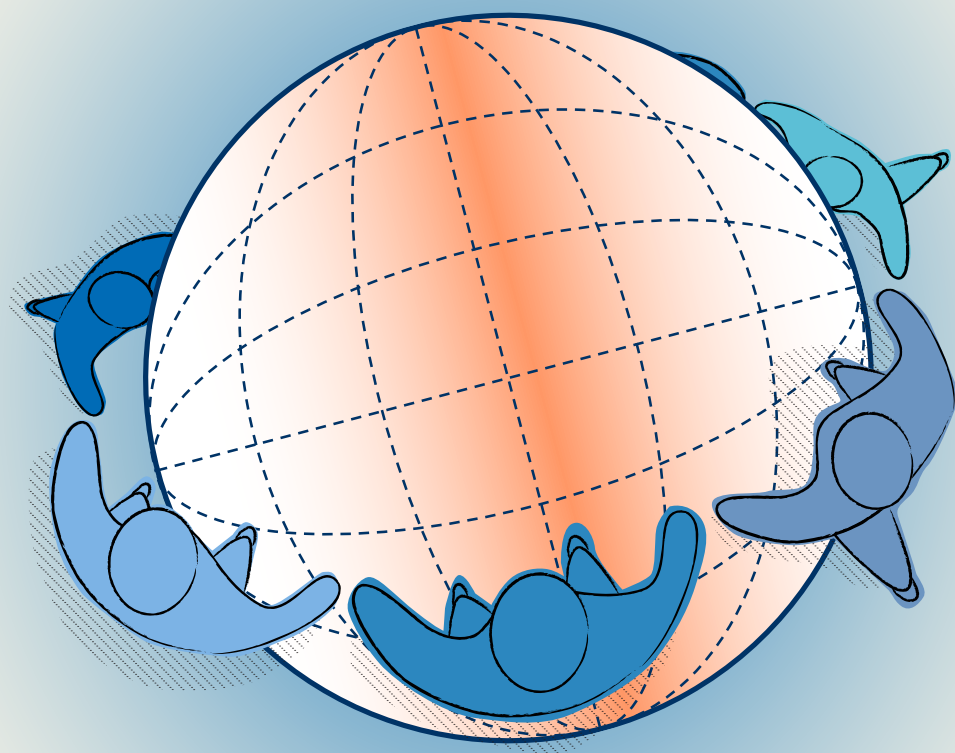


Brandeis University

Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies

**Breaking New Ground/Sowing Prepared
Fields: One-Year Follow up of a Service
Learning Initiative**

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Executive Summary

Proponents of Jewish service learning seek to make volunteer work an integral part of Jewish life and establish a term of service as a rite of passage for all young adult Jews. Over the last half-decade, short-term immersive Jewish service programs have grown dramatically. However, the success of the burgeoning field of Jewish service learning rests on the development of high-quality experiences with demonstrable long-term impact on both the Jewish connections and the social justice commitments of participants. In other words, systematic data is needed to demonstrate that the net effect of short-term service is more than a fleeting drop in the metaphorical bucket of Jewish or social justice engagement; but rather, that it is the source of enduring and expanding change.

This report examines the long-term impact of the *Break New Ground* (BNG) Jewish service learning initiative sponsored by UJA-Federation of New York. In its inaugural year, BNG enabled 129 college-age young adults to participate in immersive, service learning experiences. The initial evaluation documented a short-term positive impact on participants' civic responsibility and Jewish perspective on service. The follow-up research explores the enduring impact of BNG on alumni attitudes, intentions, and commitments one year after their service experience. The research relied on qualitative and quantitative data through focus groups and online surveys of alumni. The response rate for the survey was 64%.

Findings

It has been suggested that for contemporary young adults, identity is multi-faceted and distributed like a set of windows on a computer. The BNG initiative was intended to bring the Jewish identity and service “windows” into closer communication and to help young adults view service as an integral, and even essential, expression of their Jewish values. The results of the one-year follow-up research indicate that BNG has made progress in this direction.

Jewish perspective on service strengthened for many but not all participants

For many alumni, the BNG experience strengthened their Jewish perspective on service. However, BNG had the greatest influence on one particular subset of alumni—those with more extensive Jewish educational backgrounds. The centrality of helping others in one's Jewish identity increased most significantly in alumni with day school backgrounds. Day school BNG alumni also demonstrated stronger connections between Judaism and their motivation to volunteer as compared with alumni who did not attend Jewish day schools. Alumni comments suggest that for these participants, BNG produced a dramatic expansion of their “sphere of obligation” to include individuals in need, outside as well as inside the Jewish community. Alumni with a day school background also appear to have entered their BNG experience “primed,” with their pre-existing framework of Jewish knowledge and history of text study making it easier for them

to quickly acclimate to learning sessions and absorb new Jewish ideas and perspectives.

Continued growth in service and social justice commitments

After a BNG trip, participants returned to their campuses and home communities committed to “doing more.” Alumni found numerous ways to turn their intentions into action in the year since their return. Sixty-nine percent of alumni have taken on a leadership role related to service work. Participants without a history of regular service involvement prior to college reported the most striking increases in their volunteer activity. The BNG experience also produced greater interest in careers and post-college programs related to social justice and an impressive number of alumni reported taking steps to make these plans a reality.

Although alumni returned from their trips intent on continuing to help the communities they served, many were unable to organize follow-up projects. Many alumni felt that their follow-up plans would have benefited from the ongoing support of professional staff.

Jewish engagement increased

Most participants did not choose their BNG service trip as a means to jumpstart exploration of their Jewish identity. Nevertheless, in the year since their return, 72% of alumni have tried out new ways to express their Judaism, and even more have made efforts to learn about their Jewish heritage. One of the most impressive outcomes of BNG was how it influenced expansion of alumni’s social networks to include friends from Jewish backgrounds very

different from their own. Survey respondents also indicated that their interest in a career in the Jewish community increased as a result of their participation in BNG. These increases in Jewish engagement and connections are particularly impressive since most BNG participants were already substantially involved in Jewish campus life before their service trip.

Conclusions

Some of BNG’s long-term outcomes represent dramatic shifts in the life trajectories of young adults. For example, BNG significantly increased the volunteer involvement of participants who did not have a pre-college history of regular service work. In addition, the majority of alumni were motivated by their BNG experience to explore new avenues for expression of their Jewish identity. In these areas, the BNG initiative, as its name suggests, truly succeeded in “breaking new ground.” Other findings suggest that the impact of BNG was greatest for participants who came into the program with backgrounds that prepared them to take full advantage of their experiences on the trip. In these instances, the program had a dramatic effect, but one best characterized as “sowing in prepared fields.” If the field of Jewish service learning is to achieve its goal of making service an integral element of Jewish identity for young adults from all backgrounds, it will need to build on the areas of strength in Jewish and service identity that participants bring to the experience as well as motivate participants toward new directions of Jewish and service involvement.

Areas for Development

The field of Jewish service learning will need further development if its goals are to be fully realized and all segments of the young adult population are to be reached. The findings of this report suggest two particular areas in need of additional work.

Make Jewish learning a better fit for the full spectrum of participants

The results of this research indicate that the long-term impact of BNG is dependent on the fit between participants and the curriculum for Jewish learning. Attempts to connect service work with Jewish tradition will not be successful if the curriculum is either too simplistic or assumes too high an entry level of knowledge. At the same time, the data suggest that participants learn much from each other and would not be well served by Jewish learning “tracks.” Approaches to Jewish learning that provide multiple options or jigsaw lessons need to be developed so that some aspects of Jewish learning take place in background-based groupings while others provide the opportunity for all participants to learn together on an equal footing.

Expand follow-up programming and resources available to alumni

Follow-up programming is critical to the enduring impact of short-term immersive service programs. There are many avenues to leveraging the transformative experiences that young adults have on short-term Jewish service trips, such as embedding the initial steps of follow-up projects in the trip itself or creating alumni networks. Follow-up programming/curricula might include

advocacy, service, and fundraising activities related to the mission or work of the trip providers, communities travelled to on BNG, home communities, or campuses.

BNG has helped further the connections that participants make between social justice work and their Jewish identities. The lessons learned from BNG contribute to the knowledge base of the emerging field of Jewish service learning and its central goal—building a cadre of Jewish young adults committed to repairing the world.

Introduction

The Corporation for National and Community Service (2009) recently reported that three million college students participated in volunteer activities during 2008. Similarly, a national survey of college seniors (Liu et al., 2009) found that over two-thirds engaged in at least occasional volunteer work during their undergraduate education and an even larger portion were involved in service in their final year of college. The same study reported that over three-quarters of college seniors felt that helping others will be a very important if not an essential part of their post-college lives.

