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JEWISH TEEN
Education & Engagement
FUNDER COLLABORATIVE
Powered by The Jewish Federations of North America

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OVERTASKED AND UNDERSUPPORTED:

The State of Jewish Youth- Serving Professionals in 2023



INTRODUCTORY NOTE

By Rabbi Dena Shaffer, Director of Learning and Engagement at The Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Funder Collaborative, powered by Jewish Federations of North America

Youth professionals offer support, guidance, mentorship, and role modeling for young people. They are often a teen's "person," their non-parental trusted adult who represents safe space both for the challenges of adolescence and for their spiritual journey (exploring identity, challenging beliefs, discovering meaning and purpose). Well-trained and confident youth professionals offer teens a sense of community and belonging, exemplify values and healthy relationships, create thoughtful opportunities for young people to connect Judaism to daily life and help teens develop the crucial skills necessary for thriving in young adulthood and beyond.

We embarked on a study with Rosov Consulting to help organizations and communities better understand and champion the importance of youth-serving professionals. Historically, the role of youth professionals has been undervalued and understudied. With this report, the [Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Funder Collaborative](#) (FC), powered by Jewish Federations of North America, aims to shed light on the important role these professionals play both directly in the lives of young people and the field of Jewish engagement overall.

Social anthropologist Samuel Heilman researched various Chasidic communities in North America and Israel for his 1992 publication *Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry*. Regarding the treatment of educators, Heilman made the following observation.

In the haredi world the salary that a teacher in Gan (kindergarten) received was as high as that earned by a Rosh Yeshiva (principal), higher than what an elementary-school instructor made. In part, this was because this sort of work required a singular set of talents and exquisite patience, including the extraordinary ability to help a youngster make their first important transition from childhood into a sense of Jewish peoplehood. Although they would not put it in these terms, haredim recognized the consequence and significance of this first transition and the character formation and process of personification that it included. The increased salary was an unmistakable sign of the high value placed on the position.

Oh, how we pray such a sentiment towards professionals working with Jewish teenagers would be internalized by the leaders and stakeholders in our movements, organizations, and institutions. We can think of no better way to describe the skills of an excellent youth professional than Heilman's: "the extraordinary ability to help a youngster make their first important transition from childhood into a sense of Jewish peoplehood." How beautifully that captures the sacred and underlying efforts and calling of these professionals. As Heilman acknowledges about the teacher in the Gan, this sacred work too requires a singular set of talents and exquisite patience.

This study begs the question, how are our Jewish communities and organizations meeting the needs of their youth-serving professionals, not just in terms of compensation, as Heilman suggested, but in hiring, onboarding, training, supervision, mentorship, career-planning, professional development and other investments as well? We hope this study will enable Jewish youth-serving professionals to feel seen and heard as a national field, and ultimately generate meaningful and robust conversations that can help communities and organizations identify and consider their own "unmistakable signs" of the value they place on these professionals and positions.

WAYS TO USE THIS REPORT

We hope that this report will stimulate conversation in both local communities and among national stakeholders to examine the landscape with regards to youth serving professionals and possibly catalyze new interventions prioritizing this professional group.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

We hope that the findings from this report are thought provoking and a catalyst for improving the field of youth-serving professionals. We encourage you to bring together youth-serving professionals themselves to reflect as a group or with other stakeholders; to that end, below are suggested questions to inspire discussion:

- Which data points surprised you?
- What aligned with your perceptions or personal experience? What differed?
- How do you understand the role of a thriving youth professional field as it relates to achieving outcomes for Jewish teen engagement?
- Relative to this report, where are the youth professionals in your community/organization already successful or finding their needs being met?
 - What might we want to double down on, increase the reach of, or achieve at scale?
 - Did any of the recommendations resonate?
 - Are there areas to explore for future interventions?
- What aspects of the youth professional experience in your community/organization would you want to learn more about?

BE IN TOUCH FOR ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

We exist as a resource for those engaged in or planning teen engagement strategies. Please feel free to fill out this [form](#) be in touch with Rabbi Dena Shaffer (dena.shaffer@jewishfederations.org) for further guidance if you are interested in:

- **Fielding this survey in your own community or organization.** The instrument is vetted and customizable. We are happy to provide you with a copy as well as two hours of consultation time with our colleagues at Rosov Consulting as you seek to customize this (or any of our other data collection tools).
- **Exploring the raw data from your community.** We are happy to provide anonymous or aggregate data by zip code, to provide insight into your local community.
- **Presenting this data or holding Town Hall.** We are available to connect with your local stakeholders, professionals or lay community to share this national content.

About JFNA and the Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Funder Collaborative

THE FUNDER COLLABORATIVE

The Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Funder Collaborative (powered by the Jewish Federations of North America) is an unprecedented philanthropic experiment where national and local funders, communal leaders and Jewish professionals work together to create, nurture, sustain, and scale innovations that positively impact Jewish teens and the adults who care about them.

JEWISH FEDERATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

The Jewish Federations of North America ("JFNA") represents 146 Jewish Federations and over 300 Network communities, which raise and distribute more than \$3 billion annually for social welfare, social services, and educational needs. The Federation movement, collectively among the top 10 charities on the continent, protects and enhances the well-being of Jews worldwide through the values of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), *tzedakah* (charity and social justice) and *Torah* (Jewish learning).

About this Study

Jewish youth professionals, the Jewish communal professionals who work directly with teens on a full-time, part-time, or volunteer basis in Jewish community settings, serve as crucial role models in teen's lives and are pivotal in influencing the Jewish growth and learning of teens. Since 2013, the Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Funder Collaborative (FC) has supported and explored the impact of initiatives to enhance and strengthen the engagement of Jewish teens in 10 communities;¹ the experience and needs of Jewish youth-serving professionals have been among the primary components of this effort from the very beginning.² One of the seven measures of success articulated by the FC states that, for the FC's investment to be deemed a success:

Youth professionals working with Jewish teens [should] feel well-prepared and confident to do their work; have appropriate skills and knowledge to do their work; exhibit core competencies as required by their career stage and position and feel valued as professionals in their organization and by the Jewish community at large.

In 2022, as the strains of the Covid-19 pandemic began to lift, the FC was as interested as ever in supporting the role Jewish youth-serving professionals play in supporting the lives and Jewish journeys of teens, perhaps especially their role in promoting teens' wellness and mental health coming out of the pandemic. But to best support youth professionals, it was first necessary to understand where they are at that point in time. What are the stresses on their professional lives, and what could support them in better supporting teens?

