an individual's efforts. If the agency staff shows individual recognition, it validates the work the teens are doing, demonstrates the value they have to the agency, and encourages them to continue their work.

Some practical recognition strategies include:

- **Send handwritten thank-you letters.** Send these letters to teen volunteers, as well as their parents or teachers, and highlight the impact of the teen's work.
- **Take volunteers out to lunch.** The act of taking someone out to lunch is a sign of respect and thanks, and teens may appreciate the free meal.
- **Provide tasks and recommendations to assist in college admission.** Talk to teens about their college and career aspirations, and try to give them appropriate tasks (e.g., having a teenager who is interested in law help the office's law clerks or allow a student who wants to work in finance to sit-in on a budgeting call).
After getting to know the teen in a long-term volunteer situation, offer to write recommendations for college admission, scholarships, internships, or jobs.
- **Submit an article.** Send an article to local or school newspapers focusing on the impact of a teen's volunteer activities.
- **Nominate a highly engaged teenager for a community or civic award.** The nomination, and potentially winning the award, makes the teenager feel like their

involvement was appreciated and important. Awards are given locally, nationally, and internationally; agencies can find out about these awards on volunteer websites such as www.pointsoflight.org or www.presidentialserviceawards.gov.

- **Hold an annual volunteer appreciation event.** Providing an opportunity for agency staff and administration to show their gratitude for volunteer efforts demonstrates the impact of volunteer hours on an agency's success and can raise volunteer morale.

Projects that Engage

As our findings indicate, providing an agency environment that is social, flexible, accessible, and substantive leads to a more meaningful experience for a teen. Here are some ways an agency can integrate these findings into a volunteer experience:

- **Offer projects to be done as a collective, rather than in isolation.** Our respondents said that they enjoyed the opportunity more when they could do it with friends. This does not necessarily mean a group project, rather that teens be able to complete tasks in a social environment, such as having two teens work in the same room but on different projects.
- **Take into account a teen's schedule.** If you are determining when and where they should volunteer, do not make the opportunity too far or at a time that will be difficult for the teen to get transportation. It is always inconvenient to travel in Los Angeles during rush hour. Try to choose convenient areas or be aware of a

volunteer's schedule outside of their volunteering. It is more likely for teens to be able to participate in weekend opportunities, although agencies should be sensitive to Jewish observance. While there may not be universally convenient times or places, understanding your volunteer's schedule (such as after-school activities) shows the agency's flexibility. One of our respondents felt penalized because he did sports; agencies should advertise their willingness to accommodate prospective volunteers' schedules. By doing so, agencies show that they are aware of these types of limitations and are flexible.

- **Frame the opportunity.** Provide an informational session that explains the mission of the agency and directly connects their efforts to achieving it. This session can take place before beginning one's specific task and/or one's overall volunteer experience. Agencies should consider providing these sessions at their schools or other places where teens congregate; this can serve as very good recruitment and help agencies to cast a wider net for prospective volunteers.

For Teens

While it is important for agencies to provide positive experiences for teens, it is also important that teens understand their role in the agency-teen relationship. Teens must understand that community service is not about having one's desires catered to, but rather helping those around you and providing support for the community. In this section we offer recommendations for teens to help understand the agency experience and extrapolate the best lessons from the opportunity.

Expectations

Teens may be required to do community service hours or may be doing it by choice. Either way, teens must have realistic expectations for the tasks that agencies are able to give them. While agencies need to do a better job of framing the tasks asked of teens, teens must be mindful of agency limitations to fulfill their expectations.

Considering the range of volunteers agencies get, volunteers who have a more extensive academic or professional background are more likely to get more substantive tasks, such as working directly with clients or planning a major event. To ensure your expectations are reasonable, try these suggestions:

- **Be realistic!** Some jobs are more suited to professional staff and other volunteers who have specific skill sets or are able to volunteer more often.
- **Realize that every experience has its rewards.** If you are diligent in your work, you may receive tasks that are more fulfilling. One of our agency respondents told us that teen interns are often given more substantive and career-oriented tasks after they have proven themselves as diligent workers.
- **Know what you're passionate about.** If you volunteer at an agency consistent with your values, the experience will be more meaningful, regardless of the tasks assigned.

