

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

In the following articles, two differing perspectives on the Next Generation are articulated. Both “mainstream” and “innovative” voices advance cogent arguments for their vision of what it will take to engage young Jews in meaningful ways. Michelle Provorny Cash and Brian Gaines report their view of the field from their vantage point at Joshua Venture. They argue for a broadening of the tent, for taking risks on visionary initiatives, for transformation and change. Brian Schupper writes as an insider at the core of the traditional Jewish Federation community. He focuses on the potential of the institutional community to support long-term affiliation with the Jewish community. Pulling young people into the core, creatively adapting the tried-and-true, and involvement and participation. These two articles reflect and challenge one another in a fascinating dialogue.

Joshua Venture and the Next Generation

MICHELLE PROVORNY CASH AND BRIAN GAINES

We have heard it all before: Young people are not engaging in Jewish life; we need to put the next generation on our agendas. Initiatives targeted towards young adults exist throughout the community, and the younger generation is participating in them. But why aren't the numbers greater? Why do we see so many of the same faces at all of our events? What formula must we devise in order to reach those who are outside our purview?

While these are excellent questions, perhaps there are others that we are not asking. For example: Why do many young Jews turn away from their identities after their *bnei mitzvot*? Why do they opt out of Jewish culture? Where are they, if not at youth groups, Jewish Community Centers, and synagogues? What if many of these young Jews are just outside our doorsteps and they are shouting a message we do not hear, or simply do not understand?

Over the past three years, Joshua Venture, a fellowship program established to support emerging Jewish social entrepreneurs, has been listening to and for these voices.

So, what's on their minds?

What we've been hearing is call for change: Change in the way traditional organizations do business, change in the way young Jews are perceived, and change in the definition of what it means to be a Jew. Although young Jews' cultural upbringing and circumstances are different than those of their parents and grandparents, the tenor of their messages is much the same. If we look back through his-

tory and literature, we see generation upon generation looking forward while mining the past, choosing what to carry ahead and what to transform to fit the world they see around them.

What the next generation sees is an increasingly multicultural society, one in which mixed marriages, diverse identities, and increasing globalization are common. And like the Theodore Herzls, Sigmund Freuds, and Emma Goldmans before them, today's young Jews want to make a difference.

However, many of them do not see themselves in the traditional organized Jewish community. They view these organizations as structures created by and for previous generations. This notion is further amplified by an increasing frustration felt by younger Jews who perceive that they do not have a voice in critical decision-making nor access to vital resources and networks.

While outwardly they do not appear to be participating in Jewish life, many are, in fact, channeling their energies towards redefining a Jewishness that incorporates their experiences. Joshua Venture acts as a conduit for these ideas, in order to assure that new initiatives make their way to the Jewish community at large.

Joshua Venture's inaugural cohort, a group of eight young leaders who graduated from the two-year fellowship program in February 2003, are demonstrating the power of their ideas and transforming their visions into action.

These entrepreneurs are reaching high school students; individuals with special needs; men and women seeking new venues for biblical text study; urban Jews with little Jewish affiliation; Jewish and non-Jewish artists and audiences interested in exploring cultural similarities and differences; Latin American Jews interested in deepening their religious involvement, and non-Jewish Latinos who wish to return to Judaism after over 500 years of living as Christians.

Throughout 2002, we were engaged in recruiting a second cohort of Joshua Venture fellows who began the program in March 2003. Our call for Jewish social innovators generated hundreds of responses from affiliated and unaffiliated Jews around the globe. Many proposals conveyed passionate and thoughtful ideas about how to promote a Jewish community that responds to current societal needs. Young adults are thinking about ways to reach out to at-risk Orthodox youth; foster inclusion of Jews of color and various sexual orientations; re-envision practices such as ritual immersion; create alternate and egalitarian synagogue structures; engage in community development projects that promote dialogue between Jews and other minority groups; encourage meaningful discussion about Israel from across the political spectrum; respond to social, environmental, and economic injustice; and assist small Jewish communities in sharing resources and ideas.

At Joshua Venture we measure success by the wealth of ideas being implemented and in their ability to expand and take hold in Jewish communities across the United States. Throughout our recruitment process, we heard young adults say that Joshua Venture's inaugural fellows inspired them to take initiative and create change in their own neighborhoods. The growth of these ideas and the potential for individuals from across the Jewish spectrum to come together and spark discussions and innovative partnerships is one of the Jewish community's most significant assets. This work also has the capacity to inspire teenagers and youth to explore their Jewish identities, and to contribute to the Jewish community's continued vibrancy and stability.

How can the community respond?

