

PLANNING REPORT

Supporting the Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being of Youngish Adults

January - April 2021



Jewish Federation
OF ST. LOUIS

For our community – now and in the future

Jewish Federation of St. Louis

Young Adult Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being Roundtable

This report documents a collaborative process incorporating contributions from many people. Thank you!

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Strategies detailed in this document:

Confiding Strategies

Make professional mental healthcare more accessible

Host facilitated affinity groups for processing and reflection

Connecting Strategies

Create options and systems for collective volunteering

Train and incentivize new leaders and hosts

Create events to welcome and facilitate connection with Jewish networks

Provide experiences to create, make, and learn about Jewish culture together

Create venues for sharing and adapting traditions to build connection

Coping Strategies

Share messages that educate about and normalize mental healthcare

Consuming Strategies

Foster meaningful connection in community spaces and events

Project Framing

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, people around the world have struggled with their mental health. Isolation, fear, and rapid change have all impacted the ability for individuals to cope with both existing and newly emerging stressors.

One group that has particularly struggled in the United States is youngish adults between 22 and 40 years old. This group has the highest rates of reporting symptoms of anxiety disorders and depression (Societal Experts Action Network, 2020). In addition, the Building Resilient Communities Study conducted by Brandeis University researchers in May 2020 found that youngish adults in the St. Louis Jewish community had more trouble coping with the psychological effects of the pandemic.

To explore the needs of members of this group and identify opportunities to better support their mental health, the Jewish Federation of St. Louis convened a Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Roundtable, consisting of leaders and stakeholders from across the Jewish community. These stakeholders included a mix of youngish adults, people who work with youngish adults, and people with professional mental healthcare expertise.

These stakeholders participated in a design thinking process, centering the experiences and stories of youngish adults to generate concepts and then refine ideas that could positively impact the long-term mental health and well-being of youngish adults in the region.

Responding with Design Thinking

Design thinking is a rigorous and structured approach to finding innovative solutions to complex problems. It is different from other generative and decision-making processes in that it:

Starts with people and stories. Design thinking focuses on the people most impacted by a situation. It is rooted in stories and narratives to help understand people's experiences, behaviors, motivations, and hopes, from their perspectives.

Is nuanced, specific, and contextual. This process draws from the specific context of Jewish youngish adults in the St. Louis region, and it gathers and emphasizes nuance of experiences. This nuance is translated into specificity within design decisions, so the strategies are tailored to their audiences and their context.

Draws wisdom and ideas from diverse groups. The process leverages different types of expertise, including youngish adults, roundtable participants, and implementation partners.

Focuses on patterns of experience to generate unexpected strategies. Proposed strategies are inspired by commonalities across diverse people's lives and informed by broadly exploring different ways to address challenges.

Allows for flexibility and iteration. The structure of the process is responsive, shifting based on what we learn from participants, focusing on new relevant questions as they arise, and improving on ideas through cycles of feedback.

Creates visual frameworks to help understand experiences. To complement nuanced stories, abstracted visual frameworks make foundational learnings tangible, becoming shared communication tools for collaborators.

Process

Frame & Understand

Roundtable participants **shared stories** of youngish adults' challenges and successes, drawn from their own experiences and observations, in order to hone our focus and understanding.

Research

Two **in-depth interviews** were conducted to learn directly from youngish adults who were living alone and/or with little family support, adding nuance and detail to enrich the understanding from the first workshop.

Ideas

Roundtable participants **brainstormed** ideas, drawing inspiration from research stories, areas of opportunity, and existing practices. A prioritization survey identified the 9 highest potential ideas to continue into testing.

Test

Created prototypes to make the ideas tangible and **gathered detailed feedback** from an additional 9 youngish adults, representing diverse experiences in the Jewish community.

Refine

Roundtable participants **refined the ideas**, exploring considerations raised by feedback as well as the potential for implementation.

Reframing: Supports for Resilience

While this project was initially framed specifically around mental health and emotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, conversations with youngish adults and stories of their experiences made it clear that the issues they were facing went beyond the immediate isolation, disconnection, and fear of living through a pandemic.

The wider context of societal challenges—including racism, climate change, political tensions, and other massive upheavals—weighed heavily on youngish adults and hindered their overarching capacity to maintain resilience.

To respond, the Roundtable broadened its approach to focus on supports for resilience. With this reframing, the intention of the work extends beyond the current COVID-19 pandemic to many future challenges.



Reframing: Beyond Youngish Adults

This project was also initially focused solely on youngish adults, but it became clear during conversations with them that their experiences are entwined within broader community challenges. Older generations' perceptions of youngish adults shape not only what resources are available in the community, but also how youngish adults perceive themselves.

There's an opportunity for a community-wide shift in perception about the experiences of youngish adults. Some proposed strategies can be taken on by youngish adults themselves, but others must be taken on by the whole community. Youngish adults must be taken seriously as adults, and their experiences should be listened to, valued, and understood within their broader context.

"To me the biggest thing for youngish adults is being taken seriously as adults... The reality of this broadly defined group of people, our 'generation' cohort, is distinct from what people older than us have experienced, [particularly the] economic and social situation that we have inherited. Don't treat it as if we have not done something 'the right way.' We're doing things in response to our environment."

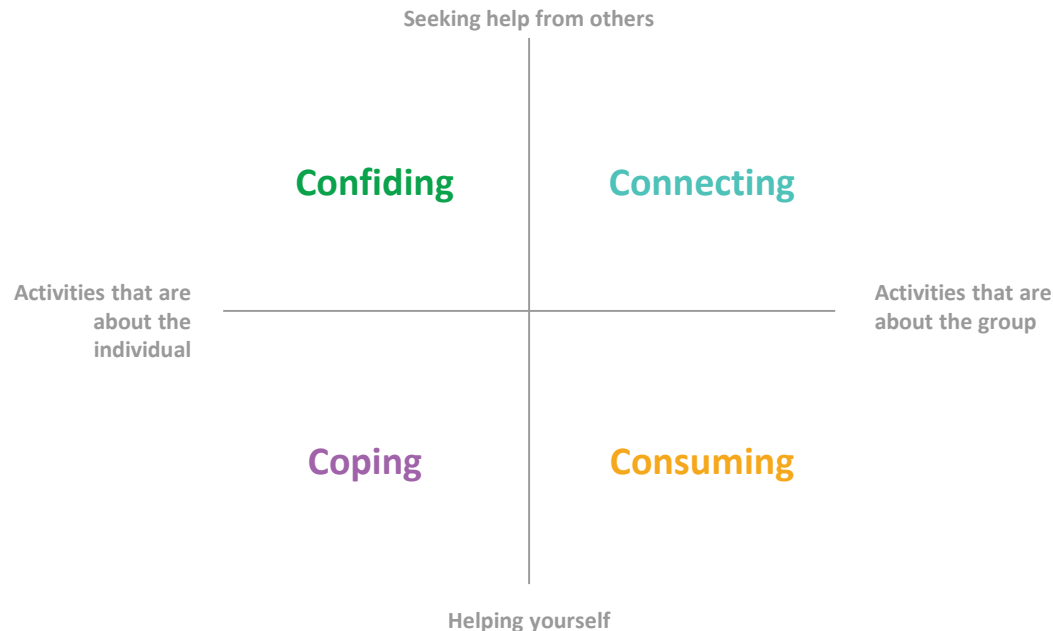
- Adam

"The more it's out there in the community, the better — parents and grandparents would benefit from seeing that mental health is important." - Talia

Framework: Supports for Resilience

Through stories representing a wide range of stories and experiences, we learned from youngish adults that the ways they sought or found support for their mental health and well-being during the pandemic fit into these four broad categories: Confiding, Connecting, Coping, and Consuming.

This framework set the foundation for the brainstorming and idea refinement in this project, and it has the potential to inform additional work in other areas as well. The following pages detail these categories and the opportunities they point to.



Confiding

Confiding Examples

Seeing a therapist
Having a significant other
Joining a support group
Connecting with faith leaders

Insights

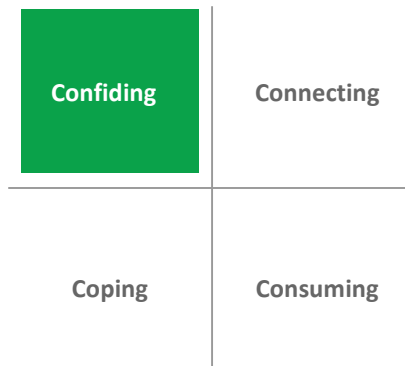
Feeling like “someone else” is more in need of a resource keeps people from reaching out for the support they need before things get worse.

When people rely primarily on a romantic or professional-care relationship for support, their stability is shaken when that one person isn’t available.

Opportunities

How might we help youngish adults to start using existing confiding resources earlier, when things “aren’t that bad”?

How might we encourage youngish adults to value and pursue other types of confiding support as well as support across the other categories?



Related Strategies

Make professional mental healthcare more accessible

Host facilitated affinity groups for processing and reflection

Connecting

Connecting Examples

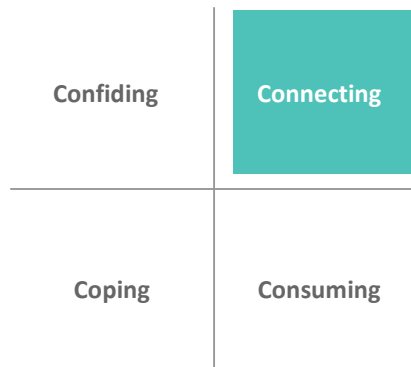
Attending a virtual shabbat
Connecting with friends or making new ones
Connecting with community

Insights

Passively “being together” in a digital space doesn’t make people feel less alone, and initiating deeper engagement means shifting from consumer to creator, which takes a lot of energy.

Building relationships doesn’t just spontaneously happen for people – it’s facilitated by someone they already trust.

Deep connections are built on meaningful experiences, shared traditions, and community processing, all of which are central to Jewish culture.



Opportunities

How might we help organizers of digital gatherings to infuse them with active participation and relationship building?

How might we activate latent capacity in individuals and organizations to organize, host, and facilitate connecting activities?

How might we adjust traditions and create new meaningful collective experiences that respond to ongoing changing contexts and conditions?