In the summer and fall of 2022, the FC partnered with Rosov Consulting to study the experiences and needs of Jewish youth-serving professionals. Supported by Rosov Consulting, the FC distributed a survey to over 500 Jewish youth-serving professionals, including those who work with the 10 original FC communities. In all, 133 people responded.³ Their responses, as well as insights gleaned from other national surveys conducted by Rosov Consulting and by others⁴ inform answers to the following questions:

- 1 Who are youth-serving professionals today?**
- 2 What is the ecosystem in which youth-serving professionals work?**
- 3 What kinds of support do youth-serving professionals receive and still need?**

NOTES

¹ Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Denver/Boulder, New York City, San Diego, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

² We acknowledge that using the term "Jewish youth-serving professionals" in this report leaves some room for ambiguity as to whether, how, and to what extent these professionals and/or the youth they serve identify as Jewish. In reality, we know that both the professionals and the youth may have complex and diverse relationships to Jewish identity. Later in this report, we use the terms "youth-serving professionals," "youth professionals," or the acronym "YPs" interchangeably to refer to these professionals who serve, support, engage, and educate young people in Jewish settings.

³ This survey was based on previous survey instruments used by the Jewish Teen Education and Engagement Funder Collaborative between 2016 and 2019 to assess the skills, competencies, job satisfaction, and profiles of youth-serving professionals. Rosov Consulting, in consultation with the Funder Collaborative, updated the instrument to explore the changing realities of the YP role in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. FC distributed the survey through professional networks (e.g., JPro, JedLab, Jteen), youth-serving organizations, federation professionals, and the FC's BeWell network to YPs who work in and outside of the 10 original communities.

⁴ These sources of data include past Funder Collaborative surveys of YPs (2016–2019; N= 839); CASJE's Career Trajectories Study, July 2021 (N=1,278); Leading Edge's Employee Experience Survey, November 2022 (N=12,387); and a JPro Professional Development Survey, December 2022 (N=1,170).

Key Findings

1

Youth-serving professionals (YPs) tend to be more homogenous than the youth they hope to reach and serve.

- a | They tend to be highly educated white Jews with very strong Jewish background (as indicated, for example, by the large percentage who have traveled to Israel).
- b | On the other hand, they also vary widely in age, defying common perceptions that only young professionals serve young people.

2

They are highly committed professionals who could be better supported. They tend to...

- a | Enter the field to serve the Jewish people, not necessarily to work with teens.
- b | Work full time for one organization, and plan to stay (even as most have been in their role for less than five years).
- c | Earn low salaries and have few opportunities for advancement. feel cared for, even as they report receiving little practical support.
- d | Increasingly be called upon to address the mental health and wellness needs of teens, something that they are underprepared to do.

3

To support these professionals and elevate their role, YP professional development should include:

- a | Developing better field-wide understanding and definition of the YP role. Building and maintaining supportive professional networks.
- b | Training of the professionals who *supervise* YPs (e.g., to help supervisors better understand the role of professional development).
- c | Providing diversity training to youth professionals.
- d | Support organizations in addressing mental health and wellness.

1

Youth Professionals Are Not as Diverse as the Young People They Often Seek to Serve

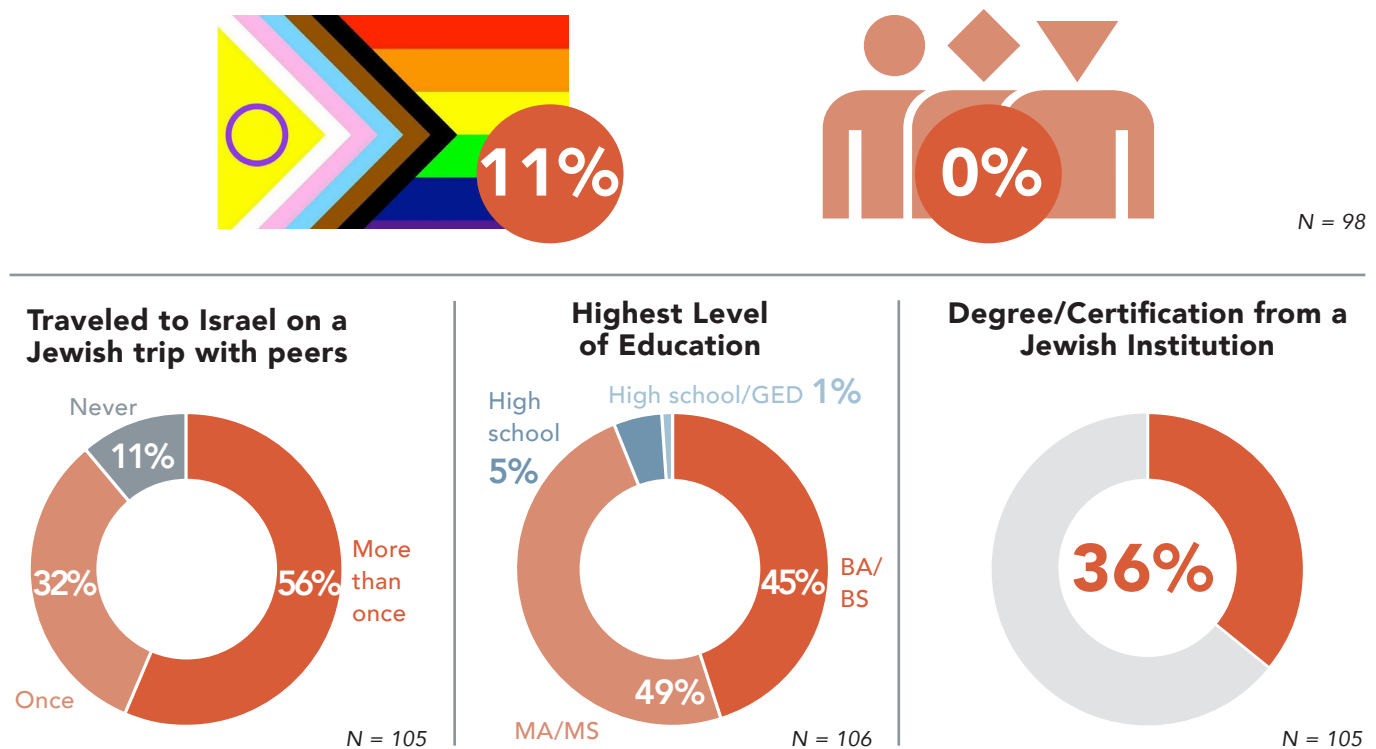


YOUTH PROFESSIONALS ARE HIGHLY EDUCATED WHITE JEWS WITH STRONG JEWISH BACKGROUNDS.

In an era where representation matters so much for young people, it is important to ask whether Jewish youth-serving professionals, in their own identities and experience, represent the diversity of the youth they would like to serve. And field-wide, how can recruitment, hiring practices, and retention efforts result in a more diverse workforce?

