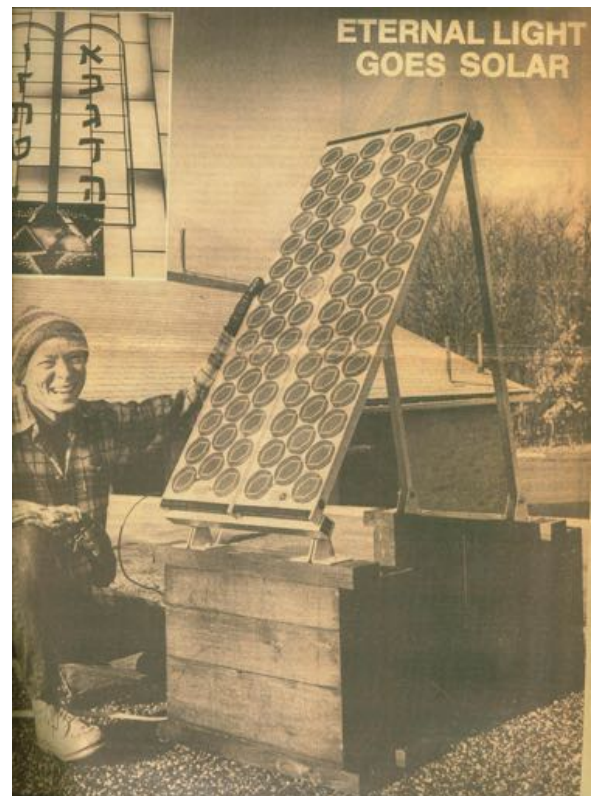




**2019 report of the initiatives inspired by the life and teachings of
Rabbi Everett Gendler**



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Summary: The Gendler Grapevine Project

In 2012, Rabbi Everett Gendler's friends, family members, and colleagues created a project that would honor his lifelong commitment to working on environmental and social justice causes as an activist, teacher, and rabbi. Between his 85th and 90th birthdays, the Gendler Grapevine Project supported initiatives and promoted activities that recognized and celebrated the deep connections between Jewish tradition, social justice, and the environment. By recommending grants through the Jewish Communal Fund of New York, the Gendler Grapevine Project supported innovative, effective, and replicable initiatives at summer camps, rabbinical schools, synagogues, and non-profit organizations.

The Gendler Grapevine Project board members' goals included allowing organizations to creatively express their values and to give them the funds and time to develop new ideas. One grantee said he appreciated that the Gendler Grapevine Project asked applicants to "be creative and bold and to push ourselves in a new direction." Another grantee reflected, "This funding allowed us to throw stuff at the wall and see what would stick." The representative explained that most non-profit budgets don't allow for experimental programming that might not work.

The board also wanted to support initiatives that were lasting and replicable. Knowing that the Gendler Grapevine Project was finite, the board asked applicants to plan for how their initiatives would continue after the grant moneys were used. The board also wanted to support projects that were inspiring. Similar to how Rabbi Gendler invented the solar *ner tamid* (eternal light) in rural Massachusetts, and now there are solar *ner tamids* all over the world, organizations were challenged to create projects that would inspire emulation and replication.

Annually, the board requested proposals asking applicants to draw inspiration from the life and teachings of Rabbi Gendler, recognizing that he incorporated his theories and teachings into physical and practical action that resonated with his congregants and community. Each grant cycle had a theme: summer camps in 2013, rabbinical schools in 2014, synagogues in 2015, L'dor V'dor (generation to generation) in 2016, HaBanim HaBonim (the children are the builders of our future) in 2017, and capstone projects in 2018. In total, the Gendler Grapevine Project supported 43 initiatives, awarding \$360,920 in total to non-profit organizations. Grants ranged from \$2,000 to \$15,000, 84% of which were between \$5,000 and \$10,000.

This report provides a summary of the Gendler Grapevine Project initiatives and an update on how they are faring in 2019. Of the 43 funded initiatives, 31 are still operating, six have evolved into related but different projects, and six are no longer operating. Many initiatives have grown and expanded, and several organizations have leveraged their initial Gendler Grapevine Project grant into more funds and partnerships. One grantee noted, "The Gendler Grapevine Project grant gave us a cushion to try to develop a new project. People like to give money to existing projects, not organizational support, so the ability to be given funds to develop a project and then fundraise around it was important and helpful."

This report summarizes how organizations such as Hazon (p. 17), JCC Chicago (p. 25), and Canfei Nesharim (p. 11) used their grants to expand their environmental and social justice work. The summaries below, and the more detailed project pages that follow, explain the impact the initiatives have had on these and all the organizations that received grants.

Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism (p. 21) created learning opportunities centered on bee keeping and curriculum development tying Judaism to honey and honey production. In 2018, they bottled and sold about 160 bottles of honey for \$18/each, making the project financially self-sufficient and even a money-maker for the congregation. The project has also generated a sense of community of being part of “the temple with a bee hive.”

New Roots (p. 34) is a food justice organization based in Louisville, KY. In 2015, they partnered with a conservative synagogue and a Baptist church and applied for a Gendler Grapevine Project grant. This first grant fundamentally changed New Roots and the Jewish community of Louisville. New Roots now works in partnership with many synagogues and the JCC to address food insecurity and food justice, and many members of the Jewish community are now donors and active volunteers with New Roots and the food justice movement.

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (p. 42) used their 2014 grant to develop the course: “Rabbis as Activist Leaders for Environmental Sustainability and Justice.” It has been taught three times and covers fundamental teachings on Judaism and the environment, the rabbinical students’ personal connection to the earth, and the basics of non-violent direct action. In 2016, The Julia Burke Foundation determined that of the 190 courses offered on faith and ecology in seminaries across the U.S., this class was cited as one of the seven best courses being taught.

Rodeph Shalom’s (p. 13) initiative, Common Grounds Farmers Market, was the catalyst to the synagogue actively engaging with their neighborhood community in Philadelphia. The Farmers Market has transitioned into a year-round program that provides meals for kids in the summer, and they are creating a joint temple-neighborhood after-school program.

Temple Sinai DC (p. 44) organized two social justice-oriented initiatives: one focused on immigration, the other, racial justice. The congregants enthusiastically participated in and embraced these issues, and the temple, historically a leader in social justice work in the reform Jewish community, is experiencing new levels of engagement from members. They declared themselves a sanctuary synagogue, created a social action fund, are working on deportation defense work, and have established an anti-racist platform. The rabbi reflected that the Gendler Grapevine Project grants created the basis for this important follow-on work.

The success the Gendler Grapevine Project initiatives have realized shows that when organizations are challenged and empowered to create innovative initiatives around causes about which they are passionate, they will develop meaningful initiatives that will last beyond the grant cycle. These grants have helped many non-profits grow a new branch on their organizational trees and, in several cases, fundamentally change their organizations.

Table of Contents

Beth Am Synagogue/In For Of, Inc., Olam Ubuntu Youth Leadership Program.....	5
Brattleboro Area Jewish Community, Outdoor Synagogue Project.....	6
Camp Shemesh Jewish Community of Amherst, Garden Expansion/Environmental Programming....	7
Camp Solomon Schechter, Teva Learning Center.....	8
Camp Young Judaea - Sprout Lake, Low-flow Toilet Project.....	9
Canfei Nesharim, Curriculum for Sustainable Living Inspired by Torah.....	10
Congregation B'nai Israel, The People of the Earth Initiative.....	11
Congregation Rodeph Shalom, Common Ground Farmers Market Youth Initiative.....	12
Eden Village Camp, T.I.R.E.....	13
Edlavitch DC JCC, Environmental and Food Justice Family Workshop Series.....	14
Ganei Beantown, Youth and Family Programing at the Boston Jewish Food Conference.....	15
Hazon, Introduction.....	16
Hazon, Betzalel's Workshop – Jewish Ritual Craft Making.....	17
Hazon, Eco Beit Midrash Source Book.....	18
Hazon, Teva Activities for the Classroom and Beyond.....	19
Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism, The Honey Bee Religious School Project.....	20
HUC-JIR New York School, Greening Initiative.....	21
IKAR and Shalhevet High School, Gan Shelanu.....	22
Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, Cycles of Seven - Educational Ritual Garden.....	23
JCA Camp Shalom, Grapevine Fellow.....	24
JCC Camp Chi, Reusable Dishware Project.....	25
JCC Chicago, Introduction.....	26
JCC Chicago, JCC Chicago Outdoor Shabbat and Holiday Program (Years 1 & 2).....	27
Jewish Farm School, Shorashim: Rooted in Justice.....	28
Jewish Theological Seminary, JTS Green Team Environmental Programming/Rooftop Garden.....	29
Kesher Olam Day Camp/Camp Yavneh, Kesher Olam Day Camp Initiative.....	30
Marks Jewish Community House, Green and Me.....	31
Netiya, Garden at Shomrei Torah Synagogue.....	32
New Roots, Introduction.....	33
New Roots, Interfaith Farm to Preschool Initiative.....	34
New Roots/Jewish Community of Louisville, Gendler Grapevine Fresh Stop Market.....	35
New Roots, Creation of a Youth Food Justice Corps.....	36
New Roots, Pollinating Food Justice in the Jewish Community.....	37
Oshman Family JCC, Youth Service Havorah.....	38
Rabbinical School of Hebrew College, Tikvah: The Jewish Eco-Ritual Lab.....	39
Ramah in the Rockies, Solar Hot Water System.....	40
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Rabbis as Activist Leaders Course.....	41
Shir Tikvah, Sacred Grounds Stewards Project.....	42
Temple Sinai DC, Introduction.....	43
Temple Sinai DC, The Open Door: Helping Refugees and Immigrants.....	44
Temple Sinai DC, Civil Rights South Trek.....	45
URJ Camp Coleman, Sustainability Shabbat.....	46
Wilderness Torah, Wilderness Torah Training Institute.....	47
Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School, Shechita Fellowship.....	48
Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School, Jewish-Muslim Dialogue.....	49
List of Board Members and Donors.....	50-51

Organization: Beth Am Synagogue/In For Of, Inc.