Related Strategies

Create options and systems for collective volunteering

Create events to welcome and integrate into the Jewish community

Host experiences to create, make, and learn about Jewish culture together

Create venues for sharing and adapting Jewish traditions to build community connection

Supports for Resilience

Coping

Coping Examples

Cooking, eating or drinking

Exercising

Overworking

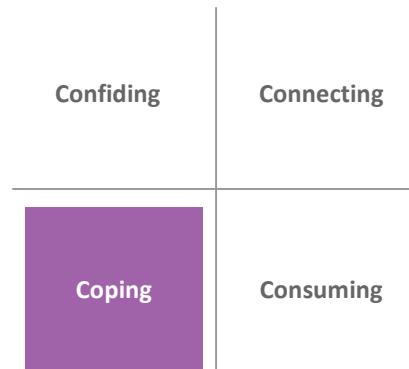
Doomscrolling

Insights

Healthy coping mechanisms can help people hang on and get through a short-term challenge, but in a longer crisis those same mechanisms can become ineffective or even destructive.

Opportunities

How might we help youngish adults be aware of their use of coping mechanisms and make adjustments when they stop being useful?



Related Strategies

Share messages that educate about and normalize mental healthcare

Supports for Resilience

Consuming

Consuming Examples

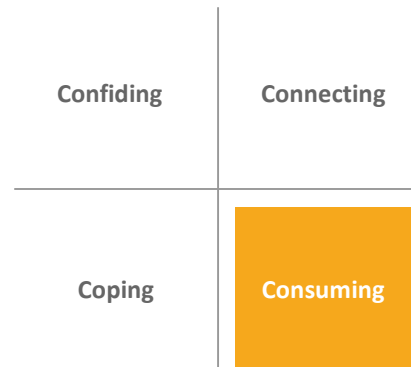
Attending virtual services
Participating in an exercise class

Insights

Passively “being together” in a digital space doesn’t make people feel less alone, and initiating deeper engagement means shifting from consumer to creator, which takes a lot of energy.

Opportunity

How might we help organizers of digital gatherings to infuse them with active participation and relationship building?



Related Strategies

Train and incentivize new leaders and hosts

Foster meaningful connection in public spaces and events

Strategies to Support Resilience

The following sections describe a set of ideas informed and refined by youngish adults and Roundtable participants.

This documentation is intended to help prompt and guide continued conversations about potential implementation. **These ideas aren't "final" but rather ready for the next set of stakeholders—implementation partners—to continue refining and developing them.**

High-Level Outcomes

As a result of these strategies, youngish adults will be supported to cultivate long-term resilience for their mental health and emotional well-being, by having healthy coping mechanisms, access to confiding resources, and robust connections to supportive community relationships.

Strategies to Support Resilience

Seeking help from others

Confiding Strategies

Make professional mental healthcare more accessible
Host facilitated affinity groups for processing and reflection

Connecting Strategies

Create options and systems for collective volunteering
Train and incentivize new leaders and hosts
Create events to welcome and facilitate connection with Jewish networks.
Provide experiences to create, make, and learn about Jewish culture together
Create venues for sharing and adapting Jewish traditions to build community connection

The strategies in **Connecting** and **Confiding** address direct, specific opportunities to impact the resilience of youngish adults in the St. Louis region, both in the immediate term and through longer-term community building.

Activities that are about the individual

Coping Strategies

Share messages that educate about and normalize mental healthcare

Consuming Strategies

Foster meaningful connection in community spaces and events

Activities that are about the group

The strategies in **Coping** and **Consuming** are critical to successful execution of the Connecting and Confiding strategies, supporting the development of a resilient community overall.

Helping yourself

CONFIDING

Make professional mental healthcare more accessible



*Tested Concept: Accessible Professional Mental Health
Care*

Make professional mental healthcare more accessible

Access to professional mental healthcare, such as therapists and counselors, is a key part of confiding for youngish adults. However, finding the right therapist and having regular access to appointments can be barriers. In addition, youngish adults do not consistently think of the Jewish community as being a resource for mental health care, and they are particularly concerned about privacy when it comes to accessing resources in the community. Consider the following actions to make professional mental healthcare more accessible.

Outcomes

Youngish adults know confiding resources are available through the Jewish community, and they are able to consistently and easily connect with professionals who are the best fit for their needs.

Actions

Make accessibility a top priority: conveniently located services and virtual therapy resources.

Create a centralized resource and message to communicate what's available in the community.

Support finding a therapist who is a good fit.

Offer a variety of services and resources.

Build on the resources already available in the community.

Impressions from youngish adults

"The really big organizations are supporting our most vulnerable or needy community members. I have a hard time feeling like I'm one of those people." - Talia

"I'm cautious about connecting with rabbis or community leaders. If I go to a community leader, my parents might find out." - Deb

Key partnerships

Jewish Family Services

Rabbis and Clergy

Youngish adult focused organizations

Make accessibility a top priority: conveniently located services and virtual therapy resources

Roundtable participants and youngish adults agreed that accessibility of therapy was really important. Virtual therapy, even after the pandemic, is incredibly useful, and should be offered on nights and weekends. Online scheduling could be a tool for helping people quickly. Short-term, free therapy might also help people who aren't sure if they want to commit to long-term confiding resources. Roundtable participants emphasized that there should be choices so people can decide what is the best fit for them.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I've heard that JFS out at Olive in West County has offerings...but that's not where I live." - Sam

"Drop in hours can't be at the synagogue where someone can see your car there. There shouldn't be a stigma, but there is." - Antonio

Model to Learn From

Employer Assistance Program

EAP programs tend to be short-term, with limited numbers of sessions that allow people to process a particular incident or to determine if they would like to continue seeking professional support.



Photo by [Jacob Lund](#) from Noun Project

Create a centralized resource and message to communicate what's available in the community.

Roundtable participants suggested that a central resource, such as a hotline, could help people connect with resources without the stigma of a particular organization. In addition, messaging is needed to communicate that resources such as JFS are available to everyone in the community. Messaging should also reinforce the professional responsibility of therapists and clergy to respect privacy.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"The really big organizations are supporting our most vulnerable or needy community members. I have a hard time feeling like I'm one of those people." - Talia

Roundtable Feedback

If younger adults see JFS as "not for them" an independent organization can easily be the central referral phone line (which could be located at any agency, since no one needs to know where it is located).



Action 3

Support finding a therapist who is a good fit.

It is hard to find the right professional. In addition to messaging to reinforce that it's normal to try out different practitioners, provide biographies and detail about practitioners in advance.

Action 4

Offer a variety of services and resources.

Youngish adults want to see that mental health care reflects not only their immediate mental health, but also that address trauma recovery for a whole community. Services and resources available should address a range of mental healthcare needs, including different therapy modalities, as well as dealing with community-level trauma and individual trauma.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"There's a learning curve for finding a therapist. You have to find your fit, and not give up on therapy before you find 'your person.'" - Deb

"In my own journey, when I opened up and found out others had these experiences, it really helped. It's so stigmatized in my parents' generation." - Talia

*"I wish people knew about the different types of therapy and what they each can offer."
- Rebecca*

Roundtable Feedback

Offering brief intros (written) for each of the therapists who are available for drop-in appointments would be useful for seeing who we might be connecting with - being clear that you might try a few different folks!

Provide referral lists that offer guidance, and financial subsidy to select private mental health care providers who use various therapeutic modalities.

Build on the resources already available in the community.

In addition to JFS, practitioners in the Jewish community may be willing to contribute time and resources to supporting youngish adults. Help build community leaders' knowledge and understanding of what resources exist, along with skills to recognize signs of distress and confidentially support people through their emotional and mental health challenges.

Youngish Adult Feedback

He also wished he had reached out to the Rabbis in his life for support. He felt other community members were struggling more.

- 30-something man

"I'm cautious about connecting with rabbis or community leaders. If I go to a community leader, my parents might find out." - Deb

Roundtable Feedback

JFS or other organizations within the Jewish community could sponsor therapy or counseling sessions.

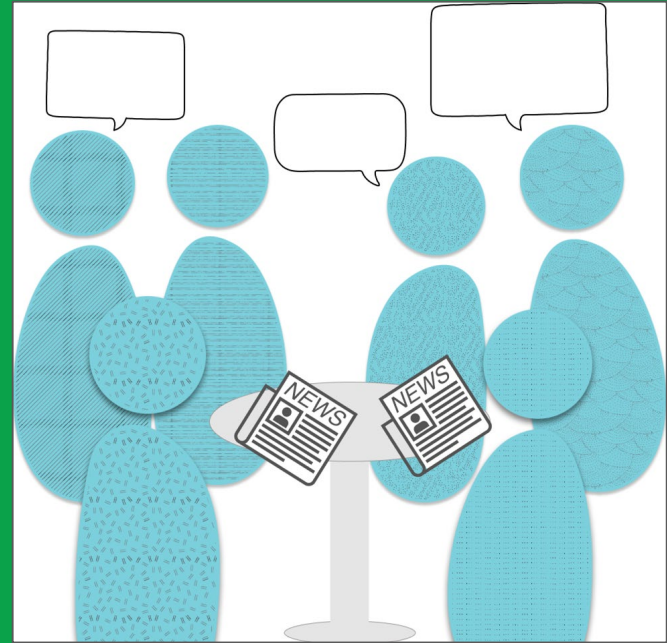
Model to Learn From

[Give an Hour](#)

Give an Hour is developing a national network of volunteer professionals capable of responding to acute and chronic mental healthcare, specifically to those who serve, such as first responders.

CONFIDING

Host facilitated affinity groups for processing and reflection



Tested Concept: Shared Small Groups for Reflection and Processing

Host facilitated affinity groups for processing and reflection

Building connections through small, facilitated groups is appealing to youngish adults but should include differing levels of commitment depending on the engagement. This strategy also has the opportunity to evolve in several directions: practicing mental health skills, connecting with people of like identities, and processing ongoing events in the world. Each of these directions would require careful facilitation and support to build trust.

Outcomes

Youngish adults have spaces that are designed for them to process their experiences and connect with others.

Actions

Build trust through groups with commonalities.

Offer different levels of commitment.

Support thoughtful and caring facilitation.

Incorporate practice of mental health and self-care skills.

Impressions from youngish adults

"I think it's important to have a topic, to help frame conversations. Or to process particular events or to process a book or movie." - Adam

"If it's with strangers, there needs to be strong facilitation to break down the walls people put up to get to a deeper topic." - Joe

"There are things I'm not going to say around folks with kids [unlike me] or who work in vastly different industries than I do." - Sam

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults

Action 1

Build trust through groups with commonalities.

Roundtable participants, in reflecting on the feedback from youngish adults, identified that there is an opportunity to create intentional spaces for people of like identities and experiences to connect within the Jewish community. Groups could range from gender, age, having children, racial/ethnic identity, hobbies, issues, and more.

Youngish Adult Feedback

“I would want groups that are set around identity. There are things I’m not going to say around folks with kids [unlike me] or who work in vastly different industries than I do.” - Sam

Model to Learn From

Employee Resource Groups

Common in large companies, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) help bring together employees of common identities, and support company culture.

