

Youth Task Force Report

Task Force Membership

Debby Gillman, Adam Kolko, Youth Director Marissa Tait, Chairs
Debbey Altman-Diamant, Ina Engel, Judith Kadosh, Hadassah Max, Carol Smith,
Bryce Tallon, Roger Zimmerman, Rabbi Mark Goodman

The Situation

Congregation Beth Shalom has a long tradition of exceptional offerings for children of different ages. Lacking, however, has been a structure or oversight to support the flow of children and families across life stages and milestones and, in particular, across identified weak points in engagement.

In recent years, prior to 2016, the community experienced significant transitions in areas of Rabbinic and administrative leadership. The youth department leadership saw a turnover of 4 directors in 6 years. The youth tefilah program has also experienced changes in leadership beyond the expected turnover of college student staff. With the current stability in Beth Shalom leadership, the community is well positioned to make significant changes to the way youth programming lives at Beth Shalom.

Data from the Congregational Survey

We learned the following things from our Strategic Planning Congregational Survey:

Demographics:

- 569 paid congregants
 - 383 family memberships
 - 186 individual memberships
 - 239 children under 17 in the home; of that 72 are under six years of age

Youth Programs	Current Enrollment 2018-2019
Religious School Enrollment	46
Pre School Enrollment	148
Youth groups – USY	15
B’nai Mitzvahs	12

The Early Learning Center currently enrolls 148 students. Over 100 children and adults attend monthly Shabbabababa services. However, families well known to the ELC could be more actively cultivated and engaged in synagogue-wide activities.

A Shabbat morning service for our youngest children has been a staple program of Beth Shalom for decades--as led by the same staff for these many years. Programming for subsequent age groups has varied in format, leadership and attendance. While there is a consistent presence of children of all ages in the building on Shabbat, there is low consensus among member families regarding what children should be doing and where they should be once they enter the building. Beth Shalom has never ceased to offer content (as opposed to babysitting) for children of all ages on Shabbat morning--even as the nature of this content is reviewed and revised. Religious Services leadership has also set a goal to encourage greater participation by older children and teens in the main service. The reputation of Beth Shalom’s main service as a place where children are *unwelcome* has begun to shift, as some younger families now opt to keep their children in services.

Teenagers are not formally engaged in any consistent manner in any religious service, although they too are being invited/encouraged to participate in the main Shabbat morning service. Exceptions to this include participation by some teens

as musicians in monthly Hod V'Hadar services; the first-ever coordinated reading of Jonah, by teens on Yom Kippur; select post-B'nei Mitzvah members who do read Torah, otherwise participate.

The Youth Religious Services and Youth Director are currently distinct positions. This makes it difficult, at times, to bridge cohorts of Shabbat and non-Shabbat activities (e.g. USY taking a role or having a program on Shabbat morning). Younger children and parents do not see the same staff on Shabbat vs. non-shabbat activities, to the detriment of their engagement. Of note, a selection of core programs (Purim Carnival, Chocolate Seder) do draw wide participation.

The priorities of youth and families are not represented to the leadership in a cohesive manner, even as individual committees do take up matters related to youth. As an example, there is a Youth Tefilah representative on Religious Services. The Youth Commission supports the Youth Director, but has no relationship to Youth Tefilah. The ELC and JJEP leadership are disconnected from each other and the Board of Trustees. A member of the Executive Committee attends Youth Commission meetings, but Youth priorities do not have a consistent voice at the table among synagogue leadership. Monies raised by youth programs and unspent revert to the main budget at the end of the budget year, thereby limiting options to expand or enhance these programs. There is no organized panel of staff and stakeholders at Beth Shalom holding Youth and families up as priorities.

Finally, despite the size of our building, the Youth Lounge is of necessity maintained as a 'neutral' space for Beth Shalom's lessees, with the result that the space does not reflect the spirit or interests of its designated members. There is no designated space for youth to leave their mark. Spaces such as stages and specialized technology rooms are not utilized.

Youth programming is experienced, at times, as an adjunct to adult-focused programs which are the community's priority. As an example the Sunday Purim Carnival set up was relegated to late at night after havdalah, as the ballroom was

in use for a late-scheduled Shabbat dinner--this, despite the Carnival having been on the Beth Shalom calendar for an entire year.

The Vision

Congregation Beth Shalom will prioritize oversight of youth and families across life-stages and milestones, ensuring that families do not get lost to gaps in engagement. Our deeply connected members and prospective members alike (and of all ages) will be well served by new programs targeted at enriching our community and our space. We have set five objectives with the aim to:

- Improve coordination of all Beth Shalom activities impacting youth and families;
- Create clear channels to give voice to the needs of this constituency to leadership;
- Bridge gaps in engagement and siloing of activities (shabbat morning vs non-shabbat activities);
- Encourage a broader vision for how youth and families interact synagogue wide, with congregants across the lifespan;
- Attend to the need for inviting physical space to meet the needs of youth and families

With improved oversight and enriched programming we hope to inspire, as well, a culture of volunteerism among member-parents, signaling that the Congregational leadership values their needs and remains accountable for issues of importance to them.

Strategic Objective #1: Creation of a **synagogue-wide** Youth Committee comprised of all stakeholders.

Ensure that the interests of youth and families are valued and incorporated into Beth Shalom’s organizational structure. The Youth Committee will facilitate coordination among staff and volunteers and represent the needs of this constituency to synagogue leadership.