Initiative Title: Olam Ubuntu Youth Leadership Program

Location: Baltimore, MD

Grant Years: 2015, 2017



Initiative Description:

The Olam Ubuntu Youth Leadership Program is a coming-of-age educational program for Jewish and African American youth, ages 13 to 15, with the goal of fostering a sense of commitment to history and humanity. Together, the youth explore Jewish and African religious teachings, traditions, and culture, as well as their own personal and academic goals. The program name is a combination of the Hebrew word for “world” (Olam) and the Nguni Bantu word that translates to “I am because we are” (Ubuntu). The Olam Ubuntu program encourages youth to build a new community, a new world founded in the combined cultural identity, and an understanding of the group. The Gendler Grapevine Project funded curriculum development in 2015, and a pilot program was launched in February 2017, which included Jewish youth who attended Beth Am Synagogue’s Discovery Lab. In 2017-2018, the program launched its first full year of operation and expanded its geographic reach to include both Jewish and African American youth across Baltimore. In 2017, an additional Gendler Grapevine Project grant enabled In For Of, Inc. to implement a Sunday field trip series.

Initiative Status in 2019:

Even though the project has been up and running for a year-and-a-half, In For Of, Inc. and Beth Am Synagogue see the initiative as still being in a start-up phase. Olam Ubuntu continues to evolve, and they make adjustments to the program as needed. They maintain the project through fundraising and have secured funds for at least another year of programming. They are pleased with the initiative and are particularly impressed with the students’ end-of-the-year projects. They feel that the curriculum they developed in 2015 is excellent and reflect that the hardest part has been recruiting enough students from both communities. They recognize that the program requires a serious time commitment from the students and are looking at adjusting the model to address this issue. A positive sign is that many past participants who completed the program in 2018 didn't want to leave, so they have a cadre of approximately 10 high school students who are coming once a month to help and mentor the younger kids.

Organization: Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

Initiative Title: Outdoor Synagogue Project

Location: Brattleboro, VT

Grant Year: 2015



Initiative Description:

Located on a unique 12-acre setting replete with field, forest, and stream, the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community's (BAJC) Outdoor Synagogue Project created a usable space outside for holding services and classes. They built a platform specifically for services and classes, added interpretive signs to a network of trails, and created a space for Mikvah down in the stream. This helped them reconnect sanctuaries and worship to the natural glories that inspire awe and wonder. The new space for outdoor services and classes are connected by a series of trails to their Shmita orchard, holiday gardens, milkweed grove, storytelling tree, and the rest of the land. The new kiosk and signs also welcome and orient people to the uniquely Jewish nature of their synagogue gardens, orchards, and trail system. Lastly, this initiative allowed them to develop a proper Mikvah down in the stream. For the first time, their whole community has a way to immerse in the hope of Mikvah and deepen their welcoming of Shabbat, other holidays, and important personal moments.

Initiative Status in 2019:

BAJC still uses the space regularly, when weather permits, which is mostly in the spring and summer. The outdoor services fit their community's needs, and people use the path, meditation points, and signage. The ability to traverse the grounds more easily is greatly appreciated by the community. The project hasn't required any more funding beyond the original Gendler Grapevine Project grant.

Organization: Camp Shemesh Jewish Community of Amherst

Initiative Title: Garden Expansion & Environmental Programming

Location: Amherst, MA

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

Camp Shemesh is the Jewish Community of Amherst's (JCA) summer day camp. Through their Gendler Grapevine Project grant, they expanded the JCA's garden to provide food for the camp and other synagogue events, connected people to nature through agricultural education, and nurtured a culture of stewardship at camp and within the JCA community at-large. They hired a stewardship coordinator to develop environmental programming and explore creative models and sources of funding for the integration of environmental programs across JCA constituencies, such as young families, teen programming, adult education, religious school, and camp. The goals of this project included developing a two-year garden plan with a corresponding curriculum map, groundwork for future camp development, and greater connectivity to environmental programming and sustainability projects at the JCA.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The garden still exists and was expanded through an additional grant from the Grinspoon Foundation. The original project champion left JCA, and this has changed how the garden is used within the organization. For example, they've adapted the garden to complement their staff's skills and interests, and they now sow primarily low-maintenance plants (e.g., peas, chives). They believe it's important that they grow food on their land; therefore, a garden will always be an aspect of their organization. Despite this, they explained that weeding and tending the garden requires significant staff time and resources, which can be hard for a small organization. The garden is used for approximately one hour per week for programming, the Hebrew school uses it a few times a year, and it's used a lot during their 5-week summer camp session. In future projects, they plan to incorporate low-maintenance landscaping projects with programming opportunities (e.g., landscaping with fruit trees and perennial plants that have a biblical reference).

Organization: Camp Solomon Schechter

Initiative Title: Teva Learning Center

Location: Seattle, WA

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

With its Gendler Grapevine Project grant, Camp Solomon Schechter expanded its Teva Learning Center (TLC) by building a garden and providing a solid, sustainable, organic agricultural curriculum. The initial set-up of the TLC involved building a 2,000-square-foot garden area that contained more than 24 organic growing beds, fruit trees, berry bushes, a small green house, a tool shed, and a compost bin. It also included the traditional Seven Species of Israel mentioned in the Torah.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The garden is doing well and is now a fixture at Camp Solomon Schechter. They bolstered their Gendler Grapevine Project grant by securing additional grants to build more structures, support the program, and write lesson plans. They've incorporated the Israeli agriculture philosophy into their gardening, planted the Seven Species of Israel, added artwork on the wall showing the agricultural aspects of Israel, and built a greenhouse and irrigation system. The garden has been incorporated into the camp's summer budget, and programming changes year-to-year, depending on the staff's interests and expertise. For example, one year, they had a staff member who was a naturopath, and she planted and taught about medicinal plants. Every year, they teach the kids about composting, Israeli agriculture, sustainability, organic gardening, and soil composition, as well as other topics. The garden has had a long-term, positive change on the camp, in sometimes surprising ways. For example, for campers who are on the Autism spectrum, the garden has provided them personal space, quiet, and tactile engagement. The garden has also been the catalyst for environmental programming, such as a focus on food waste and eating organic food. They hold camp-wide competitions to see which tables/cabins reduce their waste the most, and they sell their camp-grown fruits and vegetables (e.g., carrots, strawberries, berries) in the camp store.

Organization: Camp Young Judaea - Sprout Lake

Initiative Title: Low-flow Toilet Project

Location: Verbank, NY

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

Camp Young Judaea at Sprout Lake replaced 36 old, inefficient toilets with modern WaterSense toilets, thereby reducing its water usage by approximately 300,000 gallons each summer. This change made an appreciable contribution to improving water efficiency in the camp and greater community. Through this initiative, they also led an education campaign. They placed informative posters about water usage and conservation outside of each bathroom, which informed campers about simple ways to make significant gains in water efficiency, such as turning off the sink while brushing teeth and taking shorter showers. They also provided a Water Conservation Kit for each camper to take home. The kit contained a water pitcher, a sink aerator, and water conservation tips.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The toilets are still working, haven't required any additional funding, and have had a positive impact on the camp. As the camp relies on well water, they noted that replacing the toilets was one of the best renovations they've made at camp. Structurally and facility-wise, it has had a huge impact. Since replacing the toilets, they haven't had to use their back-up well, which has freed up maintenance time and money to work on other things around the camp. The project has had a long-term impact on camp culture as well, as campers are now aware of well water and water conservation. Since 2013, the camp has been using the pitchers with water conservation information on them, and 2018, they had the Jewish National Foundation organize a water conservation project with the campers. The camp also hosts a service program called MADIMOW, and many campers choose to focus their projects on conservation and environmental sustainability.

Organization: Canfei Nesharim

Initiative Title: Curriculum for Sustainable Living Inspired by Torah

Location: New York, NY

Grant Year: 2017



Initiative Description:

Through their grant, Canfei Nesharim developed integrated curriculum modules to inspire high school students and their families to envision and work towards a world where the Jewish community, informed by Torah values, is educated and empowered to act to preserve and protect the environment. The key concepts, goals, and objectives of the curriculum modules were developed by their Rabbinical and Science Advisory Boards, and the modules were created under the guidance of an expert in the field. Canfei Nesharim hosted a teacher training conference, where they enabled and empowered teachers to conduct the curriculum and develop the support structure necessary for its success. They hosted a retreat for participating teachers to encourage collaboration, networking, and improvements to the program, and the program was assessed by a professional evaluator. Suggestions were used to adapt and adjust the program. Their goal is to integrate the curriculum into New York City area orthodox high schools and then expand the program to other parts of the country.

Initiative Status in 2019:

For many years, Canfei Nesharim had wanted to develop environmental curriculum, but since they aren't educators, they weren't able to do so. The Gendler Grapevine Project grant allowed them to hire educators and gave them a financial cushion to develop a new project and then fundraise around it. The initiative is up and running and continues to grow, and it has reinvigorated their organization and reengaged their donors. They secured an additional one-time Schusterman grant, which helped them expand the project. They have also partnered with Grow Torah, an organization with a complementary vision but different expertise, to implement the curriculum and construct gardens at schools. They conducted a teacher training at a Jewish day school in New York City that has a community garden. Since that training, several other schools have expressed interest in the curriculum. They are planning to develop an alternative model that has a significant source-based Talmud-intensive study for more orthodox schools. They hired a rabbi who is connected with the more religiously conservative schools to help increase engagement with this community. While the first teacher training was provided free of charge, going forward, schools will either pay for the program or they will fundraise for scholarships to participate in the project.

Organization: Congregation B'nai Israel

Initiative Title: The People of the Earth Initiative

Location: Amherst, MA

Grant Year: 2015



Initiative Description:

Congregation B'nai Israel developed a calendar of earth-based rituals, classes, and festivals that positioned their on-site community farm (Abundance Farm) in new ways and changed the way their congregation thinks, teaches, and prays by reestablishing the central place of the natural world within their communal Jewish life. Their primary goals included training the teachers to instinctively think about how they could use the farm and outdoor classroom as part of their lessons, overhauling their youth and family education program so the farm was deeply integrated within it, establishing a new outdoor prayer space, creating a community-wide Sukkot Harvest Festival and Hakhel Gathering to raise awareness about environmental stewardship and food security activism, and rekindling the tradition of homemade Jewish ritual items (e.g., making Chanukah candles, matzah, Havdalah B'samim bundles).