Proponents of Jewish service learning seek to make volunteer work an integral part of Jewish life and a term of service a rite of passage for all young adult Jews (Bronznick & Goldenhar, 2008; Irie & Blair, 2008). A central organization for Jewish service, “Repair the World” was launched in July 2009 with an initial goal to “create a generation of Jews who become a powerful force, dramatically and positively leading the Jewish community and addressing pressing needs in the U.S., Israel, and around the world” (Repair the World, 2009).

Over the last half decade, immersive, short-term Jewish service programs have become a growth industry. Even a cursory search of the internet reveals a veritable explosion of Jewish alternative break service trips. Every year, organizations including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, American Jewish World Service, Jewish Funds for Justice, and Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, and many local Jewish campus groups offer an increasing array of service trips to both domestic and international destinations. Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life (2009) reports that in the

2008-09 academic year, over 2,300 students from over 120 North American campuses travelled on Hillel-sponsored alternative break service trips.

However, as with many efforts in the Jewish community, the success of the emerging field of Jewish service learning does not simply depend on whether there is a discernable need or interest. Instead, the eventual outcome depends on the development of high-quality short-term service programs with demonstrable long-term impact on both the Jewish connections and the social justice commitments of participants. Unfortunately, Jewish alternative break providers collect, at best, only limited participant feedback immediately following programs (Irie & Blair, 2008). Several external evaluation studies have documented the short-term positive impacts of these programs on participants’ sense of empowerment, civic responsibility, and Jewish identity (Beck, 2007; Chertok & Samuel, 2008; Rehnborg, Lee, Veron, & Zaligson, 2008). However, there have been no efforts to explore the longer-term outcomes of participation in Jewish alternative break experiences. While young adults clearly find service trips to be a meaningful way to spend their vacation time, the question still remains if the net effect is a fleeting drop in the metaphorical bucket of Jewish or social justice engagement or the source of enduring and expanding ripples of change. In other words, what impact do short-term immersive service programs have on the life trajectories of participants?

In 2008, the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) conducted evaluation research on the inaugural year of the UJA-Federation of New York-sponsored *Break New Ground*

(BNG) Jewish service learning initiative. This program enabled 129 college-age young adults to participate in immersive, ten-day service learning experiences with the goal of strengthening their “life-long connection to Jewish communal life.” Results of the initial evaluation suggested that college-age participants “returned to their campuses and home communities with a renewed commitment to taking an active role in ‘repairing the world’” and that “Jewish life and learning on BNG increased the salience of social justice in the Jewish identities of participants and began their incorporation of a Jewish perspective on service” (Chertok & Samuel, 2008). In 2009, CMJS conducted a one-year followup with alumni of the inaugural set of BNG trips, the first research of its kind. This report explores the enduring impact of the BNG service trip experience on the attitudes, intentions, and commitments of alumni and answers the following questions:

- To what extent have program alumni continued to apply Jewish perspectives to their service and social justice activities?
- In what ways did participation in a Jewish alternative break affect participants’ volunteer involvement or interest in longer-term commitments to social justice work?
- How does the availability of follow-up programming influence program outcomes?
- How has program participation influenced Jewish engagement and connections of alumni during the ensuing year?

The report begins with a description of the study design and methods followed by a discussion of the impact of this program in several broad areas, including development of a Jewish perspective on service, commitments to social action and social justice, and connections to Jewish life. The report concludes with the implications of findings for the continued development of BNG and more broadly for the field of Jewish service learning.

Methodology

The evaluation design included collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from BNG alumni who participated in the inaugural year of the program. Systematic information was gathered through focus group discussions and an online survey.

Alumni Focus Groups

In preparation for development of the alumni survey, all college-age participants from 2007-2008 BNG trips were invited to participate in one of two focus groups. These meetings were conducted in New York City during mid-February 2009, and alumni were offered a \$25 cash incentive for attending. Eleven BNG alumni attended focus group discussions. Using a semi-structured discussion protocol, researchers asked participants about their lasting impressions of their trip, their involvement in follow-up activities, and the impact of the BNG experience on their Jewish identity and volunteer commitments. The focus group protocol is provided in Appendix A.

Alumni Survey

All college-age alumni from BNG first-year trips were invited to complete an online survey. This survey included questions on current volunteer commitments and Jewish engagement as well questions about the perceived impact of the trip on educational and career plans. This survey also asked about attitudes toward Jewish identity, civic responsibility, and social action, which were also assessed in the pretrip survey. The alumni survey is included as Appendix B.

Extensive efforts were made to find current e-mail addresses for alumni, and multiple reminder e-mails were sent to participants in order to achieve an optimal response. In addition, a \$10 Amazon.com gift card incentive was offered for survey participation. The survey was open between May 8, 2009 and August 24, 2009. There is some variation in the level of response rate by trip provider (Table 1), with an overall response rate of 64%. This response rate is quite high, taking into account that most alumni had limited

Table 1: Survey Response Rates

Provider	Response Rate
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee	79%
American Jewish World Service	62%
Hillel at Binghamton	62%
Jewish Funds for Justice	59%
Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst	67%
Overall	64%

contact with their BNG trip provider or with CMJS during the year since their trip. Just over three-quarters (76%) of survey respondents were female, which mirrors the over-representation of women (80%) among college-age participants on BNG trips.

Findings

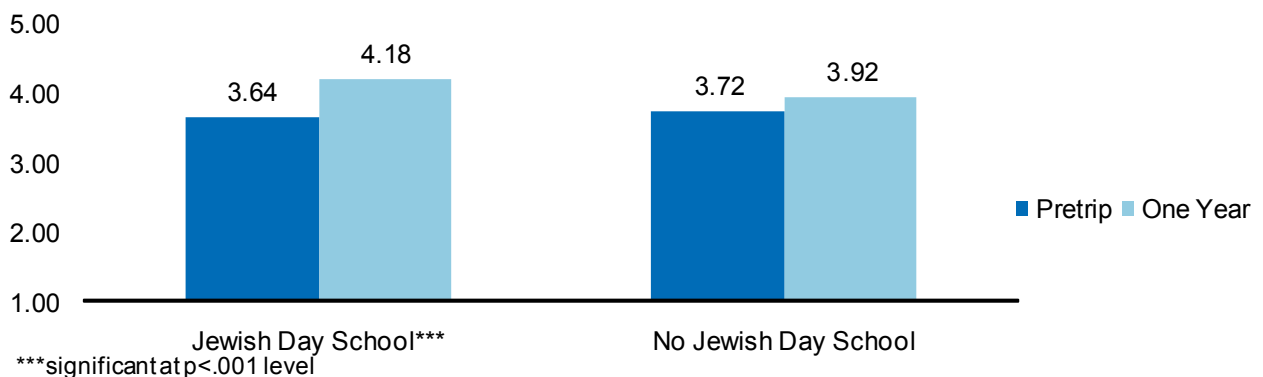
Development of a Jewish Perspective on Service

A national study of the spiritual lives of teens found that regardless of the religion in which they were raised, most adolescents found it difficult if not impossible to explain the distinctive beliefs or perspectives of their faith (Smith & Denton, 2005). Aside from the amorphous belief that God wants people to be nice and fair to each other, most of the adolescents studied, including those who identified as Jewish, were at a loss to describe the specific ethical implications of their religious identity for their day-to-day lives. One of the major goals of BNG, like other Jewish service learning initiatives, was to remedy this situation by introducing and/or reinforcing a Jewish perspective on service and social justice. This section of the report reviews results related to the integration of helping and social justice perspectives into participants' personal Jewish identities and the application of this Jewish "lens" to all aspects

of their volunteer work, including service that occurs under non-Jewish auspices.

Scholars in the field of secular service learning distinguish between the development of a perspective of personal responsibility focused on helping those less fortunate and a social justice orientation focused on addressing societal inequities (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). To assess the extent to which the BNG experience had impact on the integration of these two types of service values, both the pretrip and one-year surveys asked respondents to reflect on the extent to which "helping those in need" or "pursuing social justice" are integral to their Jewish identity. In terms of the connection between Jewish identity and an orientation toward helping, responses show an increase in average ratings between pretrip and one-year follow up. However, this change is statistically significant only for those participants who came into the program with more extensive Jewish education, as measured by Jewish day school attendance (Figure 1).¹ Participants with a day

Figure 1: Integration of Helping Perspective and Day School Background²
I express my Judaism by helping those in need



school background accounted for a little more than half (52%) of BNG enrollment in its first year.³

Comments made on both the one-year survey and in alumni focus groups suggest a possible explanation for this discrepancy in the impact on participants with and without day school backgrounds. Participants with more intense Jewish educational histories often told us that, for them, the major impact of the BNG experience was to draw attention to their Jewish responsibility to help the needy outside as well as inside the Jewish community. For these participants, more so than for alumni from non-day school backgrounds, BNG represented a dramatic expansion of what one participant called the “sphere of obligation.”