Action (What?)	Capacity (Who? How Much? How Complex?)	Time frame (When?)
Ensure creation of a Youth Committee comprised of staff serving youth and families (Youth Director; Youth Tefilah advisor; ELC; JJEP) as well as stakeholder congregants.	BOT set as an action item to create a synagogue-wide Youth Committee.	Fall 2019
Ensure ongoing communication among staff and stakeholders serving and representing youth.	Set a schedule of quarterly Youth Committee meetings, with plan to report to the Executive Committee/BOT.	By January 2020
Ensure that the interests of our youth and families are considered and/or incorporated into all facets of congregational planning.	Youth Committee will designate liaisons to committees which currently have no youth/family reps.	Ongoing

Strategic Objective #2: CBS will offer **substantive, on-site or community-based** intergenerational activities, including but not limited to educational and tikkun olam programs.

Action (What?)	Capacity (Who?, How much? How complex?)	Time frame (When?)
Programs that engage children, teens and adults in Social Action.	Age-specific and/or intergenerational. Involve youth in planning, choosing cause, planning, and implementing) Can involve discussions, learnings and/or projects.	One-time or ongoing
Learning/studying for youth and adults (e.g. Torah trop, religious texts)	Pre-B'nei mitzvah, teens, adults. Will need a leader who is learned in the activity. Under rubric of Youth Tefilah.	An introductory lesson to gauge interest. Decide whether monthly, biweekly or weekly is appropriate
Other programs designed to bring together different generations.	E.g. kids and older congregants. Teens and older congregants.	Can be a one time activity e.g. holiday-themed, or a series run throughout the year.

Strategic Objective #3: Cohort specific programs to bridge gaps in engagement.

Creation of **new signature** programs targeting select age groups that are replicable, cost effective and create expectations and excitement as children grow at Beth Shalom. Emphasis should be on **energizing cohorts** falling through gaps in engagement.

Action (What?)	Capacity (Who?, How much? How complex?)	Time frame (When?)
Beautification of Beth Shalom! An annual gift to Beth Shalom from post-B'nai Mitzvah students.	USY and Kadima create plan and implementation of this program.	Set schedule for project in Youth Calendar year in advance.
Chesed program	Kadima (Middle grades) Simple projects that take minimal effort, but are highly engaging.	Spring or fall
Oneg for young parents and open play space for young kids	ELC & Early Elementary Age Families (0-8years) -No cost to families to attend, can be sponsored by multiple families or community members	About 3 times a year, 2nd or 3rd week of the month
Teen-specific programming to elicit convention or camp-style ruach.	USY Board will set programming priorities and determining nature, location, and timing of programs.	USY Advisor and Board meet at the start of the school year and review calendar, schedule of events.

Strategic Objective #4: Improve physical space in the building to support youth programming and signal welcoming of kids into the building.

Action (What?)	Capacity (Who?, How much? How complex?)	Time frame (When?)
<p>Designated space for youth, with physical structural change as long-term priority. Aim to reduce ‘roaming’ on Shabbat, provide youth with something to do and/or somewhere to be. Solidify routines and expectations for a larger number of kids. This flows with ELC and JJEP philosophy of child-led learning.</p>	<p>Short term: New decorations to lounge, homemade or low cost</p> <p>Long term: Upgrading space, new furniture</p>	<p>Short term: Fall 2019</p> <p>Long term: Set 5-year budget plan to revise</p>
<p>Establish a library of books and developmentally appropriate toys for children outside/inside the sanctuary to send the message that they are welcome.</p>	<p>Identify parent coordinator.</p> <p>Solicit items at Shabbat morning service and in weekly newsletter. Set aside space in building for donations.</p> <p>Costs limited to storage units.</p>	<p>Over High Holy Days, into the fall.</p>

Strategic Objective #5: Staffing to Bridge Shabbat and non-Shabbat programming.

Action (What?)	Capacity (Who?, How much? How complex?)	Time frame (When?)
Age-appropriate learning and tefillah on Saturday mornings	K-3rd service/program 4th-6th service/program Torah trope class Junior Congregation	After High Holidays 2019
Attention to linking the main sanctuary service with children’s Shabbat program	Create a ‘Prayground’ space at the main Saturday morning service - a mat with toys on the side or back of the sanctuary for kids birth to 5 yrs old, and potentially programming/singing/activities in the service for the kids - Torah procession w/squishy Torahs.	After High Holidays 2019
Coordinate youth department (which meets on Mondays) and youth tefillah (which meets on Saturdays)	Set this coordination as priority for Youth Committee. Set goal for hiring staff who overlap on Shabbat and non-Shabbat programs.	ASAP

<p>Hire trained professional staff Jewish Educators that leads, programs, and lesson plans for Saturday morning activities, learning, and tefillah</p>	<p>Two trained staff with significant Jewish background, paid at a competitive rate. Keep the two college students to help out.</p>	<p>Within the next year.</p>
<p>A member of the Youth Committee that will be present at committee meetings on holidays and programming</p>	<p>Ensure communication on youth priorities for High Holy Day planning via Youth tefillah representatives or Youth Committee reps.</p>	<p>ASAP</p>
<p>Create a family program around Havdalah with event afterwards</p>		<p>December/January when Shabbat ends early.</p>
<p>Promotion and communication to transition children from 'Manny's service' to the older service</p>	<p>Ongoing monitoring of age-specific and cohort specific needs by youth tefillah, parents</p>	<p>In Progress</p>