Initiative Status in 2019:

Abundance Farm and the People of the Earth Initiative continue to thrive and serve as important parts of the broader Jewish community in the region. The Gendler Grapevine Project grant enabled them to move in a new direction by giving them the support to put resources into an area that was an edge for them, but they knew they wanted to grow. They wanted to experiment with using the farm as a resource to celebrate holidays, and the grant helped them redefine the farm as a place that is for more than just growing food. They said they appreciated that the Gendler Grapevine Project board asked organizations to be creative and bold and to push themselves in a new direction. All of the programs they created with their grant are active and have deepened. For example, they daven outside, hold a first Friday on the farm for new members, and run the annual Sukkot harvest festival. They continue to find other occasions to do ritual and celebrations outside. They are still grant-dependent and recognize that they are transitioning from a start-up phase into a mature stage and are figuring out their financial model for the future.

Organization: Congregation Rodeph Shalom

Initiative Title: Common Ground Farmers Market Youth Initiative

Location: Philadelphia, PA

Grant Year: 2015



Initiative Description:

In 2014, Rodeph Shalom partnered with The Food Trust to create the Common Ground initiative. In 2015, they built on this by creating the Farmers Market Youth Initiative, with the goal of addressing food insecurity, poverty, lack of access to adequate medical care, lack of access to valuable social services, struggling schools, and stressed communities. The initiative helped Rodeph Shalom students learn about the challenges and complexities of an urban environment. B'nei Mitzvah and Confirmation students designed, implemented, and evaluated their own social justice projects that were carried out at the market. They were implemented with rabbinic guidance and supervision and provided students with life skills such as coalition building, project design and management, objective evaluation, and resource management. Students learned what it means to do good work in the real world.

Initiative Status in 2019:

While this specific initiative has completed, it transformed their community. When they started the farmers market, the vision was two-fold: let the youth garden while providing fresh vegetables for the neighborhood, and remove barriers in the community. The Farmers Market Youth Initiative was the first step in a successful journey of meeting and opening their doors to their neighbors. Over the course of the market's three years, congregants learned that many of their neighbors receive free breakfast and lunch during the school year but nothing during the summer. In response, in 2017, Rodeph Shalom started a summer meal program called "Break Bread on Broad," where neighbors are invited into the synagogue for food and activities. There are kids who worked on the garden project who now volunteer with the breaking bread program. Rodeph Shalom is planning to create an after-school program for both Rodeph Shalom and neighborhood students. These new programs would not exist if they hadn't implemented the farmers market. The new programs are supported through grants, a donor family, and a company that helped the kids farm and sell food at the market.

Organization: Eden Village Camp

Initiative Title: T.I.R.E.

Location: Putnam Valley, NY

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

Eden Village Camp provides campers with an incredible summer experience while empowering them to promote a vibrant future for themselves, their communities, and the planet. With their grant from the Gendler Grapevine Project, Eden Village Camp instituted T.I.R.E. (Tire Inflation for the Retrieval of Energy). Through the T.I.R.E. program, Eden Village Camp took advantage of the plethora of vehicles that visited their site on pick-up and drop-off days for campers, as well as their spring and fall programming. On those days, Eden Village Camp staff used a solar-powered generator to inflate the tires of these cars so they performed at maximal gasoline efficiency. This simple act empowered both campers and their parents to make small efforts in their lives that go a long way to make for a more sustainable life here on earth.

Initiative Status in 2019:

Eden Village Camp is no longer running T.I.R.E. While they enjoyed the concept behind the initiative, they found that in reality, it didn't work the way they anticipated it would. Drop-off/pick-up days are the busiest days at camp, and they learned that trying to check every car's tires, and then adjust the air pressure, proved to make the day too hectic. Also, the solar-powered panels stopped working fairly quickly, and they decided that the initiative wasn't worth the expense to fix them. They said that they learned a critical lesson through this experience: that it's important to ensure that all of their projects are working in tandem and that it's okay to let a project go if they find that it isn't.

Organization: Edlavitch DC Jewish Community Center

Title: Environmental & Food Justice Family Workshop Series

Location: Washington, DC

Grant Year: 2017



Initiative Description:

Edlavitch DC JCC (EDCJCC) held two family workshops focused on environmental and food justice. The first was a “glean and learn” workshop, where participants travelled to a farm to glean fruits and vegetables that would have otherwise been wasted. The gleaned produce was donated to the Capital Area Food Bank. Families also participated in a learning session delivered by a EDCJCC JOFEE fellow. The second program was a hands-on workshop on composting and urban gardening. In partnership with several DC non-profits and business leaders in the urban environmental movement, families learned about the importance of composting and gardening. They also received supplies and information on how to compost and garden at home. The workshop incorporated activities for all ages, including a compost scavenger hunt, where children were given magnifying glasses and bingo cards with items, such as earthworms and bugs, to search for in their compost pile.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The workshops were a huge hit, each attracting a big turnout. Since the grant ended, EDCJCC has started a major capital campaign to renovate their building, and in conjunction with this campaign, they started a green team and are exploring how to make the JCC more green as they redesign their space. They have focused on changing habits and infusing environmental programming into the preschool. In the future, they will look for new funding streams or organize programs similar to the workshops that aren't as costly. They have a tentative plan to implement the family programming again in the future. They noted that the Gendler Grapevine Project grant brought environmental awareness to their community, and they have noticed an increased interest in programming focused on sustainability.

Organization: Ganei Beantown

Initiative Title: Youth & Family Programing at the Boston Jewish Food Conference

Location: Boston, MA

Grant Year: 2017



Initiative Description:

Support from the Gendler Grapevine Project enabled Ganei Beantown to develop and implement a new workshop track focused on youth and families at their Boston Jewish Food Conference. This annual springtime event uses food and agriculture to discuss the intersections of justice, sustainability, and culture within the Jewish community and in Jewish traditions. The conference includes multiple workshops (in the kitchen and classroom) and culminates in a Community Celebration and Shuk (marketplace), featuring experiential, do-it-yourself activities, advocacy opportunities, tabling by community organizations, a silent auction, and live music. Participants also help to prepare a kosher, vegetarian dinner alongside chef educators. The conference location changes every year, as Ganei Beantown is working to build a constituent base in the community.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The youth and family program at the 2018 Boston Jewish Food conference was a success and started a conversation about how Ganei Beantown can continue to improve their family programming. They had done some family programming in the past (e.g., Tu b'Shevat maple sugaring), as food and gardening are easy ways to reach out to and connect with kids. They are still working on how to make family programming an integral part of their work, and the Gendler Grapevine Project grant allowed their small organization to explore something new and gave them the opportunity to pursue it. The biggest lesson they learned was about marketing. Namely, that kids and families aren't interested in attending "conferences." As a result, they have rebranded their food conference as a "festival." In 2019, the food festival was held on the north shore of Boston.

Organization: Hazon

Initiative Titles: Betzalel's Workshop – Jewish Ritual Craft Making; Eco Beit Midrash Source Book; Teva Activities for the Classroom & Beyond

Location: New York, NY/Falls Village, CT

Grant Years: 2016, 2017, Capstone



Hazon's three Gendler Grapevine Project grants have expanded the organization's environmental education toolbox. For each of their grants, Hazon proposed to develop hands-on projects that would expand the work their teachers are able to do with their students. Each of the three developed initiatives can be taught independent of each other; however, together, they become a toolkit that makes meaningful connections between Judaism and nature. In their Capstone initiative, Hazon will create a Gendler Grapevine Project corner on the education page of their website, where visitors can download all the manuals and implement the projects at their respective organizations.

Through these grants, Hazon has shown that there is a desire for experiential education and hands-on learning experiences and that this method is a powerful teaching tool. Hazon's first grant was designed to meet the needs of the 12 to 13 Teva educators they train each fall. However, Hazon received feedback from their other educators that they were struggling to grasp the deeper connections between Judaism and environment, so Hazon decided to offer the Gendler Grapevine Project-developed curriculum to these educators and leaders as well. This proved to be a huge success.

The curriculum has had a greater impact than Hazon had initially created it for. For example, Hazon offers teacher trainings and oversees the JOFEE fellowship, and the initiatives are now taught to people who live and work all over the United States, not just Teva participants.

Hazon (continued)



2016 Betzalel's Workshop Description:

Hazon's Betzalel's Workshop – Jewish Ritual Craft Making Project helps people connect viscerally, directly, and in an unmediated way with Jewish tradition, patterns, and cycles. Hazon engaged the creativity and passions of children who participate in Teva, Hazon's Jewish outdoor experiential education program, by developing and offering a series of ritual craft making workshops. Through the workshop, students learn how to create ritual objects by hand using materials such as glass, wood, metal, textiles, and other local or natural materials. Workshops take place in the art studio located at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, which has over 5,000 visitors annually. Hazon developed accompanying written lesson plans for teachers to use at their own schools. These plans are posted on Hazon's educational webpage.

Initiative Status in 2019:

Hazon developed a 45-page instruction manual for teachers to help them guide kids through hands-on activities, such as making Recycled Glass Kiddush Cups, Recycled Metal Washing Cups, Wood-Burned Challah Boards, Hand-Whittled Yads, and Hand-Spun Tzitzit for Tallit. Each ritual craft contains a lesson plan with step-by-step instructions on how to implement the activity. Hazon has incorporated the lessons into the regular Teva curriculum. The lesson plans are available in both hard copy (for teachers to take back to their classrooms) and on the Hazon website for anyone to use. They have been promoting the project and its connection to the Gendler Grapevine Project through the Hazon e-newsletter and on the Hazon website. They plan to make the ritual craft program available to all of the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center visitors.

They note that this workshop has become their most popular curriculum. It is requested and taught regularly, including during the 11-week Teva season, where it reaches 1000 students per year, and during holiday retreats. Teachers have raved about it, noting that the students enjoy creating something with their hands, relating the activities to rituals they know from home, and having something to take home with them. They've added a few more crafts to the original curriculum via an additional Gendler Grapevine Project grant.

Hazon (continued)



2017 Eco Beit Midrash Source Book Description:

Through this project, Hazon is developing an Eco Beit Midrash Source Book to be used during Teva educator trainings and will be compiled into a publication that will be made available to schools and institutions interested in JOFEE. This book will enable teachers to provide a deeper knowledge and awareness when teaching Teva students Jewish ecological and social justice concepts. The book will consist of twelve 45-minute segments, each featuring traditional Jewish text sources to be studied side-by-side with modern environmental ideas.