Going on a trip where you're volunteering and helping others that are not Jewish in

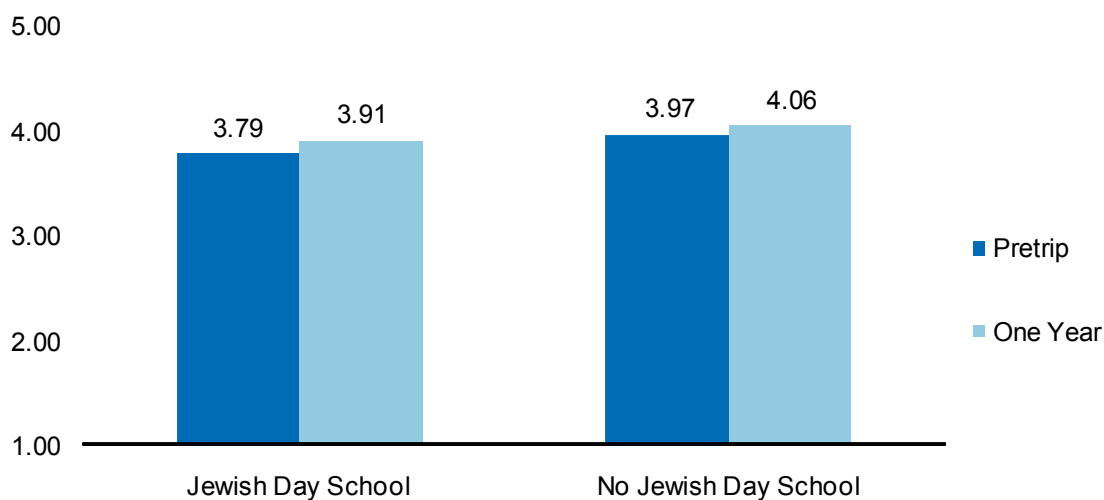
Nicaragua—that was saying to me, it's okay to help others. It's an obligation. (Focus group)

The trip had a major impact on exposing me to the need to be aware of human suffering outside of the Jewish community. As a fellow human and a Jew in particular, there is an obligation to participate in contributing to the welfare of society. (Focus group)

There was only modest change on an item asking the extent to which the active pursuit of social justice is central to Jewish identity (Figure 2). It is important to note that the belief that Judaism involves the pursuit of social justice was already pronounced among participants even before their BNG trip.

Another way to explore the impact of the BNG experience on the development of a

Figure 2: Integration of Social Justice Perspective and Day School Background⁴
For me, being Jewish involves actively pursuing ideals of social justice



Jewish lens on service is to look at how participants understand their motivations for volunteer work, regardless of whether it is conducted under Jewish auspices. One year after their trip, over half (59%) of alumni strongly agree that Jewish values motivate their volunteer commitments and 45% strongly agree that their understanding of Judaism informs their service work. The strength of the link between service and Jewish values again, however, remains unequal for BNG participants from different Jewish backgrounds. As compared with alumni who did not attend Jewish day schools, those with a day school background demonstrate significantly stronger average connections between Judaism and motivations for service (Figure 3).

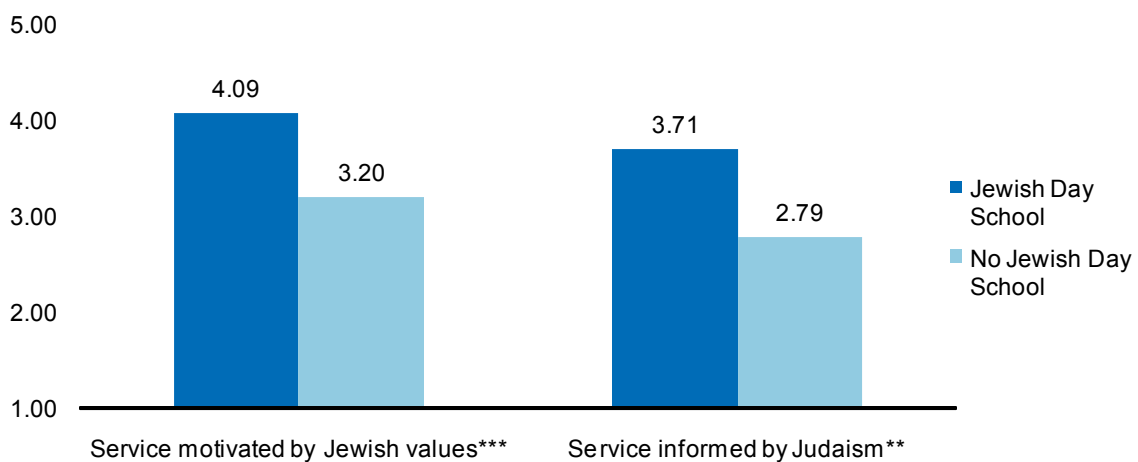
There are several interrelated explanations for the differential effect of the BNG experience on the development of a Jewish lens on service. A national study of the impact of Jewish day school education found that,

compared with their peers with public or private school backgrounds, college-age alumni of day schools not only express stronger Jewish identities but also a greater “sense of responsibility for addressing the needs of the larger society” (Chertok et al., 2007). In other words, even before they decide to participate in Jewish service trips, day school alumni are more aware of both their Jewish orientation to life and their civic obligations, making it easier to develop or reinforce the bridge between the two.

I think social justice has always been important to me, and I think the trip just continued to underpin how much social justice is a part of my Jewish identity. The two have a dialogue with each other. (Focus group)

What I really appreciate about the trip was it really embodied what I saw as my Jewish identity in that Jews have a responsibility to make the world a better place. (Focus group)

Figure 3: Jewish Motivations to Serve and Day School Background⁵



**significant at p<.01 level
 ***significant at p<.001 level

An additional explanation for this finding is that participants with day school backgrounds were “primed” for the experiences they had on BNG trips. Day school alumni entered their BNG experience with a pre-existing framework of Jewish knowledge and a history of text study that made it easier for them to quickly acclimate to learning sessions and absorb new Jewish ideas and perspectives. By comparison, participants with less Jewish education were potentially unfamiliar with both the content and process of more traditionally oriented Jewish learning or text study.

Initial evaluation of the BNG initiative noted modest growth in the incorporation of service as part of participants’ Jewish identities (Chertok & Samuel, 2008). The follow-up research shows that these gains persist one year later. For many alumni, the BNG experience strengthened their Jewish perspective on helping and increased connections between their Jewish identity and their motivations for service. However, it is apparent that the BNG experience had the greatest influence on one particular subset of alumni—those with more extensive Jewish educational backgrounds. For these participants, the expansion of their Jewish obligation to those outside as well as inside the Jewish community represents a very positive impact of BNG. A study of individuals who demonstrated sustained commitment to work that furthered social justice found that many recalled a similar “constructive, enlarging experience of the other” that challenged their assumptions about who was and was not in their sphere of obligation (Daloz, et.al., 1996). At the same

time, the attenuated impact of the BNG initiative on the development of a Jewish perspective on service among young adults with more typical Jewish educational backgrounds is a continuing source of concern.

Continued Involvement in Service and Social Justice Activities

The greatest reward for doing is the opportunity to do more.