Managing Up

In any new environment, it is necessary to understand its dynamics and one's ability to affect them. When newcomers makes an effort to learn about an agency's staff

structure, mission, and environment, they not only gain respect from their supervisors, but may also be better able to use their role to impact the organization. Staff members are easily subsumed by their work and therefore are sometimes oblivious to the needs of volunteers. For teens, it is essential that they understand not only these staff members' distractions, but also their own role in shaping their volunteer experience. Because staff does not always know how best to make an experience meaningful for their volunteers, teens should work with the staff in choosing assignments that are both fulfilling for the teen and helpful for the agency. To help you manage up, we offer the following suggestions:

- **Be assertive!** If there's a certain event or activity you want to work on, express your interest. Passivity in an agency will only bring you work that no one else is willing to do. This is your experience, and you have a responsibility to yourself to make it meaningful.
- **Know your strengths.** If you are a creative thinker and like to do design, ask that you help the marketing department or lend a creative hand elsewhere. Or, if you are a detail-oriented person who likes to plan parties, ask to work on one of the agency's fundraising events. While you may not have as much education or experience as the staff, your skills and interests can help the agency excel.
- **Ask questions.** When given a task, ask how it will help the agency achieve its mission. This will help to frame the experience for you and make it more significant. Expressing interest in the agency may provide you with increased opportunity within it.

- **Do your research.** Many agencies have a variety of departments and projects. If you understand the plethora of experiences you could have access to, it will be easier for you to communicate with staff members about what you are interested in doing and give greater meaning to your experience.

Individual Experiences

Word-of-mouth advertising is the most persuasive form of marketing among all ages. Similarly, the tendency among teens is to trust the recommendations of their peers. While teens should listen to the reports of others, they must also experience things themselves and evaluate agencies based on their own criteria. Considering how different teens are from one another, one must realize that peers may have different perspectives and experiences. To help shape your individual experience and agency perception, we offer the following recommendations:

- **Get a brochure or navigate their website.** Reading about the organization's mission and the types of volunteer activities they offer will help you to create your own perspective on the agency.
- **Get a variety of opinions.** While your best friend may agree with you on everything, that doesn't mean that he or she is always right. If there is an organization that looks interesting, ask multiple people about their experiences to see if there's a general sentiment about the agency or if your friend had a unique experience.

- **Express your concerns.** If there was a certain criticism of the organization among everyone you asked, question the volunteer coordinator on how he or she will make your experience different. This will not only help to make your experience better, if you choose to volunteer at that agency, but will also help any future volunteers.

For Other Stakeholders

Schools

Overall, schools should make sure that students understand the impact of their agency experiences. Explain why community service is important in a big-picture sense so that students understand its long-term importance. Providing an educational component that solidifies students' role in the community will be more likely to translate into long-term civic engagement.

According to Metz and Youniss (2003), "Studies show that service and activism during youth are associated with life-long civic engagement involving voting, trust in government, and involvement in voluntary organizations." It is evident why private and public schools alike would want their students to be involved in service and activism. Metz and Youniss also explain that leadership must understand that community service requirements may not result in the same socially responsible citizens, since youths are being forced to volunteer. If the teen does not have a vested interest in an agency beyond fulfilling hours, it is less likely that the experience will be meaningful for that teen. If the experience of working with an agency does not impact the teen's development, it is unlikely that their service will lead to life-long civic engagement. When teens volunteer

out of choice, their development is more significantly impacted (McLellan and Youniss, 2003).

Requiring teens to complete community service hours as a graduation requirement does integrate teens into their community and help them connect with local agencies. Yet, if schools want that connection to translate into activism, they need to make the requirement more fluid and integrated. For example, a school might frame the requirement by stating how many people in their community they hope to impact by the end of the school year. Or it might center community service activities around one mission, like alleviating hunger or supporting AIDS research. This mission can be integrated into the curriculum, either in specific classes or in school-wide programs, and then each student can find an aspect of that topic that appeals to him or her. This type of community service program creates a comprehensive experience and makes the schools more visible in treating community service as long-term social responsibility, rather than a short-term goal to graduate.

