



**Make your mark
on the Jewish story**

Gap Year Impact on our Jewish Journeys

REPORT

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1.0 Executive Summary

Three previous research projects undertaken by the Research and Evaluation Department of UJIA between 2012 and 2014 have been re-analysed to extract anything relevant to identify the Jewish journey taken by key individuals within the Jewish community.

Gap year research data indicates that almost 40% of respondents who have been on a Gap year or Yeshiva/Seminary in Israel identify themselves as Modern Orthodox and almost 60% had also attended a Jewish school.

49% respondents stated they chose their Gap year organisation because they had previously been on Israel Tour with them and 65% regularly participated in their activities.

From those Gap year graduates amongst the Youth Commission respondents, more than 65% said they were currently involved with a Youth organisation. This is reinforced by nearly 60% of respondents to the Israel Experience survey who had also been on a Gap year stating they had attended a JSoc and a similar percentage were still part of their youth movement. 30% stated they had been fundraising for Israel or had donated to UJIA.

Most of the Gap year respondents felt that going on their Gap year had a positive influence on the likelihood to engage with the Jewish community in the future.

The respondents to the Israel Experience Survey (2012) who had also been on a Gap year, mostly thought their Gap year had been extremely important in shaping their Jewish life, even more so than their family or youth movement.

The Gap year research suggested that almost 70% of respondents, who had previously been on a Gap year, felt that the whole experience had positively affected their likelihood to make Aliyah.

16 individual stories from these previous research studies have been used to highlight some of the Jewish journeys completed by some of our leaders since their time on Gap year.

2.0 Introduction/Method

This report gathers together all existing information held by UJIA about Gap year participants in an attempt to work out what we already know about the Jewish journey of key individuals within our community.

Previous research reports completed over last three years were reviewed. The original interview notes and survey responses were re-analysed for anything new or relevant to add to existing information.

The three key research reports were:

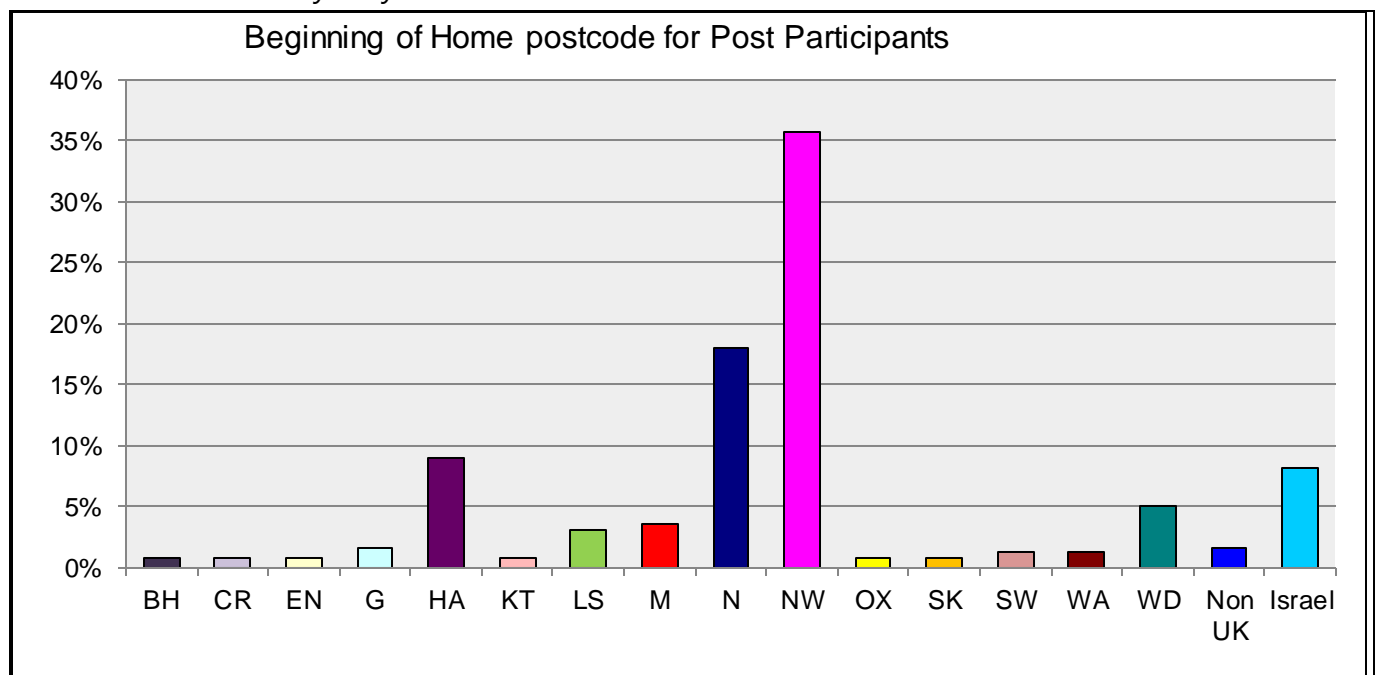
- What is the outcome of Israel Experience on a young person's Jewish identity and relationship to Israel? Completed in November 2012. (The information used comes from the 150 respondents who stated they had since been on a Gap year in Israel)
- Informal Provision for Young People in the UK Jewish Community, completed in January 2014. (The information used comes from the 76 people who completed the Participant survey who were identified as having been on a Gap year)

- Sustaining Israel Engagement: Gap year – a Case for Change, completed in May 2014. (Most of the information used has been extracted from the POST research survey i.e. responses from those people who had previously been on a Gap year at any point over the last 35 years)

No new primary research was undertaken, apart from attempting to trace gap year participants through social media eg LinkedIn.

3.0 Profiling Information

The following extracts are from the Gap year Research POST survey where we heard from 265 respondents, 99% of whom had taken a Gap year (96% in Israel). There were more male respondents than female (59%/41%). Respondents were representative geographically of the UK Jewish community as you can see in the next chart.



NB 8% stated they now live in Israel.

Postcode locations:

- BH Bournemouth
- CR Croydon
- EN Enfield/Barnet/Cockfosters
- G Glasgow

- HA Edgware/Harrow
- KT Kingston upon Thames
- LS Leeds
- M Manchester
- N North London (Finchley, Stamford Hill)