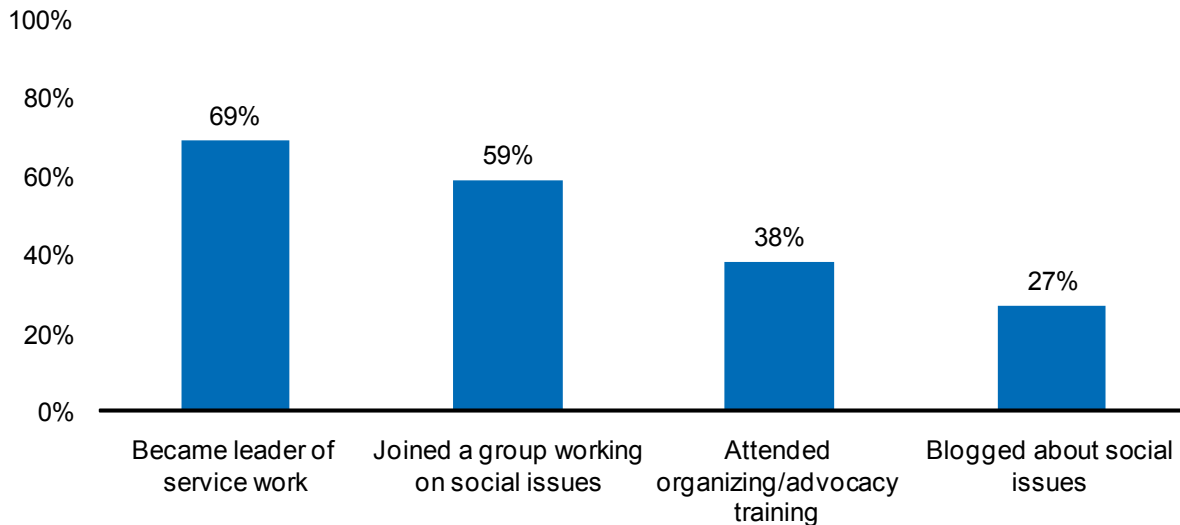
—Jonas Salk

After a week immersed in service on a BNG trip, participants returned to their campuses and home communities motivated and committed to “doing more.” In the year since their trip, alumni have found numerous ways to put their intentions into action. As one survey respondent succinctly explained, “I have realized that it is not enough to be Jewish but to be a Jew that volunteers and gives his/her time to others.” This section of the report considers the impact of BNG on participants’ involvement in volunteer service and on their educational, post-college, and career trajectories. The impact of posttrip follow-up efforts is also considered.

Involvement in Service Work

BNG alumni have explored a variety of avenues toward integrating service and social justice work into their lives. Over one-third of survey respondents (38%) have taken training to increase their advocacy or organizing skills; well over half (59%) have joined organizations involved in work on social issues; and more

Figure 4: Involvement in Social Justice Activities



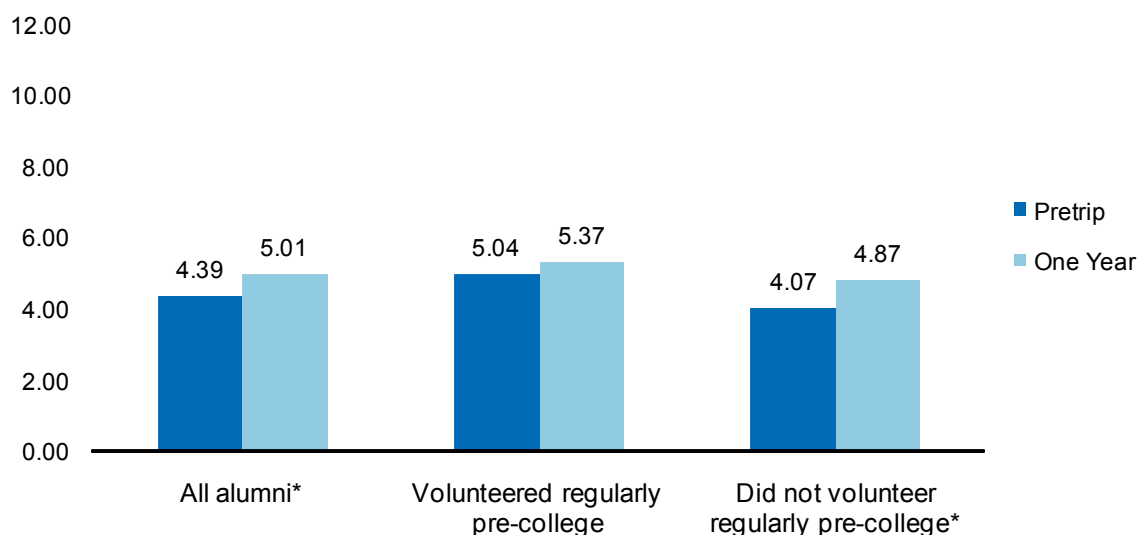
than two-thirds (69%) have taken on a leadership role related to service work (Figure 4). In addition, 26% of BNG alumni report participating in a subsequent alternative break service trip.

On BNG trips, participants learned firsthand about the implications of larger social issues faced by communities in Southeast Asia, Central America, the former Soviet Union, Israel and the United States. In the aftermath of this program, alumni remain attuned to these issues. Well over three-quarters (84%) of alumni actively seek out information on social issues and just over one-quarter (27%) use the internet to share their concerns. Almost all BNG alumni (95%) encourage others to become involved in social justice efforts.

I just became more aware of these issues and I try to spread the word. (Focus group)

The work and conversations with farmers increased my awareness and interest in issues of food justice and sustainability in the food industry. (Survey)

The impact of the BNG experience can also be seen in participants' ongoing commitment to volunteer service. On both pretrip and one-year surveys participants were asked to indicate their level of involvement ("Not at all," "A little," or "Regularly") over the previous year for six major areas of volunteer work. Their responses were then tabulated to form a Volunteer Activity Score with responses of "A little" counting for one point and "Regularly" counting for two points with a maximum score of twelve. The average score on this measure increased significantly from pretrip to one year posttrip (Figure 5). Perhaps even more important was that participants who did not have a history of

Figure 5: Impact on Volunteer Involvement and Volunteer History⁶

*significant at $p < .05$ level

regular volunteer involvement in their pre-college years reported more striking increases in their level of volunteer activity.

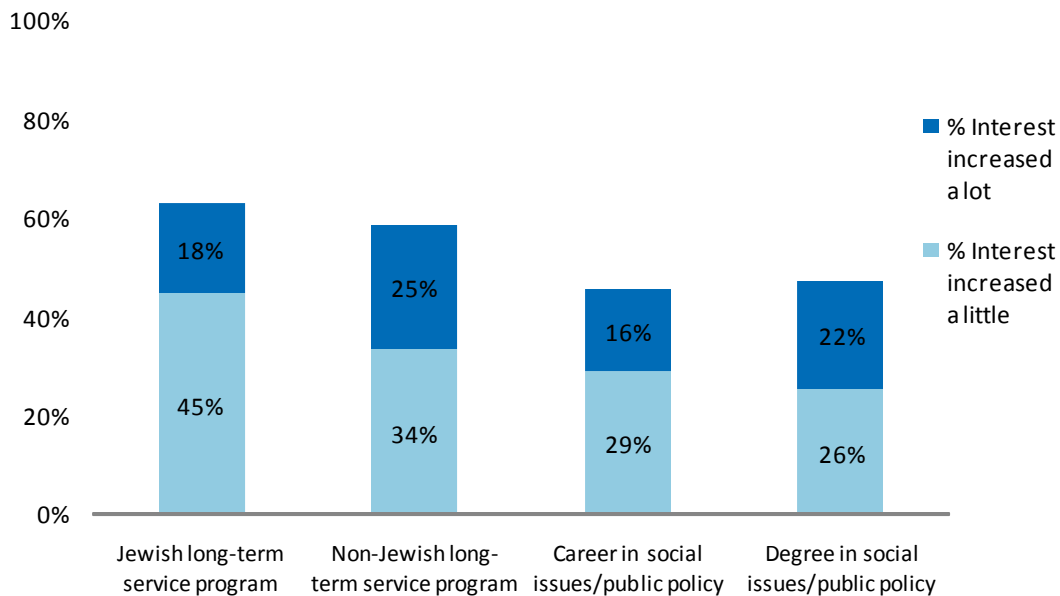
Longer-Term Commitments to Service and Social Justice

Revisiting BNG alumni one year after their trip provides the opportunity to see the evolving impact of this experience, especially on more long-term commitments to social justice work. Participants were asked how their level of interest in four different areas of long-term involvement had changed since they returned from their trip. These areas included pursuing a career related to social issues; attaining a degree related to public policy; participating in a Jewish-sponsored long-term service program such as AJWS, AVODAH, or Otzma; and participating in long-term service sponsored by a non-Jewish organization such as Peace Corps or Teach

for America. More than half of alumni surveyed indicated that their interest in Jewish and non-Jewish long-term service programs had increased, and just under half experienced an upturn in their interest in pursuing a degree or career related to social justice (Figure 6). A substantial number of participants reported a heightened interest in social justice-related trajectories of work, study, or volunteerism. As one current college senior told us, “I’ve been thinking of how I could most effectively use my future for social justice.”

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate any actions they had taken that would indicate not just interest but an enacted trajectory of longer-term service or social justice commitment. Of those participants who were in the first half of their undergraduate education at the time of the trip, almost one-fifth (18%) changed their major or minor to one that focused on social

Figure 6: Impact on Interest in Long-Term Commitment to Social Justice



issues or public policy. Among respondents who were completing their senior year or were already post-college at the time of the one-year survey, 43% reported that they had applied for a job related to social issues and 20% had applied to or enrolled in a graduate program in a social justice-related field (Figure 7). In addition, over one-third (37%) of senior-level or post-college alumni indicated that they had applied to or actually participated in long-term service programs under Jewish or non-Jewish sponsorship.