Schools should be an integral part of a student's decision process on where to volunteer. Schools should educate students on periodic volunteer events where they can earn community service hours as well as regular commitments they might consider. Schools that have websites should consider devoting a page for agencies to list volunteer opportunities. The greater involvement a school has in helping students understand their preferences and giving them access to the opportunities available, without making the decision for them, the less students will feel as though community service hours are a finite assignment that simply needs to be completed. By taking these suggestions, schools may have a great impact on teens' sense of civic responsibility.

Synagogues

Because *tikkun olam* and *tzedakah* are Jewish values and teens might feel allegiance to their religious institution, synagogues have a unique role in influencing local Jewish teens to volunteer with local agencies. When youths are taught the importance of these values early on, they are more likely to be active volunteers as teens and philanthropically dedicated as adults. According to a recent study, “The religious are far more likely to report that they volunteer on a regular basis....The Godly participate in every aspect of civic and communal life in greater numbers than their less religious counterparts” (Greenberg, 2004, p. 25). Because synagogues have a captive audience during Hebrew school, youth group, or even religious services, rabbis and educators have the ability to influence Jewish youth to participate in civic and communal life. To do so, we offer the following recommendations:

- **Sponsor a volunteer day / Mitzvah Day.** If the synagogue presents examples of ways youth can integrate *tikkun olam* into their everyday lives or places they can volunteer, it further legitimizes these agencies and the opportunities they offer. It must be noted, though, that a clearly defined follow-up strategy must be in place for the day to have the maximum impact on the teens.
- **Start young.** Institute a program for religious school, bar/bat mitzvah age, and beyond that teaches social responsibility and explains its importance in Judaism. The teen years are a critical point for identity formation, and those teens who participate in community-based programs will more than likely carry those values into their adult life and be supportive of the community long-term.

- **Make support tangible.** Rather than simply having a *tzedakah* box in the atrium, have a description of the people the money goes to and how the synagogue has impacted their lives. Having a client come tell their story on a Friday night would also help to make *tikkun olam* more tangible for synagogue members and their children.

Conclusion

Greater knowledge of Jewish teens and their expectations can provide the Jewish community with information about the way their youth engage in community service. Given that people's interests are often mirrored in their philanthropy, the expectations for teens and their relative involvement today will likely impact their philanthropic giving in the future. Our research answered the questions of how local Jewish teens engage in community service, what attracts them to agencies in which they volunteer, and what characteristics an ideal volunteer experience would possess. By identifying teens' preferences, we have been able to provide agencies, teens, and others several recommendations for creating a meaningful volunteer experience.

Previous research compounds the importance of getting teens involved in community service by presenting the case that community involvement and civic engagement lead to greater social capital. Additionally, considering that identity formation is key at this stage of their life, teens must be presented with a constructive environment that promotes healthy identity formation. By having a fulfilling volunteer experience with nurturing supervisors, teens will have a more positive formation, and therefore may contribute more to society long-term.

In summary, teens are looking for eight characteristics when choosing a community service opportunity.

- (1) Agencies that are flexible with days and offer a variety of volunteer options.
- (2) Agencies that appreciate the teen's work and recognize each for their individual performance and contribution to the staff.

- (3) Agencies that are accessible, both in terms of location and sensitivity to a teen's transportation limitations.
- (4) Agencies that provide teens substantive tasks.
- (5) Agencies where teens feel the impact of their work, especially where they can work directly with people. Agencies should frame their tasks in relation to achieving the agency's mission, helping them to understand the big picture.
- (6) Agencies and opportunities that appeal to the teen's hobbies and interests.
- (7) Agencies that have a universal impact, not just within the Jewish community.
- (8) Agencies that provide an equal amount of information to public school teens and teens that attend Jewish day schools; Jewish students at public high schools would like to be told of the same opportunities as their counterparts.

We hope that agencies will use our recommendations as a guide for harnessing teens' participation in community service programs. We encourage agencies to request our supplemental brochure and share our findings with their staff. Additionally, we hope that teens will use our recommendations as a guide to creating a context for a meaningful volunteer experience. Schools and synagogues also have a unique role they can play by imparting the long-term importance of being vested in one's community. If all stakeholders are able to understand the limitations of teens and their preferences in volunteer opportunities, local Jewish teens will have their expectations for community service fulfilled. Furthermore, these volunteer experiences will potentially impact their Jewish identity long-term, as well as their relationship with Jewish agencies and their civic engagement in society at large.

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