Initiative Status in 2019:

To date, the source book has been used to teach over 60 Jewish professionals from Hazon and partner programs. They've used this source book to frame and inform the question: "What is Jewish about Jewish environmentalism?" with Teva educators. The source book has become a powerful contribution in helping educators pass their wisdom and passion down to students. Hazon notes that the source book has become useful beyond the scope of its initial intent. The framework and the lessons have become an integral part of Hazon's trainings in programs beyond Teva, including the JOFEE Fellowship and the JOFEE Leaders Institute.

Hazon has also been using the source book in professional development seminars for mid-career JOFEE educators, and they've refined this curriculum for the JOFEE Leaders Institute cohort. This refinement consisted of further development of the user's guide, and a final edit of the beit midrash lessons. Hazon also shared the curriculum with individuals at a JOFEE Network Gathering during a session that highlighted how to use its techniques and lesson plans as a framework for teaching Jewish environmental concepts. Over 160 individuals from 50 JOFEE organizations participated in the session and can now take the curriculum and use it at institutions across the country.

As of 2019, the book is not quite complete. For example, the "How to use this book" section needs to be developed further. Once this has been completed, they will edit, format, copy edit, and send the book to be printed and posted on their website.

Hazon (continued)



Capstone Teva Activities for the Classroom & Beyond Description:

The reception of Hazon's previous Gendler Grapevine Project initiatives has been excellent, and the projects have substantially deepened Hazon's ability to inspire and educate participants. For their Capstone initiative, Hazon will expand their lesson plans and develop curriculum that will be available for Teva schools. These classes will be built as stand-alone lessons, so they can more easily be incorporated into the school setting, and they will be available on their website to download.

During each Teva season, 33 schools visit the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center. While on-site, teachers participate in trainings such as pickling, farm-tours, and educational hikes. Through the Capstone initiative, Hazon staff will be able to share the curricula with teachers via on-site educational workshops, allowing the teachers to become familiar with the curricula, receive a copy to take home, and witness the lessons in action. Because Hazon receives regular calls from schools with requests for creative materials, they think that the curriculum available online will be used by Hebrew schools and camps, even if they can't visit the Center.

The proposed course development includes:

- Science (e.g., exploring natural design with Perek Shira and Biomimicry, exploring the water cycle of Israel and holidays, Jewish measurements, Jewish calendar)
- Art (e.g., clay mezuzot and painted silk challah covers, creative bracha cards, Shiviti, Siddur art, Rosh HaShanah LaBehemot art project)
- Text learning (e.g., Shabbat as an environmental day, Noah and species preservation, Genesis and relationship to trees, careful use of resources and Baal Taschit, kindness towards animals and Tzar Baalay Chayyim, the cultivation of wonder and A.J. Heschel)
- Website

A Gendler Grapevine Project curricula section will be added to Hazon's Teva webpage and will include all of their Gendler Grapevine Project initiatives.

- Betzalel's Workshop (Jewish eco-crafts for all ages)
- Classroom teaching (Jewish ecological classroom activities for school teachers to use with their students)
- Eco Beit Midrash curriculum (a source-book for study and discussion of eco-Jewish values for adults)

Initiative Status in 2019:

This project is in its beginning stages, and it is too early to give a progress update.

Organization: Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism

Initiative Title: The Honey Bee Religious School Project

Location: Houston, TX

Grant Year: 2017



Initiative Description:

The project mission of Plan Bee was to offer a range of learning opportunities for students of all ages that revolved around the production of honey from a bee hive. Plan Bee included a curriculum that tied Jewish learning to honey and honey production and wove eco-centric values and ethics together with the cycles of the Jewish calendar and the holidays. The program included volunteer opportunities for the congregation at-large. Students learned from a professional bee keeper and were involved in the hands-on process of harvesting and bottling the honey. Honey produced from the hives was sold, used at congregational events, and gifted. Both the communal rituals that incorporated the honey as well as the religious school curriculum highlighted the centrality of honey in Jewish lore, thus adding a new dimension to their understanding Jewish text. Finally, the honey bee program provided an opportunity for adults and children to be part of a congregation-wide project that broadened their community's reach in environmental activities.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The Plan Bee project is healthy and growing, and the educational materials are still being used. Although the rabbi wishes that the hive could be on-site so the kids could have more of a personal relationship with the bees, due to some congregants' concerns about people who are allergic, they decided to keep the hive off-site. With the initial Gendler Grapevine Project grant, they employed a bee keeper, and in 2018, they bottled and sold over 160 bottles of honey for \$18/each. This has made project financially self-sufficient. The sales from the honey provide enough income to pay the bee keeper and purchase bottles and labels. There is even a little money left over, so it has become a money maker for the congregation. Most importantly, the project has generated a sense of community and is shaping an identity that they are "the temple with a bee hive." They now speak more about local sourcing and the seasons, as Rosh Hashanah is when they will get to bottle and eat the honey from their hive.

Organization: HUC-JIR New York School New York School

Initiative Title: Greening Initiative

Location: New York, NY

Grant Year: 2014



Initiative Description:

HUC-JIR modeled their Greening Initiative after neighboring New York University's successful recycling program by implementing a new centralized waste system. Rethinking HUC-JIR's waste processes was a central focus the Greening Initiative. Some simple steps they took included removing all trash cans from the classrooms and providing a central location for all waste, switching to biodegradable products, and establishing a relationship with an industrial composting company. Through their composting effort, combined with refocused efforts on recycling, HUC-JIR reduced their waste in campus trash cans. The overall goal was to make the whole student body be mindful of how they discard their waste. The Green Team also developed an educational series titled, "The Rabbi Everett Gendler Environmental Education Series," which worked to inspire change in thought and action on campus.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The recycling and waste reduction work is still happening at HUC-JIR. They said that the Gendler Grapevine Project grant allowed them to start implementing their goal of greening the campus sooner than they would have been able to if they needed to work with their typical budget. When the grant ended, they designated funds in their general budget to continue several parts of the project, such as composting. They weren't, however, able to continue the lecture series. While there was a learning period in the first year the project was implemented, the initial project fundamentally changed the campus culture and inspired more environmental projects (e.g., they recently installed low-flow toilets and high-efficiency lighting). The Green Team still organizes different projects every year. For example, they set up a station to collect items that aren't commonly recyclable at home and built relationships with organizations that recycle those items. Since the initiative in 2014, most of the student body has turned over, so everyone that is currently at HUC-JIR has only ever used compostables and known recycling to be on campus. It is the new normal for the school.

Organization: IKAR and Shalhevet High School

Initiative Title: Gan Shelanu

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Grant Year: 2016



Initiative Description:

IKAR and the orthodox high school, Shalhevet, worked together to bring the goals of Shalhevet's Green Team to fruition in a project called Gan Shelanu. IKAR utilized their Green Action Minyan Tzedek members to help the Shalhevet Green Team educate themselves, other students, and their families in Judaic responses to environmental injustice. Through the project, they installed recycling and composting bins and systems, bought and planted fruit trees, installed a drip irrigation system, led educational workshops, purchased compostable materials for daily use, and bought organic garden supplies. In educational workshops, they offered a framework of Jewish textual and traditional connection to the earth and the mitzvah of protecting it. Working with the non-profit, Netiya, they integrated "upcycle" activities into the community events, where participants learned about composting. The combination of text study and hands-on interaction with the gardening/composting process created a powerful experiential learning opportunity.

Initiative Status in 2019:

IKAR is still working with the school and their Green Team. The garden was completed and the high school students still maintain it. The Gendler Grapevine Project grant helped both organizations be able to transition to using compostable dishware at all of their events during the grant period. The school has discontinued using compostables, but IKAR still does in their office. The school didn't have a city contract to pick up the compostables, but IKAR is working with them to find an alternative. IKAR has since moved offices and will build an urban garden at their new building. The long-term impact of the Gendler Grapevine Project grant has been that it has made IKAR committed to composting and adding a garden to their new building; for the school, it has helped encourage them to recycle.

Organization: Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center

Initiative Title: Cycles of Seven - Educational Ritual Garden

Location: Falls Village, CT

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

The Isabella Freedman Retreat Center, a 400-acre sanctuary in the Berkshires, is at the center of the Jewish environmental and food education movement. With their grant from the Gendler Grapevine Project, Isabella Freedman designed, constructed, and staffed a garden with maximum visual Jewish ecological impact for the thousands of visitors they receive every year. The garden was designed around seven raised beds and signs that provide experience in digging, planting, harvesting, blessing, composting, as well as a space for holding Shabbat and Shmita. With such a large audience, they are able to effectively educate people to use Jewish gardens in their own communities.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The garden is still an active and present feature at Isabella Freedman. They noted that the garden has positively affected peoples' experiences when they visit the Center. It is a different and unique space for programming, and it is very visible and accessible. They said that the way they use the garden has evolved over the years. Initially, they had a set or rigid idea of how each bed would be used, but they've discovered that the cycles of visitors they have at the Center require that they be more flexible with the beds. For example, instead of having plants growing in each bed, they now keep some of the beds open, so student groups can plant in them. The garden has not required any extra funding. Since the garden was built in 2013, they said that all they have needed to do is repaint the signs.

Organization: JCA Shalom

Initiative Title: Grapevine Fellow

Location: Malibu, CA

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

Camp JCA Shalom created a staff position called the Grapevine Fellow. The Fellow joined the camp staff in the summer of 2013 and educated and inspired Camp JCA Shalom campers and staff on sustainability best practices, environmental awareness, and the connections between Judaism and the environment. The Fellow's responsibilities included teaching campers and staff how to be Shomrei Adamah (keepers of the earth), strengthening and modeling the Jewish environmental concepts of Bal Taschit (not wasting) and Tzaar Ba'alei Hayyim (ethical treatment of animals), and realizing other environmental values in all aspects of camp life, including dining hall practices, bunk programming, and specialty areas.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The fellowship still exists, but the name has been changed to "The Segil Family Fellow," to reflect the board member who has continued to fund this position since the Gendler Grapevine Project grant ended in 2013. Camp JCA Shalom prides itself on its history of centering its programming and ethos on nature and the environment. This is largely driven by their executive director, who is passionate about farming and gardening. To this foundation, the fellowship has added a high-level educator who runs the camp's summer farm, garden, and environmental education. Having a Fellow devoted to environmental education has had a dramatic and immediate effect. The Fellow also oversees and serves as a mentor for three to four younger staffers, including the Hazon-sponsored JOFFEE Fellows. After leaving Camp JCA Shalom, the Fellows have continued their environmental work in various capacities, including consulting, the Peace Corps, and as a farm director. As the farm and garden programs have grown, they have become integral parts of the camp's overall program and have morphed into more general camp activities, as opposed to being one-off activities. The environmental programming has directly impacted the 1000 staffers and campers, who, day-in and day-out, live a more environmentally aware life. In early 2019, the camp was tragically destroyed by the Woolsey Fire. While they rebuild their facilities, activities, including summer camp, will be held at other sites. As they rebuild, they will be integrating farming back into the camp, with the goal of making it stronger and more central.

