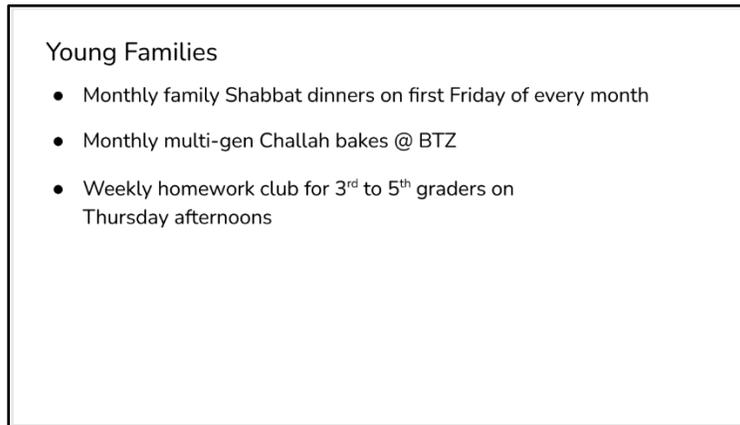


AGM Written Report: Engagement and Programming

Jonah Potasznik | June 22nd, 2022

This past year has shown a wonderful growth of engagement with youth and young families at Beth Tzedec. As a synagogue, we've made important changes to facilitate this growth and I look forward to discussing them with you through this report and in emails, phone calls or over a beverage.

Last year, I reported to the general body at the 2020-21 AGM about several event initiatives we were hoping to start up in the 2021-22 programming year. Here's the slide from that presentation:



A year later, you just have to look at this slide and smile, don't you? Go through the three bullet points and realize what has happened over the past year:

- **"First Friday Family Shabbats"** started in October, and, despite a brief hiatus due to the Omicron wave in Winter, continued throughout the year. We started our first one with about 40 participants. By the Spring, we were hitting over 100 attendees. (110-120 at May's and June's.) Participation consists of a majority of member families, as well as ~20% potential member families.
- **Multi-Gen challah braids** continued alongside the Shabbat dinners, in the middle of the month. Attendance started strong for this initiative but waned by the Spring. It is worth considering whether we need to adjust this program or try another mid-month engagement opportunity in the upcoming year.
- **HW Club** grew from 6 starting students in the Fall to 29 students by the Spring. This includes 13 member families and 10 non-member families. HW Club became a weekly touch point at the shul for these families. For members, it was a way for their children to feel comfortable in the building, perhaps for the first time. For non-members, it was an important engagement opportunity: to schmooze in the parking lot with HW Club staff and member families, as well as receive a flyer for whatever big event was coming up.

Here is the slide from last year's AGM report on teen programming:

Teens

- Bi-weekly (= every other week) teen learning initiative, in partnership with Kehilat Shalom
- Bi-weekly teen 'homework & hangs' @ BTZ, in partnership with BBYO
- Monthly post-b'nai mitzvah 'life skills' series (For example: learning CPR/first aid from EMTs, investing/financial literacy, plumbing, wood working)

Again, a point-by-point breakdown is helpful to see all we have accomplished, and perhaps what are next steps are:

- The Bi-weekly teen learning initiative became the **Teen Learning Project**, run in partnership with Kehilat Shalom with a small group of 4 teen participants from October thru May. It was a good start for a program that is quite novel in the Calgary Jewish community: high-level post-B'nai Mitzvah learning that is open to any interested Jewish learner. Plans are in place to start the program again in the Fall with a larger participant cohort.
- "Homework & Hangs" became **Teen Hang**, put on in partnership with BBYO. We averaged 10 teen participants at this bi-weekly program, many of whom are from Beth Tzedec families. Similar to HW Club for the younger crowd, this program became a way for teens to feel comfortable in the Beth Tzedec building, as well as a touchpoint opportunity between synagogue staff and participant's parents.
- The Life Skills series did not start. However, we did re-start the **Dorshei Tzedec Teen Philanthropy Program**, in partnership with the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary and the Jewish Federation. This program had 12 post-B'nai Mitzvah participants learning weekly over a 4-week period about consensus building, philanthropic skills, and the nuts and bolts of how Jewish community works on an in-depth level. Perhaps even more importantly, this program was led by two college students, Moriah Samchek and Hannah Silver, proving that a pipeline of leadership can be built with young adults in the Beth Tzedec community.

