

Youth and Family Learning Annual Report

2021-2022

Submitted by: Barbara Fink, Director of Youth and Family Learning
Deborah Zuckerman & Hannah Zweibel, Co-Chairs, Board of Education

As we embarked on year 2 of the global pandemic, we felt like we could do this. We had learned so much last year about how to safely engage kids and families and continued successful in-person and online programming. We were the only synagogue in West Hartford to offer both in-person and virtual classes all year long. Religious School met in person on Sundays at The Emanuel from 9-12, and Wednesdays from 4-5:30 AND online for several of our students whose families were not comfortable being in person yet. Each student was offered 20-30 minutes of one on one Hebrew tutoring that mostly took place on Zoom, but some students met with a teacher in person.

Here are some highlights of the year.

High Holiday Family Programming. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Family Services were led by Rabbinic Intern Jessica Dell'Era. Jessica once again created an interactive service that was engaging to families with children of all ages. We held our services outside in the parking lot, under the tents. We did not have early childhood services this year as no one registered for them. We also held Rosh Hashanah babayit on Erev Rosh Hashanah. Eric Maurer and Ruthie Fierberg led our teen programs outside in Siegel Garden.

Tashlich at Camp Shalom Once again, we targeted preschool and school aged families to join us at Camp Shalom to gather socially and perform the custom of Tashlich. Barbara created a learning guide for families to do together and provided individual supplies for each family. She created a *derech t'filah*, prayer walk with different prayers and blessings printed on lawn signs that families engaged with on their walk to the lake to perform Tashlich. It was then brought to The Emanuel for all our congregants and neighbors to enjoy. Josh Cohen acted as DJ, while Rabbi Small and Cantor Risman welcomed everyone. This year we had s'mores around a campfire.

Sukkot This year we held a family learning day on the Sunday before in the parking lot. Each family was given a learning packet with instructions and learning sources for each of the different stations. Stations included, pickle making, making decorations for the Emanuel sukkah, learning about different things that were done during the time of the Temple, like *simchat shoeva*, learning about *ushpizin*, making kindness rocks, and learning how to shake a *lulav and etrog*.

To the Mitzvah and Beyond We continued our Family Series led by the rabbi and Barbara for our 6th and 7th grade families as they begin their b'nai mitzvah preparations. Topics included: Making a Minyan by Making it Count, Taking Care of Ourselves and Others with Dr. Andy Magin, Putting the Mitzvah Back in Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Everyday Miracles and Wearing T'filin at the World Wide Wrap.

Shabbat B'bayit is our weekly Friday night family experience that was led by Rabbi Small, Jessica Dell'Era and Barbara with songs, stories, and blessings at 5:30 on Zoom. Each week different families lead candle lighting, kiddish and motzi from their home. This program continues to attract a growing number of families each week. It is an easy entry point for many, the program is short & age appropriate and most importantly fun and participatory. We have seen families go from parents leading the blessings, to parents and kids leading together, to kids being able to lead on their own!

Shabbat Morning We celebrated Shabbat monthly with our Family Services led by rabbinic intern Jessica Dell'Era and kvelled when our 6th graders read Torah at each Family service this fall and winter and our 5th graders read Torah for the first time in May. Our Tot Shabbat program has attracted a core group of families, and each month we see new faces as well.

Chanukah We celebrated chanukah in 2 ways this year. First with the Synagogue wide party on the 4th night. It was the first time we celebrated together in 2 years. On the 8th day, JTConnect created a Chanukah Olympics with games and activities led by our teens for our kids. They all really loved learning about Chanukah together.

Purim was back to normal- sort of. We held a special megillah reading for families after Religious School on Wednesday. We gathered in Silverman for a unique dinner thanks to Josh Cohen and Brotherhood. The 6th and 7th graders under the guidance of Hazan Risman put on a spiel and Jessica and Hazan Risman read parts of the megillah. We had bounce houses, balloon animals, hamantashen and Rita's ices. We were a stop on the JTConnect party bus. It was a celebration like no other!

Matan Siddur 5 third graders showed their newly learned reading skills during a Shabbat service in March. Since our classes have become so small we are able to give each kid a stand and microphone which allows each kid to really shine during the service.

Passover Experience Families were invited to our deconstructed Passover Seder. We started the program with a charoset bar. Families were able to make their own charoset with different ingredients. Our teens acted as the bartenders. We started the seder together led by Hazan Risman with each family at their own table. When we got to the Magid Section, families were invited to do different

activities to learn about different parts of the magid section. Some of the activities were deciding if it was a miracle or science behind some of the things that happened during the story, making puppets to depict the 4 children, write your own dayenu, comparing biblical plagues to modern plagues, making a seder plate, washing cup, matzah cover, and comic story, learning how we are to feel like we left Egypt in every generation, and about God's promises to us, and a Passover Chalk walk. We ended with a sing along of Passover songs and an afikoman hunt.

Lag B'Omer Field Day We held our first annual Lag B'Omer field day with Beth El Temple, Congregation Beth Israel and Temple Sinai at SSDS. The day began with a sing along led by the synagogue's cantors. We then split the kids into 4 teams by age level to compete in relay races, capture the flag and kickball. We ate snack together and had a great day.

Bagels, Blocks and Beyond Our early childhood Sunday morning program for kids 5 and under and a caregiver returned this year. We held 3 this year: one on gratitude, one on Chanukah, and one on Purim.

Jr. USY and USY Meetings Our advisor, Cara Levine led our middle school and high school students in a diverse array of programs. Some highlights were: make your own sushi Shabbat dinner, Board and brush project benefiting sharsheret, matzah pizza & movie night, Israel Shabbat dinner & the Purim party bus with JTconnect, .

JTConnect continued to offer a diverse range of classes. This year they included a blacksmithing class where the teens created yads in our parking lot. We had 18 members every Sunday at The Emanuel, 6 participated on Monday nights at the JCC, and 1 participated on Sundays at the program at Congregation Beth Israel. Our teens continue to stay connected to Jewish learning through this amazing community program.

Finally, we thank all of our Religious School staff for the hard work and dedication that makes our school as wonderful as it is:

Debbie Mehlman, Robin Rosenthal, Nancy Fichman, Carolyn Topol, Jennifer Molinari, Fern Cohen, Gilana Levavi, Lance Goldberg, Beckie Sahl, Philip Schlossberg, Lev Kropsky, Gail Mackey, Jessica Dell'Era, Rabbi David Small, and Hazzan Daniella Risman

A special Todah rabbah to Debbie Mehlman, Carolyn Topol and Robin Rosenthal who retired at the end of the school year.

And our Teacher Aides:

Saige Beatman, Rebecca Diaz-Matos, Adam Godel, Samantha Smith, Lake Piekarsky, Simon Rosenberg, Aaron Schlossberg, Ben Smith, Abigail Sadinsky, Jonah Shulman, Hannah Shtern, Hannah Fink, Jonah Rosenberg, Ryan Leef, and Adam Diaz-Matos

And our Board of Education:

Daniela Brown, Heather Jacobson, Jeni Maghaleas, and Angela Stein