In some ways, YPs are in fact as diverse as the broader Jewish population. For example, 11% of the youth-serving professionals responding to the survey identify as LGBTQ+, a number that is similar to the percentage in the larger Jewish community.⁵ In other ways, however, youth-serving professionals are a pretty homogenous group. They identify as Jewish (98%), are born in the United States (95%), and do not identify as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPOC) (96%).⁶ Youth-serving professionals are highly educated (most have earned bachelor's (45%), master's (49%), or doctorate/rabbinate (5%) degrees). They also seem to have strong Jewish backgrounds, as indicated by the 90% of respondents who had traveled to Israel on a Jewish trip with their peers, and the 50% who had done so more than once (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: YPS ARE HIGHLY EDUCATED WHITE JEWS WITH STRONG JEWISH BACKGROUNDS.



NOTES

⁵ The Pew Research Center's 2020 study of Jewish Americans found 10% who identify as gay, lesbian, transgender, or "something else."

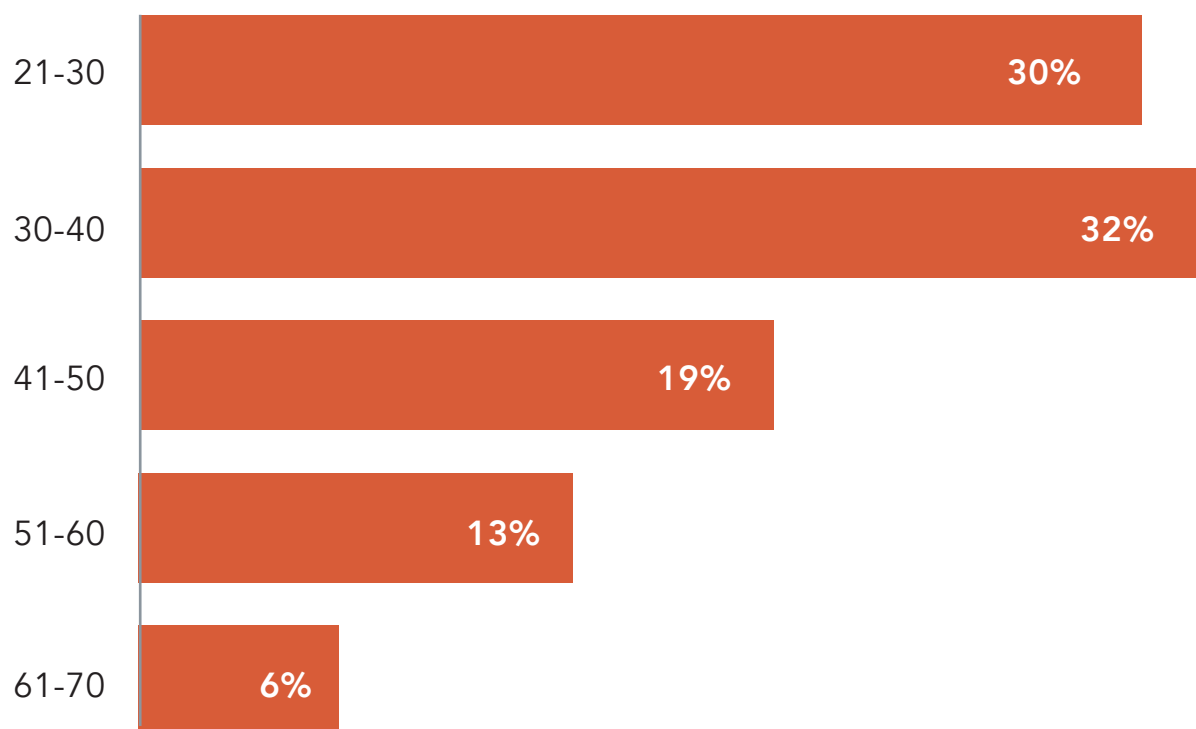
⁶ None of the respondents to the survey identified as BIPOC. It remains an open question whether there are no (or very, very few) BIPOC youth-serving professionals, or whether they were unable, or disinclined, to respond to this kind of survey.

We know that teens today are aware of and value the diversity of the people around them, and we know that this could be supported by educators who look like them. What's more, YPs often share a desire to lead the charge when it comes to increased diversity and representation. How then can we support YPs in engaging a diverse group of youth participants, as well as recruiting people from diverse backgrounds into youth-serving professional roles?

NOT ALL YOUTH PROFESSIONALS ARE YOUNG.

One area in which professionals in the field are less homogeneous is their age (see Figure 2). Even if almost a third (30%) of youth-serving professionals are under the age of 30, 40% are over the age of 40. Their median age is 31, and there are youth professionals in their 50s and 60s too. These data challenge a common misperception of youth-serving professionals as young professionals, perhaps right out of college, starting on their first professional experience. Knowing the age diversity of youth-serving professionals, how can we ensure that all have the necessary support to be successful in their role?