Roundtable Feedback

Sometimes people are lonely and don’t know that anyone can understand what’s happening to them. There should be spaces for people who share an identity within the Jewish community to come together.

Model to Learn From

JProSTL Affinity Groups

Staff who work throughout the St. Louis community connect with their colleagues with similar professional interests and identities, including young professionals

Action 2

Offer different levels of commitment.

Youngish adults need to know what they’re committing to and how it will fit into their life. Some seek short-term, drop-in connections, while others want to build trust with a group. Create a variety of formats and timings to more easily fit into many people’s schedules.

Youngish Adult Feedback

“There is value in having a set group to build on this with. But I am sometimes not great at committing to longer-term things” - Adam

“This feels like homework to me, but if it were a lower barrier to entry, like going to a park to talk about things that I don’t have to prepare for, it feels more open-ended.” - Talia

Model to Learn From

The Dinner Party

A platform for grieving 20- and 30-somethings to find community and lasting relationships around the common experience of grief.

Roundtable Feedback

This might be two separate ideas: one focused on connecting around therapeutic self-care, and one focused on connecting based on identity and experiences.

Support thoughtful and caring facilitation.

The facilitation structure and support of this strategy is critically important to youngish adults. Group relationships might straddle a line with therapeutic connections, particularly as participants broach difficult and personal topics.

Training for facilitators should cover how to manage group structures, power dynamics, and trust-building. Youngish adults want to have a safe space to share their feelings and responses, even if they aren't fully thought through.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"This is wading into a therapeutic group. It should be closed, and carefully facilitated, or people could be retraumatized." - Rebecca

"I would want a flat facilitation structure, where everyone's on the same footing, but there's a more relaxed opportunity to give an answer not fully baked." - Deb

"If it's with strangers, there needs to be strong facilitation to break down the walls people put up to get to a deeper topic." - Joe

Model to Learn From

[Resilience Circles](#)

These small groups bring people together to increase their personal security through learning, mutual aid, social action, and community support. Circles are focused on economic stability, and the organization offers resources for organizing and hosting.

Roundtable Feedback

There's so much healing that happens within community when there is sharing and reflection.

Model to Learn From

[Center for Mind-Body Medicine Certification Program](#)

Participants in the Center for Mind-Body Medicine's certification program receive ongoing supervision, in-depth training, and one-on-one support to prepare them to lead Mind-Body Skill Groups with diverse communities.

Model to Learn From

[Resetting the Table](#)

To build a new group of practitioners who can facilitate constructive deliberation across divides, Resetting the Table offers a 7 month training, including coaching and mentorship where they practice intervening amidst free-flowing conversation, address misunderstandings, and challenge each other across differences.

Incorporate practice of mental health and self-care skills.

Youngish adults expressed skepticism about self-care as another thing to worry about doing right and finding the time for, but they also seek integrated, holistic ways to manage their mental and emotional well-being. Groups that provide venues to learn and practice skills of self-regulation and self-care could benefit youngish adults in their long-term resilience, provide a channel for sharing additional resources and referrals, while also building connections across the community. Beyond identity groups, connections to build and practice the skills of self-care and emotional health could support some youngish adults.

Host facilitated affinity groups for processing and reflection

Model to Learn From

[Center for Mind-Body Medicine](#)

Mind-Body Skill Groups teach evidence-based skills of self-awareness, self-care, and self-expression that enable participants to create a comprehensive, individualized program for being balanced and resilient.

Youngish Adult Feedback

“I like the idea of mutual support for each other, but where does it need to become a professional relationship?”

- Talia

“You need a balanced mental, physical, social, and emotional living philosophy. Otherwise, self-care becomes a chore. Emotional health needs to be holistic, and self-care has to be intentional — not putting the onus on the person who’s struggling.” - Rebecca



Attribution: [Alia Youssef from Noun Project](#)

CONNECTING

Create options and systems for collective volunteering



Tested Concept: Participate in Service Through Collective Volunteering

Create options and systems for collective volunteering

For youngish adults, connecting with others through meaningful experiences is central to being part of a community. Completing helpful tasks and being of service to others also directly contributes positively to mental health and emotional well-being.

While participating in the community through service and giving back is rewarding, the barriers to getting started can be difficult to surmount, and service opportunities are not always designed to build connections and relationships. The following actions would support implementing a system for community involvement and activation to engage youngish adults and build or deepen community connections.

Outcomes

Youngish adults can easily find opportunities to meaningfully participate in community and build connections with people across the St. Louis region. Those interactions support a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction, and a sense of purpose.

Actions

Provide easy options for participation.

Create cohorts for connection.

Design intentional experiences for relationship-building.

Make it worthwhile to recipients and organizations.

Connect to shared Jewish values.

Impressions from youngish adults

"Doing good for others makes you feel good!" - Antonio

"I would find it so fulfilling to participate in something like this, and to support someone else. It makes me feel accomplished and connected to others." - Talia

Key partnerships

Jewish Federation of St. Louis

Synagogues

Organizations outside the Jewish community

Groups that serve youngish adults, including YPD, Moishe House, JGrads, NextDor

Provide easy options for participation.

Committing to volunteering can take a lot of effort on the part of the volunteer. Providing a range of different entry points with different timeframes and commitments can make it easier for people to get involved. Youngish adults sometimes default to the thing that is the easiest to do, rather than digging into the best fit for their interests, skills, or desire to connect.

There are many existing models and tools for supporting volunteer commitment and participation that can be adapted for the Jewish community.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I appreciate that there are multiple entry points in terms of commitment. It doesn't feel as intimidating to participate."

- Adam

"People are more free on the weekends, and it could align with Shabbat spirit." - Joe

"There should be some built-in flexibility. [When traveling] we looked at a volunteering database, and picked one that was least annoying to coordinate." - Wonder

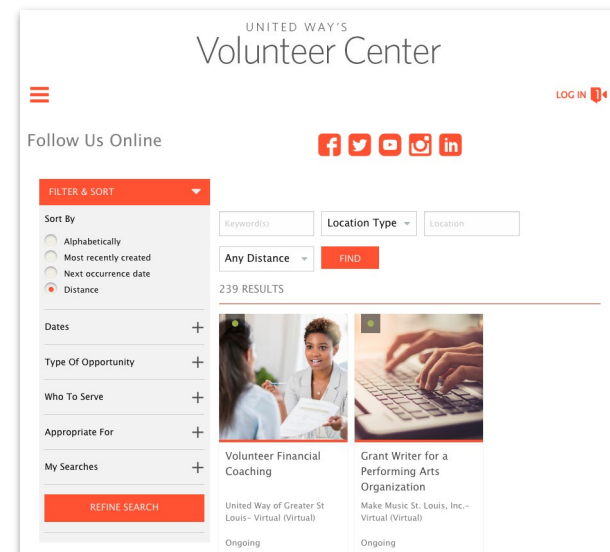
Roundtable Feedback

There should be a span of time commitments — everything from 30 minutes to half a day.

Model to Learn From

United Way's Volunteer Center (stlvolunteer.org)

The United Way of St. Louis organizes volunteer opportunities into a searchable database as a single portal across St. Louis.



Design intentional experiences for relationship-building.

Service opportunities will provide the most mental health benefit if they encourage meaningful connections with others. This can have two components:

Connecting volunteers to each other

Intentionally designing experiences and groups of volunteers can support not only more effective volunteering but also new relationships. Roundtable participants suggested creating cohorts based on interest or other identities.

Connecting recipients and volunteers

Having a variety of touchpoints for volunteers can allow for more ways to get to know people and build relationships. Participants were also interested in the mutual aid components of service, where a community is actively caring for itself.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I love having all these different touchpoints (running errands, helping out, hanging out with kids), because these are cool touchpoints to get to know people and build connections."

- Adam

"It can be hard to meet people and talk because you're focusing on what you are doing." - Joe

Model to Learn From

Trybal Gatherings

Trybal is a national nonprofit that reimagines Jewish gatherings in the modern world, and focuses specifically on creating a Jewish environment for meeting new people and building relationships.

Roundtable Feedback

Studies have proven that if you want people to connect for dating, give them a social justice project to do.

Maybe we put together small volunteer groups that pick their task weekly or monthly that they do together.

Groups could come together around a particular skill or interest — like gardening or maintenance.

Make it worthwhile to recipients and organizations.

It was particularly important to youngish adults that systems for collective volunteering have an impact in the community and do not overburden organizations that are already taking on these efforts. This means efforts should go beyond short-term volunteer days, focusing on longer-term engagements and careful coordination with other ongoing efforts. There's also an opportunity to extend service outside of the Jewish community to other organizations and efforts.

Create options and systems for collective volunteering

Roundtable Feedback

Even though this is the lowest hanging fruit, people feel territorial about it. There are biases across the community about who could participate.

Youngish Adult Feedback

***"There are enough places for people to volunteer already for people to find something to plug into without this."** - Sam*

***"I want this to connect to organizations that have already been doing this work for a long time."** - Adam*



Connect to shared Jewish values.

Both youngish adults and roundtable participants identified the opportunity to connect service to Jewish values and identity. This might include choosing volunteer opportunities that tie closely to the Jewish calendar or community, such as shopping for Passover food for people who live somewhere that matzo is hard to access, or connecting with community and cultural organizations to plan volunteering activities.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"It would be nice for this to be around a shared value — like bringing Passover food to Jewish folks who don't have access." - Talia

Roundtable Feedback

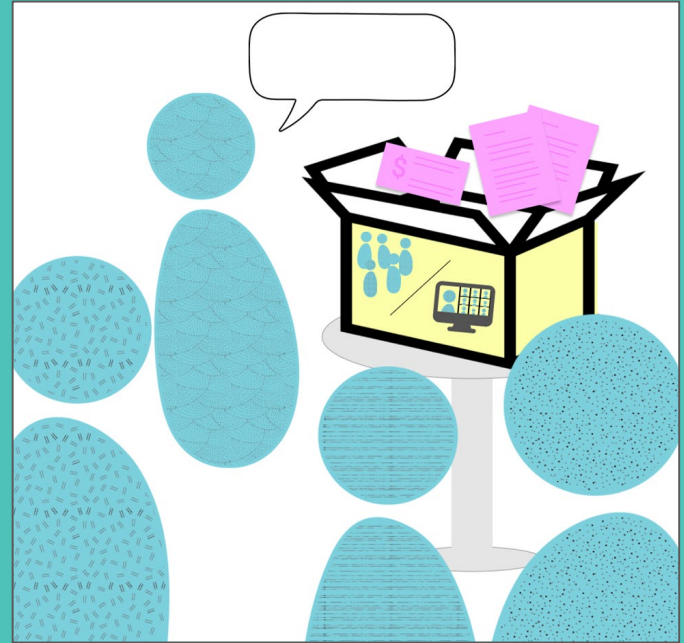
There are opportunities through Synagogues to participate in these types of projects, but it is a barrier that they are through Synagogues.

