



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

▶ MATTHEW WOLFSON

For an organization dedicated to developing meaningful connections among students and young adults, the pandemic brought immense challenges to Metro Chicago Hillel's leadership and staff...and they delivered! As Chair of Metro Chicago Hillel, I am so proud of our significant accomplishments this past year as we continued to play a critical role in supporting the well-being of our community. Our (almost exclusively) virtual efforts resulted in reaching 258 Jewish students at least once and 783 Jewish young adults through Base.

Through collaboration and innovation, our team successfully adapted to a new (and hopefully temporary) virtual environment by running 98 online programs and events that engaged 303 undergraduates. In addition, our Base rabbinic couples were able to develop meaningful connections despite restrictions on in-person gatherings. Together Rabbi Megan and Paige GoldMarche and Rav Ezra Balser and Laura Elkayam held pastoral meetings—intimate, emotionally supportive conversations—with 507 students and young adults. This was a 12% increase from last year!

Through primarily virtual events, we provided our students with unique experiences to participate in empowering programs that allowed for self-reflection and growth. And more than ever, we focused on supporting students' and young adults' mental health. Staff were trained to recognize warning signs, and how to help members of our community find resources and care for themselves. Every program and activity was planned with the ultimate goal of keeping our students and young adults healthy and uplifted.

- Over the course of the year, we distributed over 250 boxes to students across America. The boxes were sent out each month and contained activities and ritual items to use as we gathered on Zoom every Friday afternoon to continue our Shabbat traditions.
- In May, we celebrated five students and one young adult as they celebrated their bnei mitzvah. After months of studying with Rabbi Megan, Rav Ezra, and Rabbi Nicole, they each read from the Torah and gave a D'var Torah.
- As a congratulations for finishing fall finals, we sent 115 Winter Break boxes to students filled with items to keep them warm.
- During the second-ever Hillel Global Giving Week, we raised over \$25,000, thanks to generous matches by Hillel International and one of our own donors.

As we begin the 2021–2022 school year, we look forward to a significant expansion in the opportunities we can offer students and young adults by opening two new Base locations in Andersonville and Logan Square. With these additions, we are excited to welcome two amazing rabbis and their partners—Rav Jonathan Posner and Hannah Swirnow, and Rabbi Sarah Mulhern and Rav Will Friedman—to the Base team. The following is a full list of our rabbinic couples and their Base locations:

Rabbi Megan and Paige GoldMarche
Doppelt Base in Andersonville

Rav Ezra Balser and Laura Elkayam
Loop Base

Rabbi Sarah Mulhern and Rav Will Friedman
Silverstein Base in Lincoln Park

Rav Jonathan Posner and Hannah Swirnow
Base Logan Square

Your support helps us continually fulfill our mission to inspire every student and young adult to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life. Together, we provide young Jews in the Chicagoland area the best opportunities to create strong relationships with their peers, find mentors, and create community. Thank you for investing in our future leaders and strengthening the Jewish community of tomorrow.

YOUNG ADULT PROFILE

Alex Chernick

"Base has provided me with a much needed community and schedule during the pandemic. Base events always gave me something to look forward to while the world was completely shut down. Base events are always engaging and interesting, and they connected me with new people during a time when meeting new people felt impossible. As I signed up for more and more programming, I enjoyed growing my relationships with Rabbi Megan and many others in the Base community as their faces became more familiar."



STUDENT PROFILE

Willa Countryman *Loyola Senior*

"Hillel was the first club I joined at Loyola, so even when I was home for my first semester of college, Hillel felt like a home base. It has not only helped me connect with my religion and culture but helped me find some of my best friends. Throughout this year, Hillel provided me with safe ways to have fun, make friends, and even learn about social justice and anti-racism."



IN 2020-2021, METRO CHICAGO HILLEL...

ENGAGED STUDENTS



1,159

total students participants engaged in **79** Tzedek Initiative events



576

Shabbat boxes sent



392

total students participated in **36** Israel events



217

coffee chats with students



60

Jewish Learning Fellowship graduates



30

students signed up to vote through MitzVote



20

student leaders served on campus boards



16

cohorts offered throughout the year

GREW DONATIONS



290

donors, up 25% from last year



123

young adult donors, up 70% from last year



100

first-time donors to Metro Chicago Hillel

▶ METRO CHICAGO HILLEL'S VIBRANT COMMUNITY



MCH INFUSES VALUES INTO EVERYTHING WE DO

B'tzelem Elohim (In the image of the Divine) — Every student is created in the Divine image. Everyone across the spectrum of identity, background and belief deserves respect and belongs in our community. This value underpins how we relate to each other, especially this past virtual year. We embodied b'tzelem Elohim in the patience and grace we showed each other when someone tried to speak while muted, needed to reschedule a coffee date, or forgot what icebreaker question they were meant to answer while introducing themselves. We began programs by sharing our names and pronouns. We offered space for processing in the wake of the election and the recent violence in Israel. **66 students** participated in our microcommunities which celebrated the diverse identities and interests of our students.