FIGURE 2: AGE OF YOUTH-SERVICE PROFESSIONALS⁷



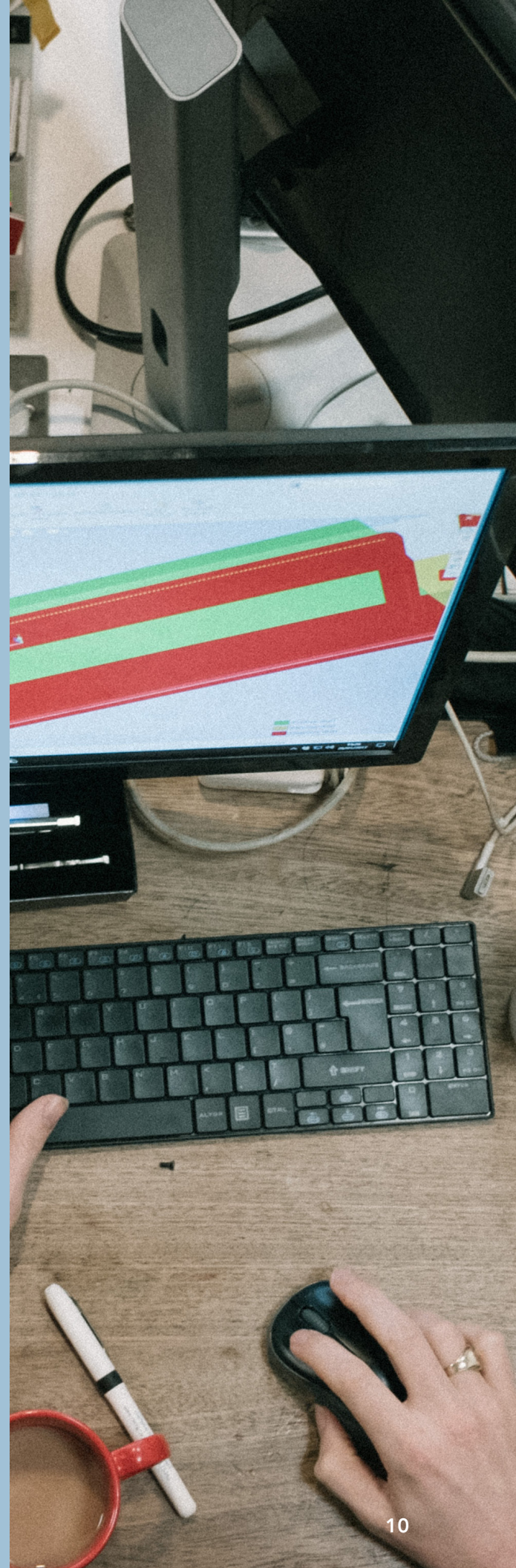
N = 224

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⁷These numbers are based on data collected in 2019 from the 10 original FC communities.

2

Youth Professionals Are Highly Committed and Under Supported



YOUTH PROFESSIONALS ARE MOTIVATED TO IMPACT THE JEWISH PEOPLE MORE SO THAN TO WORK WITH TEENS.

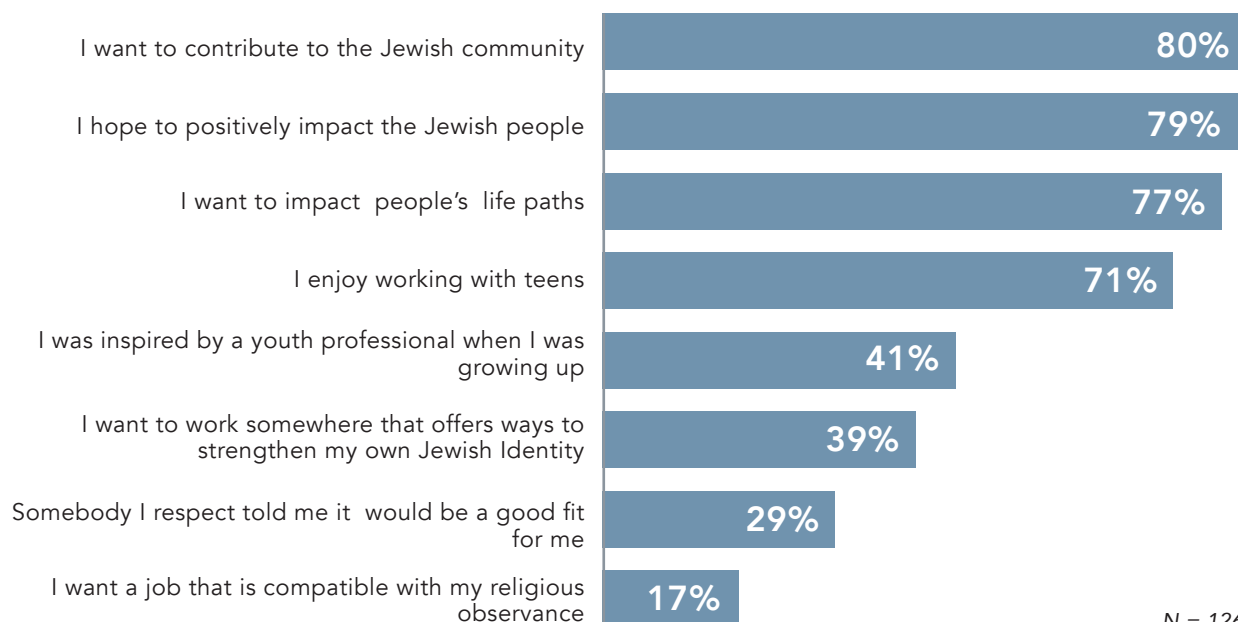
What brings educators to work as youth-serving professionals in the first place? In general, the desire to impact the Jewish people seems to be a somewhat stronger motivator than working specifically with teens. More survey respondents said they were motivated to enter the field by a desire to contribute to the Jewish community (80%) or to “positively impact the Jewish people” (79%) than those who said they enjoy working with teens (71%). Additionally, a perception in the field holds that youth professionals are eager to “pay it forward” and that they are motivated to work with teens as a result of support they had when they were younger. But relatively few of this survey’s respondents indicated choosing the field because they themselves were inspired by a youth professional growing up (see Figure 3).

It is interesting to ask whether these findings should lead the field to think differently about the professional career path of youth-serving professionals. Rather than aim to “retain” these professionals in youth-serving positions, should the focus shift to sustaining Jewish communal professionals who serve the Jewish community writ large? Perhaps, the goal should be not to lower the transition rate in youth-serving roles, but to support these professionals so that even as they move to different organizations and roles, they remain in service of the Jewish community.

FIGURE 3: REASONS TO ENTER THE FIELD

Which of the following, if any, were reasons why you chose to work as a youth professional in the first place?