We should learn from [non-Jewish community programs] and "not recreate the wheel," but do it in a Jewish way.



CONNECTING

Train and incentivize new leaders and hosts



Tested Concept: Learning to Host Events in New Contexts

Train and incentivize new leaders and hosts

Creating community takes a lot of work, and is a skill that must be honed over time. Cultivating a cohort of youngish adults who feel confident and empowered to host and create community spaces supports not only these individuals and their guests, but also the long-term resilience of the Jewish community. Cultivating new leaders and hosts should include a blend of training on the technicalities, confidence building, and incentives to support future convenings. The following actions outline these steps.

Outcomes

Youngish adults have the confidence and tools to develop and host events that connect youngish adults across the Jewish community with each other.

Actions

Support and partner with existing organizations.

Build confidence and capacity for leadership.

Provide technical and logistical support.

Create different levels of engagement for hosts and leaders.

Impressions from youngish adults

"I would want to take this on in a way that isn't burdensome, and is still fun. Fostering connections, meeting new people, are positive for my mental health." - Deb

"I love hosting — it makes me feel good, and really fills me up." - Talia

"We desperately need this. We are going to need a fill a leadership vacuum [as people age]. Leadership isn't distributed evenly across ages." - Sam

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults, including YPD, Moishe House, JGrads, NextDor

Support and partner with existing organizations.

Across the Jewish community, there are events, gatherings, and convenings being planned in both public and private ways. Any new trainings or incentives should align with these efforts, and build partnerships that strengthen current organizational efforts. Of particular importance is supporting people who aren't already connected in the community to build relationships and participate.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"This shouldn't detract from the organizations whose mission is already this. Could it partner with other organizations?" - Joe

"We desperately need this. We are going to need a fill a leadership vacuum [as people age]. Leadership isn't distributed evenly across ages." - Sam

"There need to be self-organized spaces and spaces that are open where you can meet and get to know the community at large." - Adam

Model to Learn From

[Moishe House Without Walls \(MHWOW\)](#)

MHWOW empowers young adults called "hosts" to confidently cultivate a unique Jewish community of their peers through consistent programming and common interest or practice. Hosts create experiences for their friends, and receive funds to support their efforts.

Roundtable Feedback

Consider if hosts are inviting their friends or if people can sign up and get placed.

Ensure that people who already feel marginalized or aren't connected to the Jewish community can participate.

Build confidence and capacity for leadership.

Hosting helps provide young adults with confidence and connection to others, and builds capacity across the Jewish community for leadership. Intentional opportunities to learn the skills of leadership is a long-term investment in community growth.

Youngish Adult Feedback

“I need a kick out of the nest to take on a leadership role. I have a group of Jewish peers, and I want us to do something together.” - Deb

“There should be a workshop that’s like things you didn’t learn in Hebrew School: join a shul, committees, etc...” - Sam

Model to Learn From

Former YPD Training

In the past, YPD offered education to help train participants to be better board and committee members, including a toolkit and a vocabulary for leadership.

Roundtable Feedback

Back in the day, YPD was more robust and served as a training ground — a year-long, amazing leadership class for 30-40 people, creating the next generation of people to serve on Jewish Community Boards. Everyone got the chance to host.



Provide technical and logistical support.

Support for planning starts with confidence and extends through the technical specifics. Youngish adults mentioned logistical support including identifying venues, having ideas for programs, and funding to offset costs. Roundtable participants pointed to examples locally and nationally that provide training and resources. These models could be opportunities for partnership or to learn from.

Model to Learn From

PJ Library [Together Experiences](#)

The PJ Library offers small grants for family and friends that are connecting about Jewish culture and learning. Grants reimburse for costs up to \$50, and include ideas on what to do with friends.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I would want logistical and technical support, and a template for sharing and creating buzz." - Deb

"If you complete the training, you should get \$10/person to put towards the event, with resources of people to reach out to, organizations to work with, places to get food." - Joe

"This seems like a third party fundraising kit — it could be something to help people learn philanthropy and connect with each other. It would be great to take events to the next level." - Rebecca

Roundtable Feedback

A few years ago, there was a grant that supported different families to host a kiddush on shabbos. That incentivized someone, because hosting is a lot of work.

Piggy-back off trainings in the community or at organizations like Moishe House.

Create a mentorship structure, so people are supported in their growth as leaders.

Model to Learn From

[Retreatology](#): The Art of Jewish Retreat-Making

Retreatology, hosted by Moishe House, teaches participants how to create a Jewish gathering for their friends and community from start to finish. After completing the training, participants are eligible for a grant of up to \$5,000 to plan and execute a Jewish learning retreat.

Create different levels of engagement for hosts and leaders.

Youngish adults are looking for different levels of hosting, from bringing together a few friends to organizing large-scale fundraisers. Hosting with a low barrier to entry can be a stepping stone and resources should reflect different levels of comfort with the idea of organizing events.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I would love to have resources of past events, so you don't have to reinvent the wheel every time." - Deb

"There is a burden for the host when you're taking on helping people, and they may be talking to you for the first time. It's helpful to have the resources to be able to host." - Adam

"Make it hyper-local — no one wants to drive. We used to picnic with our neighbors." - Antonio

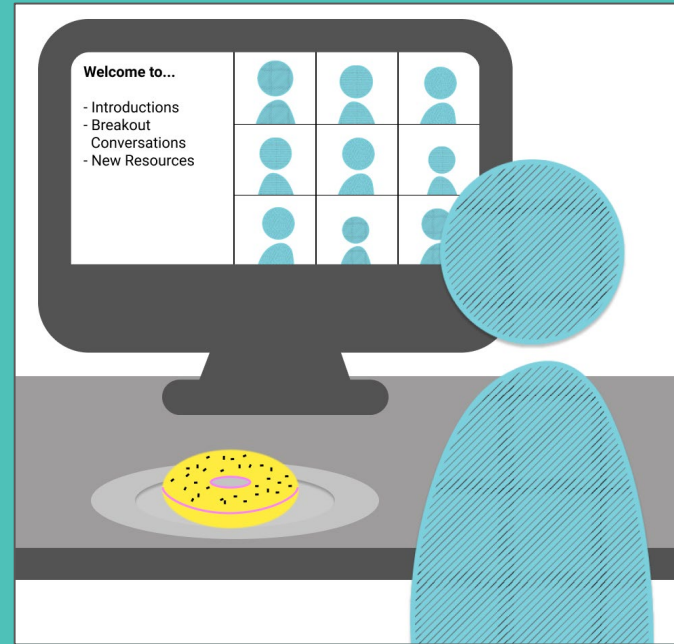
Roundtable Feedback

Provide a quarterly training so new people could learn the skills throughout the year.



CONNECTING

Create events to welcome and facilitate connection with Jewish networks



Tested Concept: Shabbat Nosh across St. Louis

Create events to welcome and facilitate connection with Jewish networks.

Programming that invites and welcomes youngish adults into Jewish community spaces is appealing to youngish adults who are seeking ways to find their place and connect with others. It is particularly helpful as a way for youngish adults to feel explicitly invited to integrate into the rich network of organizations and leaders in the Jewish community. This strategy emphasizes the resilience that comes from strong connections built gradually over time (in comparison to other strategies that have both short and long-term benefits).

Existing programming, such as Shabbat Shalom STL, provides a model to build on. Participants saw an opportunity to extend beyond synagogues into the broader set of community organizations.

Outcomes

Youngish adults understand the community resources and groups available to them, and build connections and relationships with those groups.

Actions

Choose times and locations that are accessible for people with a range of Jewish practices.

Make it easy to meaningfully connect with others.

Connect with a variety of organizations and sites.

Impressions from youngish adults

"I've been attending a queer Friday night happy hour at a synagogue in another city. It's nice to have Shabbat dinner with someone." - Sam

"I could see a variety of organizations (NextDor, Moishe House, synagogues, etc) putting their own spin on this." - Deb

"I didn't have any context with the Jewish community here. I didn't have any friends who were from St. Louis and actively involved to have a foothold. I knew it was something I wanted." - Adam

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults

Synagogues

Other Jewish community organizations

Action 1

Choose times and locations that are accessible for people with a range of Jewish practices.

Choosing times and locations that work for a range of youngish adults is important to connecting across different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. Once it's safe to meet in person, a variety of locations can help expose youngish adults to the broader community.

Action 2

Connect with a variety of organizations and sites.

Organizations across the community already offer programming to welcome individuals and youngish adults. Expand on these programs, and encourage other types of Jewish organizations and groups to serve as hosts.

Create events to welcome and facilitate connection with Jewish networks

Roundtable Feedback

This should be wherever youngish adults are, including in unexpected buildings, neighborhoods, or zip codes.

Accommodate the Orthodox community without isolating them.

Consider other times beyond shabbat, since there are already so many shabbat meals, like pre-shabbat, havdalah, or on a Wednesday night.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I could see a variety of organizations (NextDor, Moishe House, synagogues, etc) putting their own spin on this." - Deb

Roundtable Feedback

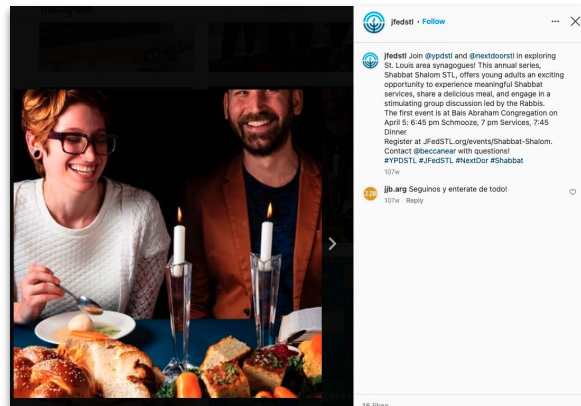
It would be great to expand Shabbat Shalom STL beyond the synagogues to neighborhoods. It should include existing Jewish groups and individual people.

Support the costs of hosting.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"Make it hyper-local — no one wants to drive. We used to picnic with our neighbors." - Antonio

"Include optional minyan, so I'm not like 'should I go to this or to shul?'" - Sam



Model to Learn From

Shabbat Shalom STL

A series hosted by YPD and NextDor that provides an opportunity to experience Shabbat services, share a meal, and engage in discussion with the Rabbis of different congregations.