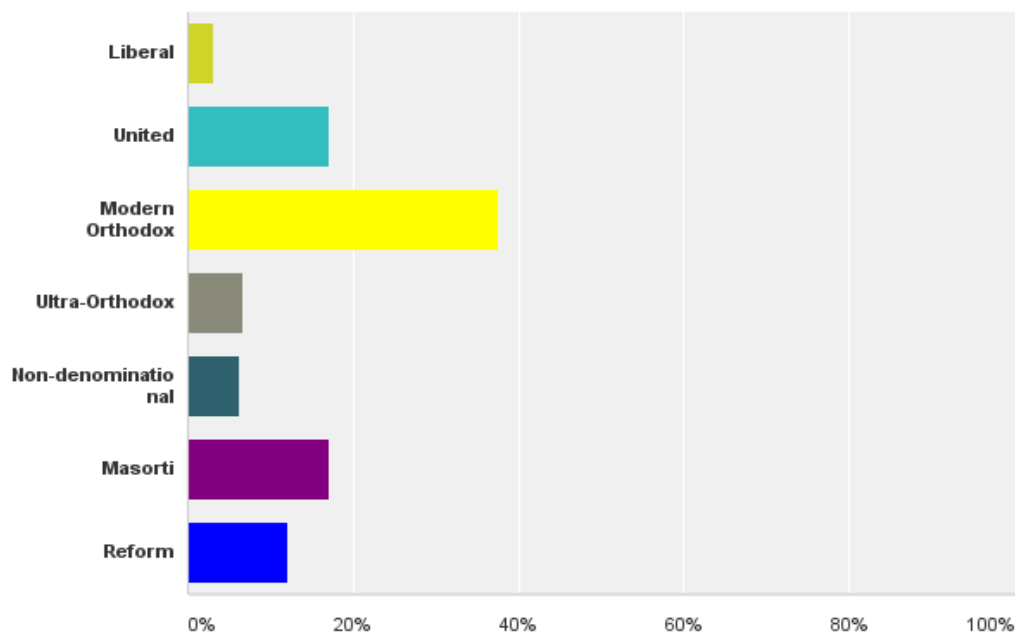
NW North West London (Hendon, Mill Hill, Hampstead)
 OX Oxford
 SK South Manchester
 SW South West London (Kensington, Wimbledon, Chelsea)

WA Warrington
 WD Hertsmere/South Hertfordshire (Watford, Bushey, Borehamwood, Radlett)

We can also see that almost 40% identified as being Modern Orthodox.

Q5 Please tell us your religious denomination:

Answered: 223 Skipped: 42



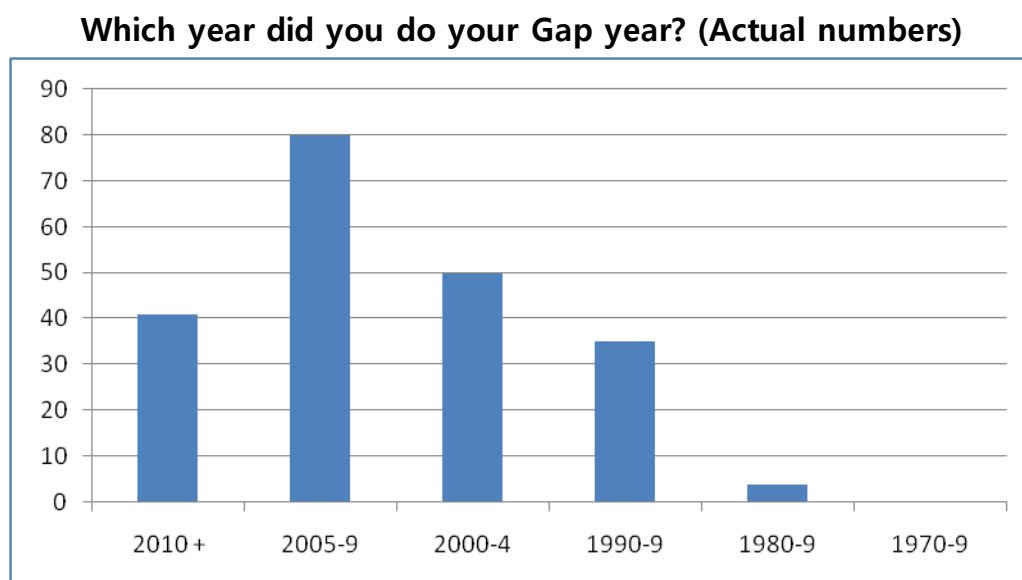
A number of respondents indicated that they were now more or less religious than their parents for a variety of reasons i.e. not just as a result of going on a Gap year.

“An interesting ‘side-effect’ of my Gap year was my discovery that, for me, Liberal Judaism did not actually have the answers I wanted and that I was much more comfortable with the ideology of the Masorti movement.” POST online respondent

This is a highly engaged group of individuals as more than 80% socialise primarily with other Jews. 50% attend Jewish educational events for their age

group, 16% are Youth Movement Madrichim, 15% attend JSoc at University, and 53% attend synagogue regularly. Additionally 30% volunteer for a charity and 33% financially contribute to the Jewish community. This is not a typical group! The Jewish community in the UK is generally less engaged than those represented here. Of the 15 comments to this question, we learn that one started the Moishe House, another has a husband who is a rabbi and another is now a Jewish educator.

There was a good spread of input from across the decades as the following chart shows.



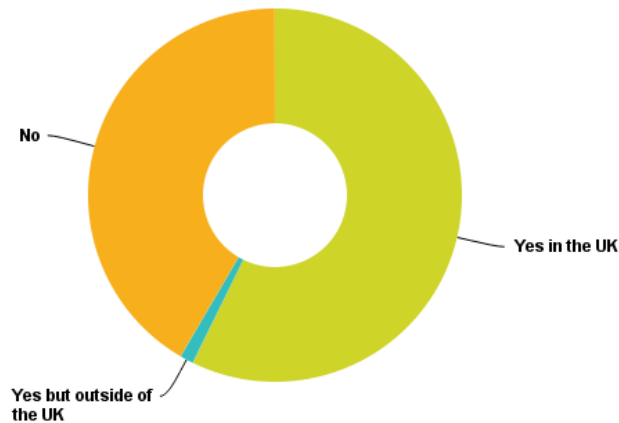
This distribution reflects actual data, as we know the numbers choosing to go on an Israel Gap year peaked in 2008 and have been declining ever since. This reflects the national trend of declining gap year numbers, which can be attributed to several factors, notably the large increase in University fees.

The results from the POST Gap year Survey also show that almost 60% of all those who had been on a Gap year had also been to a Jewish school. It is clear

from this data, that there is a greater chance of a teenager going on an Israel Gap year programme if they attended a Jewish secondary school.

Q4 Did you attend a Jewish school here in the UK?

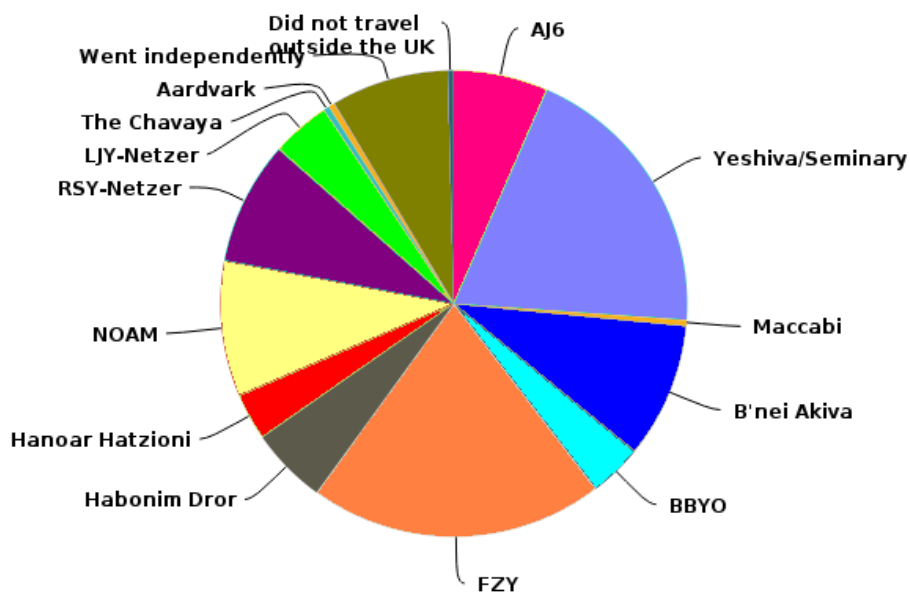
Answered: 255 Skipped: 12



Finally, the following pie chart shows that approximately 20% of the respondents went to a Yeshiva/Seminary for their Gap year; a similar number went with FZY.