% who selected the reason; respondents could select more than one

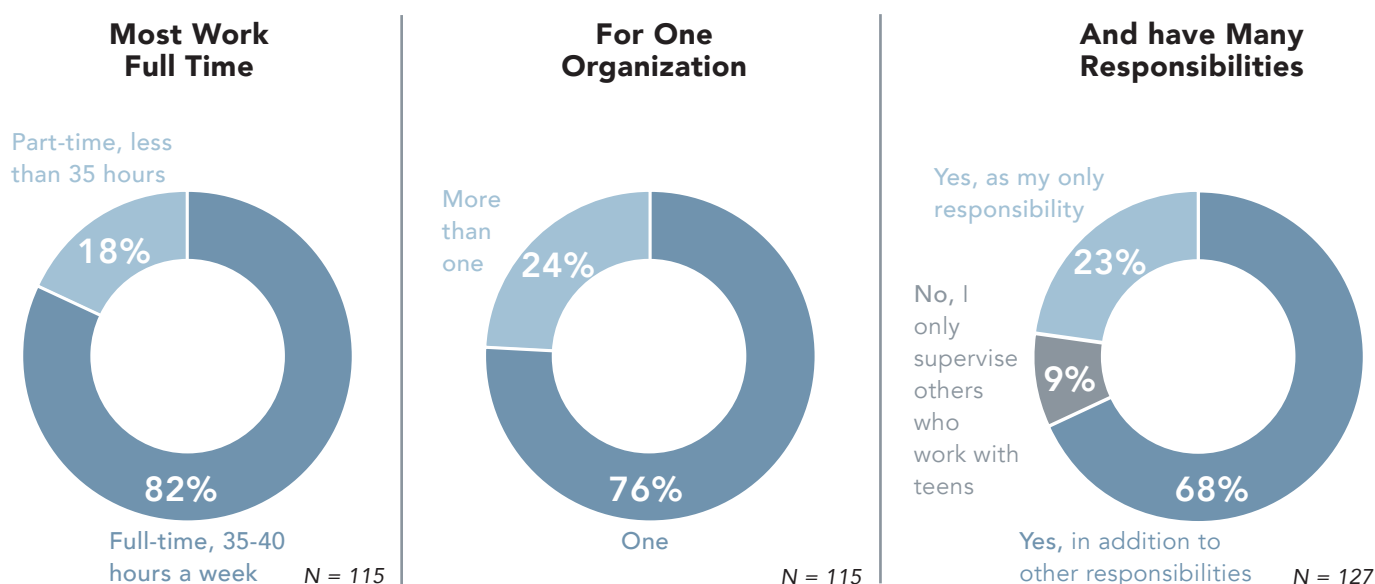


N = 126

YOUTH PROFESSIONALS ARE FAIRLY STABLE IN THEIR POSITIONS.

In many cases, youth-serving professionals may in fact have more stable careers than many imagine. There is common understanding that youth-serving professionals are individuals who are stretched thin over multiple roles and workplaces, which in turn hurts their likelihood to remain in the field for long. Somewhat surprisingly, both facts are challenged by the findings of this survey. As can be seen in Figure 4, most of the survey respondents say they work full time (82%) for one organization (76%). But while they may have job stability, many have other responsibilities in addition to working directly with Jewish teens (68%). Youth-serving work, on its own, is substantial, how then can we advocate for protecting YPs time from other responsibilities?

FIGURE 4: MOST YPS WORK FULL TIME FOR ONE ORGANIZATION AND DIRECTLY SERVE TEENS



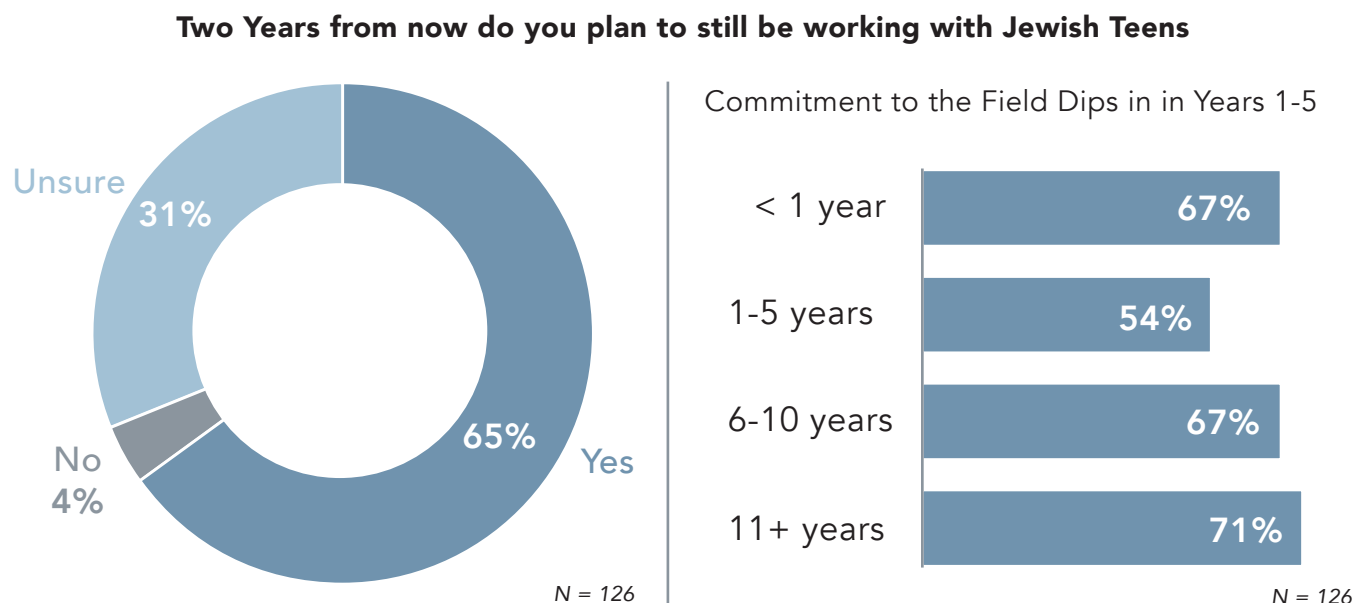
When we asked YPs whether they plan to still be working with Jewish teens two years from now, 65% indicated they plan to do so. However, this number is somewhat lower (54%) for those who have worked in the field for one to five years (see Figure 5). This dip in commitment after the novelty of the first year wears off, and before someone becomes a “lifer,” is a critical time for implementing interventions that could deter emerging talent from leaving the field.⁹

NOTES

⁸ Survey respondents work for Jewish supplementary schools (47%), youth groups (43%), Federations or Foundations (12%), social-justice or service-learning organizations (12%), or summer camps (12%). Fewer work in Jewish community centers (9%) or Israel education/advocacy organizations (9%).

⁹ This finding is supported by a CASJE study of the career trajectory of Jewish educators, which points to the first five years of one’s career as a crucial period when interventions could support longer-term retention.

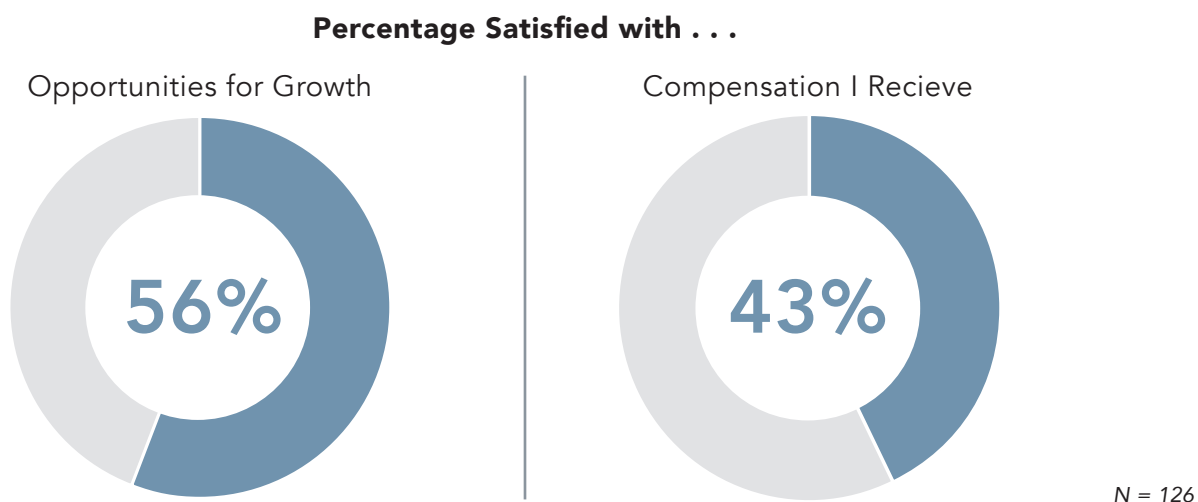
FIGURE 5: COMMITMENT TO THE FIELD IS HIGH BUT DIPS IN YEARS 1-5



YOUTH PROFESSIONALS EARN LOW SALARIES AND HAVE FEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT.

