

Young Leaders Becoming Leaders

Will Schneider

Across the country, Jewish organizations and projects are experimenting with programs, marketing, and outreach to attract next generation funders and participants. While many have yet to find success, Slingshot has been able to attract funders in their 20s and 30s to the Slingshot Fund collective giving process. The opportunity afforded by membership in the Slingshot Fund goes beyond the traditional collective giving, grant-making experience. In fact, the foundation of Slingshot's success in attracting next generation members lies not at all in the funding process, but instead in the opportunity we provide next generation funders in their 20s and 30s to play leadership and decision-making roles in a growing organization. Slingshot's purpose is not to hoard our members, but instead to help them find their place in Jewish life.

Through the Slingshot Fund, several dozen funders in their 20s and 30s can explore Jewish life in the company of their peers and play leadership roles in an organization they help shape. The Slingshot Fund is inspired by *Slingshot: A Resource Guide for Jewish Innovation*, an annual guidebook that features the 50 most innovative projects in Jewish life. Slingshot Fund members work together over the course of five months to read applications from the organizations listed in *Slingshot*, analyze their financial statements, go on site visits, and make funding decisions. Slingshot Fund members thus have the opportunity to translate their philanthropic motivations and goals into decisions and substantial impact.

As we have observed this cohort's philanthropic identity develop, we have tried to draw conclusions about what it will mean for the Jewish community. More specifically, how does this identity differ from that of their parents' generation? As Slingshot's members play a more substantial role in Jewish life, where do they envision committing their support? This cohort's future support for and involvement in Jewish life are bound up in the answers to these questions.

To explore the origins and implications of this generational shift, particularly regarding mainstream Jewish involvement, I spoke with two Slingshot Fund leaders and their parents. Rachel Klinghoffer and Jonathan Raiffe both grew up in families that were deeply involved with traditional Jewish organizations and structures. They are now in their 20s and are strongly committed to newer expressions of Jewish philanthropy.

IMPACT OF FAMILY ON THEIR JEWISH INVOLVEMENT

Jonathan

Jonathan's family has been active for several generations in the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. He credits his family with being the source of his philanthropic values; his grandfather served as president of the Federation, and while he was

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growing up his mother, Sara Adler, served as campaign chair and president of the Federation's Women's Division.

As my mom and grandfather put it, having the ability and means to help others and understanding how lucky and fortunate we are to live the lives that we live, it is our responsibility to give back to others and give back to the community. Specifically the Jewish community and Israel were very important themes growing up.

Directly out of college, Jonathan looked for an opportunity to join a Jewish organization, allocate funds, learn leadership skills, and play a hands-on role running an organization. The network of innovative smaller Jewish organizations developing across the country presented such an opportunity, an option that was not available to his mother when she was in her 20s.

For me, when I think of philanthropy, it means being involved and seeing organizations firsthand, not going to a charity happy hour, and writing checks. With Slingshot and other younger organizations, the door was wide open: "Get involved; we can use everyone's help." There wasn't really much of a barrier to entry.

Thinking of the Federation world, for better or worse, there's a little bit of a barrier to entry. The same is true of larger secular organizations. I tried to get involved with an established organization I am connected to, and when I said, "What can I do?" they handed me a phone list and said, "Call people up and ask for more money"—which obviously doesn't satisfy the level of involvement I am looking for.

Rachel

Rachel also grew up in a household with a strong commitment to the Jewish community. Her father Steven Klinghoffer has been involved for more than 30 years in the Jewish Federation of MetroWest New Jersey, serving as campaign chair and president of the Board of Trustees, while Rachel's mother Lori also held several lay leadership positions, including serving as president of Jewish Federations of North America's National Women's Philanthropy. Rachel, who is a professional artist attending the Rhode Island School of Design, shares her parents' sense of responsibility to the Jewish community. In her early 20s, she was involved with the Lions of Jerusalem, a community arts initiative sponsored by the MetroWest Federation, in which 30 Jewish organizations purchased and decorated life-size fiberglass lions.

The values my parents brought me up with were that we were fortunate, so we had a responsibility to care for others. It was just something we needed to do. It was always there and for me, it just seemed like the normal thing. It wasn't until later that I realized it wasn't necessarily the case that everyone's parents were involved with something they felt passionate about.

The Lions of Jerusalem project was a really great hands-on artistic experience, I loved doing that project. And it's great to do projects like that here and there, but it made me really want to get involved in a broader arts organization rather than just starting up a here-and-there project, every few years.

Rachel is now a board member at JDub (formerly JDub Records), a not-for-profit record label that serves as an entry point into Jewish life for hundreds of thousands of Jews around the world.