Make it easy to meaningfully connect with others.

Wherever these events happen, the goal should be focused on connection between youngish adults and community organizations and resources. This means keeping groups small, creating opportunities for personal connection and sharing, and offering a variety of facilitation and hosting structures.

Youngish Adult Feedback

“When this is over, I want to get out and move — to do physical things like play games or dance — with other people.” - Rebecca

“I would expect this to be small, maybe 5 people, or 10 if we’re not social distancing.” - Sam

During the pandemic, he was invited to join a virtual shabbat dinner. Participants brought readings and prayers, and they connected with each other in messages. - 30-something man

“I would consider facilitating something like this. I would want to focus on topics and issues that are relevant to me.” - Deb

Model to Learn From

OneTable

OneTable supports people to build a shabbat dinner practice that feels authentic, sustainable, and valuable. Their resources focuses on youngish adults, encouraging them to envision what their gathering might be and provides resources and support to create their vision.

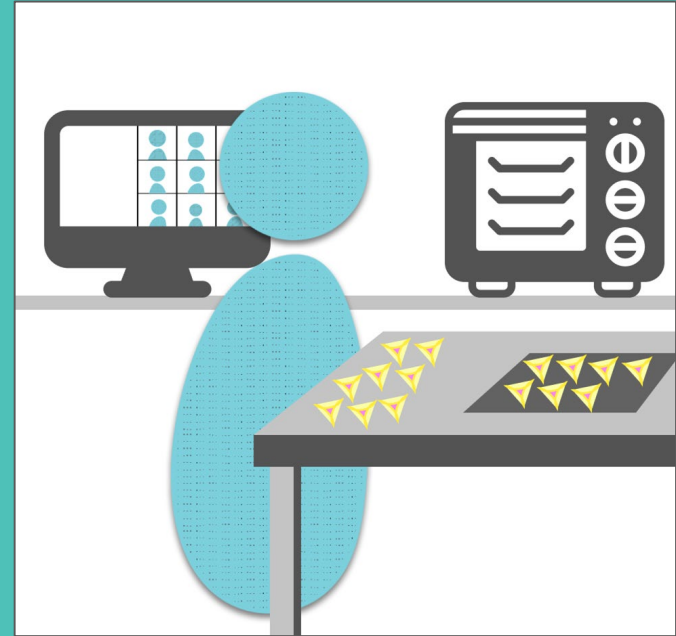
Roundtable Feedback

Consider ‘underprogramming,’ so people can host on their own, instead of staff or rabbis.

Switch up topics and formal versus informal facilitation to attract people with different interests and styles.

CONNECTING

Provide experiences to
create, make, and learn
about Jewish culture
together



Tested Concept: Creating and Making Together

Provide experiences to create, make, and learn about Jewish culture together

During the pandemic, experiences where people have been consuming new information virtually have sometimes left them feeling more disconnected than before. Sharing experiences to create, make, and learn provide venues for deeper connection to both the Jewish community and to other people. By hosting events, both virtual and in-person, that connect with Jewish traditions and experiences, youngish adults can come together around a shared topic and build relationships through a shared experience. This strategy emphasizes the resilience that comes from strong connections built gradually over time (in comparison to other strategies that have both short and long-term benefits).

Outcomes

Youngish adults connect with each other through active, creation experiences, rooted in Jewish culture.

Actions

Foster intimate spaces for connection.

Balance learning and connection.

Connect with Jewish traditions, experiences, and calendar.

Provide opportunities for a range of interests.

Make execution easy for participants and organizers.

Impressions from youngish adults

“When you’re producing something, whether it’s a success or a flop, it’s great to have a small group to commiserate with.” - Deb

“I have been doing this during the pandemic. Food is Jewish culture! I bake with my mom on FaceTime. I also took a babka making class.” - Talia

“Things that are building or handy might attract people who don’t see themselves as artsy.” - Joe

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults

Organizations already hosting collaborative programming in the community

Action 1

Foster intimate spaces for connection.

Participating in these activities should foster authentic connection, and help people feel less alone. Particularly in a virtual format, these connections should be carefully fostered through more intimate spaces, like small groups or breakout rooms.

Youngish Adult Feedback

“This should have a mix of people you know and don’t know. It’s awkward if it’s all new people.” - Wonder

*“When you’re producing something, whether it’s a success or a flop, it’s great to have a small group to commiserate with.”
- Deb*

Roundtable Feedback

Have smaller groups, or a large group with breakouts (in person or online) of no more than 5 people to foster conversation.

Action 2

Balance learning and connection.

While people are excited to learn new things, too much structure could stifle organic conversation and connection. Balance providing a formal structure and educational content with allowing people to relax and engage with each other. Related conversation prompts or an informal facilitator can ease the group into talking while making.

Roundtable Feedback

Have a goofy icebreaker or game to kick things off.

There should be some structure and education to make the connection to Judaism, but this should be secondary to the social aspect.

Youngish Adult Feedback

*“I want it to feel like I’m hanging out. I don’t want to feel like I’m ‘on.’”
- Antonio*

Connect with Jewish traditions, experiences, and calendar.

For youngish adults, connecting to Jewish traditions and experiences helps center on meaningful experiences, and fill gaps left without family nearby or a developed community yet. This also provides an opportunity to learn about Jewish culture and different practices and traditions, which can help make sense of difficult times.

Youngish Adult Feedback

“This fills a gap for those of us who aren’t near our families during other holidays and rituals.” - Adam

“It would be great if this was based around the holidays — a competition for a sukkah during sukkot, for example.” - Joe

“I have been doing this during the pandemic. Food is Jewish culture! I bake with my mom on FaceTime. I also took a babka making class.” - Talia

“If it’s a Jewish tradition, I would want to hear everyone’s memories and give them a chance to share, so I could learn about each person.” - Deb

Model To Learn From

Babka Bonanza hosted by MaTovu

During this virtual baking class, participants learned the process of baking babka, a sweet cake that originated in the Jewish communities of Poland and Ukraine.

Model To Learn From

Virtual Cooking Class at Young Israel of St. Louis

Young Israel hosted a virtual cooking class for Tu B’Shvat, featuring Hawaiian chicken wings, coconut rice, and fruit & chocolate lollipops.

Roundtable Feedback

There’s an appetite to learn new skills that are tied to Jewish identity.

Action 4

Provide opportunities for a range of interests.

While baking was popular among the youngish adults who provided feedback, it is important to offer program to match a range of skills and interests. This might include other crafting skills, or extend into other creative practices like music or gardening.

Youngish Adult Feedback

“Things that are building or handy might attract people who don’t see themselves as artsy.” - Joe

Roundtable Feedback

There should be a rotation of options that allow different people to get involved. Ideas include baking, painting with wine, gardening, Jewish crafts, building a sukkah.

Action 5

Make execution easy for participants and organizers.

Creating things, particularly at home, requires preparation for both participants and hosts. Consider options to reduce the burden on hosting organizations by asking participants to find materials, but also provide fun ways for participants to feel connected through shared materials.

Youngish Adult Feedback

“I have everything I need to bake, but when I took a succulent making class, they dropped off everything I needed.” - Talia

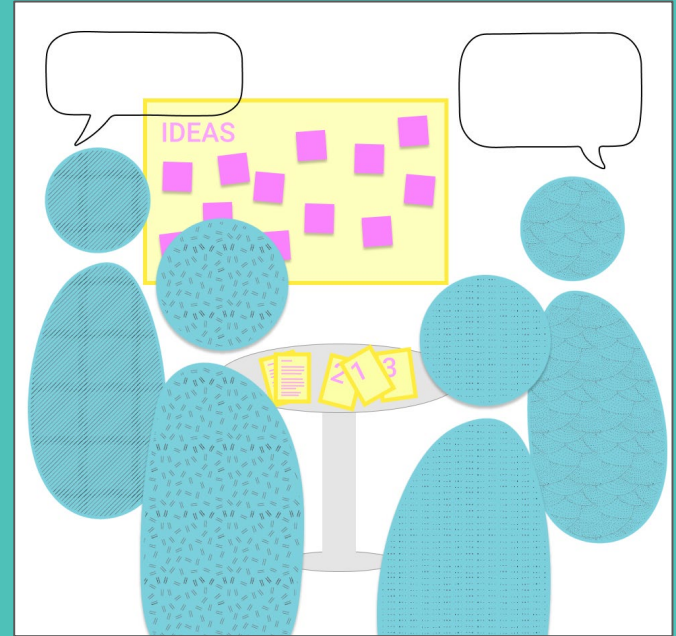
“I might do this in person, but not virtually. The way my apartment is set up, it’s hard to do.” - Sam

Roundtable Feedback

Immersive experiences are great, but preparing and dropping off materials is complicated. Provide options where people can find the tools and resources on their own in advance.

CONNECTING

Create venues for sharing and adapting traditions to build connection



Tested Concept: Adapting and Sharing Traditions

Create venues for sharing and adapting traditions to build connection

Connecting to tradition is important to feeling connected to family, friends, and culture, and can impact mental health. Working with others and engaging with traditions, particularly those that help make sense of a complicated world, is beneficial.

However, the idea of adapting and sharing traditions had a mixed response from youngish adults. In some practices, there is resistance to the idea of adapting or changing traditions. For others, youngish adults may not feel confident in their own practice of Judaism to feel comfortable sharing with others. Due to these complexities, this idea may be best applied in the context of other strategies, including *creating and making together* and *training new hosts*.

Outcomes

Youngish adults feel empowered to access and rely on Jewish traditions, and build connections with others in learning about and expanding their practice.

Actions

Develop resources to connect Jewish traditions to the current moment.

Create experiences for different forms of practice.

Allow for learning and exposure to other ways of being Jewish.

Impressions from youngish adults

"I'm not somebody who doesn't want Judaism to ever change or evolve, but I'm further along the traditional end that I'm not going to do a ton of reinventing" - Sam

"I am very reform, and I don't feel like I know enough. Do I know the prayers? Do I know what you're talking about? I had a bat mitzvah and I am very culturally Jewish, but I don't feel Jewish enough." - Deb

"I get really anxious and depressed when I can't be with my family for the holidays. It was really hard for me to know my family was having seder without me, so I sent them chocolate bars so we would feel connected." - Talia

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults

Action 1

Develop resources to connect Jewish traditions to the current moment.