Many youth-serving professionals are not satisfied with their opportunities for growth or the compensation they receive (see Figure 6). This is not a new trend or one that is easy to address given the many organizational factors that influence professional growth and compensation. While primary drivers for some, they are also not the only reasons why professionals leave the field. In open-ended responses, those who do not plan to stay in the field for more than two years described a variety of challenges, including long hours, lack of advancement, and a general sense of urgency that may lead to burnout. As one respondent put it: “Everything feels so challenging that it’s hard to feel successful.”

FIGURE 6: SATISFACTION WITH GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES AND COMPENSATION



YOUTH PROFESSIONALS FEEL CARED FOR IN THEIR WORK ENVIRONMENTS, EVEN AS THEY REPORT RECEIVING LITTLE PRACTICAL SUPPORT.

Many youth-serving professionals reflect positively on their relationship with their supervisor. Most of them agree that their supervisor values their ideas (81%), listens when they raise concerns (75%), and genuinely cares about their well-being (73%). But these warm feelings and sense of good relationships do not always seem to translate to practical support. Relatively few youth-serving professions feel as though their supervisor knows what professional development they need (37%), provides mentorship (40%), offers useful feedback on their performance (47%), or offers work-life balance support (55%) (see Figure 7). In responses to an open-ended question about the challenges they face in their work, many youth professionals cited lack of support and professional development opportunities as one of the stressors on their career:

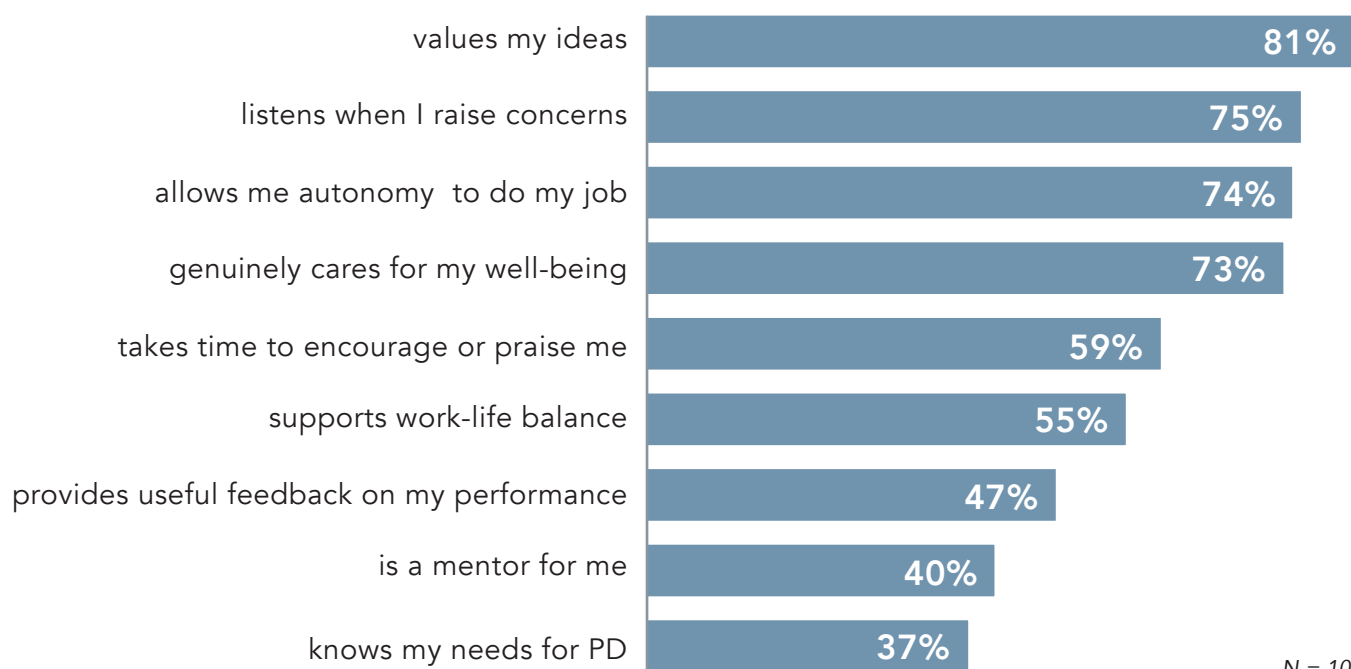
"[I need more] time to network and learn from other professionals who have a similar role as I do."

"Being in the loop of all innovations, network/collaborate with other professionals [could support me]."

It would seem that even as most youth professionals feel cared for and heard by the supervisors, many would in fact benefit from more feedback, mentorship, and networking with other youth professionals.

FIGURE 7: YPS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SUPERVISORS

My supervisor . . .



YOUTH PROFESSIONALS ARE INCREASINGLY BEING CALLED ON TO ADDRESS THE WELLNESS NEEDS OF TEENS

A mental health and wellness crisis has been growing among youth of all religious and cultural backgrounds for several years now, and this crisis has been exacerbated by the social isolation forced upon teens during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰ Prioritizing teen wellness and helping young people thrive has now become a more formal responsibility for youth-serving professionals. They describe how teens excessively worry and feel stressed, and how they need support especially in coping with academic pressure. Youth-serving professionals seem to have their fingers accurately on the pulse, because these are some of the main concerns teens have raised about their own well-being (see Figure 8).¹¹ But YPs do not always have the training or resources they need to address these challenges. When asked to write (in open-ended narrative responses) what areas of professional development would be most helpful to them, youth mental health was among the two areas cited most often (along with methods for teen recruitment and retention). Should onboarding of youth-serving professionals, across the field, include standardized training and tools for supporting teens' mental health?

FIGURE 8: YOUTH MENTAL WELL-BEING CHALLENGES (YPS' PERCEPTIONS)

Teens need the most help with . . .