Q11 Which organisation did you go on your gap year with ?

Answered: 245 Skipped: 20



49% stated they chose this organisation for their Gap year because they had previously been on Israel Tour with them and 65% regularly participated in their activities. We know from other data that engagement with the Youth movements is now very different from previous generations but their importance and role in recruiting future leaders for the community should not be underestimated.

"My Movement journey started at the age of 8 and has influenced all parts of my life ever since, including my Gap year in Israel" POST Gap year Interview

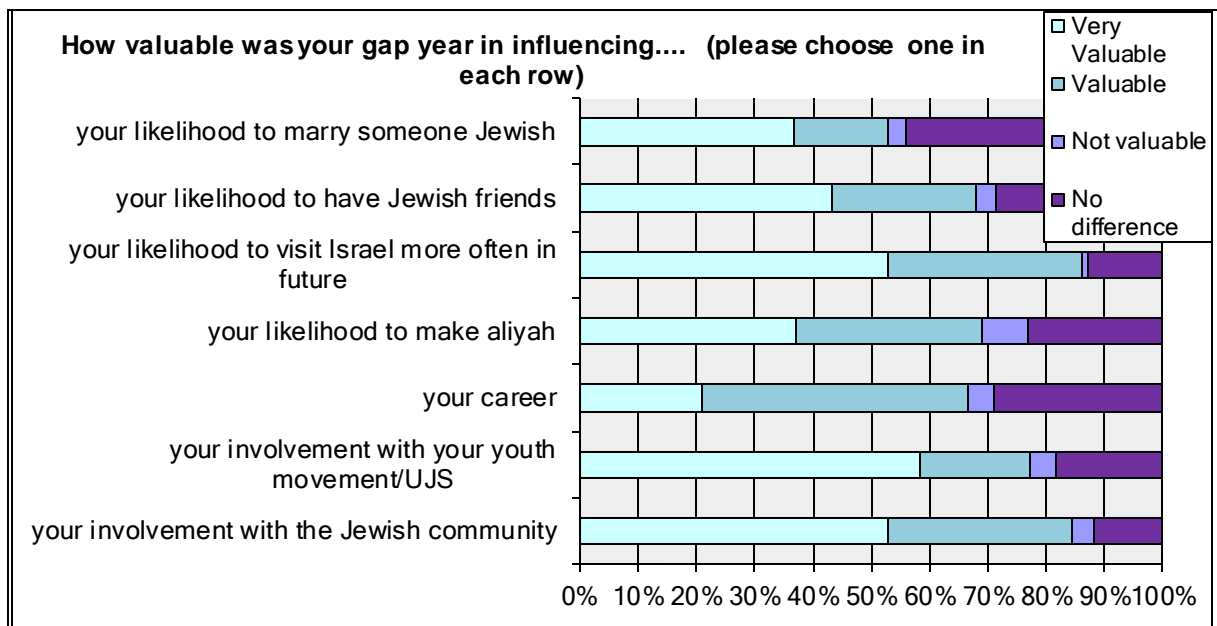
The benefits of doing a Gap year at a Yeshiva were highlighted by the following quotes:

"Gap year in yeshiva gave me a key to the knowledge base of Judaism and a deep emotional and intellectual love of the land and state of Israel. This has allowed me to develop personally and to contribute culturally and educationally to the wider community. The skills to access our Jewish texts have allowed me to continue to learn and to teach." POST Survey respondent

"The unrivalled opportunity to learn and enhance one's connection to the Torah, the Land of Israel and the Jewish Nation as a whole" POST Survey respondent

4.0 Influences of Gap Year on Jewish Life

From the bar chart below we can see that for most of the respondents going on their Gap year has had a more positive influence on the likelihood to engage with key interactions in the future across the Jewish Community.



The most positive attribute was 'increasing visits to Israel' which had the vast majority of respondents feeling their Gap year had been valuable or very valuable in impacting on this. It was closely followed by 'increasing involvement with the Jewish Community' with 84%. We asked respondents to tell us how their Gap year had influenced their Jewish lives:

"...Strengthened my Jewish identity, I now keep more halacha and Shabbat. I am now very involved in the Jewish community" POST online respondent

"...It made me determined to take an active role in the community. It also gave me the confidence and the tools to make informed choices about my Jewish life" POST online respondent

"...It strengthened my connection to Israel. I wasn't very religious and I found meaning in being Jewish through Israel. It also created a bond between myself and my youth movement" POST online respondent

It is interesting to note that just under half of the respondents felt that their Gap year made no difference to their likelihood to marry a Jewish person. This could be that most young people who go on a Gap year are already involved with the Jewish community and marrying someone Jewish was already in their plans.

A small minority of respondents felt less positive about their Gap year in Israel, and its effect on shaping Jewish life:

"It helped me understand why I didn't want to be more observant". POST online respondent

"Negatively, I feel excluded from Judaism, I am not Zionist and don't want to be".
POST online respondent