Many Jewish traditions focus on reflection, issues of social justice, and other priorities that resonate in the current moment. Build on this relevance by developing and making available resources that support youngish adults in making these connections.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"[It would be] taking the core components and making it as fun as possible — here are the core tenets and here's your own unique take on it." - Joe

"Creating new traditions is super fun. We do these holidays every year, and it make sense to make them relevant, timely, and special." - Talia

Model to Learn From

OneTable Live

During the pandemic, OneTable adapted their programming to support alternative Friday night dinners that promoted public health precautions, including Solo Shabbat, Shelter-in-Place Shabbat, and Virtual Shabbat.

Action 2

Create experiences for different forms of practice.

Judaism is diverse, and following traditions means different things to people of different Jewish identities and backgrounds. Adapting and sharing traditions can be important to connecting with people who have been excluded in the past to make them feel welcomed and included. More observant people may be less interested in adapting long-standing traditions.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"The beauty of tradition is that it's been the same way for generations...When we do something different, it's because it's fun." - Antonio

"Reaching the part of the Jewish community that has felt isolated or ignored to plug in is hard. This is a target group to reach around reframing traditions." - Adam

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I am very reform, and I don't feel like I know enough. Do I know the prayers? Do I know what you're talking about? I had a bat mitzvah and I am very culturally Jewish, but I don't feel Jewish enough. Even if I don't feel Jewish enough, I can feel like a woman, or part of a group, that can offset my feeling of not belonging." - Deb

Allow for learning and exposure to other ways of being Jewish.

The diversity of Jewish practice and tradition creates an opportunity for sharing experiences, stories, and practices. Create venues for people to learn from each other, and share their traditions. Consider incorporating collaborative opportunities to discuss, share, and plan traditions.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I would love to collaborate on new traditions, to hear from other friends and siblings who are exploring new traditions."

- Talia

"I'm thinking about this as an event, where people could discuss and be creative." - Joe

"I want to learn about different practices and backgrounds. There's a lot I don't know about other people's practices." - Rebecca

"I want to hear stories, and see how I can relate the story of the Jewish people to things that are happening right now."

- Talia

Model to Learn From

Songful Prayer Leadership Workshop at MaTovu

This weekly virtual gathering seeks to empower people with diverse backgrounds to lead Jewish prayer services "rooted in tradition and filled with song".



COPING

Share messages that educate about and normalize mental healthcare



Tested Concept: Learning about Self-Care and Emotional Health

Share messages that educate about and normalize mental healthcare

Communication channels, particularly social media, are an important part of reaching youngish adults. Any coordinated efforts to advance supports for resilience should include communication and the messaging. These messages should normalize mental healthcare and encourage prioritizing emotional well-being.

Youngish adults want to see campaigns that speak not only to them, but to the broader community. These messages must be authentic, applicable, and should engage directly with people. It's also important to recognize that social media can be an emotionally challenging space for some youngish adults, and can't be the only communication channel.

Outcomes

Communication to the Jewish community consistently normalizes mental healthcare and provides authentic messages and skills that support mental and emotional health.

Actions

Reach the wider community, not just youngish adults.

Share authentic messages & teach skills.

Engage, don't just broadcast.

Impressions from youngish adults

"The more it's out there in the community, the better — parents and grandparents would benefit from seeing that mental health is important." - Talia

"I wonder how much of the [social media campaign] is a reminder of the care versus having access to the care." - Adam

"If someone says 'exercise helps', I want to see examples for different lifestyles and conditions. What's that like if you live in a high rise?" - Deb

Key partnerships

Groups across the Jewish community, including those that serve youngish adults

Reach the wider community, not just youngish adults.

For youngish adults, some of the value of a campaign would be normalizing the idea of mental healthcare and emotional well-being more broadly across the Jewish community, particularly with older relatives and community members.

A campaign should be designed to support youngish adults through their wider network, in addition to being sharable to reach other parts of their community one-on-one.

Youngish Adult Feedback

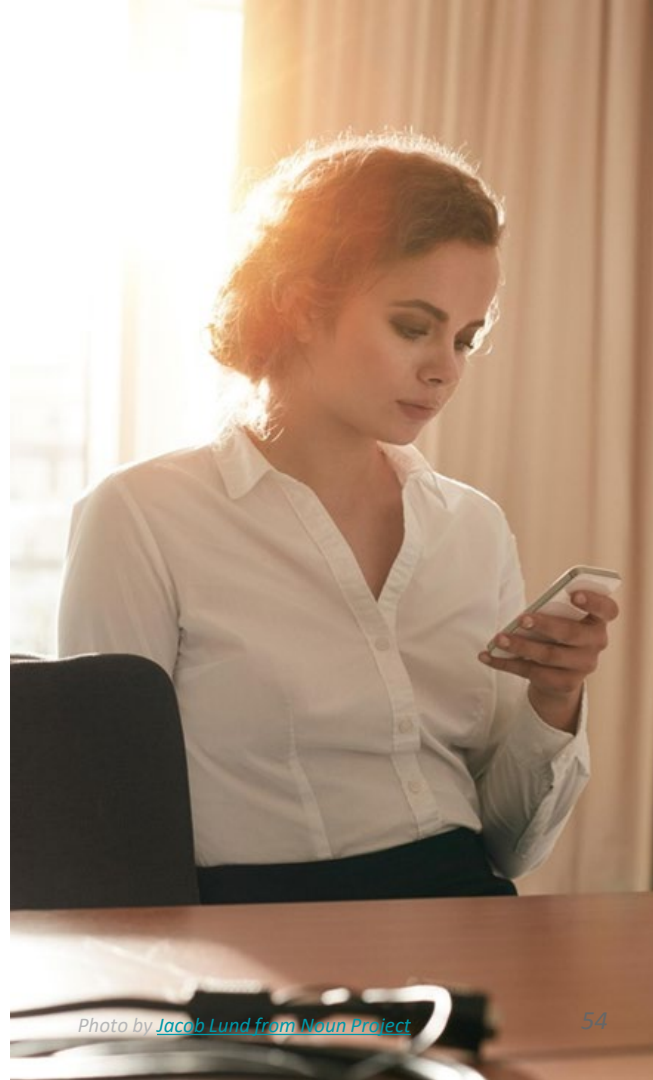
“The more it's out there in the community, the better — parents and grandparents would benefit from seeing that mental health is important.” - Talia

“I’m more inclined to share these messages one-on-one, specifically to the people who need to see or hear it.” - Talia

Model to Learn From

Normalizing Pronouns

Across the country, individuals, groups, and organizations have sought to normalize asking for and using preferred pronouns for all people. This has included messaging campaigns, education efforts, and support to ask for pronouns at the beginning of every conversation.



Share authentic messages & teach skills.

Self-care can feel like a burden, particularly when youngish adults are stressed. Sharing should go beyond ideas to teach new skills for self-care. This is critical to enabling youngish adults to take on new actions and sustain efforts.

In addition, social media showcases a rosy picture of people's lives, and it's critical for youngish adults to be able to see authentic and real stories of how people are struggling in their own lives. This might include talking about difficult situations, and normalizing being vulnerable.

Share messages that educate about and normalize mental healthcare

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I like those things where you get a 30 second deep-dive into a skill or an idea." - Joe

"There's a woman who posts on Instagram all day — it feels like her real life. The good, the bad, the ugly, the hilarious. She's easy to relate to and trust." - Talia

"If someone says 'exercise helps', I want to see examples for different lifestyles and conditions. What's that like if you live in a high rise?" - Deb

"On the one hand, it would be great to get Jewish people who know and work in the mental health field to say, 'look at these services', so there is trust and relevant education. On the other hand, I know people want to see 'just like me! A regular person!'" - Wonder

Roundtable Feedback

Have a regular period for sharing apps, tools, and resources that are available to help with things like mood tracking, meditation, etc.

Actually teach the skill, rather than just send people out into the world.

Social media can show a perfect life, but it doesn't show what's really going on for people. Show the real life stuff.

Model to Learn From

[Habif Health on Instagram](#)

The WashU student health center highlights a mix of opportunities for health and actionable tips.



Engage, don't just broadcast.

There is an opportunity to take social media beyond a one-direction communication tool. At a basic level, having a social media campaign led by a specific person or group of people can help humanize and provide greater interaction, encouraging people to engage in, learn from, and share the conversation.

This engagement could extend to developing systems for resource referral and deeper support, such as a system for assessing and responding to mental health crises via social media interaction. A new idea that emerged from the Roundtable participants, this would require substantial training and support for the people managing the campaign, and should be tested with youngish adults before moving forward.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"Self-care is great when it's done right...but you don't want it to become another expectation added to yourself"
- Antonio

"I could see forwarding this to my sister and some girlfriends, maybe." - Deb

Roundtable Feedback

Have the communication go beyond one-way, with an actual person who youngish adults can identify and interact with.

In the most involved version, provide crisis response intervention, with people who are putting out messages of support are trained to identify crises.

Model to Learn From

Green Dot Training

Used on many college campuses, Green Dot Training teaches skills for bystander intervention for different types of violence.

Model to Learn From

Mental Health First Aid

These courses teach participants how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance abuse disorders.

Model to Learn From

Small Talks with [@findmywell-being](#)

The therapist matching service MyWellbeing hosts 'small talks' on their Instagram, asking therapists to answer questions from followers.

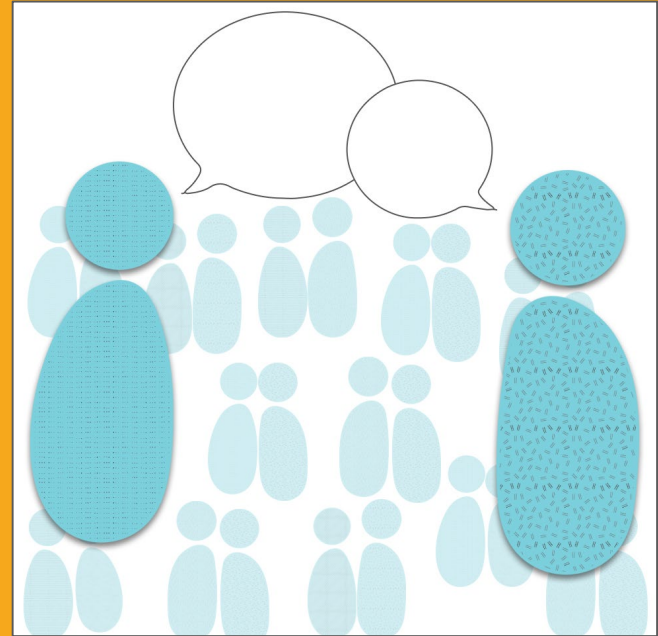
Model to Learn From

Crisis Text Line

Crisis Text Line provides free, 24/7 text-based mental health support and crisis intervention by empowering a community of trained volunteers.