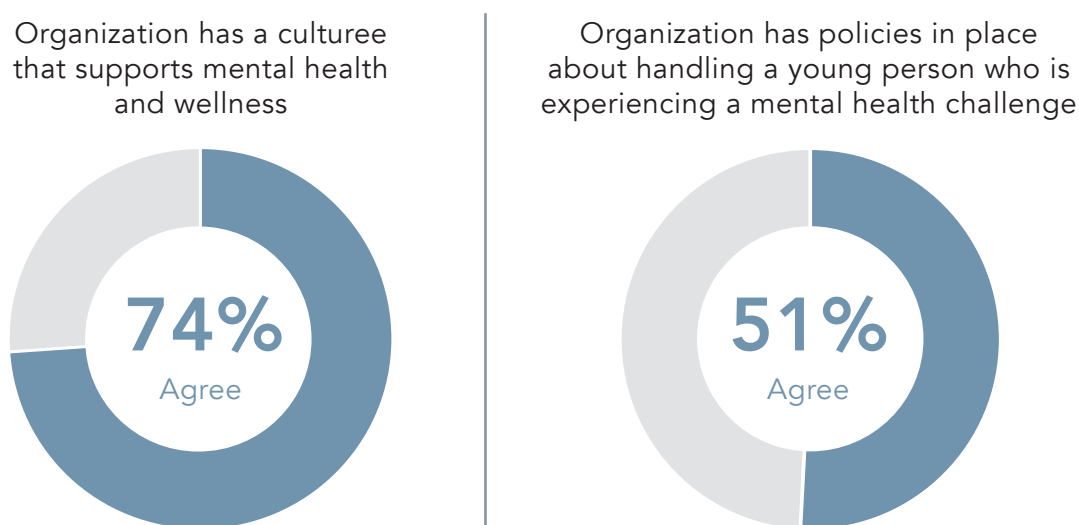
NOTES

¹⁰ This crisis has been thoroughly documented, most extensively by the Center for Disease Control ([see here](#)). This crisis has been so acute, it merited an “[advisory](#)” by the US Surgeon General.

¹¹ See, for example, [this report](#) from the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. Youth-serving professionals are also well attuned to what their teens are experiencing when it comes to facing and addressing antisemitism. Teens and youth-serving professionals largely do not identify antisemitism as a concern, even as parents and institutional leadership often do.

One way in which youth-serving professionals could be supported in this regard is through their organizations. However, not all Jewish organizations are set up to support youth mental health. Even as three-quarters of youth-serving professionals say their organization has a culture that supports mental health and wellness, only half say their organization has policies that help them navigate this aspect of their role (see Figure 9). In other words, to address the youth mental health crisis, the Jewish community should support not only youth-serving professionals, but also Jewish organizations more broadly.

FIGURE 9: JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS' PREPAREDNESS TO ADDRESS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



WORKING WITH PARENTS CAN SOMETIMES BE CHALLENGING.

The broad array of professional development needs brought up by youth-serving professionals (anything from grant writing, to marketing and communication, to engaging in conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) highlights the extent and variety of the demands on them. Another area where youth-serving professionals are called upon to support teens is navigating relationships with parents. Overall, 65% of youth-serving professionals say they actively cultivate relationships with the parents of teens (and this is higher for more seasoned YPs; 73% of those who have been working with teens for over six years say they engage with parents). Professionals engage with parents to support teens' wellness challenges, as an important conduit to the teen audience, and because parents of teens have their own engagement needs and are seeking supportive community during these years. On the other hand, those YPs (especially less seasoned ones) who do not cultivate relationships with parents sometimes find parents to be inaccessible and difficult to contact. Working with parents is another domain where YPs could be better supported and trained.

3

What Youth Professionals Need: Supportive Peer Networks and Supportive Supervisors



As demands on the role increase, YPs are feeling underprepared for the work they must do. On the one hand, almost three-quarters (74%) of the respondents said they participated in some kind of professional development experience over the past 12 months, but on the other hand, only 46% of felt that they receive sufficient on-the-job training. And as we just saw, when asked about the areas where they could benefit from professional development, youth-serving professionals shared a broad and diverse range of domains, which indicates the range of professional skills they need and demands they face. No single course, series, or one-off training can meet that variety of needs for professional development. How could the field promote and organize, across the community, a robust menu of professional development offerings to better support professionals in meeting these demands?

NETWORKING WITH PEERS

Youth-serving professionals who did take advantage of professional development opportunities report several benefits; first among them is gaining a sense of community and of a professional network of peers (78% say that; ahead of 72% who say they enhanced their ability to do their work better). Feeling less alone, and knowing your professional peers well, it would seem, are major factors in a positive youth professional experience. Interventions like cohort-based learning and in-person networking events could be effective in engendering a sense that YPs have a supportive professional network of peers who work with youth. More, and more robust networks (such as the one created by the Funder Collaborative's national PD efforts, or the ones that could be cultivated using such [AI-supported online tools as the Name Game](#)) could allow youth-serving professionals to connect with peers across settings, break down silos, learn together, problem-solve, and more.

SUPPORTING SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISORS

The data from the survey also suggests the crucial role of supervisors. While youth-serving professionals report an overall supportive work environment, they do not feel like their professional development needs are being met, or that they have sufficient opportunities for on-the-job learning and advancement. It may be that (at least some) supervisors lack a sophisticated understanding of the role of, needs for, and demands on youth-serving professionals. Quite often, the people supervising youth professionals do not work in the youth space, or have not for some time, but rather in a broader educational capacity. This may make it difficult for supervisors to appreciate some of the unique challenges facing youth professionals (such as balancing work and home lives when most teen programming takes place on evenings and weekends). Their supervisors could be trained to address these challenges specific to the role of youth-serving professionals. Yet, professional development for supervisors is hard to come by. Resources should be invested in addressing the professional development needs of both youth-serving professionals and their supervisors.

The findings from this survey of youth-serving professionals highlight many bright spots. First, YPs are stable in their positions, largely work full time for one organization, and plan to stay in the field. They are highly motivated professionals who care about the Jewish community and, in turn, feel cared for by their supervisors.

Yet, this study, the body of work focused on the field of youth-serving professionals, and our experiences via the Funder Collaborative make it clear that there are several areas that require critical, field-wide attention. There is still a lack of standards of practice, funding, and support for policies and structures. Dedication and supportive efforts to improve the professional experience of youth professionals require a common knowledge base, grassroots support, and a shared sense of identity.