Involvement in Trip-related Follow-up Efforts

In focus group discussions, many alumni told us that they returned from their trips fully intent on continuing to aid the communities they had served in Nicaragua, Israel, Belarus, the Gulf Coast, Thailand, and West Virginia.

However, all too often, they regretfully admitted that they were unable to sustain their focus and that attempts to organize follow-up projects fell through.

We had all these plans. We were going to send them care packages. We had all these follow-up plans that never took off. (Focus group)

When I was there I thought, 'Oh my God, I did so much. As soon I came back, I'm going to do all these great things.' A group of students decided we're going to still do something, but it kind of died out. I really wish we actually stuck to our words and actually did something for those people. (Focus group)

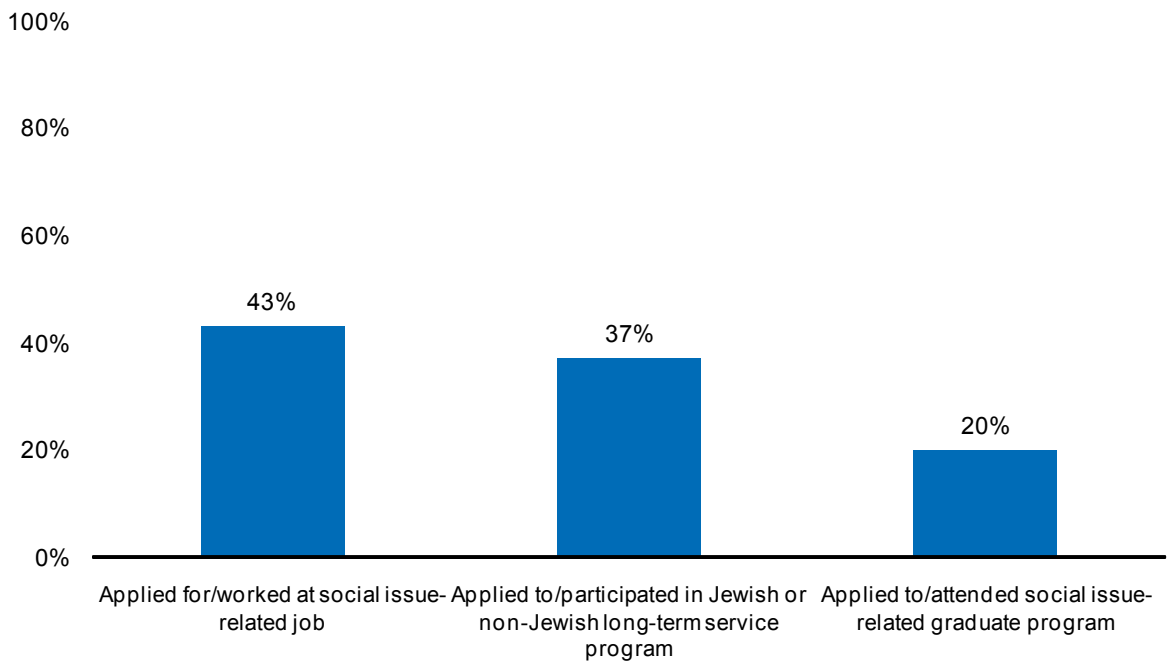
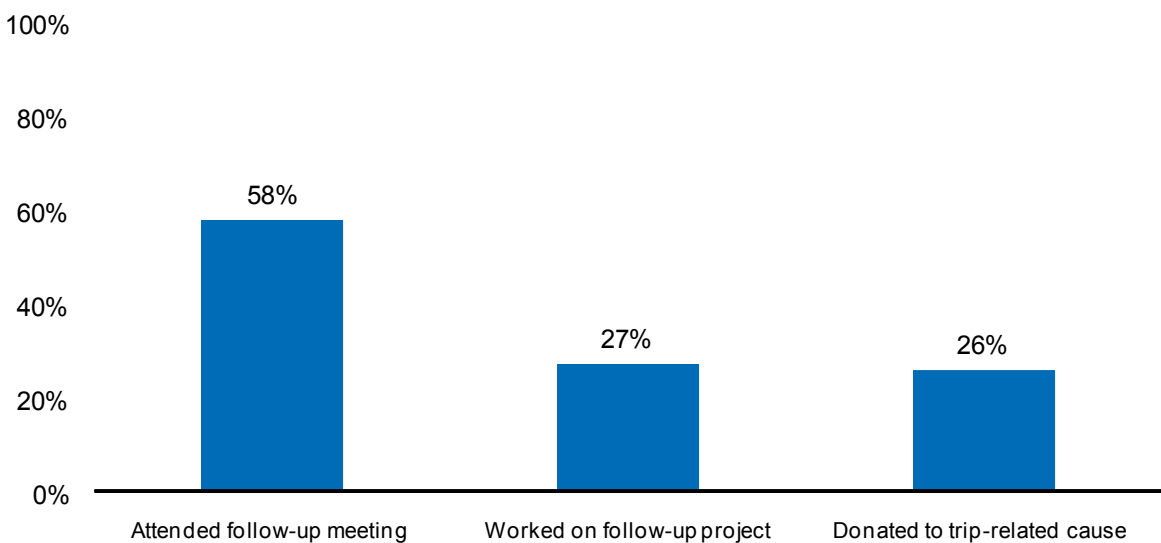
Figure 7: Impact on Actions in Long-Term Commitment to Social Justice⁷

Figure 8: Posttrip Participation



Survey responses tell a similar story with just over one-quarter (27%) indicating that they worked on follow-up efforts despite over half (58%) having attended at least one posttrip meeting (Figure 8).

Many alumni felt that their follow-up plans would have benefited from the ongoing support of staff associated with either their trip provider or their campus Hillel. Unfortunately, their group leaders were often part-time employees of the organization providing the trip and were unavailable for follow-up meetings or projects. Some campus Hillel personnel who accompanied BNG groups were in entry-level or fellowship positions and moved on to other opportunities at the end of the academic year. Other Hillel staff members, whose portfolios included service, were often too busy with other volunteer efforts to effectively serve as the mentors of returning BNG groups.

We try every month to get together on our own. Lately we haven't been able to, because we don't have any staff with us anymore. Our staff was only there for a year. (Focus group)

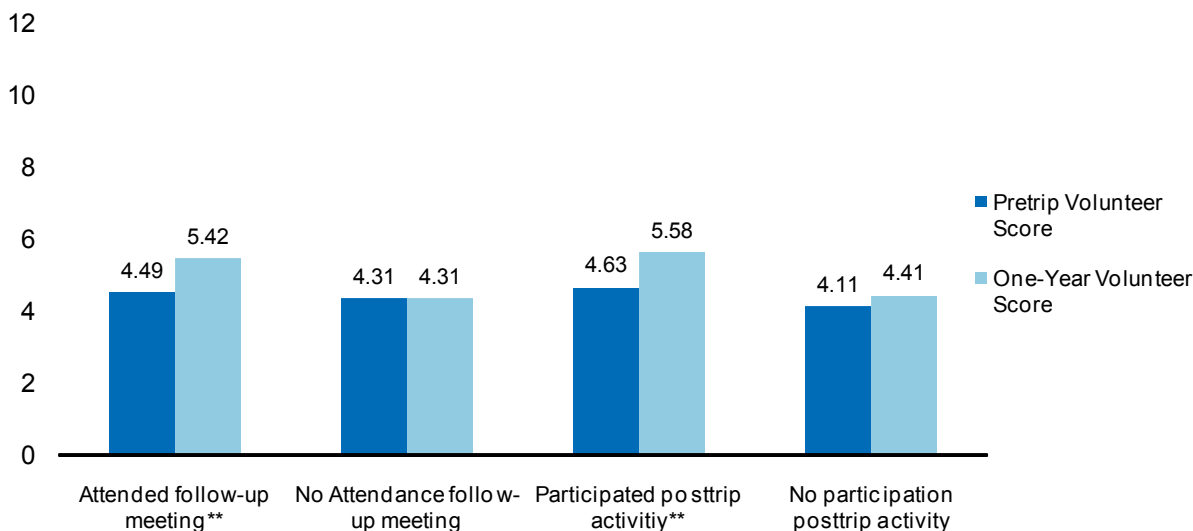
Inspiration is fleeting, it's like a wave—you see it and then it crashes. Like that was our trip. You get us all fired up, and then you're like, 'ok, see you guys later.' I wish there was more direction to actually keep that going. (Focus group)

Alumni also indicated that they wanted to know what happened to the projects on which they worked during their trip but did not see to completion. One participant wistfully told us “I felt like I became very close with the people with whom we were working...it would be nice to know that the ditches that

we dug were really helpful when the rainy season came.” Several alumni who had traveled to Israel on BNG and refurbished bomb shelters for use by the local neighborhood wondered if these spaces had become the centers of community activity that they envisioned. Unfortunately, only one-third (32%) of survey respondents received an update on their service work or on the community they served. Overall, most alumni (78%) indicated that their trip provider did contact them after their return. However, there was substantial variation. The alumni of certain trip providers reported almost universal follow-up communication, while less than half of the alumni of other trip providers recalled any follow-up communication. Even when contact continued beyond the trip, information about volunteer opportunities not specific to the BNG experience was the type of communication most frequently recalled by alumni (65%).