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As an artist, getting involved with JDub was an opportunity that was greater than any one-off Federation project. JDub is really a taste-maker, not only in the Jewish realm, but in the larger cultural realm. That was something that was extremely interesting, exciting, and enticing to me that I wanted to be part of. Not just going to events and doing a thing here and there, but to really have an active voice in the organization.

IMPACT OF THEIR JEWISH INVOLVEMENT ON THEIR FAMILIES: INFLUENCING THE MAINSTREAM

Jonathan and Rachel both credit their parents' values with helping them make their philanthropic choices and launch their own philanthropic careers. Notably, as Jonathan and Rachel have grown into leadership roles, their experiences have begun to affect their parents' philanthropic choices.

Sarah Adler: Jonathan and I have talked about organizations that Slingshot has considered funding, and often it has given me pause and opportunity to think through how I look at the world and organizations.

Steven Klinghoffer: My experiences have informed Rachel's choices, but frankly, I think Rachel's experiences are now informing what I do day-to-day. Certainly some feedback that Rachel has given me has caused me to raise issues in my AIPAC involvement, as it relates to how the under-40 crowd values Zionism and how the value of Zionism can best be transmitted. Rachel and I have had extensive discussions about that, and it certainly has influenced some of my discussions with the AIPAC staff, and Rachel is not bashful; she's chimed into some of those discussions.

Also, Rachel's experiences with Slingshot have informed my thoughts on what the future role of the Federation movement should be. The original mantra of the Federation was to have a unified campaign for Israel and overseas and for local needs. I think this mantra is not as compelling as it was. Especially the younger generations are much more apt to make designated gifts, to be hands-on. Yet, I think there's a very important role for the Federation to play at being the central address for the community, being a leader, providing some type of safety net for the Jewish community.

CHANGING THE FEDERATION CULTURE

Rachel's parents advocate for what they see as a necessary change in culture at the Jewish Federation of MetroWest New Jersey.

Steven Klinghoffer: The Federation will need to change somewhat. Clearly this generation, Rachel's contemporaries, is much more interested in designated gifts. They're much more interested in hands-on involvement, and Federation is going to have to provide more opportunities in that area to attract these individuals. And I think that a lot of Rachel's contemporaries will discover, as they get a little bit older, the importance of having a central address in the Jewish community and of having an annual campaign.

Lori Klinghoffer: In the traditional Federation movement people are beginning to open their minds a little bit. I'm a Federation player, and I think there's extraordinary value in the Federation movement. It needs change and perhaps the greatest value is enhancing the ability to be fluid. But I think that there are lessons to be learned from both the good and bad experiences, over the last 100-plus years. As Rachel and her peers become more dug into what they want to accomplish, they, I believe, will find lessons in the past, both

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good and bad. What worked, what didn't, what can help them deliver their message and create the right kind of product that's going to enhance the global Jewish community.

NEXT STEPS FOR JONATHAN AND RACHEL

Both Jonathan and Rachel seem inclined to become engaged in the Federation movement, assuming it undergoes some culture change. Jonathan has already begun participating in the young funders group of the Miami Federation and recently returned from a mission trip to Israel. Rachel insists that she will return to the Federation when she is given a seat at the table.

Jonathan: Slingshot presented the lowest barrier to entry, but very recently I've gotten a lot more involved in Federation life and found that with my experiences it's not that much more of a challenge.

Rachel: I would love to be more involved in Federation. It just hasn't happened for me yet for a lot of reasons. I'm in this weird age bracket right now, and it doesn't necessarily lend to an appropriate fit for me. But Federation is very important to me and my peers, and it's something I do want to be involved with in a more active way when the time is right.

CONCLUSION

The commonly held belief that next generation funders have not engaged with the Federation system because they disagree with the broader peoplehood mission did not surface in my conversations. In fact, my conversations with Jonathan and Rachel revealed that the change in generations has not diminished the desire to give Jewishly or be involved with Jewish life. Both Jonathan and Rachel have sought out opportunities to be far more engaged in Jewish life than their parents could have been at their ages.

Next generation funders have an expanded set of opportunities to serve as young leaders in a way that was not available to their parents. For example, before turning 30, both Jonathan and Rachel have participated in strategic planning retreats, made professional allocation decisions, conducted site visits, and led fundraising efforts—all opportunities that previous generations would not have had at their ages.

Two questions remain: Will they ultimately apply their alternative leadership experience in the Federation system? If so, what will be the results of an influx of young lay leaders with a wealth of leadership experience?