CONSUMING

Foster meaningful connection in community spaces and events



Tested Concept: “Big Talk” in Spaces for Connection

Foster meaningful connection in community spaces and events

Youngish adults want to start and deepen relationships with others, but simply being together in larger groups isn't enough to feel the benefits of connection. Within existing group spaces and events, there's an opportunity to intentionally foster relationship building through structured, personal sharing in smaller groups or pairs. Through curated conversation prompts and simple guidance for facilitation, event organizers can make every shared space a place for deeper relationship building.

Outcomes

Community events provide opportunities for people to consistently make meaningful connections with each other.

Actions

Build upon existing tools

Fit within structures of existing events

Support inclusion through facilitation

Impressions from youngish adults

"I am hesitant because some people will dominate these conversations. A good moderator can make people of diverse backgrounds feel welcome." - Sam

"It feels like this needs to deal with big issues, like racism within the Jewish community. You need space to work through it and talk it out." - Talia

"This could be built into another public event, like an author's talk, to support schmoozing." - Deb

Key partnerships

All organizations that host events

Action 1

Build upon existing tools

Existing resources to help build community and connection can be deployed and adapted to fit specifically St. Louis and Jewish contexts. Provide resources that make it easy for organizations to implement.

Roundtable Feedback

Use prompts, tailored for the Jewish community, in pairs and small groups on Zoom to help people connect with each other.

Model to Learn From

[Big Talk: The Card Game](#)

The Big Talk Card Game facilitates meaningful connections by prompting open-ended and thought-provoking questions that can be used in a variety of settings to encourage people to share their thoughts, feelings, and life stories.

Action 2

Fit within structures of existing events

Many organizations host events that have opportunities for community building and connection, but sometimes it doesn't happen organically. Add on to these events by providing resources for intentionally prompting connection.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"This could be built into another public event, like an author's talk, to support schmoozing." - Deb

*She had been building relationships with other members of her synagogue before the pandemic. After, she attended services virtually, but didn't feel the same connection as before. She stopped attending services.
- 30-something woman*

Roundtable Feedback

This should fit into big, existing events like community Seders.

Cards or prompts would be helpful during for Shabbat, during the nosh, or as part of ice breakers at events at the young adult organizations.

Support inclusion through facilitation.

Talking to strangers is difficult. Provide facilitation and resources to support youngish adults in making connections, and in navigating power dynamics and inclusion. Allow sufficient time for deeper conversation.

Roundtable Feedback

Consider having plants in the audience to help prompt conversation and facilitate.

Youngish Adult Feedback

"I am hesitant because some people will dominate these conversations. A good moderator can make people of diverse backgrounds feel welcome."

- Sam

"I imagine this as a speed dating or round robin to get to know people in smaller groups. You need smaller groups for a deep dive." - Joe

"You need space and time to push and get uncomfortable, outside your comfort zone."

- Talia



Appendix

Image Citations

Page 1: Young men and women having fun at an outdoor dinner party by [Jacob Lund from the Noun Project](#).

Page 7: Storming of the United States Capitol on 6 January 2021 by [Tyler Merbler from Wikimedia Commons](#)

Page 7: COVID-19 San Salvatore by [Alberto Giuliana from Wikimedia Commons](#)

Page 7: George Floyd Protest in Dallas by [Matthew T. Radar from Wikimedia Commons](#)

Page 18: Young woman relaxing on sofa with laptop in living room by [Jacob Lund from Noun Project](#)

Page 19: Transgender businesswoman taking a call outside by [Noun Project from Noun Project](#)

Page 26: Young female sitting on a log while meditating near a lake by [Alia Youssef from Noun Project](#)

Page 31: Jackie Speier and colleagues volunteering at Samaritan House by [Jackie Speier from Wikimedia Commons](#)

Page 32: Shabbat dinner at a Moishe House by [Moishehouse from Wikimedia Commons](#)

Page 36: Young men and women having fun at an outdoor dinner party by [Jacob Lund from the Noun Project](#).

Page 38: Party host serving food to friends during a party at night by [Jacob Lund from Noun Project](#).

Page 54: Female executive sitting in a hotel conference room using cell phone by [Jacob Lund from the Noun Project](#)

Page 60: Women having a conversation over a cup of tea by [Alia Youssef from Noun Project](#)

PLANNING REPORT | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Supporting the Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being of Youngish Adults

January - April 2021



Jewish Federation
OF ST. LOUIS

For our community – now and in the future

Jewish Federation of St. Louis

Young Adult Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being Roundtable

This report documents a collaborative process incorporating contributions from many people. Thank you!

Prepared by

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Thank you to **Lori Kabrun-Berry** and **Emily Bornstein** for their support on this project.

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Interview and feedback participants

(all names are pseudonyms)

Akiva

Antonio

Joe

Sam

Adam

Samantha

Rebecca

Talia

Wonder

Deb

Project Framing

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, people around the world have struggled with their mental health. Isolation, fear, and rapid change have all impacted the ability for individuals to cope with both existing and newly emerging stressors.

One group that has particularly struggled in the United States is youngish adults between 22 and 40 years old. This group has the highest rates of reporting symptoms of anxiety disorders and depression (Societal Experts Action Network, 2020). In addition, the Building Resilient Communities Study conducted by Brandeis University researchers in May 2020 found that youngish adults in the St. Louis Jewish community had more trouble coping with the psychological effects of the pandemic.

To explore the needs of members of this group and identify opportunities to better support their mental health, the Jewish Federation of St. Louis convened a Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Roundtable, consisting of leaders and stakeholders from across the Jewish community. These stakeholders included a mix of youngish adults, people who work with youngish adults, and people with professional mental healthcare expertise.

These stakeholders participated in a design thinking process, centering the experiences and stories of youngish adults to generate concepts and then refine ideas that could positively impact the long-term mental health and well-being of youngish adults in the region.

Responding with Design Thinking

Design thinking is a rigorous and structured approach to finding innovative solutions to complex problems. It is different from other generative and decision-making processes in that it:

Starts with people and stories. Design thinking focuses on the people most impacted by a situation. It is rooted in stories and narratives to help understand people's experiences, behaviors, motivations, and hopes, from their perspectives.

Is nuanced, specific, and contextual. This process draws from the specific context of Jewish youngish adults in the St. Louis region, and it gathers and emphasizes nuance of experiences. This nuance is translated into specificity within design decisions, so the strategies are tailored to their audiences and their context.

Draws wisdom and ideas from diverse groups. The process leverages different types of expertise, including youngish adults, roundtable participants, and implementation partners.

Focuses on patterns of experience to generate unexpected strategies. Proposed strategies are inspired by commonalities across diverse people's lives and informed by broadly exploring different ways to address challenges.

Allows for flexibility and iteration. The structure of the process is responsive, shifting based on what we learn from participants, focusing on new relevant questions as they arise, and improving on ideas through cycles of feedback.

Creates visual frameworks to help understand experiences. To complement nuanced stories, abstracted visual frameworks make foundational learnings tangible, becoming shared communication tools for collaborators.

Process

Frame & Understand

Roundtable participants **shared stories** of youngish adults' challenges and successes, drawn from their own experiences and observations, in order to hone our focus and understanding.

Research

Two **in-depth interviews** were conducted to learn directly from youngish adults who were living alone and/or with little family support, adding nuance and detail to enrich the understanding from the first workshop.

Ideas

Roundtable participants **brainstormed** ideas, drawing inspiration from research stories, areas of opportunity, and existing practices. A prioritization survey identified the 9 highest potential ideas to continue into testing.

Test

Created prototypes to make the ideas tangible and **gathered detailed feedback** from an additional 9 youngish adults, representing diverse experiences in the Jewish community.

Refine

Roundtable participants **refined the ideas**, exploring considerations raised by feedback as well as the potential for implementation.

Reframing: Supports for Resilience

While this project was initially framed specifically around mental health and emotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, conversations with youngish adults and stories of their experiences made it clear that the issues they were facing went beyond the immediate isolation, disconnection, and fear of living through a pandemic.

The wider context of societal challenges—including racism, climate change, political tensions, and other massive upheavals—weighed heavily on youngish adults and hindered their overarching capacity to maintain resilience.

To respond, the Roundtable broadened its approach to focus on supports for resilience. With this reframing, the intention of the work extends beyond the current COVID-19 pandemic to many future challenges.



Reframing: Beyond Youngish Adults

This project was also initially focused solely on youngish adults, but it became clear during conversations with them that their experiences are entwined within broader community challenges. Older generations' perceptions of youngish adults shape not only what resources are available in the community, but also how youngish adults perceive themselves.

There's an opportunity for a community-wide shift in perception about the experiences of youngish adults. Some proposed strategies can be taken on by youngish adults themselves, but others must be taken on by the whole community. Youngish adults must be taken seriously as adults, and their experiences should be listened to, valued, and understood within their broader context.

"To me the biggest thing for youngish adults is being taken seriously as adults...The reality of this broadly defined group of people, our 'generation' cohort, is distinct from what people older than us have experienced, [particularly the] economic and social situation that we have inherited. Don't treat it as if we have not done something 'the right way.' We're doing things in response to our environment."

- Adam

"The more it's out there in the community, the better — parents and grandparents would benefit from seeing that mental health is important." - Talia

Framework: Supports for Resilience

Through stories representing a wide range of stories and experiences, we learned from youngish adults that the ways they sought or found support for their mental health and well-being during the pandemic fit into these four broad categories: Confiding, Connecting, Coping, and Consuming.

This framework set the foundation for the brainstorming and idea refinement in this project, and it has the potential to inform additional work in other areas as well. The following pages detail these categories and the opportunities they point to.



Strategies to Support Resilience

The following sections describe a set of ideas informed and refined by youngish adults and Roundtable participants.

This documentation is intended to help prompt and guide continued conversations about potential implementation. **These ideas aren't "final" but rather ready for the next set of stakeholders—implementation partners—to continue refining and developing them.**

High-Level Outcomes

As a result of these strategies, youngish adults will be supported to cultivate long-term resilience for their mental health and emotional well-being, by having healthy coping mechanisms, access to confiding resources, and robust connections to supportive community relationships.

Strategies to Support Resilience

Seeking help from others

Confiding Strategies

Make professional mental healthcare more accessible
Host facilitated affinity groups for processing and reflection

Connecting Strategies

Create options and systems for collective volunteering
Train and incentivize new leaders and hosts
Create events to welcome and facilitate connection with Jewish networks.
Provide experiences to create, make, and learn about Jewish culture together
Create venues for sharing and adapting Jewish traditions to build community connection

The strategies in **Connecting** and **Confiding** address direct, specific opportunities to impact the resilience of youngish adults in the St. Louis region, both in the immediate term and through longer-term community building.