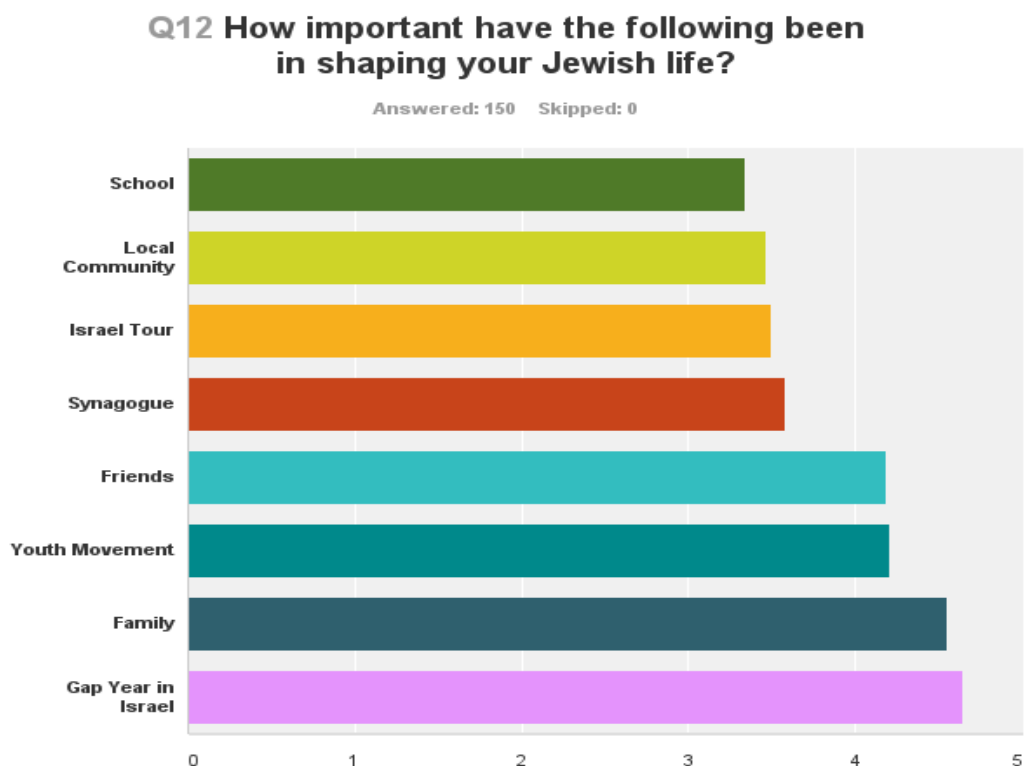
5.0 Impact of a Gap Year

Many of the people we heard from as part of the Gap year research shared similar views about the outcomes of their Gap year. It has influenced everything in their life since; it taught them life and social skills which were important for their time at university and now at work. It was the foundation for their ongoing learning; it taught them skills in interpreting/reading religious texts (if they went to a Yeshiva/Sem), and overall gave them a love for Israel and in many cases lifelong friends. The following quote highlights this nicely:

"My Gap year experience has completely defined who I am and where the direction of my life has gone. I would be an entirely different person today if I had not gone to Israel. I made so many close friends, who (in general) I have kept in much better contact with than school or uni friends and these continue to be the people I am closest with now. I had never been to Israel at all before... I have now led Israel Tour for my Youth movement, inspiring another generation of young people to learn about Israel and have visited many times since. Religiously my Gap year was also very important to me, it changed my connection to Judaism and I am certain that I would not have remained involved in Jewish life if I had not gone. I learned so much from the Machon programme from some exceptional teachers, and made friends so that when I arrived at JSoc/Uni, I already knew a large number of people and was much more inclined to stay involved. I also started attending Limmud after my Gap year... and that has been an amazing part of my life, in terms of the volunteering, networking and fuelling

my passion for Jewish learning which truly started in Israel."POST online respondent

The respondents to the Israel Experience Survey who had been on a Gap year mostly thought their Gap year had been extremely important in shaping their Jewish life, even more than their family or youth movement, as the chart below shows.



(Weighted average with 1 = not at all important and 5 = extremely important)

This data supports the research done by JPR in their study titled "Strengthening Jewish Identity: What works? An analysis of Jewish students in the UK" dated September 2014, which found that overall, the most important Jewish educational programmes were those involving an extended yeshiva/seminary experience or gap year in Israel.

6.0 Making Aliyah

The Gap year research suggested that almost 70% of respondents who had previously been on a Gap year, felt that the whole experience had positively affected their likelihood to make Aliyah. Of those 27% had spent their year at a Yeshiva or Seminary, 19% had been with FZY and 14% with B'nei Akiva, all the other organisations showed a much lower likelihood. This therefore suggests that as BA and Yeshiva/Sem are significantly more represented in the whole survey, that these types of Gap year programmes are more likely to instil young people with a vision that considers their future living in Israel.

"Ultimately it influenced my decision to make Aliyah both in terms of ideology and also practicality - the experience here made me realise that living in Israel was feasible and the amount of my friends from the movement who moved here gave me a support network." POST online respondent

"It helped embed my love of being in Israel" POST face to face interview with someone who has made Aliyah

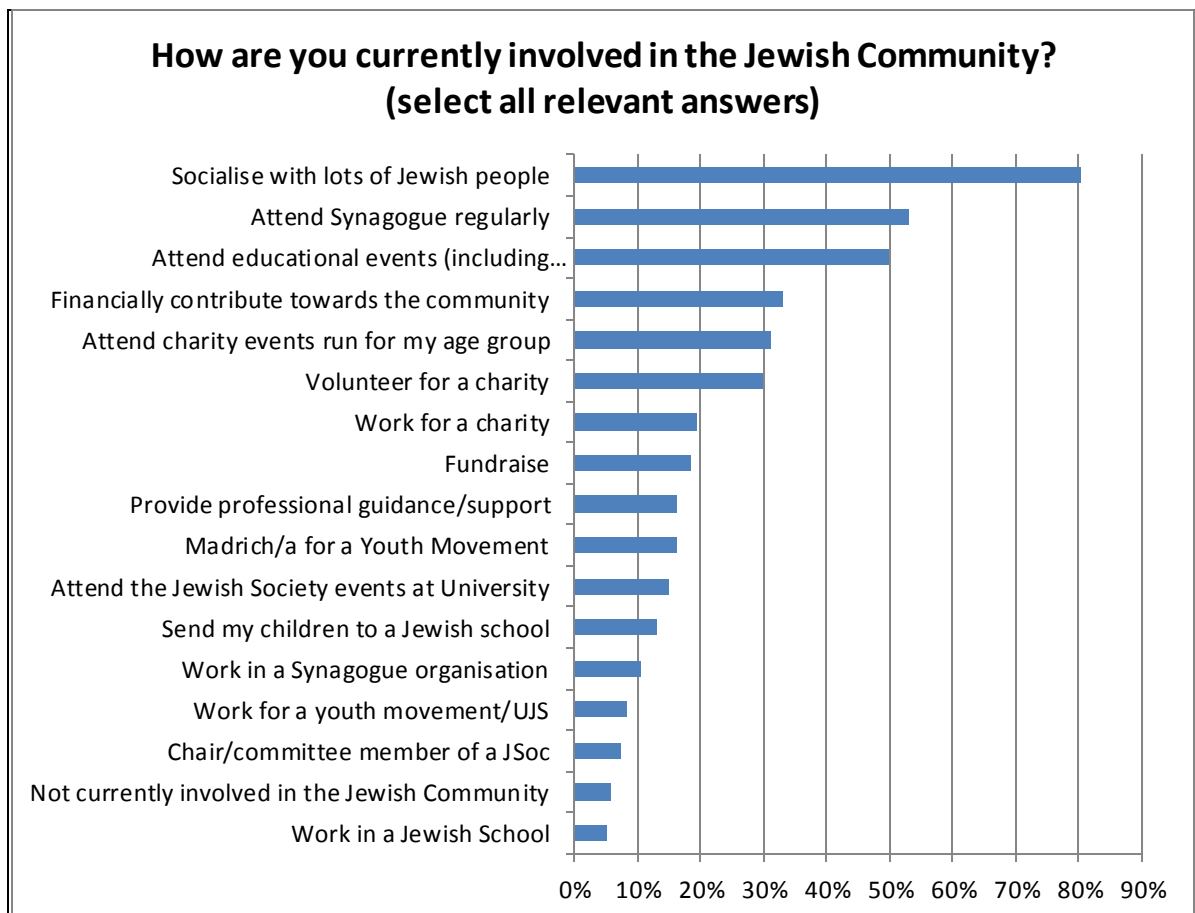
"At the beginning I thought I might have made Aliyah but I soon realised that my connection with Israel was through a Gap year lens and not reality it was 'not the real Israel'. I have not considered making Aliyah since". POST face to face interview.