Organization: JCC Camp Chi

Initiative Title: Reusable Dishware Project

Location: Chicago, IL

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

Camp Chi, the summer camp of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago, is located on the shore of Lake Bluff in Wisconsin. With their grant from the Gendler Grapevine Project, Camp Chi reduced their use of disposable paper plates, plastic utensils, and polystyrene cups by purchasing reusable dishware, cups, and silverware. By highlighting the environmental impact of this change in and around the dining hall, campers learned about the importance and value of being stewards of the environment. Furthermore, during Shabbat, they designated a time for campers to participate in an experiential study of Bal Tashit and the impact of waste on the environment. Using this project as an example, campers engaged in considering how they could incorporate similar changes in their lives at home.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The reusable dishware is still in use at Camp Chi. The camp has over 1600 kids in attendance over the course of the summer, so they recognize and acknowledge how much waste they are not creating. They still address the importance of environmental sustainability with the campers, and the education materials they created in 2013 are still being employed. The original reusable dishware project has inspired additional donations to help make the camp more environmentally sustainable. For example, environmentally friendly, low-flow water fountains were donated and installed in 2017. They also have implemented everyday initiatives to be greener at all their camps in the Chicago area. They see that the students are much more aware of their environmental impact, and they use their three meals a day that they eat with the kids as a venue to teach the campers to live more environmentally sustainable lives.

Organization: Jewish Community Centers of Chicago

Initiative Title: JCC Chicago Outdoor Shabbat & Holiday Program

Location: Chicago, IL

Grant Years: 2016, 2017



In 2016, the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago applied for a grant to develop an outdoor shabbat and holiday program. Their goal was to expand their outreach beyond the four walls of their centers and to utilize their suburban properties in the process. The 2016 program proved to be a success, and they wanted to continue the programming in 2017, but they didn't yet have a dedicated budget to do so. Their 2017 application for an additional Gendler Grapevine Project grant mirrored their 2016 application in scope and proposed funding. In response, the Gendler Grapevine Project board approached JCC Chicago and offered a matching grant up to a certain amount, noting that any money JCC Chicago raised over that goal was theirs to keep. In short, JCC Chicago could use the matching grant as an opportunity to fundraise for the program and start to transition the financial responsibility for the program away from the Gendler Grapevine Project and toward JCC Chicago.



Jewish Community Centers of Chicago (continued)



2016 and 2017 Initiative Description:

The Outdoor Shabbat and Holiday Program engages families in unique experiences that bridge the connection between Judaism and the environment. The program is held at the Lake County JCC, which is located on 37 acres and encompasses nature trails, protected marsh lands, fields, and the Garoon Gateway to Science. The program inspires the connection and responsibility that the Jewish people have to the planet and provides an opportunity for people to be surrounded by nature, take walks through the wetlands and marshes, and celebrate under the stars—a unique way to welcome and celebrate Shabbat and Jewish holidays. For the 2017 initiative, JCC raised over half the money needed to support the program, which the Gendler Grapevine Project matched. They have developed environmental-focused community programming centered on Shabbat and Jewish holidays, many of which were held outdoors.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The outdoor Shabbat and holiday events are still being held. JCC Chicago organizes the picnic-style, community-wide events at the lake and the park. Over the two years of the program, they've discovered success by reaching out to more communities for fewer larger events. They've also learned that low-barrier, early engagement opportunities to connect with families works well, and they have realized lots of success with larger signature events. They also have moved to charging a small fee to attend the event, as they found that people are more likely to show up if there is a nominal fee, and this process also allows them to gather contact information for follow-up communication. Because the events have successfully connected young families with the JCC and early childhood opportunities (e.g., school and camps), the events are now funded by Early Childhood Centers, in addition to private funding and grants. They reflected that the Gendler Grapevine Project grants gave them the opportunity to try new things and experiment with new and untested programming. While the matching grant proposal was initially challenging for them, they noted that when they realized that grant funding would end, they approached it differently and figured out how to successfully fund it on their own.

Organization: Jewish Farm School

Initiative Title: Shorashim: Rooted in Justice

Location: Philadelphia, PA

Grant Year: 2017



Initiative Description:

Through Shorashim: Rooted in Justice, Jewish Farm School developed a teen-focused series of workshops that used food as a lens through which they explored a range of topics, including sustainability, worker's rights, social justice, and Jewish traditions. Jewish values were at the root of the curriculum and framed deeper learning and broadened the students' Jewish literacy in ways that were relevant to their interests and passions. Concepts such as Bal Taschit and the Jewish agricultural laws of Peah and Leket were taught to students through engaging and experiential activities and were used to contextualize contemporary issues in the legacy of Jewish traditions and strategies for social change.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The resources Jewish Farm School initially developed for the teen workshops have proved to be helpful for a wider audience. They haven't received any other grants to support Shorashim, but they are using the developed lessons plans and adjusting them for other programs. They have found that having an adaptable three-part program ready to go has been an asset for their organization, and they have offered it to other organizations with which they partner. For example, Jewish Farm School has used the workshops for an adult education program they conducted at a local synagogue. Jewish Farm School's Executive Director also adapted the workshop for the fellows at the organization Repair The World. Finally, Jewish Farm School is part of a national group of Jewish farm programs. This group recently launched a webinar series with one-hour long trainings and the Shorashim workshop will be included in this series. They have already shared a .pdf of the curriculum and showed a video of it being taught. For the webinar, they are preparing a more polished version of the curriculum and will issue a report regarding how they support emerging projects.

Organization: Jewish Theological Seminary

Initiative Title: JTS Green Team Environmental Programming & Rooftop Garden

Location: New York, NY

Grant Year: 2014



Initiative Description:

The Green Team Terrace Garden and Eco-Sanctuary project resulted in the development of a physical space that created educational programming and provided hands-on opportunities for students at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York City. The rooftop garden served as the site for the Eco-Sanctuary and was a substantive Jewish learning tool. Wooden raised-beds carved with Jewish symbolism, along with benches and plaques, transformed the space into a functional, usable garden and educational space. Rabbinical students tended the garden, harvested the food, and donated a percentage of the food to the Morningside Heights community. In addition to the physical garden space, JTS provided internship opportunities to its undergraduate students who helped establish the garden. The school also created environmental education programming such as holiday tie-ins and an Earth Day celebration to connect Jewish learning with practical knowledge about the environment, food ethics, and sustainability. Finally, JTS expanded its composting program to its undergraduate residence hall, which helped support the rooftop garden.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The building on which the rooftop garden was built is currently the site of a new library and dorm; therefore, the garden no longer exists. While the garden is gone, JTS has maintained the environmental education programming they started through their grant. For example, they still organize a Tu b'Shevat program to connect environmental programs to Judaism. The composting program that was started under the Gendler Grapevine Project grant is still used in residence halls, and the city now picks up the compost. JTS hopes to build more green areas in the future.

Organization: Kesher Olam Day Camp/Camp Yavneh

Initiative Title: Kesher Olam Day Camp Initiative

Location: Vermont

Grant Year: 2017



Initiative Description:

Kesher Olam Day Camp is a Vermont-based camp for rural and otherwise underserved Jewish families who have limited opportunities to access the larger Jewish community. The roving camps emphasize the connection to place and to Israel and use local foods to make those connections apparent (e.g., set up a “mock kibbutz”). Teams of camp leaders go for one week at a time to multiple communities to run the day camps. The curricula is consistent across all camps each summer and focus on Israel, the connection to the land, and Israeli foods, using ingredients that the families source themselves and children prepare. Children participate in crafts, Israeli folk dancing, singing, and games based on Israeli and Jewish cultural themes. Families also have an opportunity to participate in regional activities for all Kesher Olam families, including Yavneh family camp.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The Gendler Grapevine Project funds enabled Kesher Olam to make some clear curricular goals and form the identity of the program. While the Gendler Grapevine Project grant funds were used in 2017 and stretched into 2018, they received additional private individual donations to support the organization as well. They have also been working with the Jewish Camping Federation, which helps them fund traveling day camps. The majority of their organizational funds come via family tuition. They believe this traveling day camp model is vital to the Jewish community, because there are many kids who don't have Jewish day camps close to where they live. Kesher Olam has successfully addressed this issue in Manchester, VT.

Organization: Marks Jewish Community House (JCH) of Bensonhurst

Initiative Title: Green and Me

Location: New York, NY

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

The Marks JCH implemented a “Green and Me” project at their summer camp. The curriculum focused on sustainability, environmentalism, and RRR (reduce, reuse, recycle), in conjunction with emphasizing the Jewish values that charge people to be environmentally conscious individuals. A “Green Educator” met with camp groups once a week, focusing on various environmental issues and their connection to Jewish values. Discussions and activities included conducting a trash audit, creating bird feeders out of recycled materials, starting a recycling program, designing signs and posters with specific environmentally friendly acts, tracing the lifecycle of different products, volunteering to plant and clean up a local public park, and quantifying the amount of energy saved for recycled items.

Initiative Status in 2019:

Following the path of creating an understanding of the value of the environment and determining if objects that are used benefit or harm the world, Marks JCH continues implementing lessons and actions they first developed through the Green and Me project in camp. Youth and staff discuss their responsibilities as Jewish people to care for the environment and how this value directly relates to their day-to-day life. Environmental sustainability and RRR are woven into the camp curriculum. An example of a camp activity includes campers exploring the importance of environmental awareness by creating a fashion runway-style presentation utilizing trash-like items for their costumes. In addition, signage developed through Green and Me remains displayed, a recycling program they implemented continues, and in 2019, their JCC Maccabi team took on recycling as their cause and will be doing an agency-wide project on the topic, beyond camp. They acknowledge that their Gendler Grapevine Project grant initiated much of the environmental education in Marks JCH Day Camp.