It is energizing to think what might be possible if we were to come together to professionalize the field. To that end, the following are recommendations to consider:

IMPROVE THE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS FOR YOUTH PROFESSIONALS

Develop clearer and more realistic job descriptions for youth professionals. Currently, there is no formal definition for who “counts” as a youth-serving professional. As a result, the role tends to include a wide variety of tasks, skills, points of entry, and expectations.

- It is difficult to know what training and professional development youth professionals may need or what opportunities for advancement might be created without first standardizing who a youth professional is and what is expected in their role.
- Of the percentage of those who plan to leave the field, low salaries, long hours, and lack of opportunity for advancement are the reasons cited. Clearer and more realistic job descriptions set boundaries helpful to professionals serving these positions and may also drive respect for the role or inspire creative solutions around compensation and advancement.

Improve supervision for YPs by focusing on their managers. As the roles and responsibilities of YPs are made clear, the additional training supervisors will require will become clear. While YPs report feeling supported, the data demonstrates a need for supervisor training on:

- Supervision best practices (e.g., promoting professional development, supporting work-life balance).
- Communicating expectations and respecting boundaries.

Support the mental health and wellness of YPs and teens. Wellness has emerged as a critical component of professional development (see our recommendations under PD as well). YPs are increasingly responding to the mental health and wellness needs of the teens they serve, and national initiatives are equipping them to do so in ways appropriate to the role. Yet, the organizations they work for lack the culture and policies to address the growing mental health crisis. Organizations that employ YPs should:

- Review their policies and procedures for addressing mental health issues. Communicating expectations and respecting boundaries.
- Provide staff with training in identifying and responding to mental health issues.

EMPHASIZE THE CREATION OF A DIVERSE TALENT PIPELINE AND SUPPORT CAREER PATHING RATHER THAN TRADITIONAL RETENTION.

Ensure roles are filled with the right person for the right duration. YPs tend to be more homogenous than the youth they are tasked with reaching and serving. Numerous studies reflect the importance of representation to Gen Z ([which itself is more diverse than any previous generation](#)). Therefore, communities and organizations should consider the following:

- Intentional recruitment and hiring strategies that attract and support diverse talent.
- Training about how to support colleagues and teens with diverse identities. Such training helps foster an inclusive work environment attractive to aspiring youth professionals of all entry points, increases collaboration and promotes teamwork, and expands market reach (an area which nearly all youth professionals have expressed the desire for increased competence. Also see our recommendations on PD).

Standardize onboarding for new hires. Onboarding will aid in early feelings of success and carve out future professional development opportunities which may aid in retaining talent and identifying field leaders. It will also ensure new talent are skilled in vital areas such as teen mental health or parent engagement.

Consider developing a more expansive view, education, and practical supports around career pathing. This study revealed that many youth professionals are attracted to the opportunity to serve the Jewish people rather than specifically to work with teens.

- This may include accepting and naming for youth-serving professionals the “steppingstone” nature of youth work or recalibrating expectations around desired duration in this role.
- We should consider reinterpreting “retention” in terms of retaining professionals in service of the Jewish people rather than retaining professionals in their current roles.
- Professional development opportunities may include leveraging potential senior youth professional and former youth-professional mentors and exposing youth professionals to broader serving institutions like Jewish Federations and JCCs in order for them to engage in discovery early on and identify how successful execution and professional development opportunities of their youth-serving portfolio may advance their career aspirations.

INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE AND COLLABORATION.

Increase collaboration to recruit, onboard, and continuously train professionals who are on the frontlines with teens. While engagement approaches may vary, the challenges are universal and collaborative interventions will offer better access to world-class tools and resources, trainings with diverse providers, and peer-learning opportunities in pluralistic settings. These interventions can be operated at both the national and local levels.

Provide opportunities for YPs to network. Repeatedly, YPs share that being part of a supportive professional network with other YPs is one of the most beneficial aspects of participating in professional development. We encourage communities to understand networking as complementary to professional development, the latter focusing on skill or knowledge-delivery. While a stronger network may be a byproduct of cohort-based learning, sometimes people need a different platform to be together and to encourage collegiality. Intentional networking is a low-cost way for communities to strengthen the ecosystem and there are excellent and effective models to draw on:

- **Co-working.** Many communities have instituted co-working days where youth-serving professionals can come together for the workday. Co-working offers opportunities for real-time collaboration and ideation, while preserving productivity. Co-working also has been proven to breakdown territorialism between youth-serving professionals and organizations. The chance for first-hand insight into someone else's professional experiences cultivates empathy and sense of shared identity.
 - Some models rotate hosts amongst participating organizations so youth-serving professionals can see youth-serving spaces firsthand. Others have a fixed host at a neutral communal space or leverage public spaces such as cafes or established co-working spaces. Did any of the recommendations resonate?
 - Consider covering the cost of a communal lunch to inspire conversation and to communicate professional value and investment in co-working opportunities. This could be paired with (optional) facilitated discussion or learning.
- **Sponsored 1:1's.** Give youth professionals who opt-in the opportunity to build and strengthen individual relationships. Local, central and neutral leadership such as a Federation, can supply coffee gift cards and a simple invitation that intentionally connect one youth-serving professionals to another. We recommend a pace of one match per month until everyone has had a chance to connect. For a digital (and less labor-intensive solution) communities could build out a local version of the national [Name Game](#). Contact Rabbi Dena Shaffer (dena.shaffer@jewishfederations.com) for more information if this intervention is of interest to your community or organization.
- **Social gatherings** aimed at creating or reinforcing connections.
- **Leverage social media** such as Facebook groups, Slack channels, or a WhatsApp group chat, to create digital hubs for real-time idea sharing, connections, program banks, and more. Especially where there are few resources or staff capacity, these platforms empower youth-serving professionals themselves to meet some of their own networking and professional needs.

IMPLEMENT A UNIFIED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE.

In a world that is rapidly changing, the education and training we're providing youth professionals has not kept up. Collaboration in this space would empower the field to tap into best practices in delivering adult education and professional development in order to ...

- Increase YP's knowledge of adolescent development and well-being.
- Increase YP's ability to build strong relationships with teens and parents.
- Increase YP's ability to provide substantive programmatic content and help teens explore how Judaism can add meaning to their lives.
- Increase YP's competency to serve as Jewish role models for teens and to see themselves as an important part of a teen's life.
- Equip YPs to communicate and work with the parents of the teens they serve as well as connect meaningfully with families who have never, or rarely participated.

A unified professional development initiative would also help elevate and standardize the core competencies and skills where YP's themselves are articulating the greatest needs; they include:

- Program recruitment and retention
- Teen mental health and wellness
- Professional skills (budgeting, technology, project management, workplace dynamics, self-advocacy)
- Parent engagement
- Navigating difficult conversations



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