These figures are much higher than we see actually making Aliyah, as clearly a number of other factors are taken into account before someone decides to go and live in Israel. However, it is clear from this research that going on a Gap year makes individuals more positively disposed towards spending their future lives in Israel.

7.0 Current involvement in the Jewish Community

The Gap year respondents identified how they were currently involved in the Jewish community, not surprisingly 80% stated they socialise with many Jewish

people, but we also found out their involvement across a whole range of other paid and voluntary activities. The chart below highlights these.



For those that said they currently 'work' in the community i.e. work for a synagogue organisation, work in a Jewish school, work for a youth movement or work for a Jewish charity, the table below shows which organisation they went on their Gap year with. Although the numbers are not large compared to the rest of the study, Yeshiva/Sem stands out as the organisation that instils more people to consider a paid career in the community.

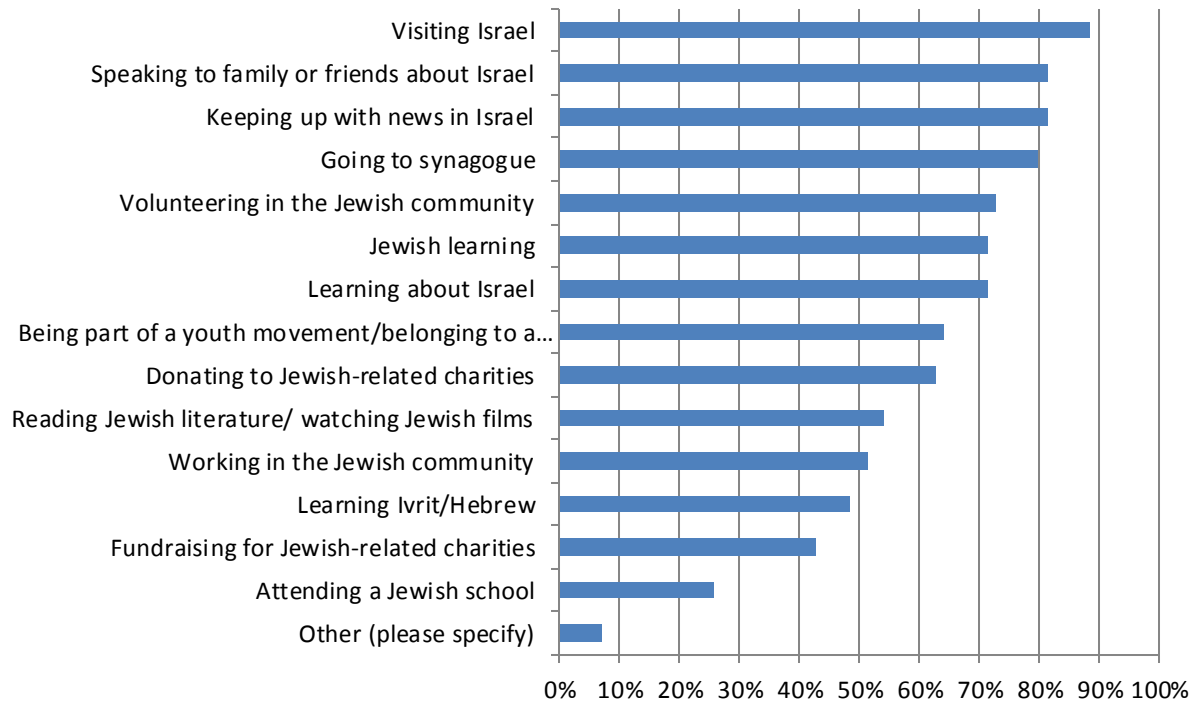
Which organisation did you go on your Gap year with ?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
AJ6	7.1%	6
Yeshiva/Seminary	24.7%	21
Maccabi	1.2%	1
B'nei Akiva	11.8%	10
BBYO	4.7%	4

FZY	15.3%	13
Habonim Dror	8.2%	7
Hanoar Hatzioni	3.5%	3
NOAM	4.7%	4
RSY-Netzer	8.2%	7
LJY-Netzer	4.7%	4

For those people who went on a Gap year and now give up their time or money i.e. by volunteering for a charity, or financial donations to the community, nearly 50% identified as belonging to the Modern Orthodox community, more than double any other religious denomination.

More than 80% of the respondents from the Youth Commission survey who had also been on a Gap year stated that keeping in contact with Israel by either visiting, following the news in Israel or speaking to family/friends in Israel was something that they were heavily engaged in. The following chart shows all the ways that these survey respondents stated they were engaged with the Jewish Community/Jewish culture.

In what ways do you engage with the Jewish Community or Jewish Culture? (Tick all that apply)