Organization: Netiya

Initiative Title: Garden at Shomrei Torah Synagogue

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Grant Year: 2016



Initiative Description:

Netiya designed and built a kitchen garden at Shomrei Torah Synagogue (STS) in the San Fernando Valley. Netiya installed this model congregational garden at STS with the help of STS members and community. Families and individuals that rolled up their sleeves included two rabbis, leaders from the STS and Netiya boards, and lay leadership of all ages. The garden included benches and pomegranate, citrus, plum, and fig trees, as well as hibiscus, lavender, rosemary, tomatoes, zucchini, peppers, parsley, chives, sage, greens, lemon verbena, and native strawberries. The garden measured approximately 25 by 15 feet and was maintained by the head of religious education and the students. In keeping with the Jewish tradition, their goal was that at least 10% of the food grown would be tithed to address food insecurity in and around the West Hills.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The garden worked great for about a year, until the religious school director who oversaw the project left STS. The garden fell into disuse until late 2018, when a congregant volunteered to take care of the garden. This man, along with several friends, replanted the garden and is using it to promote vegetarianism and healthy eating at the synagogue. The group is planting vegetables that will be served in salads at congregational luncheons. They will also advertise the garden in the newsletter, display the food at temple events, and organize times where they will discuss healthy eating with other congregants. They will plant the garden seasonally, so they can use the plants, such as parsley and bitter herbs, for ritual purposes. When STS first planted the garden, it had a big impact on the religious school. STS hopes it will now have a greater impact on the larger community. If this generates more interest in gardening, they plan to turn a plot of land across the street into a community garden. They have not raised additional funds for the garden, but an individual donor has redone the irrigation system so the garden is less labor intensive. They note that relying on a handful of motivated volunteers has been the biggest challenge to having a successful garden.

Organization: New Roots

Initiative Titles: Interfaith Farm to Preschool Initiative; Gendler Grapevine Fresh Stop Market; Creation of a Youth Food Justice Corps; Pollinating Food Justice in the Jewish Community

Location: Louisville, KY

Grant Years: 2015, 2016, 2017, Capstone



New Roots' mission is to address food justice by helping everyone, no matter their income level, be able to afford fresh, organic, and locally grown fruits and vegetables. New Roots had been working with Louisville-area churches, and when the Gendler Grapevine Project RFP was released in 2015 asking for proposals from synagogues, New Roots' executive director, Karyn Moskowitz, asked if New Roots would be eligible for a grant if they partnered with a conservative synagogue and a Baptist church. The Gendler Grapevine Project board approved the request and awarded New Roots a grant for their proposed project. While Ms. Moskowitz is Jewish and had been working on food justice issues since she founded New Roots in 2009, it wasn't until 2015, when she applied for a Gendler Grapevine Project grant, that the organization actively engaged and teamed up with the Jewish community in Louisville.

This initial project not only changed New Roots but also the Jewish community of Louisville. The success of their first project, The Interfaith Farm to Preschool Initiative, led to them receiving three more Gendler Grapevine Project grants in 2016, 2017, and the Capstone year. The projects also helped New Roots solicit funds from individuals, something that they had struggled to do in the past. The initiatives also provided an introduction for many non-Jews to Jewish culture, as New Roots led tours of synagogues. Significantly, it also brought Jews to African American churches. The Gendler Grapevine Project initiatives have introduced higher income Jewish families to food justice work and many of them have become donors. In fact, Jewish families now make up the majority of New Roots' individual donor base. In addition, New Roots won grant funding from the local Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence.

Via their 2016 initiative, New Roots recruited a JOFEE Fellow named Michael Fraade in partnership with Hazon and the local JCC. He was a game changer in Louisville, and he greatly contributed to Jewish environmental and "foodie" life in Louisville. He started a restaurant night where Jews got together to eat and discuss interesting subjects like Jewish genealogy, pickling, etc. He also organized monthly Shabbat dinners that were queer/trans friendly and open to anyone in the community. He was also one of the leaders in their new quarterly renewal minyan. The projects have also affected the broader Jewish community in that people are learning more about food insecurity, food apartheid, and health inequities.

New Roots (continued)



2015 Interfaith Farm to Preschool Initiative Description:

In an attempt to address Louisville's inner city food insecurity issues, New Roots partnered with Congregation Adath Jeshurun (Congregation AJ), a conservative synagogue and their preschool, and Pleasant View Baptist Church, an African American Church and their Cherish Forever Preschool, to ensure the consumption of farm-fresh fruits and vegetables through increased participation in the New Roots Fresh Stop Market and other programs. At the same time, they also worked toward an increased understanding of the historical relationship between the Jewish and African American communities in Louisville. They brought these two communities back together to work toward social justice and spiritual, physical, and emotional healing, using food justice as an entry point.

Initiative Status in 2019:

This impact of this initiative has been tremendous. In 2015, New Roots helped organize interfaith activities for the two institutions, where congregants visited each other's places of worship and shared meals and stories. One of the greatest successes of this project was the creation of the Parkland Fresh Stop Market (FSM), which is now one of New Roots' most successful markets, with over 150 shareholders. It was created, is run by, and is sustained by members of the Pleasant View Baptist Church, Congregation AJ, and Parkland neighborhood residents. After the grant ended, Congregation AJ took over organizing and buying the full price shares at the Parkland FSM. One of the most important impacts of this initiative is how it has shifted the synagogue's response to hunger. Congregants are no longer content to simply show up once a year on Yom Kippur with a can of food to give "to the needy;" they now have a deeper understanding that fresh food is a right, not a charity. Congregation AJ's rabbi has said that knowing that part of his share cost goes to subsidize a family who cannot afford to purchase fresh food otherwise, plus understanding that both his family and the other family are eating the same food over the coming week, has lifted the veil that had separated him from the reality and complexity of food insecurity faced by many in their community. The only part of this particular initiative that hasn't continued is the farm to preschool portion of the project.

New Roots (continued)



2016 Gendler Grapevine Fresh Stop Market Description:

In 2016, New Roots partnered with Hazon's JOFEE Fellowship program to organize in the Jewish community of Louisville and beyond to create leadership opportunities for families with limited resources, JCC members, and others. To do so, they created the Gendler Grapevine FSM @ the J (Louisville's Jewish Community Center). Hazon's JOFEE fellow worked with New Roots to establish this market. The food was paid for in advance so farmers didn't face the same degree of financial risk as they do with a standard farmers market. Families pooled their cash and SNAP benefits on a sliding scale to access a bi-weekly "share" of ten varieties of local, organic produce from Kentucky farmers. Local chefs provided demos and recipes of fresh, kosher food at each event, and other fun-filled activities were also offered.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The Gendler Grapevine FSM @ the J is thriving and has budded off a sister market in nearby Berrytown. New Roots views this as their most successful initiative. Since Jewish families have become part of the Gendler FSM @ the J, all market cooking demos are kosher. They've successfully moved the market from majority high income shareholders to a ratio of 70% limited-resource shareholders and 30% higher-income shareholders. While there are many Jewish families associated with this market, it's also incredibly diverse, with Asian, African American, Muslim, and White stakeholders, in addition to others. Last year they were able to reach 250 families with biweekly shares of farm-fresh organic produce over the course of 22 weeks. This particular market resides in one of Louisville's USDA "Food Deserts," yet is housed at the JCC, in what is perceived as a "wealthy neighborhood." This has opened the minds of New Roots leadership (especially board members) that even areas of their city that may at first glance look wealthy are not necessarily so. Almost all of the Gendler volunteer leaders are limited-resource Jewish seniors, some with developmental disabilities. The market provides them an opportunity to become food justice leaders in their community, and these volunteers are committed to growing this movement.

New Roots (continued)



2017 Creation of a Youth Food Justice Corps Description:

In 2017, New Roots focused on the next generation of food justice organizers through their project: Creation of a Youth Food Justice Corps and Testing the Replication of the New Roots Fresh Stop Market model. They worked with 12- to 14-year olds who: 1) learned to utilize community gardening to heal themselves and their community; 2) learned from and shadowed adult food justice leaders at the FSM and Fresh Stop Training Institute; 3) learned how to leverage their technological fluency for the purpose of social change; 4) organized within the Jewish community, their schools, and other spaces they inhabit to grow the local food justice movement; 5) learned the basic Jewish values of Tzedakah and Tikkun Olam; and 6) worked with New Roots professionals. New Roots also networked with other Jewish Community Centers that were interested in creating a FSM in their food-insecure neighborhoods to replicate the New Roots' model.

Initiative Status in 2019:

This initiative is in partnership with the Gendler Grapevine FSM @ the J and is still running. New Roots has received additional financial support for this project from the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence. The food justice corps has also continued, with some youth leaving the program, some leaving and re-entering, and new ones coming on board. The Gendler FSM @ the J has become a b'nai mitzvah project for many youth. For 2019, they had a Bat Mitzvah who focused on creating a food justice learning wall at her synagogue and spoke about food justice and New Roots as part of her d'var torah. New Roots also traveled to another city, to help them establish their own FSM. From this experience, they learned that to replicate their model properly, they need to take their time defining and codifying the FSM model and having their people, processes, and platforms in place; spend time with leaders in new communities before promises are made; recognize that tension exists and there should be a plan in place to address it at the beginning of the relationship; understand that leadership means different things to different people, and the discussion of what leaders do and how they are developed needs to occur before replication of the FSM model happens; and figure out how flexible the model can be (i.e., how much change can take place before it is not a FSM).

New Roots (continued)

Capstone Pollinating Food Justice in the Jewish Community Description:

In 2015, in partnership with the Gendler Grapevine Project, New Roots implemented a community organizing strategy to engage the Jewish community of Louisville in their local food justice movement. New Roots had already made a large impact in the non-Jewish, mostly African American community, creating leadership opportunities and generating excitement around local, organic agriculture. However, engaging the local Jewish community and their relationship with the Gendler Grapevine Project created a turning point for New Roots.