Tzedek (Justice) — Jewish values and texts inspire students and young adults to pursue justice. This year, we experimented with a structure for our *Tzedek* programming where two staff members were responsible for staff learning, social media, and student programming around a different monthly theme, connected to the topic of social justice. Our social justice microcommunity engaged in ongoing conversations through their WhatsApp group. For next year, we hired a Springboard Social Justice Fellow who will help enact our evolving vision for *Tzedek*.

Limmud (Learning) — Students and young adults actively engage with Jewish text and learning. This year we ran **seven successful JLF cohorts**, creating small learning communities for our students despite having to meet over Zoom. Building on that success, we also participated in a pilot program through Hillel International called Winterfest, a shorter-term cohort-learning experience featuring two curricula created by our staff and designed to appeal to students' interests and need for community over winter break. **50 students** opted into this learning program over winter break. MCH also successfully concluded its first adult bnei mitzvah cohort of **six students** and young adults who spent the year studying together in preparation for the service held in May.

STUDENT PROFILE

Hannah Jabaley *Loyola Freshman*

"Hillel gave me an opportunity to make friends in a year where that was kind of hard to do. I also came to Hillel because I wanted to be involved in a Jewish community while in college and away from home."

STUDENT PROFILE

Emilio Davis *UIC Senior*

"Hillel was the driving force behind the rediscovery of my Jewish identity. I had not been involved in Jewish life since my early childhood due to the Jewish members of my family either passing away or moving away. Even before the first day of classes after I transferred to UIC, Hillel introduced me to my first Shabbat, and by the end of the semester I had been incorporated into a new Jewish family for which I am forever thankful."



Yisrael (Israel) — Students and young adults are committed to Jewish peoplehood and experience a deep engagement with the Jewish people all over the world, and the state and land of Israel, and all of her inhabitants. Our Israel programming this year was among our most innovative, with offerings like the Yalla Race, a virtual Amazing Race experience throughout Israel. Multi-part learning series spoke to the particular interests of our students, from arts and culture in Israel to Israeli politics and media.

Yehadut (Jewish Life) — Students and young adults are actively engaged with Jewish practice, holidays and traditions. This year we committed to creating a vibrant weekly virtual Shabbat experience, which served students across MCH. Pop-up sukkah events, Hanukkah candle-lighting, a Purim extravaganza that enabled us to engage with puzzles, videos and games in a way that could only have been possible in a virtual space, and a variety of Passover programming and seders all contributed to the rich Jewish experiences MCH offered this year.



RACIAL JUSTICE DAY OF LEARNING

On February 7, **1,500 Chicagoans** joined for a virtual day of racial justice learning for the Jewish community. Rabbi Megan and Caroline Spikner were two of the leaders of the planning team. Laura Elkayam of Base Loop led a session with her father about Jewish Moroccan food and culture. Caroline and her mother led a space for Jews of Color and their families. College students led a session for their peers in connection to their fellowship with Jewish Council on Urban Affairs. The day was featured on local news, and Rabbi Megan led the closing program!



YALLA RACE

When we found out that Israel trips were canceled this year, the MCH team knew we had to bring an Israel experience to our students. Thus the Yalla Race was born! Yalla Race is an experience that brought our students from the beaches of Tel Aviv, up to the peak of Mt. Hermon, and through the shuk in Jerusalem, right from their bedrooms! **30 students** in six teams competed against one another in a virtual competition racing across Google Maps, Zoom and the Internet. Our students

virtually visited eight different locations and learned about Israel history through unique stories and personal testimonies from Israelis. Upon registration, students received a "Yalla Box" filled with Israeli materials like a Dead Sea mud mask, Hebrew-English dictionary, and many other surprises to bring a little more Israel into their homes. We could never replicate the power of visiting the actual places, but we hope our Yalla Race has inspired our students to see Israel for themselves when the pandemic comes to an end!