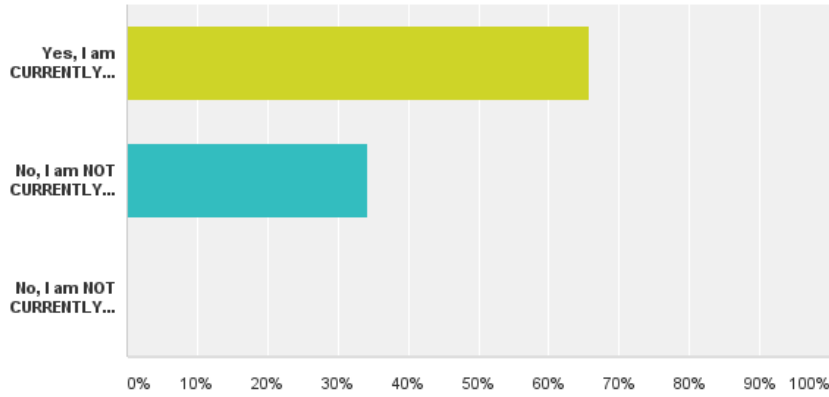


8.0 Involvement in a Youth Movement

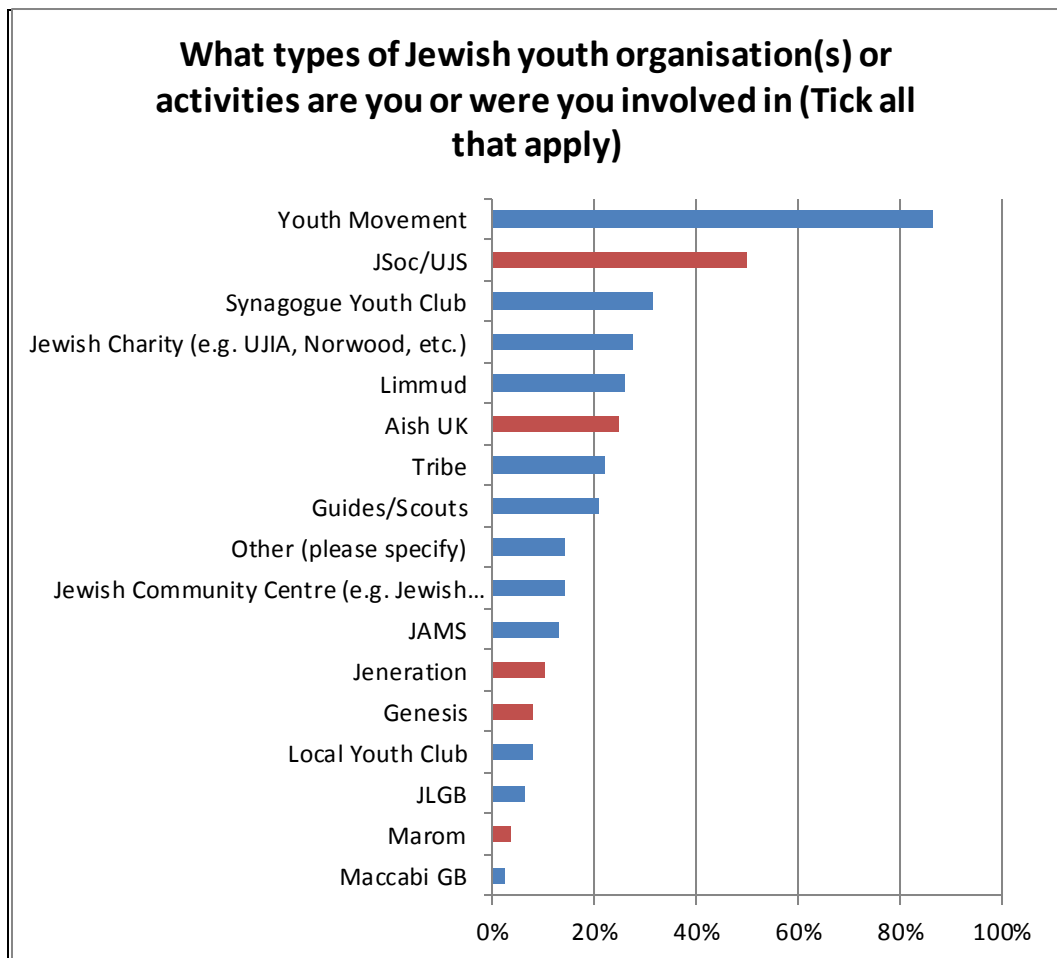
From those Gap year takers amongst the Youth Commission respondents we can see from the next chart that more than 65% said they were currently involved with a Youth organisation.

Q9 Are you involved in ANY Jewish youth organisation or activity (such as the ones listed in the previous question) in the UK?

Answered: 76 Skipped: 0



When asked what they are or have been involved with, the following youth organisations were mentioned.

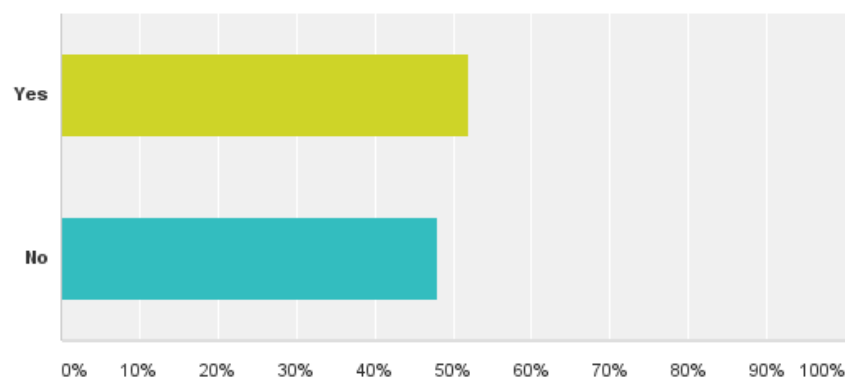


The organisations in red are the ones that could be attributable to those who have done a Gap year, because they are generally aimed at people who are older than a Gap year taker. Others may also apply though.

Looking at the 150 respondents from the Israel Engagement research who also went on a Gap year, more than 50% of them went onto say they were still involved with their youth movement, as can be seen in the following bar chart.

Q9 Are you currently involved in the youth movement/group with which you went on Israel Tour?