There were many discussions from the bima and church pulpits about the benefits of pursuing food justice (tzedakah) over charity, and how well that fits in with their shared religious values and scriptures. They were able to hold space for difficult interfaith conversations and build relationships across religion and race in a historically segregated city. A focus on Jewish youth turned into dedicated volunteer hours, b'nai mitzvah projects, J Serve food justice workshops, changes in eating habits, and true leadership. They created two new interfaith Fresh Stop Markets (FSM)—the Parkland FSM at a black Baptist church in Louisville's West End, and the Gendler Grapevine FSM @ the J in Louisville's East End. The Gendler Market is one of New Roots most successful markets, with an average of close to 80 diverse families—a majority of whom struggle with limited resources, Jewish and non-Jewish—and a dedicated group of volunteer shareholder leaders who come to the JCC biweekly for 26 weeks to enjoy the food and community. Many of their Jewish shareholders have turned into sustainable donors.

Now that they have a model for Jewish community engagement in food justice, they are going to grapevine this project and pollinate other communities in their region.

The goal of their Capstone project includes spreading Jewish food justice in two other cities with JCCs in the Ohio River Valley Region. They will do this by conducting a series of small food justice workshops/discussions with leaders in this community, featuring the works of Rabbi Gendler. They will host visits for the Ohio River Valley Region communities and develop a plan to spread food justice into the region's Jewish communities, either through FSMs or another channel that fits with the communities' hopes and dreams for their future.

By the end of year two, their new leadership teams will work with New Roots to create relationships with Jewish leaders in two other communities in the Ohio River Valley Region.

Initiative Status in 2019:

There is no update at this time, as this project is still in the beginning stages.

Organization: Oshman Family JCC

Initiative Title: Youth Service Havorah

Location: Palo Alto, CA

Grant Year: 2017



Initiative Description:

The social action program, Youth Service Havurah (YSH), gave middle and high school students the opportunity to deepen their connection to Judaism through social action and hands-on opportunities. YSH introduced teens to social and environmental justice issues and empowered teens to be proactive and identify gaps they noticed in service needs in the community. The group decided on the issues they wanted to address and created projects based on their choices. Each YSH project incorporated relevant Jewish learning. An open discussion at each YSH meeting about the continued relevance of the rabbi's philosophy and ethical concerns infused each project with value and meaning. YSH helped teens see how relevant Jewish ideas, texts, and concepts are to their world and how they can work to make the world a better place.

Initiative Status in 2019:

YSH is still running and has continued to grow. The Gendler Grapevine Project initiative provided Oshman Family JCC with a way to engage teenagers in meaningful social work. They secured an additional grant from the Jim Josephs Foundation to continue the work they started with their Gendler Grapevine Project grant. This new grant is for two-and-a-half years, and it provides them with funds to hire an additional staff person. Their current focus is on community building and developing a strong sense of self. They are working toward achieving specific outcomes for Jewish teens. In addition to working on creating a stronger sense of self, they are also helping teens establish strong friendships as well as inspire and empower teens to make a positive difference in the world in which they live. One participant made a video of her experience working with YSH and on their Martin Luther King, Jr. Mitzvah Day. They hope to continue to increase engagement and have enough participants to split the groups into two age divisions: middle school and high school.

Organization: Rabbinical School of Hebrew College

Initiative Title: Tikvah: The Jewish Eco-Ritual Lab

Location: Newton Centre, MA

Grant Year: 2014



Initiative Description:

The goal of Hebrew College's Tikvah: The Eco-Ritual Lab was to create a set of liturgical and ritual resources that foster and deepen environmental awareness and activism at key moments in the Jewish life cycle, such as Brit milah and naming ceremonies, b'nai mitzvah, hanukat bayit rituals, wedding and commitment ceremonies, conversions, ethical wills, and funerals/periods of mourning. Through a marketing campaign, they planned to develop resources specific to each of these life cycle moments and then disseminate them across denominations to rabbis, cantors, and family educators. Materials would also be disseminated through Hebrew College Rabbinical School alumni and the School of Jewish Music, as well as denominational rabbinic associations. In their development phase, they hosted a training in which rabbinical/cantorial students and clergy learned about the rituals and liturgy, practiced together, and workshopped how to implement the new resources in their communities.

Initiative Status in 2019:

Hebrew College organized an eco-ritual lab day, where students, educators, rabbis, and faculty gathered and discussed different rituals. They discussed how to connect ecological cycles with Jewish life cycle moments and brainstormed around underrepresented activities (e.g., they focused on closings and transitions, such as moving into a new house and thinking about these moments of transitions parallel to events like the changing of the seasons). Attendees were inspired and still incorporate what they learned at that event into their rabbinical practices today. Due to internal organizational features, some of the details of the original proposal were not able to be carried out. Green Seminary and Hazon are currently working with the Rabbinical College to help incorporate more sustainable practices into the organization.

Organization: Ramah in the Rockies

Initiative Title: Solar Hot Water System

Location: Rocky Mountains, CO

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

In order to address the fact that all of their campers need to take hot showers on Friday before Shabbat, Ramah in the Rockies developed an innovative solar hot water heating system, using commercial grade 500-gallon drinking-water bladders and a solar hot box. The system successfully increased the water temperature of 45 degrees to 80 to 85, which was then delivered to the shower house. With support from the Gendler Grapevine Project, Ramah in the Rockies improved the efficiency of their design, expanded its use to other places in the camp, included educational programming about the system, and promoted its design to other camps.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The solar hot water system still works, and they use it all the time. After six years, the plastic tops finally need to be replaced, so they took the opportunity to upgrade the system in the summer of 2019. They commented that they feel there is a commercial need for systems like this at camps throughout the county. While the initial capital costs of installing a solar hot water system required fundraising and grant writing, they say that it was a game changer for them. It has cut down on their propane use, allows campers to have hot water before Shabbat, and provides a great opportunity to educate campers about energy and water use. The solar hot water system has been so successful, they applied for and secured another grant to purchase a second system for their bathhouse. They admit that there is more they could be doing in regard to conservation, and they continue to look for more opportunities to be efficient and are researching if they could do geothermal heating. In the mean time, they're very happy with their system and how they are using it to educate and motivate the kids to engage in doable and effective activities. They noted, "What we do in our 8 weeks isn't individually going to fix climate change, but the values we are giving kids does matter."

Organization: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Initiative Title: Rabbis as Activist Leaders for Environmental Sustainability & Justice

Location: Wyncote, PA

Grant Year: 2014



Initiative Description:

Rabbi Mordechai Liebling developed and offered the course, “Rabbis as Activist Leaders for Environmental Sustainability and Justice” for the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC). The first course was taught in the 2015 spring semester and combined text, experiential exercises, and activist involvement. It covered fundamental teachings on Judaism and the environment, a deepening of the rabbinical students’ personal connection to the earth, and the basics of non-violent direct action. The course also examined current environmental issues, such as climate change and shmita, and how rabbis can address these issues both as rabbinical leaders and as activists. The plan was to make the class a permanent course at RRC and develop curriculum that could be adapted for use in adult education settings, particularly college campuses and congregations. They also planned to make the curriculum available to over 400 reconstructionist rabbis and rabbinical students, as well as to over 100 affiliated congregations via reconstructionist websites.

Initiative Status in 2019:

To date, this course has been taught three times at RRC. The course has evolved slightly over the years, and Rabbi Liebling has updated some of the readings. The course has influenced the students who have taken it. Rabbi Liebling said, “It has broadened awareness about the possibilities of activism.” He noted that the Gendler Grapevine Project grant was helpful in that it gave grantees a little bit of space to think about other things they can pursue and do, and he appreciated that. He said that giving people who spend a good amount of time doing activism work more time to be thoughtful was helpful. The process provided him extra time to read and reflect, which allowed him to do a better job developing the course. Significantly, in January 2016, The Julia Burke Foundation produced the “Report on Faith and Ecology Courses in North American Seminaries.” This report examined 250 faith institutions across the country. The report stated that 58 institutions offer 190 courses on faith and ecology. Of those 190 courses, Rabbi Liebling’s Gendler Grapevine Project course, “Rabbis as Activist Leaders for Environmental Sustainability and Justice” was cited as one of the seven best courses being taught in seminaries across America.

Organization: Shir Tikvah

Initiative Title: Sacred Grounds Stewards Project

Location: Minneapolis, MN

Grant Year: 2015



Initiative Description:

Shir Tikvah transformed their grounds into a model of sustainable landuse through actions such as replacing the lawn with native prairie grasses, installing rain gardens, expanding the existing onsite vegetable garden, and adding apple trees and beehives. These steps furthered their sustainability efforts while having a direct environmental impact and engaging congregants of all ages in meaningful volunteer activities. The project was spearheaded by their Climate Change Minyan, and it added to their on-going efforts (e.g., installation of a solar-powered ner tamid, upgrading to energy-efficient lighting, and organizing learning activities for all ages on Tu b'Shevat) to reduce their carbon footprint and call attention to the alignment of Jewish values with environmental stewardship. They hope their beautification project has served as inspiration and a blueprint for other faith communities wishing to engage in similar activities.

Initiative Status in 2019:

In 2019, the physical garden is basically the same as it was when they installed it in 2015. The garden has made the grounds much prettier than they were. They have had to maintain the grounds in order to keep their watershed grant going, and this has required some added financial investment but nothing outrageous. When Shir Tikvah overhauled their grounds in 2015, they also started victory garden. The addition of fruit trees and vegetables has helped their social justice efforts, and they are thinking about expanding the garden. Initially, the beautification project had a huge impact because it helped beautify the building and neighborhood, and it inspired people to become interested in what was happening to water run off and where it was going. Thinking about water run off and where it goes is largely ignored now by the community, because the problem was addressed and it no longer exists. The main issue they have to deal with now is maintenance.

Organization: Temple Sinai DC

**Initiative Titles: The Open Door - Helping Refugees & Immigrants;
Civil Rights South Trek**

Location: Washington, DC

Grant Years: 2015, 2016



Through their Gendler Grapevine Project grants, Temple Sinai DC organized two social justice-oriented initiatives. The first addressed immigration, and the second, racial justice. Congregants enthusiastically participated in and embraced these initiatives, which have spurred new levels of engagement from temple members.

The Open Door initiative and the trip to McAllen, TX, predated the federal government's move to separate families and detain refugees at the border. When these changes were implemented, the Temple Sinai community responded in kind by being one of the first temples to declare itself as a sanctuary synagogue, and helping to propel this movement nationally. Rabbi Jonathan Roos believes that the Gendler Grapevine Project initiatives created the foundation for the congregation's leadership role. The Open Door initiative has affected the national reform Jewish community as well. Rabbi Jonah Pesner, head of the Religious Action Center (RAC), participated in The Open Door. The connection he established with the Sacred Heart Relief Center in Texas continues. In fact, in 2019, Sister Norma Pimentel was asked to speak at RAC's annual Consultation on Conscience meeting and was interviewed on the main stage by Rabbi Roos.

