

Jewish Peoplehood and Identity Service-Learning Study

A Collaborative Project of
The RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service
The University of Texas at Austin
And United Jewish Communities
09/01/2007- 09/30/2008

The Jewish Peoplehood and Identity division of the United Jewish Communities (UJC) believes that service programs of both short term (7 to 10 days) and long term (6 months to one year) duration, performed in a Jewish environment with an intentional Jewish learning component, are critical to the building of Jewish identity and engaging young adults in Jewish life. These programs engage a new generation of young Jewish volunteers with the broader Jewish community, both domestically and abroad.

Over 60 Jewish service programs exist for young North American Jews between the ages of 18-35. The programs take place in the United States, Israel, and several other countries worldwide in an effort to shape their participants into “global Jewish citizens.”

The RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service has been awarded a contract to investigate the ways in which participation in voluntary service programs affects the formation of Jewish identity among Jewish young people. For this project, eight organizations sponsoring one or more service programs will be studied.

Short term programs

- American Jewish World Service - Alternative Breaks
- Hillel Alternative Breaks
- Jewish FundS for Justice -Alternative Breaks
- Jewish National Fund (JNF) – Israel Alternative Breaks
- Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) – Alternative Breaks
- Keshet/Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) – Alternative Breaks

Long term programs

- American Jewish World Service (AJWS) – Fellows Program
- American Jewish World Service (AJWS)- Volunteer Summer
- AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
- Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) - Jewish Service Corps
- OTZMA Volunteer/Leadership Fellowship

These eight organizations have seen increasing numbers of participants throughout recent years. In 2005, over 5,200 individuals participated, while in 2006 over 6,700 individuals took part in these programs.

In order to understand the connection between Jewish service programs and Jewish identity among young adults, the study will engage in these activities:

- **Pre-Service Survey: Fall 2007 – Spring 2008** with Jewish young adults who have applied to participate in one of the service programs listed above. The RGK Center will survey young adults who have applied for and been accepted to serve, as well as those not accepted to serve.
- **Focus Groups: Spring 2008** with participants of Jewish service programs and non-participant Jewish young adults in Austin, TX and in three cities with large Jewish populations: New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.
- **Post-Service Survey: Spring 2008 - Early Summer 2008** with Jewish young adults who completed their service experience along with non-participants included in the pre-service survey.

With this study, The Jewish Peoplehood and Identity division of the United Jewish Communities and the RGK Center desire to gain a much clearer understanding of the relationship between long and short term service programs and the ways in which these programs build a connection to Jewish identity, Jewish community and the mission of the Jewish federation system.

For more information you may contact Dr. Sarah Jane Rehnberg, the study's principle investigator at rehnberg@mail.utexas.edu or either of the graduate research assistants working with the project; Jinwoo Lee at jwlee@prc.utexas.edu or Jennifer Zaligson at jonaligson@gmail.com