STUDENT PROFILE

Rachel Front *DePaul Senior*

“Metro Chicago Hillel has made me feel like a valued part of the community from the moment I walked into my first Hillel Hangout. As a Latina and a Jew often I feel that I do not fit in and am faced with expectations of who I should be. From the very start, Metro Chicago Hillel has invited me to be ALL of myself and has allowed me to share and embrace my mixed identity. In addition to this, MCH has always had my and other students back when we have been faced with adversity. Being a Jewish student at my university is not always the easiest, but knowing that MCH was there for me helped me so much during difficult times. Due to Hillel, I am now a better leader who is equipped to fight for what is right. I also have learned how to embrace and celebrating my Jewish identity on a more regular basis—whether that be through hosting Shabbat dinner or taking perspective students out for coffee and a bagel. Thank you MCH for all the love and opportunities you have given me!”



SHABBAT BOXES

The pandemic has given Metro Chicago Hillel an opportunity to create synergy between Shabbat and the magic of receiving mail in ways that we had never considered. Our “Shabbat in a Box” initiative has been our most successful program since the start of the pandemic. In the fall semester alone, we sent out over **250 boxes**, and we had 20-30 students on our Shabbat call each week. Most importantly, we created a model that builds connection and community no matter how physically distant we may be and which can be a refreshing, rewarding alternative Shabbat experience when we can’t be together in person.



TZEDEK INITIATIVE

This year Metro Chicago Hillel undertook a new culture change to make *tzedeck*, Hebrew for “justice”, a core part of our programming, mission and values. We added *Tzedeck* to our organizational values and undertook an audit of our values and actions as an organization. We did significant staff learning around racial justice through trainings, reading and discussion. Each month we chose a theme related to the secular or Jewish calendar and linked it to racial justice through programming, social media posts and intention setting at our virtual Shabbats. In the month of May, during the counting of the Omer, eight students hosted small outdoor Hillel Hangouts to lead discussions around various oppressions that continue to exist in our communities. In addition to our community-wide programming, we reframed our Social Justice JLF curriculum so students could have deep learning around how we, as a Jewish community and as college students, can more actively combat racism and injustice in the world. Throughout the entire year we ran **79 events** with a total amount of **1,159 participants**.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COHORT

This fall MCH kicked off our first Leadership Development Cohort (LDC). Over ten weeks, **eight students** received technical skills in program ideation, creation and execution, explored pressing issues in their respective communities, and considered how they could leverage their strengths as student leaders to solve those problems. In between learning sessions, students met with Hillel staff mentors to develop their individual final projects. We were blown away by the creativity of our students, whose final projects explored questions ranging from how to discuss antisemitism on campus with non-Jewish peers, to how to help Jewish first-year students find a home in Hillel when they couldn't gather in person, to how to make people smile during the dark winter months. We are excited to continue this program to prepare underclassmen to take on leadership roles across our campuses and as a project incubator so that students can bring their ideas to life.

VOICES OF ISRAEL

For the first time, we launched a new and exclusive Israel-centric cohort! "Voices of Israel" was a 3-session series. The first cohort explored diverse voices on Israeli art and culture. The second focused on Israeli politics. During each series, we hosted amazing Israeli speakers who brought expertise and their own lived experience in sharing their take on topics including Israeli art, fashion, and the Israel-US relationship. The cohorts included **36 students** from a variety of religious backgrounds.

JLF

The Jewish Learning Fellowship (JLF) is essential to building our community at MCH. The fellowship brings students together from all our campuses into cohorts designed to spend 10 sessions together; learning from their teachers and each other, while asking questions and diving deeper and deeper into the traditions of Jewish texts. This year we ran **seven cohorts with 60 participants**—the most cohorts we have ever run, with more students attending than ever! Despite our limitations during the pandemic, students still gathered online each week to study Torah together and delve into questions of history, traditions, identity, and community. The set time of the class was a highlight of our students' weeks.



STUDENT PROFILE

Drew Englander *Loyola Senior*

"I came into Loyola not knowing what Hillel was or what it meant but left not only knowing what it meant but having it be a vital part of my college times. Hillel taught me how to be myself and how to be Jewish and proud. It has connected me to passions I would have never known and opportunities than I could have ever asked for. I'm glad I said yes to that first coffee date and joined the Hillel family."





PARTNERSHIP WITH YLD

Base works regularly with the Young Leadership Division of JUF. Almost **250 young adults** virtually participated in our flagship collaboration LEARN cohorts with Rabbi Megan and Rav Ezra, on topics ranging from Mental Health to Jewish Thought to Relationships. Rabbi Megan also worked with YLD staff to provide packages for young adults free of charge for the High Holidays and Passover (OneTable and Repair the World also joined in on this partnership). Base staff are in regular communication with the YLD team to ensure we are collaborating to best serve Chicago's young adults!