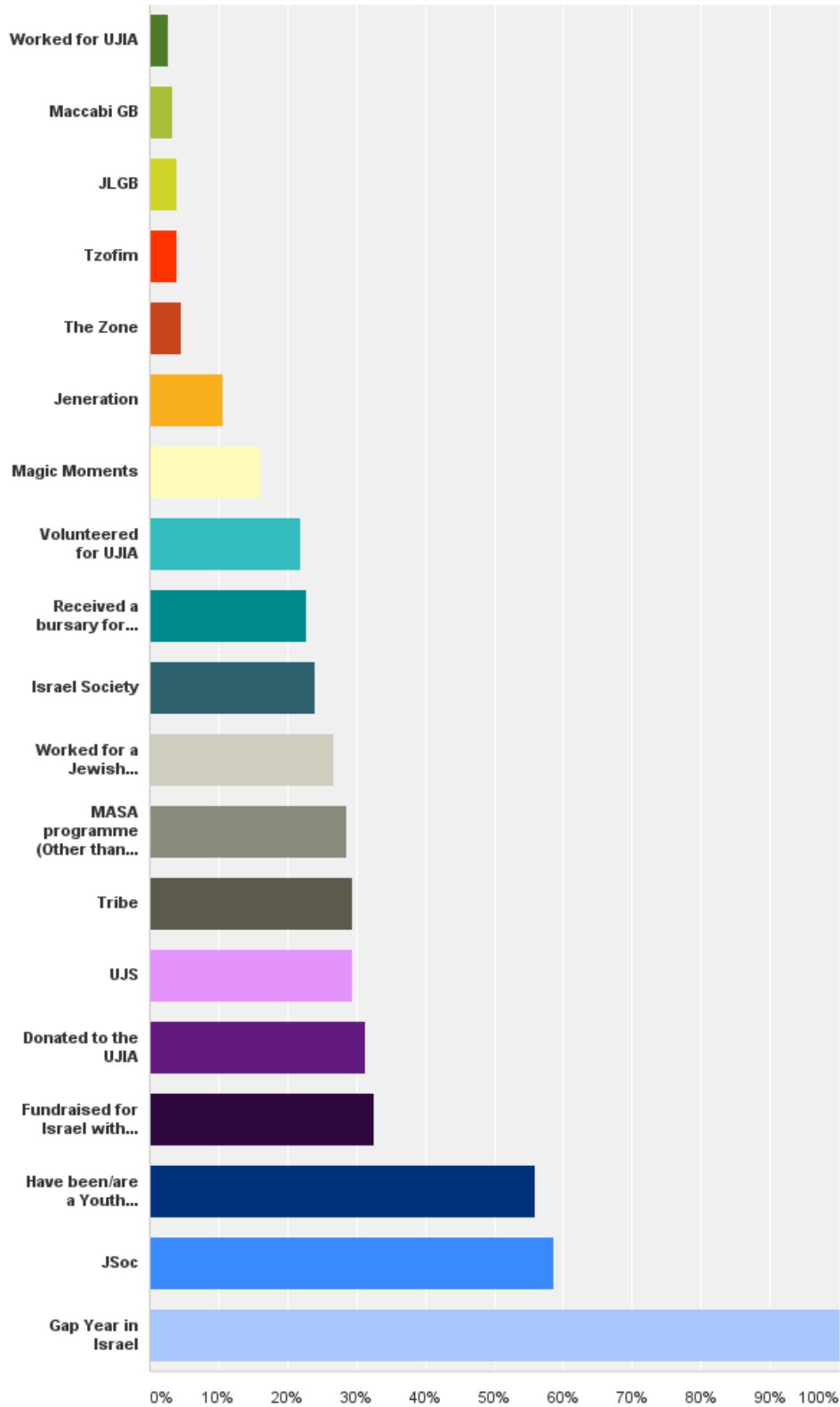
Answered: 150 Skipped: 0



The following chart also shows what those people who have been on an Israel Gap year have also done in their Jewish lives over the last seven years. Nearly 60% have attended a JSoc and a similar percentage were still part of their youth movement. 30% stated they had been fundraising for Israel or had donated to UJIA.

Q24 In the past seven years, have you been involved in/done any of the following? (Tick all that apply)

Answered: 150 Skipped: 0



9.0 Engagement with Israel

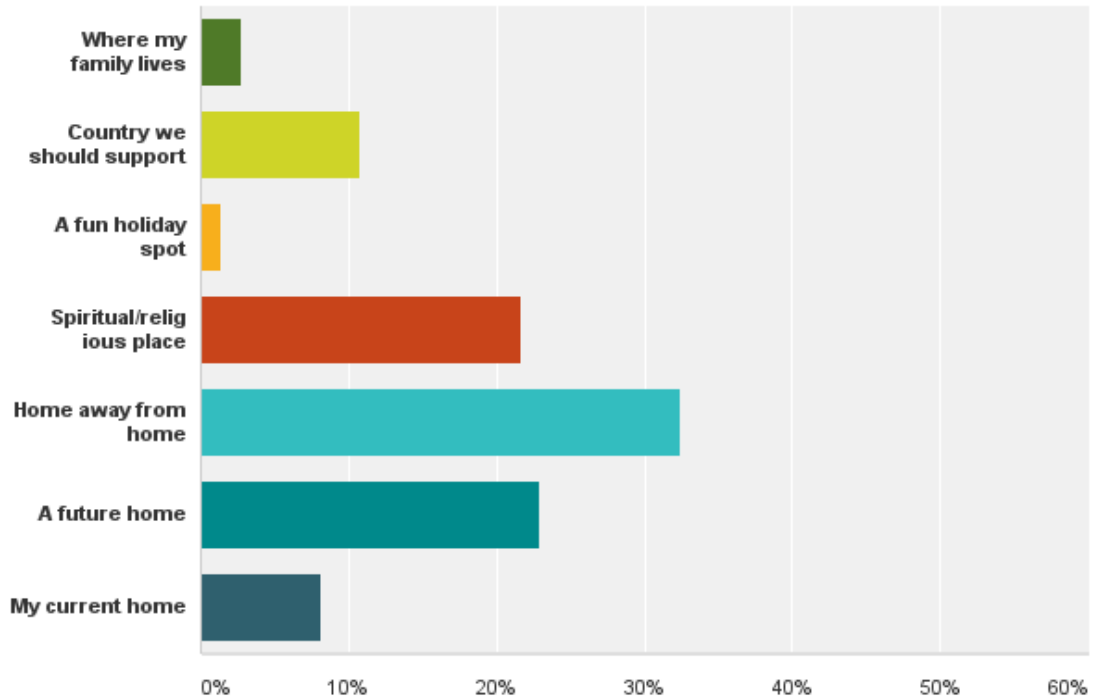
Those people who responded to the Youth Commission survey and had been on a Gap year felt they had a strong connection with Israel and have since been back to Israel many times. The chart below shows the strength of their feelings towards Israel.



For many Israel Experience respondents who had been on a Gap year said that Israel felt like a home away from home or possibly a future home. See chart below. These two surveys suggest that a Gap year in Israel is likely to make you more positively disposed towards Israel in the future too.

Q28 Which of the following best describes what Israel is to you?

Answered: 148 Skipped: 2



Selected quotes from the Israel Experience Survey

On tour I started thinking about year course and am now filling this in from my apartment in Bat Yam. It all comes down to the inspiration the Madrichim can instil at the end of the day. I had amazing leaders along my FZY journey and hence I'm here following their footsteps (Israel Experience Survey respondent)

I went to yeshiva for a year and now made Aliyah (Israel Experience Survey respondent)

The main influence on my relations with Israel was my Gap year (Israel Experience Survey respondent)

Tour was my first formative Israel experience, after which I stood for the national leadership team of BBYO. I attended every leadership course that BBYO offers and as a madrich have staffed and rushed every machine offered by the organisation. I took Israel tour this year and after finishing my degree – I plan to become a movement worker for BBYO before making Aliyah. Israel is my past, present and future. I ideologically believe in a Jewish homeland for Jewish people, whilst I don't agree with many policies of the government and the army. Israel is an integral part of

my everyday life. I consider myself to be Israeli before British because Israel is an integral part o of my Jewish identity (Israel Experience Survey respondent)

Many years have passed since tour and my youth leadership work fell away during university. It was strong all through my community where I grew up but has drifted through university. I am sure when I return home it will be back, but less strong. (Israel Experience Survey respondent)

Tour was great, but my Gap year with Habonim Dror provided a much deeper connection which has shaped my attitude towards today, exponentially more so that tour. (Israel Experience Survey respondent)

10.0 Individual Stories

The following individual stories were gathered as part of the Gap Year or Youth Commission research projects and provide an insight into the Jewish journey post Gap year for some of our survey respondents.

Anthony Ashworth Steen - went to Habonim Dror and did Israel Tour through them, did a Gap year at a Yeshiva and went onto University. He was a Habonim Movement worker in Manchester and feels that the Youth Movement was the constant in his life at that age. Now works for UJIA.

Sam Clifford - Following Gap year with Hanoar Hatzioni, Sam decided to change her university course, in the end she studied Jewish Civilization. She then went on to do her masters in Youth Work, whilst also working part time for Jewish Care. Sam has always worked for Jewish organisations most recently on the Lead programmes for JLC.

Guy Copitch – heavily involved with RSY-Netzer (inc Madrich) including Gap year with them, but after University opted not to take a job with RSY-Netzer and moved into a marketing career in industry with McCann Erikson.