Since implementing The Open Door and the Civil Rights Trek projects, Temple Sinai has incorporated a social action fund into its capital campaign, designed to support and enhance social justice programming and staffing. For Temple Sinai leaders, both Gendler Grapevine Project initiatives demonstrated the high impact adult Jewish service learning programs can have, noting the increased energy and participation of congregants in the synagogue generally, and social justice programs specifically.

The temple leaders have learned that if they propose engaging, tangible, and meaningful social justice projects, people will want to be involved. Temple leaders reflected that this has opened a door to their community, and they want to expand Temple Sinai's social justice work. For example, they are now actively engaged in deportation defense work. The rabbi reflected that the synagogue would not have engaged in this work if they had not received the Gendler Grapevine Project grants. Realizing that the trips inspire action, Temple Sinai is planning more trips, the most recent involving a visit to Cuba in March 2019.

Temple Sinai DC (continued)



2015 The Open Door - Helping Refugees & Immigrants Description

The Open Door initiative focused on social justice work around immigration reform and direct service to recent immigrants. Temple Sinai organized local educational events to teach and engage volunteers and to provide direct support to refugees in the Washington, DC area. They also partnered with interfaith congregations in Washington, DC. The DC events centered on a teach-in hosted at Temple Sinai and featured a keynote speaker, workshops, and discussions focused on immigration issues and immigration reform. Congregants also took a trip to volunteer at the Sacred Heart Relief Center in McAllen, Texas, where participants engaged on the front-lines to assist refugees. The trip to McAllen allowed congregants to see, firsthand, the needs of the immigrant community and to provide direct service to the interfaith organization working with this at-risk community.

Initiative Status in 2019:

Temple Sinai is still deeply involved in immigrant justice work, and their commitment is now larger than it was during their original trip to Texas. They've returned to Texas since 2015 and have traveled to other places to assist in refugee work. For example, in February 2018, they went to an ICE detention facility and have provided volunteer support to immigrants individually and in partnership with another organization. No additional grant funding has been required, as participants now pay their own way for the trips. The synagogue's previous work in Texas validated their programming, which is now included in their annual budget. Individual congregants have also donated funds to support this work. Since receiving Gendler Grapevine Project funding, the synagogue has provided support to a refugee family, helping them get established with an apartment and furnishings, as well as to an individual refugee working his way through the legal system.

Temple Sinai DC (continued)



2016 Civil Rights South Trek Description:

This initiative had two components: a Washington, DC-based racial justice education program, and a civil rights-focused trip to the southeastern United States. This project engaged the entire congregation in learning about civil rights and racial justice, and energized the cohort who participated in the trek to continue this work at Temple Sinai upon their return. They began the conversation with a racial justice-themed discussion group on Yom Kippur afternoon. During Martin Luther King Day weekend, they organized programming meant to continue this conversation with their community. Their Kabbalat Shabbat service featured the band, The Afro-Semitic Experience, and the following day, they visited the National Museum of African American History and Culture. In April 2017, they brought a cohort of Temple Sinai adults on a four-day visit to the pivotal sites of the civil rights movement, going to the museums that commemorate the movement and speaking with people who participated in the civil rights movement. Finally, they brought this work back to Temple Sinai, using their learning as a springboard to continue their pursuit of racial justice in the modern day.

Initiative Status in 2019:

The work they started in 2016 continues today. They have established a program for racial justice, which is led by a task force and committee. They also have created a working group called "Embracing our Multiracial Community at Temple Sinai." The goal of this group is to make Temple Sinai a proactive, anti-racist synagogue. The people leading this group attended the Civil Rights South Trek and were inspired to address racism and injustice when they returned home. They are conducting trainings with leaders, learning how to identify problems, fixing them, and then moving forward.

Organization: URJ Camp Coleman

Initiative Title: Sustainability Shabbat

Location: Cleveland, GA

Grant Year: 2013



Initiative Description:

Camp Coleman developed a camp-wide “Sustainability Shabbat.” This initiative included a meal that was entirely locally sourced and organic. With this opportunity, Camp Coleman educated campers and staff on the benefits of eating locally grown foods and how they could take this lesson home with them. Through the lens of Jewish values, participants learned about and participated in a project with the goal of altering the way they thought about food and questioning where the food they were eating was made or grown.

Initiative Status in 2019:

While Camp Coleman is no longer hosting a big event celebrating sustainability at camp, they continue to focus on sustainability during some Shabbats. After the Sustainability Shabbat, kids provided a lot of feedback about how much they enjoyed the meal. In fact, many noted that it was their favorite meal of the entire season, and they expressed interest in learning more about where their food came from. In response to this feedback, the camp has altered their meals a little bit. For example, they have reduced how often they serve processed foods like lunch meats. Also, the kids have expressed interest in visiting the kitchen and seeing where the food they’re eating comes from and learning what goes into it. While the specific Sustainability Shabbat wasn’t continued because of lack of funding, in recent years, they built a garden, which has become an important part of the camp.

Organization: Wilderness Torah

Initiative Title: Wilderness Torah Training Institute

Location: Berkeley, CA

Grant Year: 2016



Initiative Description:

With the Gendler Grapevine Project's support, Wilderness Torah (WT) held its inaugural four-day Wilderness Torah Training Institute (WTTI) in 2016. Fifty community educators and leaders attended the training, who were mentored and trained in WT's earth-based Judaism model. The training was geared toward lay leaders and educators, institutional representatives, rabbinical students, and anyone wishing to deepen their own experience. The format closely followed WT's festival format and offered participants an immersion into earth-based Jewish life. Participants were trained in WT's K-12 experiential education model, while experiencing a holistic community-building approach, and left with a curriculum that they could use in their own communities.

Initiative Status in 2019:

WTTI ran for two years, but due to lack of funding, it was suspended in 2018 and 2019. During the two-year hiatus, they reevaluated and reformatted the training. WTTI was initially designed to be multi-year, and it was powerful. In 2016, the WTTI included 50 people, and 12 of them returned the following year, joining approximately 40 new participants. Despite their successes, WT felt the long-term impact of the training wasn't what they wanted it to be. Through analysis and feedback, they determined that more ongoing mentoring would make the program more effective. They also plan to work with fewer people for a longer period of time (e.g., a total of five to seven days). They note that holding the two WTTIs elevated their national status, and they are now viewed as a national thought leader. This has resulted in consulting work and has leveraged their voice across the country. They appreciate that the Gendler Grapevine Project grant helped connect them to Rabbi Gendler's lineage, allowed them to honor him, and helped them grow earth-based Judaism. They've been communicating with other foundations regarding funding for the 2020 training.

Organization: Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (YCT) Rabbinical School

Initiative Titles: Shechita Fellowship; Jewish-Muslim Dialogue

Location: New York, NY

Grant Years: 2014; 2016

YCT implemented two initiatives in 2014 and 2016. Both projects were grounded in social justice and were student-led. YCT did a great job supporting the passions of their students and giving them the freedom to pursue those interests.



2014 Shechita Fellowship Description:

Through their grant, YCT developed and implemented a fellowship to train six rabbinical students in shechita, or the skill of performing kosher slaughter. The school realized what a powerful tool shechita could be for fostering connections to Judaism when a student said, “In a world where global food traditions are being erased, I am so glad that we can keep alive this Jewish food tradition.” Viewing shechita as a radical way to reconnect with food, the goals for their initiative included: train students in shechita, create a cohort of shochetim able to both slaughter and educate about slaughter, create more options for sustainable kosher meat in communities, and use shechita as a tool to prepare rabbinical students to inspire their communities through the intersection of Judaism and food. They also offered educational demonstrations of shechita at Colgate University and on Martha’s Vineyard.

Initiative Status in 2019:

While the shechita fellowship is no longer being taught or offered at YCT, students and graduates from YCT have collaborated with other Jewish organizations to teach about and engage in shechita. These organizations include Hazon and the Jewish Initiative for Animals, both of which engage in Jewish environmental education more broadly. Inspired by the project to connect the taught values to their work, some YCT graduates who participated in the program ended up taking jobs with Jewish organizations that focus on social justice and advocacy.

YCT Rabbinical School (continued)



2016 Jewish-Muslim Dialogue Description:

This initiative focused on creating a dialogue and engaging with the American Muslim community throughout the 2017–2018 academic year. The initiative was developed by a YCT student, and in the summer of 2017, that student participated in a Quranic Arabic program. This six-week intensive program had more than 50 students, of which more than 90% were Muslim. This provided the YCT student a unique opportunity to build a social network within the American Muslim community, allowing for joint consideration of how American Jews and Muslims can work toward mutual support most effectively. This project prompted internal discussion of Jewish-Muslim relations at YCT in real time. The school developed an open-source, interfaith resource bank, which allowed students and faculty to collaborate and share sources for use in lectures and interfaith programs. YCT hosted scholars and leading personalities from the American Muslim community as guest speakers in a series of “Gendler Grapevine Dialogues,” which were conversations designed to highlight shared interests or concerns and cultural points of contact between Jews and Muslims.

Initiative Status in 2019:

In 2017 through 2018, the initiative was embedded into the YCT curriculum. While the school is unsure if the initiative will be continued, they believe it was a good experience for those who participated in it. Since graduating, participants from this program continue to engage in important cross-cultural work, such as Jewish-Black and Jewish-Muslim bridge building. YCT commented that the Gendler Grapevine Project grant was an integral part of their students’ journeys and meeting their future goals. After participating in the Jewish-Muslim Dialogue program at YCT, all of the students who engaged with the initiative filled out a survey, and the vast majority of them reported that the programming was a “very worthwhile” and “very important” part of their education. The school feels that each of the students/rabbis affected by the grant and exposed to the initiative are now better equipped to reach out to a Muslim leader that they know and start dialoguing and creating projects together.

Gendler Grapevine Project Leadership

The Gendler Grapevine Project board and advisory committee is replete with family, friends, and colleagues of Rabbi Everett Gendler. They graciously lent their time and expertise to ensure that this sunset initiative resulted in innovative, replicable, and lasting initiatives.

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