Activities that are about the individual

Coping Strategies

Share messages that educate about and normalize mental healthcare

Consuming Strategies

Foster meaningful connection in community spaces and events

Activities that are about the group

The strategies in **Coping** and **Consuming** are critical to successful execution of the Connecting and Confiding strategies, supporting the development of a resilient community overall.

Helping yourself

Make professional mental healthcare more accessible

Access to professional mental healthcare, such as therapists and counselors, is a key part of confiding for youngish adults. However, finding the right therapist and having regular access to appointments can be barriers. In addition, youngish adults do not consistently think of the Jewish community as being a resource for mental health care, and they are particularly concerned about privacy when it comes to accessing resources in the community. Consider the following actions to make professional mental healthcare more accessible.

Outcomes

Youngish adults know confiding resources are available through the Jewish community, and they are able to consistently and easily connect with professionals who are the best fit for their needs.

Actions

Make accessibility a top priority: conveniently located services and virtual therapy resources.

Create a centralized resource and message to communicate what's available in the community.

Support finding a therapist who is a good fit.

Offer a variety of services and resources.

Build on the resources already available in the community.

Impressions from youngish adults

***"The really big organizations are supporting our most vulnerable or needy community members. I have a hard time feeling like I'm one of those people."** - Talia*

***"I'm cautious about connecting with rabbis or community leaders. If I go to a community leader, my parents might find out."** - Deb*

Key partnerships

Jewish Family Services

Rabbis and Clergy

Youngish adult focused organizations

Host facilitated affinity groups for processing and reflection

Building connections through small, facilitated groups is appealing to youngish adults but should include differing levels of commitment depending on the engagement. This strategy also has the opportunity to evolve in several directions: practicing mental health skills, connecting with people of like identities, and processing ongoing events in the world. Each of these directions would require careful facilitation and support to build trust.

Outcomes

Youngish adults have spaces that are designed for them to process their experiences and connect with others.

Actions

Build trust through groups with commonalities.

Offer different levels of commitment.

Support thoughtful and caring facilitation.

Incorporate practice of mental health and self-care skills.

Impressions from youngish adults

"I think it's important to have a topic, to help frame conversations. Or to process particular events or to process a book or movie." - Adam

"If it's with strangers, there needs to be strong facilitation to break down the walls people put up to get to a deeper topic." - Joe

"There are things I'm not going to say around folks with kids [unlike me] or who work in vastly different industries than I do." - Sam

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults

Create options and systems for collective volunteering

For youngish adults, connecting with others through meaningful experiences is central to being part of a community. Completing helpful tasks and being of service to others also directly contributes positively to mental health and emotional well-being.

While participating in the community through service and giving back is rewarding, the barriers to getting started can be difficult to surmount, and service opportunities are not always designed to build connections and relationships. The following actions would support implementing a system for community involvement and activation to engage youngish adults and build or deepen community connections.

Outcomes

Youngish adults can easily find opportunities to meaningfully participate in community and build connections with people across the St. Louis region. Those interactions support a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction, and a sense of purpose.

Actions

Provide easy options for participation.

Create cohorts for connection.

Design intentional experiences for relationship-building.

Make it worthwhile to recipients and organizations.

Connect to shared Jewish values.

Impressions from youngish adults

“Doing good for others makes you feel good!” - Antonio

***“I would find it so fulfilling to participate in something like this, and to support someone else. It makes me feel accomplished and connected to others.”
- Talia***

Key partnerships

Jewish Federation of St. Louis

Synagogues

Organizations outside the Jewish community

Groups that serve youngish adults, including YPD, Moishe House, JGrads, NextDor

Train and incentivize new leaders and hosts

Creating community takes a lot of work, and is a skill that must be honed over time. Cultivating a cohort of youngish adults who feel confident and empowered to host and create community spaces supports not only these individuals and their guests, but also the long-term resilience of the Jewish community. Cultivating new leaders and hosts should include a blend of training on the technicalities, confidence building, and incentives to support future convenings. The following actions outline these steps.

Outcomes

Youngish adults have the confidence and tools to develop and host events that connect youngish adults across the Jewish community with each other.

Actions

Support and partner with existing organizations.

Build confidence and capacity for leadership.

Provide technical and logistical support.

Create different levels of engagement for hosts and leaders.

Impressions from youngish adults

"I would want to take this on in a way that isn't burdensome, and is still fun. Fostering connections, meeting new people, are positive for my mental health." - Deb

"I love hosting — it makes me feel good, and really fills me up." - Talia

"We desperately need this. We are going to need a fill a leadership vacuum [as people age]. Leadership isn't distributed evenly across ages." - Sam

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults, including YPD, Moishe House, JGrads, NextDor

Create events to welcome and facilitate connection with Jewish networks.

Programming that invites and welcomes youngish adults into Jewish community spaces is appealing to youngish adults who are seeking ways to find their place and connect with others. It is particularly helpful as a way for youngish adults to feel explicitly invited to integrate into the rich network of organizations and leaders in the Jewish community. This strategy emphasizes the resilience that comes from strong connections built gradually over time (in comparison to other strategies that have both short and long-term benefits).

Existing programming, such as Shabbat Shalom STL, provides a model to build on. Participants saw an opportunity to extend beyond synagogues into the broader set of community organizations.

Outcomes

Youngish adults understand the community resources and groups available to them, and build connections and relationships with those groups.

Actions

Choose times and locations that are accessible for people with a range of Jewish practices.

Make it easy to meaningfully connect with others.

Connect with a variety of organizations and sites.

Impressions from youngish adults

"I've been attending a queer Friday night happy hour at a synagogue in another city. It's nice to have Shabbat dinner with someone." - Sam

"I could see a variety of organizations (NextDor, Moishe House, synagogues, etc) putting their own spin on this." - Deb

"I didn't have any context with the Jewish community here. I didn't have any friends who were from St. Louis and actively involved to have a foothold. I knew it was something I wanted." - Adam

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults

Synagogues

Other Jewish community organizations

Provide experiences to create, make, and learn about Jewish culture together

During the pandemic, experiences where people have been consuming new information virtually have sometimes left them feeling more disconnected than before. Sharing experiences to create, make, and learn provide venues for deeper connection to both the Jewish community and to other people. By hosting events, both virtual and in-person, that connect with Jewish traditions and experiences, youngish adults can come together around a shared topic and build relationships through a shared experience. This strategy emphasizes the resilience that comes from strong connections built gradually over time (in comparison to other strategies that have both short and long-term benefits).

Outcomes

Youngish adults connect with each other through active, creation experiences, rooted in Jewish culture.

Actions

Foster intimate spaces for connection.

Balance learning and connection.

Connect with Jewish traditions, experiences, and calendar.

Provide opportunities for a range of interests.

Make execution easy for participants and organizers.

Impressions from youngish adults

“When you’re producing something, whether it’s a success or a flop, it’s great to have a small group to commiserate with.” - Deb

“I have been doing this during the pandemic. Food is Jewish culture! I bake with my mom on FaceTime. I also took a babka making class.” - Talia

“Things that are are building or handy might attract people who don’t see themselves as artsy.” - Joe

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults

Organizations already hosting collaborative programming in the community

Create venues for sharing and adapting traditions to build connection

Connecting to tradition is important to feeling connected to family, friends, and culture, and can impact mental health. Working with others and engaging with traditions, particularly those that help make sense of a complicated world, is beneficial.

However, the idea of adapting and sharing traditions had a mixed response from youngish adults. In some practices, there is resistance to the idea of adapting or changing traditions. For others, youngish adults may not feel confident in their own practice of Judaism to feel comfortable sharing with others. Due to these complexities, this idea may be best applied in the context of other strategies, including *creating and making together* and *training new hosts*.

Outcomes

Youngish adults feel empowered to access and rely on Jewish traditions, and build connections with others in learning about and expanding their practice.

Actions

Develop resources to connect Jewish traditions to the current moment.

Create experiences for different forms of practice.

Allow for learning and exposure to other ways of being Jewish.

Impressions from youngish adults

"I'm not somebody who doesn't want Judaism to ever change or evolve, but I'm further along the traditional end that I'm not going to do a ton of reinventing" - Sam

"I am very reform, and I don't feel like I know enough. Do I know the prayers? Do I know what you're talking about? I had a bat mitzvah and I am very culturally Jewish, but I don't feel Jewish enough." - Deb

"I get really anxious and depressed when I can't be with my family for the holidays. It was really hard for me to know my family was having seder without me, so I sent them chocolate bars so we would feel connected." - Talia

Key partnerships

Groups that serve youngish adults

Share messages that educate about and normalize mental healthcare

Communication channels, particularly social media, are an important part of reaching youngish adults. Any coordinated efforts to advance supports for resilience should include communication and the messaging. These messages should normalize mental healthcare and encourage prioritizing emotional well-being.

Youngish adults want to see campaigns that speak not only to them, but to the broader community. These messages must be authentic, applicable, and should engage directly with people. It's also important to recognize that social media can be an emotionally challenging space for some youngish adults, and can't be the only communication channel.

Outcomes

Communication to the Jewish community consistently normalizes mental healthcare and provides authentic messages and skills that support mental and emotional health.

Actions

Reach the wider community, not just youngish adults.

Share authentic messages & teach skills.

Engage, don't just broadcast.

Impressions from youngish adults

***"The more it's out there in the community, the better — parents and grandparents would benefit from seeing that mental health is important."** - Talia*

***"I wonder how much of the [social media campaign] is a reminder of the care versus having access to the care."** - Adam*

***"If someone says 'exercise helps', I want to see examples for different lifestyles and conditions. What's that like if you live in a high rise?"** - Deb*

Key partnerships

Groups across the Jewish community, including those that serve youngish adults

Foster meaningful connection in community spaces and events

Youngish adults want to start and deepen relationships with others, but simply being together in larger groups isn't enough to feel the benefits of connection. Within existing group spaces and events, there's an opportunity to intentionally foster relationship building through structured, personal sharing in smaller groups or pairs. Through curated conversation prompts and simple guidance for facilitation, event organizers can make every shared space a place for deeper relationship building.

Outcomes

Community events provide opportunities for people to consistently make meaningful connections with each other.

Actions

Build upon existing tools

Fit within structures of existing events

Support inclusion through facilitation

Impressions from youngish adults

"I am hesitant because some people will dominate these conversations. A good moderator can make people of diverse backgrounds feel welcome." - Sam

"It feels like this needs to deal with big issues, like racism within the Jewish community. You need space to work through it and talk it out." - Talia

"This could be built into another public event, like an author's talk, to support schmoozing." - Deb

Key partnerships

All organizations that host events