

From: **REPAIR THE WORLD**

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FOR RELEASE: THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 2011

**REPAIR THE WORLD RELEASES RESULTS OF LANDMARK SURVEY
OF JEWISH YOUNG ADULTS AND VOLUNTEERISM**

**FIRST OF ITS KIND STUDY FINDS COMMUNITY SERVICE INTEREST FOREMOST IN AREAS
EDUCATION/ILLITERACY AND POVERTY, WITH ENVIRONMENT A RUNNER-UP**

VOLUNTEER INTEREST IS NOT YET STRONGLY RELATED TO JEWISH IDENTITY

(June 23, 2011, New York) – Jewish young adults demonstrate overwhelmingly an abiding commitment to volunteerism, with a particular interest in efforts to eradicate poverty and illiteracy and preserve the environment. At the same time, their service tends to be infrequent and motivated by a desire to make a difference in their local communities. And although their commitment to volunteerism increases with their degree of religious involvement, most do not connect their volunteering to their Jewish identity nor do they consider Israel to be a major focus of their service endeavors.

These are the major findings of the first-ever comprehensive study of contemporary Jewish young adults and their attitudes and behaviors towards community service. The landmark study – **Volunteering + Values: A Repair the World Report on Jewish Young Adults** – was commissioned by Repair the World, a national organization committed to making service a defining element of Jewish life, learning, and leadership. It was conducted as a collaborative effort between the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and Gerstein | Agne Strategic Communications.

The survey examined a diverse sample of young Jewish adults between the ages of 18 and 35, drawn from the Taglit-Birthright Israel applicant pool of more than 300,000 individuals and the Knowledge Networks online research panel. The Taglit pool is the largest extant list of American Jewish young adults and includes program participants and non-participants from virtually the entire spectrum of Jewish backgrounds and denominational identities. (Taglit-Birthright Israel provides the gift of first time, peer group, educational trips to Israel for Jewish young adults ages 18 to 26 to strengthen their personal Jewish identity and connection to the Jewish people). The Knowledge Networks panel is a representative sample of the U.S. population using probability-based sampling techniques. In total, more than 2,000 individuals received the survey, with a 45% response rate via both phone and online.

“Momentum is building in the American Jewish community for a renewed commitment to making a positive impact on the world, driven by young adults with a keen sense of social responsibility,” said Jon Rosenberg, CEO of Repair the World. “At this moment in our communal history, the findings of our study should serve as a road map to more meaningful engagement by Jewish young adults.”

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P. 2—Repair the World Study

Rosenberg explained that, until now, little was known about the full extent of the sample group's service commitment. That was the goal of this study, "to develop a portrait of what motivates Jewish young adults to volunteer, the varieties of service in which they participate, and how they construe the connections of their involvement in volunteering to Jewish values and identity."

Added Jim Gerstein, principal of Gerstein | Agne: "The study reveals that Jewish millennials believe their service can make a difference in the world and in the lives of others. While these young adults currently do not connect their service with Jewish values and identity, the data provide a path forward for Jewish leaders who believe that making this connection is important for strengthening the Jewish community."

Fern Chertok, associate research scientist at the Cohen Center, echoed these sentiments, noting that "this study makes clear that Jewish young adults are volunteering in their communities and want to address pressing social issues domestically and abroad. However, the research also highlights the challenges that the Jewish community faces as it works to encourage Jewish millennials to see their commitment to serving the common good through the prism of Jewish tradition, values, and identity."

The key findings of the study are:

- **The majority of contemporary Jewish young adults engage in volunteer work**, with volunteer rates ranging from 63% to 86% depending on denomination/identity. Over three-quarters, 78%, also engage in some form of civic activity, such as participating in the political process, publicly expressing their opinions, or financially supporting causes. Motivation tends to be rooted in a desire to make a difference in the lives of others and working on issues that have personal meaning with the volunteer.
- **Most volunteering is an infrequent and episodic activity**. Almost one-third of respondents have made volunteering an integral part of their lives and engage in a service activity at least once a month. But, only 21% have participated, at some point in their lives, in an intensive program of one to 12 weeks, such as an alternative college spring break ("Alternative Break") or immersive summer experience. More than 50% of respondents said that in a typical week they don't volunteer.
- **Much of the volunteer work is local**, as cited by nearly 80% of respondents, and focuses on efforts to ameliorate disparities in economic resources and educational opportunity. Indeed, as it relates to the focus of respondents' primary volunteer work, the three most cited are material assistance to the needy, health care/medical research, and education/literacy. Conversely, only 1% of respondents cited Israel/Middle East Peace as the primary focus of their volunteer work.
- **The most commonly cited volunteer activities included teaching and mentoring**, as well as collecting, sorting and distributing goods such as food and clothing, event planning, and providing manual labor for building construction and revitalization or repairs.
- **Gender is a significant predictor of volunteerism**, with 78% of females, compared to 63% of males, volunteering within the past 12 months.