What these young adults have in common is their passion for the Jewish community and for seeing it grow and prosper in the 21st century. Many of them speak about the prin-

ciple of *tikkun olam* and about embodying this ideal by responding to the needs of their day. While some of these ideas have made their way to the organized Jewish community, many remain beneath the communal radar screen.

These young adults have visions that, with mentorship, support, and encouragement, have the capacity to transform the Jewish landscape. Our research has identified access to capital, technical assistance, mentorship, and proper networking opportunities as the elements most necessary to ensure their success.

The young Jews launching these ventures travel a difficult road. Their programs are often perceived as too risky and untested, and given their youth, they themselves lack credibility, experience, and thus funding opportunities. The work they do is frequently marginalized, and they feel isolated in their struggle to birth new ideas. Many of them operate outside of established Jewish life, and are unsure how to access the resources established organizations have to offer. Some approach the mainstream community, find it unequipped to hear their ideas, and reject all traditional Jewish structures. Others do not even try.

It is essential that these young visionaries – and all Jewish young adults – develop their leadership skills in order to assume increased responsibility in the Jewish community. Traditional organizations can provide immeasurable support in this area by listening to these new voices and expressing their willingness to cultivate young leadership.

If we continue to narrow our lenses and view the next generation as a group of singles or young professionals and center only on their desire to socialize, marry, or travel, we reap benefit from only a fraction of their ideas and abilities. It is important to recognize that many young adults have limited means. Many simply cannot afford to join synagogues or spend money on singles events. If they do get in the door, the types of programming they encounter may not speak to their diverse interests.

Jews in their teens, twenties, and thirties want to be engaged. They want to have a seat at the table and a voice in policymaking. They want the Jewish community to explore what is meaningful to them through connections to the lives they lead in the world. Despite and because of their age, young people often have as much to teach as they have to learn. If we do not make them full partners, we risk losing them for good.

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national program that provides support to emerging Jewish social entrepreneurs between the ages of 21 to 35. For more information, please visit www.joshuaventure.org.

Engaging the Next Generation: Challenges & Promise

BRIAN SCHUPPER

Despite a host of challenges unique to engaging young adults, the last decade has witnessed some highly successful initiatives by the mainstream Jewish community and others outside the core. Though the efforts of the latter may at times appear bolder than traditional outreach efforts, established communal institutions are often better equipped to ensure long term commitment. These institutions are uniquely situated to engage the next generation and integrate them into the community by channeling existing resources, obtaining additional targeted funding, and partnering with a wide variety of organizations. A brief look at some of the challenges and one community's response sheds light on the power of the institutional Jewish community to successfully reach out to and develop the next generation.

Generational Challenges

Generational challenges are those particular to engaging young adults. One of the first such challenges is the diversity of the target audience. *Next Generation* has described groups ranging from students in day schools to people in their 40s, although it is generally understood to include only adults in their 20s through their late 30s. Thus, the next generation includes a diverse group, ranging from people with their first jobs, apartments, and cars through married couples with children and who own a home. Any engagement effort toward this generation should either have a very broad appeal or else consciously target a subset of the larger group.

Other generational challenges include the limited resources available to the target population. Even if young adults have a strong desire to get involved in institutional life, many have limited time and money as they are beginning their careers and families. They might not know how to get on a non-profit board, or how to make their voices heard by decision-makers; they may be unaware of the significance of fund-raising campaigns or the expectation of being involved in these campaigns.

Conversations young leaders have had with unaffiliated peers indicate that some young adults hesitate to participate in traditional institutional life. Some seem to be suspicious of the established community's willingness to include their generation. Additionally, while they respect the notion of fundraising to save and enrich Jewish lives, and the efforts to strengthen the Jewish community, they are not sure how it directly benefits them. Despite this, many have a strong desire to volunteer or be active in their community, whether it is their broad, civic community or their local Jewish community. The challenge is to channel their desire to be active into involvement in the organized Jewish community.

Institutional Challenges

Institutional challenges emanate from the existing community structure and include issues of resource allocation and access to the communal decision-making process. Be it staff time, funds for programming, subsidies, or leadership development, sufficient resources are generally not allocated specifically for engaging young adults.

Many community members assume that once Jews marry and have children they will rejoin institutional life. In a world of limited resources, some think it is better to wait for this inevitable return to the community rather than divert resources from other vital areas. Unfortunately, if they conclude that there is no place for them in the Jewish community, young adults may turn elsewhere for structure during their formative years after college.

Furthermore, board members of any given institution tend to be older and have a different set of Jewish priorities, whether it is healthcare for aging parents or educating their children. The concerns of young adults may not even be on their radar screens, a fact compounded by the general lack of representation by young adults among decision-makers.