Speaking of which, in the young professional sphere, **Hebrew School but Better** continued apace, bringing a group of ~10 young professionals together bi-weekly for socializing and Torah learning. Outside of Beth Tzedec proper, relationships were built with leaders at other synagogues and Federation that should lead to more effective young professional engagement across the community. Notably, our **Sfinge & Spirits Hanukkah event** was hosted by Beth Tzedec and put on in partnership with Temple, Kehilat Shalom, HOJMI, and Federation. 35 young professionals came together to celebrate Hanukkah together.

Last year's AGM report also included plans for "big tent" events in place around the Jewish holiday cycle. I am happy to report that our programming for Hanukkah, Purim, Pesach, and Shavuot were all

well-attended and served their purpose in spreading a wider engagement net across the general community that fueled our “membership funnel.”

Speaking of membership, here’s a chart provided by David that shows a pretty clear trend over the past 15 years:



I’m happy to say that as of June 21st, we sit at **475 member units strong, a 37 unit increase from two years ago**. There are many reasons for this increase not included in the details above: Keruv class led by Rabbi Cantor Russ is amazingly robust. Our educational programs- notably Shul School and the B’nai Mitzvah Program- are only growing stronger, especially thanks to new education

director Ari Cohen. **NONE of the above programs/initiatives would have been able to happen without Jen, Teresa, or Bill.** They are so, so necessary for what we do here. Regardless of the reason, the increase show that something special is happening here at Beth Tzedec.

And this brings me to my final point: though this has been a numbers-heavy report, I think we should keep in mind it is not the numbers themselves that are important (though they are nice to recognize!), but *the story that the numbers tell*. What is that story?

Well, they say a picture paints 1000 words:



This picture was taken during our Shavuot Dinner and “Torah After Dark” event. Over 90 participants came in person to celebrate Shavuot with a dairy-filled dinner and late-night interactive Torah learning sessions. (Oops, more numbers.)

This may look like an ordinary picture of a small group of folks learning Torah around a messy table. What it *actually* is, is the Jewish future. This is a picture from a Torah learning session led by two congregants: one in 8th

grade and one in 6th grade. These boys *led this session*. There were four generations represented around the table that evening- including their own grandmother. I can not speak emphatically enough about how important these kinds of moments are to building the kind of culture I believe we’d like to see here at Beth Tzedec: one in which we are together, across generations, engaging in both Jewish learning and ritual, as well as more “regular” social activities as one big family. Supporting one another, relying on one another. Being spontaneous with one another!

To me, that is, without a doubt, the story that is happening here at Beth Tzedec, right now. Yes, people are coming back from COVID. The response to in-person events, both large- and small-scale, has been tremendous. But it is more than that. I believe families and individuals are seeing the value of the kind of culture we are building here.

Where do we go from here? Let me throw out a few thoughts:

- I believe we have a strong base of programming- both large-scale “big tent” events and smaller, intimate “heartbeat” events- that will bring people together regularly. I believe we should build on the successes of this past year as outlined above.
- I believe that ultimately, the community’s success- in terms of memberships, to be sure, but also in terms of creating a positive, relevant vision for Jewish life in the 21st century- does not depend on the events themselves, but relationships that are built through those events. I am referring to relationships between synagogue leaders and general members, as well as between members themselves.
- To that end, we also need to start focusing on systems that build relationships. One such system is about to be launched in trial version: **Beth Tzedec Pods**. I hope everyone will check out the [informational Google form](#) and sign up to participate if interested.
- These formal systems should continue to be complemented by informal modes of behavior (“synagogue culture”) modeled by synagogue leaders that shows hospitality to members and guests, and instills a feeling of comfort and “at-home-ness” in all who walk through our doors.