Participation in follow-up meetings and projects is clearly seen by alumni as a conduit to acting on their commitment to the communities in which they served. It also appears to catalyze volunteer involvement more broadly. For example, significant increases in the average Volunteer Activity Score were observed specifically among those alumni who took part in follow-up meetings or projects (Figure 9).

Although efforts to provide continued assistance to the communities where they served on BNG trips proved difficult to sustain, a substantial number of alumni have found meaningful ways to act on their intention to make service and social justice work more integral parts of their lives. Alumni have sought out opportunities to enhance

Figure 9: Participation in Follow-up and Volunteer Involvement⁸

** significant at $p < .01$ level

their social justice skill set, taken on responsibility for leading service efforts on their campuses or in their home communities, and increased their overall level of volunteer engagement. As a result of their BNG experience, alumni have become more interested in careers and post-college programs related to social justice and service and an impressive number have taken steps to make these plans a reality.

Jewish Engagement⁹

Being in this small town in Nicaragua with no electricity and no running water and still feeling so grounded in the tradition of being Jewish really stayed with me. I definitely see the trip as a real turning point in my Jewish identity. (Focus group)

I realized that I always took for granted that I was Jewish. When I came back, I started to wonder more

about the Jewish religion, and I wanted to get more involved and understand more. (Focus group)

Most participants did not choose their BNG service trip as a means to explore their Jewish identity. Nevertheless, participants spent a week or more surrounded by Jewish peers and involved in an immersive experience that included Jewish learning and living in Jewish time. For many, the trip proved to be an experience that transformed their Jewish identity. In the year since their return from BNG, 72% of alumni have explored new ways of expressing their Judaism, and even more have continued efforts to learn about their Jewish heritage (Figure 10). Focus group participants told us that they have taken a new interest in lighting Shabbat candles, attending evening seminars on Jewish topics such as Israel, working in Jewish summer camps, dating Jews, and experimenting with ways to

make Shabbat more meaningful for themselves and their friends.

Most areas of Jewish campus activity showed positive changes in average level of involvement from pretrip to one-year posttrip.

Increases were statistically significant for two areas of Jewish campus life—Israel programs and Jewish social events. (Figure 11).¹⁰ Previous studies (Chertok, Sales, Klein & Saxe, 2006; Sales & Saxe, 2006) have documented the significant social divide

Figure 10: Posttrip Exploration of Jewish Heritage and Identity

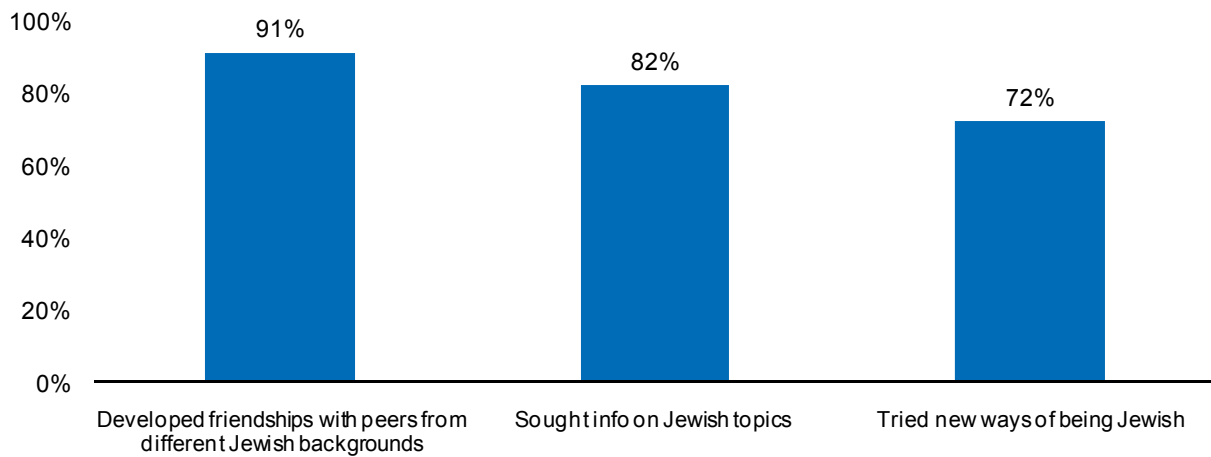
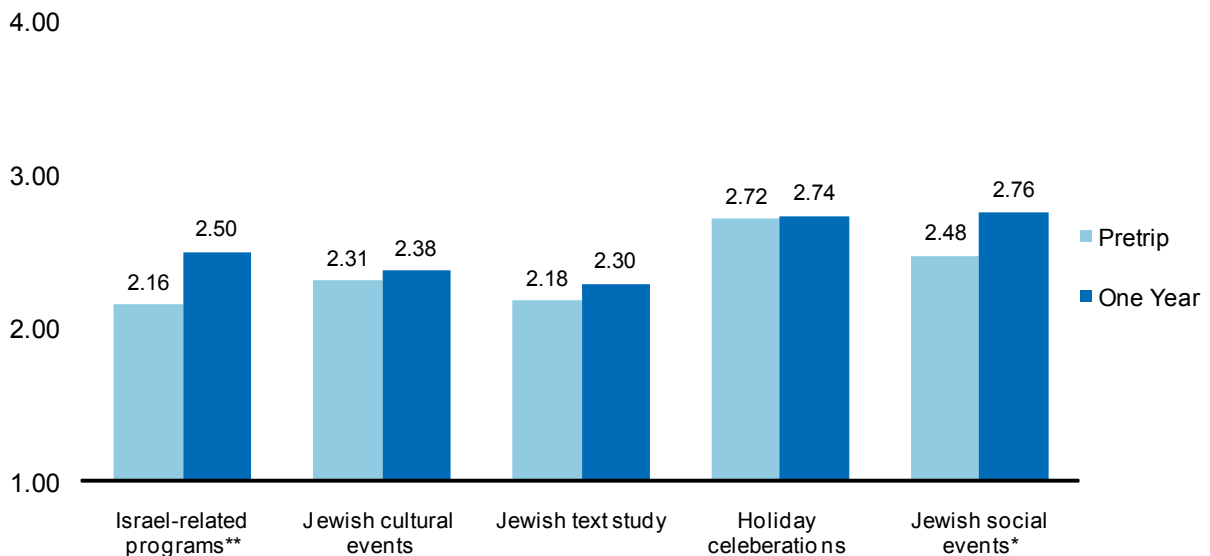


Figure 11: Involvement in Jewish activities¹¹



* significant at p<.05 level
 **significant at p<.01 level

between religiously observant and non-observant Jewish students on college campuses. Although there were no significant changes from pretrip to one year on participants' abstract sense of Jewish peoplehood, one of the most impressive outcomes of BNG was how it influenced the social networks of alumni. The vast majority of alumni maintained social contact with fellow trip participants (83%) and developed friendships that transcend denominational lines (91%).

We also learned a lot about each other. Over Shabbat, it was 24 hours together with just each other, and we had conversations. That was really inspiring to hear about everyone else's story, someone who came a long way from where they used to be or just maintaining what they grew up with, and then hearing people's reasons for doing what they do. (Focus group)

My friend circle expanded so much. People that I wasn't close with that are now my best friends. It's amazing. (Focus group)

Participation in BNG also increased the salience of Jewish identity as it relates to future career trajectories. More than one-tenth (12%) of survey respondents indicated that their interest in a career in the Jewish community increased substantially. Among those alumni who were seniors or post college

in the year since their trip, almost half (48%) sought jobs in the Jewish community, 24% applied for or participated in a long-term Jewish service program, and 12% applied to or attended graduate programs with a focus on pursuing a career in the Jewish community.

