



J-Life: Tikkun Olam, Community Synagogue of Rye

RYE, NY

WHO ARE THE LEARNERS? THE TEACHERS?

- Second grade families.
- Babysitting provided for younger siblings by teen madrichim.
- Older siblings attend regular Center For Jewish Learning classes.
- Second grade teacher from Center for Jewish Learning helps to facilitate learning.
- Family Educator designs lessons and facilitates.
- Cantor provides musical enrichment.

All families in the Center for Jewish Learning are expected to participate in J-Life sessions which happen across the grades. Typically at least one parent is present at each session. Teachers work with the Family Educator during their orientation at the beginning of the year to review lesson plans. Some require a clear script for their role in a given J-Life session while others are more comfortable adding their own voice. Ongoing professional learning, supports teachers' growth working with parents as well as children. Occasionally outside speakers are invited in to work with families.

WHEN DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- During Center for Jewish Learning hours on Shabbat morning, 8:45-10:45.
- Four or five sessions during the year.
- Family involvement in tikkun olam projects is at their convenience.

Originally all sessions occurred consecutively in order to build community. However, ongoing assessment of the model led to scheduling 2 sessions in the Fall and 2 in the Spring in addition to the I-2 tikkun olam experiences. Families are also encouraged to participate in the congregation's Gleaning experience – harvesting vegetables at a local farm to be donated to area food pantries.

WHERE DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- All J-Life: Tikkun Olam sessions held in the synagogue.
- Various spaces in the synagogue utilized including classrooms and large group spaces.
- Tikkun olam projects take place at various sites in the community.

In the coming year, one session will be off-site at a local nature preserve.

HOW IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED?

- Community building a key component among and between families and their children.
- Key questions include, "How will this be meaningful for your family?"
- All sessions begin with 15 minutes of schmooze time for parents with coffee and a light snack.
- Primarily informal learning.
- Combination of parallel and shared learning for parents and children.
- Parents asked to do some preparatory reading for each session. Educator sends a follow-up email recap-ing each session and providing suggestions for further reading or relevant resources.
- Tikkun Olam projects organized by parents with one parent per site coordinating scheduling and supplies as necessary.

Learning organized in one of three ways. In scenario one, parents begin with Family Educator while children in classroom with their teachers followed by a joint activity in large group space. In scenario two, kids and parents begin together for a large group introduction and then divide into groups and rotate through stations facilitated by teachers. In scenario three, kids and parents divided into groups and remain together in one location throughout the morning, all doing the same learning.

WHY IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED THIS WAY?

- To give parents an opportunity to learn alongside their children.
- To provide opportunities for children to see their parents as Jewish role models, applying Jewish teaching to their daily lives.
- To build community among families, strengthening connection to each other and to the congregation.

The learning represents elements of the congregational vision developed during participation in The RE-IMAGINE Project. Ongoing assessment of the model provides a key input as to how closely the model remains aligned to the vision.

KEY FIRST STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

- During the summer prior to launching the model, a lay implementation committee met regularly initially calling the model “Jewish Learning for Jewish Living.”
- J-Life involved only first and second grades.
- Decided to begin with tikkun olam as content since it represented a gateway that all participants could be comfortable with regardless of their Judaic knowledge base.
- Families received many forms of communication to encourage them to participate, to clarify expectations for parent involvement, and to share the calendar.
- Families completed feedback sheets at the end of each session so to allow the implementation committee to assess successes and emerging challenges.

Communication continues to be a key component of managing the model. Families receive a detailed J-Life brochure including a calendar at the beginning of the year, a letter from the Director of Education and one from the Family Educator, an invitation for parents from their children, as well as several emails to support preparation and follow-up for each session.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR J-LIFE: TIKKUN OLAM.

- J-Life committee made up of lay people whose children are in grades K-6, a sub-committee of the Center for Jewish Learning committee.

- J-Life committee offers constructive feedback and input for future programming.
- Members take on some hands-on roles as necessary, helps with communication and drafts survey for feedback from parents each year.

The Family Educator meets with the J-Life four to five times a year. A member of the committee reports into the Center for Jewish Learning Committee around successes and challenges. Currently there are no teachers on the committee, but that may change.

BUDGET/RESOURCES

- Primary cost is staff – Family Educator and time of Rabbinic Intern.
- Approximately \$200 for materials.
- A J-Life brochure created that describes all J-Life offerings across the grades.

INTEGRATION OF J-LIFE: TIKKUN OLAM FAMILIES AND LARGER CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITY

- All families participate in the model.
- In the Tikkun Olam year, 2nd grade families participate in Mitzvah projects connected to congregation-wide holiday celebration.

Teachers work to integrate J-Life learning into the regular Center for Jewish Learning sessions as well. They now perceive J-Life as an enhancement to their regular teaching rather than as an unrelated add-on. As this understanding deepens, they find more opportunities for integration throughout the year.

IMPACT ON LEARNERS, TEACHERS, CONGREGATION

- J-Life now understood as core element of congregational culture.
- Kids appear more connected to Jewish learning.
- Teachers now see importance of regular communication with parents.
- Impact on parents varies – for some experience transforms their practice, for others it leads to increased involvement in the congregation.
- Most families value opportunity to learn as adults and with their children.