Joseph Finlay – Gap year with Hanoar Hatzioni, went to Cambridge University, Joseph is a founder of Moishe house, Wandering Jews, and the Open Talmud Project.

Bernard Freud spent 2 years at Yeshiva in 2001-3 and then went to Cambridge University to study medicine. He was on the JSoc committee whilst he was there, after qualifying he has been employed by the NHS ever since.

Nicky Goldman - attended Jewish schools in her home city of Liverpool, she attended many youth movements including BA, BBYO, Study Group and AJ6, she was on the first Mazkirut of AJ6 and did 2 years movement work for them. She has a degree from University of Liverpool where she was the JSOC chair, she also has a Masters. She has been working in the world of Jewish informal and formal education for 30 years.

Royi Gutkin – heavily involved with BA growing up, was involved in JSoc and worked at UJIA as Birthright Co-ordinator for 3 years, now works in the Non-Jewish community. He is fond of Zionist Federation where he helps out, goes to events as organiser and participant Royi belongs to a synagogue called Netzach Yisrael, an independent start-up community of 20-30 couples who meet in an independent day school in Hendon; it is the 'evolution of a youth prayer group' he used to go to- he is quite involved with various events and in his words he 'bit off more than he can chew' by volunteering to take on so much. Royi engages in choice charities his friends are involved with. Royi is pulled into organisations by word-of-mouth and encouragement from others: this historically includes Mitzvah Day, Norwood, and Kisharon.

Shelley Marsh - Shelley attended a Jewish Youth club and was the first person from a Jewish youth group to go on Gap year. Having spent 12 years living and working in Israel, Shelley returned to the UK as a trained youth worker, focussed mainly in Jewish youth work, became a Director of informal education at UJIA and went on to become the Executive Director at Limmud.

Arieh Miller – Gap year with RSY-Netzer, Arieh is a governor at Akiva primary where he went to school and leads security for his synagogue. Arieh used to work for the CST and now for the Israeli embassy in London. Arieh has been very involved in RSY-Netzer over several years from participant to paid leader, as well as Jewish Scouts, Maccabi GB, UJS Hillel, Limmud and Jewish learning, Jeneration,

JLGB through the DofE, and has led Israel Tour and four year 6 Israel trips. He donates to Jewish charities.

Adam Overlander-Kaye started to go to BA age 14 been involved ever since. He went to Birmingham Uni and was the JSoc chair. He has worked for UJS (director of education), UJIA (fundraising manager) before going back to Yeshiva and then did a MA. He went to Yeshiva through BA on his Gap year. He is currently the fundraising director for Reform Judaism.

Claire Samuel – Went on her Gap year with LJY and stayed involved with them whilst at Uni (Birmingham), she led summer camp and Israel tour. She took part in the JSoc at Uni and also started going to Limmud the year she came back from Israel and has gone every year since. Claire has been involved in Moishe House/grassroots Jews; now attends NNLS. Claire studied politics at Birmingham and then became a Teacher through Teach First for few years. Now she is working in IT consulting for Accenture.

Nic Schlagman - Nic was involved with Noam since the age of 9 and went on his Gap year with them. He went to University of Sussex whilst here he stayed involved with NOAM but was not involved with the JSoc. He 'wanted a break'. After university he became a movement worker for Noam for 2 years and then went to live in Israel for 10 years (initially on kibbutz). Whilst in Israel he worked for RSY-Netzer, running their Gap year programme for 4 years and then did a stint at an NGO (African Refugee Development Centre). Nic then came back to the UK and worked for UJIA.

Rebecca Skolnick – went on FZY Gap year, became very involved at Birmingham JSoc. Now is a teacher and has worked in Jewish and non Jewish schools.

Benji Stanley - synagogue membership until 15, spent a Gap year in Israel with RSY-Netzer. He was engaged in social action, volunteering in university around homelessness, immigration, depression. Benji worked for RSY-Netzer for over a year. He is the co-founder of Open Talmud and is a graduate of the Leo Baeck College; he is now a Rabbi with the Reform Movement holding the role of Young Adult Development Rabbi.

Danny Stone - Went on his Gap year with Noam in 1999 and then went to Nottingham University where he was involved in the JSoc. He also worked for UJS (campaigns director) and as a political advisor for Lord Janner, RSPB (senior parliamentary officer) and now a Director for the PCAA Foundation (All Party Group working on anti-Semitism).

Ben Thwaites - Ben went to Yeshiva for his Gap year and then did a law degree followed by Law school, he then went back to Yeshiva to do some further studying, this time to Gush Etzion. When he returned to the UK he worked as a lawyer for Herbert Smith but in 2010 he decided to move into a Jewish educational role at the Forum for Jewish Leadership. He continues to provide legal counsel to Jewish charities.

The testimonies here point to a group of people ranging from their 20s to 40s who are almost all heavily engaged in Jewish life, either professionally or as lay leaders, or in some cases, both. They spent their Gap Year in Israel with one of a variety of Youth Movements, or at Yeshiva.

What we do not know is the extent to which other influences in their lives have played their part in their Jewish engagement.

11.0 Summary

This report gives a positive picture of the outcome of an Israel gap year in the on-going Jewish journey of its past participants. The previous Gap year research undertaken between the years 2012-14 does provide some indication of how an Israel Gap year has influenced key attributes such as the participant's career, ongoing involvement with their Youth movements and with the wider Jewish Community. Together with the personal stories, this analysis should be directly relevant to understanding the Jewish journey and the importance of a Gap year as a catalyst towards an individual's increased and continued involvement in Jewish life in the UK.

The two previous surveys used in this analysis provide further data which supports the findings from the large scale Gap year research project undertaken in 2014.

It should be reiterated, however, that the data which informs this report has not been generated by any "new" information. This report has been an exercise in mapping existing data.

12.0 Recommendations/ suggestions

1. Quantitative research: between the years 2012-14, we have gathered a great deal of data on Gap year participants, potential participants and past participants from three separate projects. We do not recommend that it would be cost-effective to run a further large scale study at this time. We have evidence from these research studies that can be used to help form strategy, fund-raising, marketing and PR initiatives for Gap year.
2. Qualitative research 1: we know intuitively and from the testimonies of the case studies presented here of the importance of the Israel Gap year on the Jewish journey of past participants. The testimonies in this report can be multiplied many times. It may be of value to undertake a small scale project, identifying and interviewing additional Gap year past participants to further "prove" the value.
3. Qualitative research 2: The element that the case studies in this report have in common is the Israel Gap year. We also know (JPR 2013, 2015, Cohen 2011) that other factors influence a young person's life choices and Jewish journeys. It may be of value to return to those in the case studies here, as well as expand the data set, to try to understand *the relative significance* of the Gap year.

4. A round table discussion of stakeholders should use the three previous reports and this current report to inform and contribute to A UJIA strategy to take Gap year development forward in the coming 3-5 years. The membership of that stakeholders group should be determined by lay leaders and professionals working in the field. The recommendations above should be debated at that discussion.