The trip made me feel much more connected to my Jewish heritage. I leave this week to volunteer in Israel for five months and am looking at jobs in the Jewish community for when I return. (Survey)

Pouring concrete floors in Thailand, repairing homes in West Virginia, painting bomb shelters in Israel, and digging drainage ditches in Central America are not usually thought of as avenues for building Jewish engagement. However, as the data from the one-year follow-up study indicate, these were highly effective methods for the participants on BNG trips. In the year since their return, alumni have explored new and different ways to express their Jewish identities and have expanded their social networks to include friends from Jewish backgrounds very different from their own. These increases in Jewish engagement and connection are particularly impressive in light of the fact that most BNG participants were already substantially involved in Jewish campus life before their service trip.

Summary and Recommendations

It has been suggested that for contemporary young adults, identity is multi-faceted and distributed like a set of windows on a computer (Turkle, 1995). This finely partitioned sense of self-definition means that Jewish identity is but one of a myriad of identity elements that do not necessarily interconnect or even influence each other. The BNG Jewish service learning initiative was intended to bring the “windows” of Jewish identity and service identity into closer contact so that both would become more salient, and service would be seen as an integral and even essential expression of Jewish values. The results of the one-year follow-up research indicate that the BNG initiative made substantial progress in this direction.

Some of BNG’s long-term outcomes represent dramatic shifts in the life trajectories of young adults. For example, BNG significantly increased the volunteer involvement of participants who did not have a pre-college history of regular service work. Additionally, the majority of alumni were motivated by their BNG experience to explore new avenues for expression of their Jewish identity and to expand their social circles to include new friendships with peers from very different Jewish backgrounds. A substantial number of alumni have also recast their future plans to include education or careers related to furthering social justice or the Jewish communal good. In these areas, the BNG initiative, as its name suggests, truly succeeded in “breaking new ground.”

Other findings suggest that the impact of BNG was greatest for participants who came into the program with backgrounds that better prepared them to take full advantage of their trip experience. For example, BNG had its greatest impact on instilling a Jewish perspective on service among participants who attended Jewish day school and therefore had a more substantial Jewish educational background. These participants came with a set of text study skills and a foundation of Jewish knowledge that allowed them to fully engage in Jewish learning on the trip and expand their already existing Jewish sphere of obligation to include non-Jews. In other words, the program had a dramatic effect on these participants, but one that is best characterized as “sowing in prepared fields.”

If the field of Jewish service learning is to achieve its goal of making service an integral element of Jewish identity for all segments of the young adult population, it will need to build on the areas of strength in Jewish and service identity that participants bring to the experience as well as motivate participants toward new directions of Jewish and service involvement. For example, for those participants who enter a Jewish service learning program with ample histories of service and social justice activity, but without equally strong Jewish backgrounds, service learning should reinforce the importance they already attach to working for the common good while at the same time build a Jewish framework to motivate, support, and understand that work.

Areas for Development

Make Jewish learning a better fit for the full spectrum of participants

Although many BNG participants in the first year of the initiative came from backgrounds of strong Jewish engagement, there was also representation from the full spectrum of Jewish identity and experience. However, the “one size fits all” approach to Jewish learning sessions that most trips employed was often not a good match for all participants. Attempts to connect service work with Jewish tradition may not be optimally successful if the curriculum is either too simplistic or assumes too high an entry level of knowledge. At the same time, the data suggest that participants learn much from each other, especially when they can share the diversity of their backgrounds. Rather than segregating participants into Jewish learning “tracks,” trip providers should develop curricula with multiple options or jigsaw lessons so that some aspects of Jewish learning are done in groupings that respond to different needs and backgrounds while others provide the opportunity for all participants to learn together on an equal footing.

Expand follow-up programming and resources for alumni

The results of this research also indicate that the availability and success of follow-up programming influence the long-term impact of BNG. Although alumni from the first year of BNG often received follow-up communication from their trip provider or

organizer (for example, the campus Hillel), it was often of a generic nature and did not address their desire to be updated about the specific projects on which they worked or the communities in which they served. Alumni attempts to continue their commitment to helping these communities were limited by the lack of ongoing guidance and support from trip providers or campus organizations.

On the importance of post-immersion programming, one writer has warned, “without follow-up, the very success of immersion programs can be their downfall: Jewish experiences can come to be seen as otherworldly vacations that have no bearing on or relevance to everyday life” (Valley, 2008, p. 2). There are many avenues to leveraging the transformative experiences that young adults have on short-term Jewish service trips. For example, the initial steps of follow-up projects can be integrated into the trip itself, allowing participants to see how their work in the field will relate to their work when they return to their home communities and campuses. Follow-up programming/curricula might include advocacy, service, and fundraising activities related to the mission or work of the trip providers, communities travelled to on BNG, home communities, or campuses. Jewish service learning programs should also create formal alumni networks where participants can share their ideas and service experiences and can continue to explore a Jewish perspective on service. Geographically or topic-based leadership circles of young people committed to service might also be developed.

BNG has contributed to furthering the connections that participants make between social justice work and their Jewish identity. The lessons learned from BNG add to the knowledge base of the emerging field of Jewish service learning and brings its central goal—building a cadre of Jewish young adults committed to repairing the world—closer to reality.

Notes

¹Although inferential statistics are inappropriate for data when the survey frame includes all units of the population, we report statistical tests as an approximate guide to the ratio of the effect size of the program to variance for a given variable. In addition, although the current research involves the population of BNG trips, this represents a sample of service trips offered during the same time period and by the same providers.

²Paired T-test comparing pretrip and one-year responses were run for participants with day school background, (n=33, t=3.764, p≤.001) and no day school background, (n=35, t=1.07, p≥.1). Results were significant for those with day school background but not for those without day school background.

³Non-Jewish participants (n=4) were not included in the analysis of the relationship between Judaism and service or of Jewish identity, engagement, or background.

⁴Paired T-test comparing pretrip and one-year responses were run for those with day school background (n=33, t=.584, p≥.1) and non-day school participants (n=36, t=.723, p≥.1). In both cases, the results were not statistically significant.

⁵Two sample t-tests were run for both questions comparing those with day school background and those without day school background. Those with day school background scored significantly higher than non-day school participants on Jewish motivations to serve, (n=70, t=3.367, p≤.001) and on service informed by Judaism (n=69, t=3.214, p≤.01)

⁶Paired T-test comparing pretrip and one-year volunteer scores were run for those who volunteered regularly before college (n=27, t=.886, p≥.1) and those who did not volunteer regularly before college, (n=46, t=2.247, p≤.05) and overall (n=74, t=2.364 p≤.05). Increases in volunteer scores were significant overall and for those who did not volunteer regularly before college.

⁷Only those participants in their senior year of college or are post-college were included in these analyses. Forty-nine percent of respondents (n=41) are in this category.

⁸a. Paired t-tests were run of pretrip and one year volunteer scores for people who attended a trip follow-up meeting and those who did not. Those who attended a follow-up meeting significantly increased their volunteer scores (n=41, t=2.766, p≤.01), while those who did not attend a follow-up meeting did not significantly increase their scores (n=29, t=.000, p≥.1).

b. A set of paired t-tests were run of pretrip and one year volunteer scores for people who participated in a posttrip activity and those who did not. A respondent is considered to have participated in a posttrip activity if they reported that they participated in one of the following items since their trip; worked on a follow-up activity related to their trip; donated money to a cause related to their trip; or created a presentation, article, or report about their trip. Those who participated in a posttrip activity significantly increased their volunteer scores (n=35, t=3.240, p≤.01), while those who did not participate in a posttrip activity had no significant change (n=38, t=.676, p≥.1)

⁹In order to most accurately describe the typical BNG participant, responses from Yeshiva University participants were not included in analyses of impact on non-service related Jewish identity or engagement.

¹⁰The tests were run excluding those students who graduated in 2008 on the premise that undergraduates might have more access to Jewish activities than people out of school. Seventy percent (n=83) of Year 1 participants were undergraduates during the '08-'09 school year.

¹¹ a. Paired t-tests were run for all measures of involvement in Jewish activities. Involvement in Jewish activities ranged from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Leader). This analysis excluded non-undergraduates, non-Jewish respondents, and students from Yeshiva University.

b. Student involvement in Israel-related programs increased significantly (n=44, t=2.626, p≤.01).

c. Student involvement in Jewish cultural events did not increase significantly (n=45, t=.425, p≥.1).

d. Student involvement for Jewish text study did not increase significantly (n=44, t=.725, p≥.1).

e. Student involvement in holiday celebrations did not increase significantly (n=46, t=.178, p≥.1)

f. Student involvement in Jewish social events increased significantly (n=46, t=2.297, p≤.05).