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P. 3—Repair the World Study

- **Religious involvement also influences volunteer habits.** Jewish young adults with the highest levels of Jewish religious involvement, including but not restricted to Orthodox young adults, are the most likely to engage in volunteering, to do so regularly, and to volunteer under Jewish auspices.
- **Volunteering is the result of social learning that originates in the home and is reinforced by peers.** Social networks, such as family and friends, play a prominent role in volunteer recruitment, as cited by nearly 25% of respondents. Parental involvement also tends to be a motivating factor; Jewish young adults who recalled their parents engaged in community service were themselves more likely to be regular volunteers.
- **Only a small portion of Jewish young adults, 10%, indicated that their primary volunteer commitment was organized by Jewish organizations.** Moreover, only 18% said that they prefer to volunteer with Jewish organizations or synagogues over other non-profit organizations. And the vast majority, 78%, said it doesn't matter if the organization with which they are engaged in service is Jewish or non-Jewish.
- **Young Jewish adults don't know about volunteer opportunities in the Jewish community.** Of particular interest, a substantial number of respondents, 23%, indicated that their lack of familiarity with volunteer opportunities available through the Jewish community was a major reason why they did not volunteer with Jewish organizations. There is also the perception among this cohort that Jewish organizations do not address the causes that most resonate with them, and that the focus of Jewish organizations is too parochial and narrow, serving only the needs of the Jewish community.
- **Universal values rather than Jewish-based values and identity drive volunteerism.** For many young Jewish adults, volunteering is an activity partitioned off from their Jewish identity in much the same way that their Jewish identity is separate from many aspects of their current lives. Overall, only 27% of respondents agreed that they consider their volunteer actions to be based on Jewish values and only 10% strongly endorsed this statement.

“This survey provides important guidance for effectively engaging Jewish young adults in more sustained and effective modes of volunteering,” Rosenberg explained. “It also provides a baseline for change within the Jewish service community. Our challenge – as an organization and as the community at-large – is to bridge the gap between service and Jewish identity, and help young Jewish adults see their engagement through the prism of Jewish tradition, values, and identity.”

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(Editor's Note: For copies of **Volunteering + Values: A Repair the World Report on Jewish Young Adults**, and to arrange interviews with Jon Rosenberg, CEO of Repair the World, contact Bruce Bobbins at DKC Public Relations, 212-981-5190 or bruce_bobbins@dkcnews.com. For testimonials about the importance of the study, see below).

TESTIMONIALS

“Volunteering +Values:

A Repair the World Report on Jewish Young Adults”

Through my work as a public servant and community leader, I know my service has strengthened my personal commitment to tikkun olam — repairing the world. It gives me great pride to know that Jewish young adults of all backgrounds are so motivated to serve others in ways they find deeply meaningful and impactful.

— **Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL), U.S. Representative for Florida’s 20th Congressional District**

Repairing the World -- tikkun olam -- is an abiding Jewish value, and I am grateful not only for this report that proves that our young adults are dedicated to this value, but also for an organization like Repair the World that works at so many levels to help Jews make a real difference in their cities and communities -- and around the world.

— **Susan K. Stern, Appointee for Chair of the President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships; Chair of the New York State Commission on National and Community Service**

Repair the World's strategies are not unlike Teach for America's: through a term of service, inculcate a life-long commitment to positive social change. Recent research about TFA's REALITY program for Jewish corps members demonstrated that connecting personal religious values and identity to one's service not only strengthens connection to that identity; it also strengthens one's commitment to serve in very powerful ways. I applaud Repair for its contributions to our understanding of this demographic and for its commitment to high-quality service as a shared goal.

— **Wendy Kopp, CEO and Founder of Teach For America**

“Volunteering + Values” represents an extraordinary contribution to the field of Jewish service learning and to the Jewish community as a whole. It lets us know more about Jewish young adults' motivations to serve and it charts a path forward for our work as a community to make service an integral part of Jewish life and identity.

We must take up the challenge that Jewish young adults don't know about volunteer opportunities in the Jewish community, and we must ensure that the powerful values that inspire Jewish service are leveraged into a commitment to service in support of justice for all people everywhere. We at American Jewish World Service are thrilled to partner with Repair the World in support of this critical work.

— Ruth W. Messinger, President of American Jewish World Service

It is thrilling to know that a significant majority of young Jews participate in volunteer activities. These young people have absorbed the best lessons of citizenship. They are dedicated to giving back to their community, to ensuring opportunity for everyone, and to creating a more just world. But as a Jewish community, we have failed to instill in many of these young people the knowledge that Judaism has much to say about what a just world might look like, and about how to go about creating such a world. We are the proud inheritors of thousands of years of tradition about giving tzedakah, eliminating inequality, and addressing difficult societal issues. As rabbis, educators, communal professionals, and lay leaders, we have a responsibility to help the next generation to access this wisdom, to feel pride in this rich heritage, and to look to Judaism to guide our involvement in the world.

— Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Executive Director of Rabbis for Human Rights-North America

This is a wonderful study. It shatters the stereotypic image that describes young men and women as an overly self involved generation who as a result of over use of social media are increasingly lacking social skills. It crystallizes most of the assumptions that are beginning to emerge i.e., young adults volunteer and desire to make a difference. They are their parents' children most of whom were and are more attracted to secular and humanitarian causes and are less likely to be synagogue engaged.

It stands to reason that children of an intermarriage, who up until recently have not been welcomed into the synagogue community, are less inclined to volunteering in the Jewish community. Most importantly, this study recognizes that men are less engaged and new strategies are called for to correct this volunteer imbalance.

— Rabbi Charles Simon, Author of *Building a Successful Volunteer Culture*, Director of the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs

This is a fascinating and important report, as it begins to peel back the layers of what it means to be engaged in the community, and specifically of what this means for Jewish young adults. I applaud Repair the World for an insightful examination of the challenges and opportunities facing the Jewish service movement. They have set the stage for important work that must be done by all of us if we are to help young adults become more fully engaged to truly make a difference in our local and global communities.

— **Dan W. Butin, Dean of the School of Education at Merrimack College and author of the award-winning book *Service-Learning in Theory and Practice: The Future of Community Engagement in Higher Education***

“Volunteering + Values” is a careful and insightful study of young Jewish Americans’ volunteering and service. For Jewish groups and leaders, it offers important practical guidance. The future of their organizations and communities depends on a generation whose members expect to serve but who define service in universalistic (not explicitly Jewish) terms and whose concern for domestic American poverty and social inequality far outweighs their interest in Jewish or Israeli issues. “Among the vast majority of Jewish young adults who say it does not matter if they volunteer with a Jewish or non-Jewish organization, the reasons they give for choosing any volunteer option center on whether the activity involves a cause or issue that is personally meaningful to them.” Anyone who hopes to sustain organized Judaism in the United States needs to tap their idealism and their habits of service in ways that strengthen Jewish organizations and communities.

Meanwhile, this portrait of young Jewish-Americans reinforces generalizations about American civil society, overall. A century ago, civic participation mostly meant fulfilling one’s duties to the groups to which one belonged by birth. Individuals were taught that they owed personal support to the religious denomination, town, political party, newspaper, ethnic group, state, and country of their parents. Congregations, schools, and universities often explicitly exhorted young people to honor the duties conferred on them by their inherited identities. Good citizens viewed their own contributions as part of grand narratives and ideologies. Beginning in the Progressive Era, however, critics emphasized freedom of personal choice and the responsibility to act in accordance with information and conscience for the public good. These critics won a whole series of concrete reforms, from the secularization of universities to the secret ballot.

Today’s prevailing ideal is citizenship as informed choice, not inherited duty. The disadvantage arises when citizenship becomes episodic, superficial, and designed more to satisfy the one who serves than to address underlying injustice. “Volunteering + Values” provides some encouraging evidence of young Jewish Americans’ idealism and service, but also troubling indications that many are volunteering in ways that satisfy their preferences more than the demands of social justice.

— **Peter Levine, Director of Research and Director of CIRCLE (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement) at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University**

The new Repair the World study provides an important new window into the world of young Jewish adults and their commitments. At a time when, alas, academic institutions – both secondary and higher education – are increasingly arid expanses devoid of passion and commitment, volunteer opportunities may well be those places where young adults try on a mode of living that is noble and ennobling, a way of life that is idealistic and aspirational rather than cynical and materialistic.

What we learn from this study is that most young adults are already finding their way to volunteering opportunities -- but that much more can and should be done. It is refreshing, although not exactly surprising, to learn that young Jewish adults engage in volunteer work or other forms of civic activity at such high rates (78%). The challenge, then, is how to develop what is often a set of one-off acts of volunteering or a donation of money into a sustained and purposeful life of service, a life of service that is understood to be the enactment of the highest values of the Jewish tradition.

The study also helps us to see that the mission and purpose of Repair the World is an important one, but a complicated one. Some may believe that Jewish service is the “next new thing,” i.e., that service is the antidote or silver bullet that will ensure ongoing Jewish involvement for those who are unaffiliated religiously and who have not participated in Jewish education in schools or camps. But this study raises questions about that simple “next new thing” conclusion, indicating that Jewish educational experience leads to volunteering under Jewish auspices but the absence of Jewish education does not. In fact, the population with less Jewish education tends not to associate the values of compassion and social justice with the Jewish tradition! Of course, this is not a reason to abandon efforts to provide meaningful Jewish service opportunities to the unaffiliated, those young adults who are not interested in or who have not had serious exposure to Jewish education. But it does highlight the challenge – first and foremost, an educational challenge – and it should warn us away from any simplistic conclusions about employing service as a mechanism for Jewish involvement of the currently unaffiliated.

— Jon A. Levisohn, Assistant Professor of Jewish Education and Assistant Academic Director of the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University