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Appendix A: *Break New Ground* Alumni Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Welcome to the *Break New Ground* alumni focus group. My name is [name] and I am a researcher at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. We are the same research team that sent you pre- and posttrip surveys last year. We are interested in learning about the experiences of *Break New Ground* alumni in the year since their trip.

[Distribute Briefing Sheet]

As you know, participation in this study is completely voluntary. We hope that you will participate fully and honestly but you are also free to pass on any questions that you choose not to answer. Whatever you share with us in this focus group will be treated confidentially.

We will record this discussion so that we have a complete record of what you say, but no one outside of the Cohen Center research team will have access to that recording. Information from this study will only be reported in ways that do not identify individuals.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Let's begin by finding out more about who you and your *Break New Ground* trip.

1. Tell me about you. Please share your name, the destination and organizer of your trip, and the college or group you traveled with.
2. What memories of your trip (positive or negative) still stand out for you?
3. Thinking about yourself before your trip and now, can you attribute any changes or decisions to this trip?
4. Are there any ways in which the trip strengthened your sense of civic responsibility or commitment to working for social change?
Are there actions you have taken or decisions you have made since your trip that are related to that impact?
5. Are there any ways in which the trip influenced your Jewish identity or involvement in Jewish life?

6. How, if at all, has the trip influenced your understanding of the connection between Judaism and service work/social justice?

Are there any actions/decisions related to that connection?

7. Looking back, what could have been done differently so that the experience of the trip would stay with you longer or in more ways?

8. Is there anything I didn't ask but that I should know to understand how the experience or your trip has played out in the year since your return?

Appendix B: Alumni Survey

Welcome to the *Break New Ground* alumni survey!

It has been a year or more since your alternative break trip with [Name of trip provider]. As a follow-up to our research last year, we're contacting you again to learn about your life since the trip.

This survey takes about 10 minutes to complete. While you are free to skip any questions you do not want to answer, we hope that you will answer honestly and completely.

All of your responses will remain strictly confidential. Only the research team will see your answers. No one from your university or the organization providing your alternative break will see your responses. Findings of this research will be reported only in ways that do not identify individuals.

To thank you for your participation we will send you a \$10 Amazon.com gift card when you complete the survey.

If you have any questions or difficulties, please contact Josh Tobias at jtobias@brandeis.edu or 781-736-3946.

Thank you very much for your participation!
Fern Chertok and Nicole Samuel
Research Team

A Bit About You

1. Are you currently...

- A freshman (1st year)
- A sophomore (2nd year)
- A junior (3rd year)
- A senior (4th + year)
- In a master's degree program (e.g. MA, MBA, MSW, MS)
- In a doctoral degree program (e.g. PhD, EdD)
- In a professional degree program (e.g. MD, JD)
- Not a student
- Other

2. Are you currently...

- Working full-time
- Working part-time
- Not working but looking for work
- None of the above

Service and Volunteer Efforts

3. Since your trip, how often have you engaged in any of the following volunteer or social action efforts?

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| a. Serve as a mentor, tutor, coach, counselor or some other activity that benefited youth or schools? | <input type="radio"/> Not at all |
| | <input type="radio"/> A few times |
| | <input type="radio"/> Regularly |
| b. Help people through human service organizations such as hospitals, nursing homes, crisis centers, shelters, or food banks? | |
| c. Volunteer for a performing or arts organization such as a museum or theater? | |
| d. Engage in activities to protect the environment, wildlife or animals? | |
| e. Volunteer to help raise money for a charitable cause? | |
| f. Volunteer for a synagogue, Hillel, Federation or other Jewish organization? | |

4. Thinking about all your volunteer or service work since your trip, what portion was sponsored or organized by Jewish organizations?

- None
- Very little
- About half
- Most
- Almost all or all
- Did no volunteer or service work since the trip

5. Thinking about any volunteer or service work since your trip (whether or not it was under Jewish sponsorship), to what extent ...

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. Were you motivated by Jewish values? | <input type="radio"/> Not at all |
| b. Was it informed or influenced by your understanding of Judaism? | <input type="radio"/> A little |
| | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat |
| | <input type="radio"/> Very much |
| | <input type="radio"/> Great extent |
| | <input type="radio"/> Not applicable—have not done volunteer or service work since trip |

Experiences Since Your Trip

6. Since your trip have you...

- a. Encouraged others to become involved in service or social justice
- b. Posted or blogged about social issues on-line
- c. Sought out more information about social issues
- d. Taken a course(s) related to social issues or public policy
- e. Changed your academic major or minor to one related to social issues or public policy

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

7. Since your trip how, if at all, has your interest in each of the following changed?

- a. Studying for a degree related to social issues or public policy
- b. Pursuing a career related to social issues or public policy
- c. Participating in a long-term Jewish service program (e.g., AJWS, AVODAH, Otzma)
- d. Participating in any other long term service program (e.g., Peace Corps, Teach for America)
- e. Pursuing a career in the Jewish community

- Decreased a lot
- Decreased a little
- Stayed the same
- Increased a little
- Increased a lot

8. Since your trip have you...

- a. Joined a club or group working on social issues
- b. Taken on a leadership role in volunteer or service work
- c. Participated in another alternative break trip
- d. Applied to or participated in a long term Jewish service program
- e. Applied to or participated in any other long-term service program
- f. Applied to or attended a graduate education program related to social issues or public policy
- g. Applied for or worked at a job related to social issues or public policy
- h. Participated in training related to community organizing or advocacy

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

9. Since your trip have you...

- a. Sought out information on Jewish topics Yes
- b. Tried out ways of being Jewish that are new or different for you No
- c. Developed new friendships with peers from Jewish backgrounds different than your own Not applicable
- d. Taken course(s) related to Jewish subjects
- e. Applied for or worked at a job in the Jewish community
- f. Applied to or attended a graduate program that will prepare you for Jewish communal work

10. Please describe any other ways (either positive or negative) that your alternative break experience had an impact on you.**Your Trip Group****11. Since your trip have you...**

- a. Attended a follow-up meeting for your trip Yes
- b. Attended a social get-together with peers from the trip No
- c. Worked on a follow-up project related to your trip
- d. Donated money to a cause related to your trip
- e. Created a presentation, report, or article related to your trip
- f. Used your experience to educate others about social issues related to the trip

12. Since your trip has your trip organizer or trip provider...

- a. Been in contact with you Yes
- b. Informed you of other volunteer or advocacy opportunities No
- c. Sent you information on social issues related to your trip
- d. Sent you follow-up information on the projects on which you worked

13. How do you feel about the availability of follow-up opportunities related to your trip?

- Would have liked less
- Just about right
- Would have liked more

The 2008 Presidential Election

14. To what extent did your alternative break experience influence your thoughts about candidates or issues?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Very much
- Great extent

Your Thoughts and Ideas

15. To what extent do you believe ...

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| a. You have the power to make a difference in the community. | <input type="radio"/> Completely |
| b. You can successfully encourage others to participate in the community. | <input type="radio"/> Very much |
| c. You have enough influence to impact community decisions. | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat |
| d. You have the skills to organize other students to take action on a problem in the community. | <input type="radio"/> Very little |
| e. You can develop ideas about how to take action on a problem in the community. | <input type="radio"/> Not at all |
| f. You have the skills to persuade other people that a problem in the community needs to be solved. | |

16. How important is it to you to . . .

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. Be aware of important needs in the community | <input type="radio"/> Extremely Important |
| b. Help improve the community | <input type="radio"/> Very Important |
| c. Focus on root causes of social problems | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Important |
| d. Influence social values | <input type="radio"/> Slightly Important |
| e. Participate in community action programs | <input type="radio"/> Not at all Important |
| f. Volunteer your time helping people | |

Your Jewish Life**17. For each statement, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree.**

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people | <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree |
| b. I express my Judaism by helping those in need | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree |
| c. For me, being Jewish involves actively pursuing ideals of social justice | <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree |
| d. I am comfortable with peers from more observant Jewish backgrounds | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree |
| e. I am comfortable with peers from less observant Jewish backgrounds | <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree |

18. Since your trip how involved have you been in....?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| a. Israel-related programs or events | <input type="radio"/> Not at all |
| b. Jewish cultural events or exhibits | <input type="radio"/> A little |
| c. Jewish learning/text study | <input type="radio"/> A lot |
| d. Holiday celebrations organized by Hillel, or another Jewish group | <input type="radio"/> Program leader |
| e. Jewish social events | |
| f. Jewish worship | |

The Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University is a multi-disciplinary research institute dedicated to the study of American Jewry and the development of religious and cultural identity.

Brandeis University



Maurice *and* Marilyn Cohen
Center *for* Modern Jewish Studies