MISHMAR: MAINTAINING COMMUNITY THROUGH SONG

Throughout the pandemic, nearly **50 Basers** joined Rav Ezra and Laura of Base Loop on Zoom for spirited singing and schmoozing. Mishmar, a traditional Thursday night "pre-game" for Shabbat, translated beautifully to the computer screen as Basers brought guitars, egg shakers, and other instruments to gather joyously in song. This program has also been a meaningful way to mark time and Jewish ritual in what has otherwise felt like a timeless pandemic blur!

STUDENT PROFILE

Allison Worth *Columbia College Chicago Senior*

"Since there are so many Jewish creators in sci-fi and fantasy, I've always been interested in how that comes through in their work. Taking the Judaism & Fandom class was really cool because it showed me how a lot of popular media I hadn't even thought about parallels the Torah and other Jewish teachings, and it was great timing because right as the class wrapped up, I was starting a Podcast Series Production class for the spring semester. I realized that Judaism & Fandom was a topic I wanted to explore more, and that's what led me to develop "They Made It Out of Clay", which goes through a variety of pop culture works and how their Jewish creators' backgrounds influence their characters and themes. I think taking the class really helped re-spark my interest and helped me see that there are a lot of other people interested in the same niche topics I am."



YOUNG ADULT PROFILE

Joey Becker

"When the world shut down, Base remained an energetic and active destination for building Jewish community (whether on Zoom or in-person at safe/outdoor/socially-distant events). In particular, I appreciated that Base was open to experimenting with safe, in-person events (e.g.: High Holiday Services)."



PITA IN THE PARK

Israel's birthday does not pause for a virus! Rav Ezra and Laura were happy to create a safe, outdoor opportunity to celebrate Yom Ha'Atzmaut as a community. With individually pre-packaged shawarma and falafel sandwiches from Taboun, and classic Israeli tunes playing in the background, **30 Basers** excitedly gathered in a park down the street to celebrate our homeland.

BASE CELEBRATION

On August 19, over **60 Basers** gathered on Zoom to celebrate the community that had been built and sustained in pandemic. Laura Elkayam of Base Loop created a video about Base's work, Base Ambassadors gave testimonials about the impact of Base on their lives, games were played, and over \$12,000 was raised by young adults to demonstrate their buy-in to the Base community.



YOUNG ADULT PROFILE

Carol Guzman

"While coming to Base, I have learned how lovely and wonderful it is to create a community and lasting friendship after college with like minded individuals."



RECENT GRAD SHABBAT

This year we took a new approach to recent grad Shabbat. We gathered **50 recent college grads** for a virtual social event geared towards making new friends and learning about Base and YLD on a Thursday night, and then the young adults chose between a virtual Shabbat dinner or Saturday night havdalah in small groups facilitated by Base and YLD leaders. Both gatherings began together with traditional ritual before the break-outs.

BNEI MITZVAH

Several students had shared with Rabbi Megan that they had never had a chance to celebrate becoming bnei mitzvah as teens. Inspired by their interest and passion, we spread the word that a cohort was starting. This year, Rabbi Megan and Rabbi Nicole worked with **five students and one young adult** to study in preparation for their May celebration. The group gathered monthly on Zoom to study their Torah portion and build community. Each participant chose an area for deeper study, for which we provided books and regular educational support. As the date for the service approached, Rav Ezra worked with the students to learn how to read from the Torah. We held a beautiful outdoor ceremony in May with family and close friends in person, and the rest of the community joining in via Zoom!



BASE BY THE NUMBERS

2020-2021



525

one-on-one meetings/
conversations



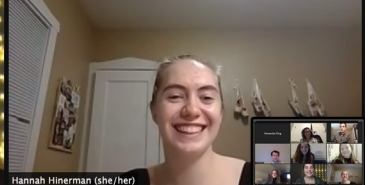
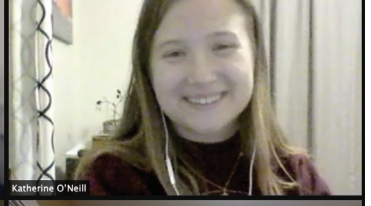
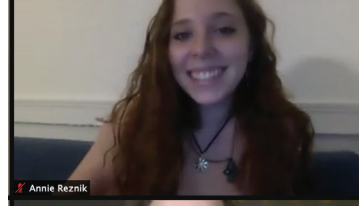
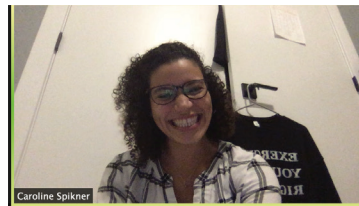
554

people attended
a learning program



300

young adults had 6+
interactions with Base



YOUNG ADULT PROFILE

Talia Schiff

"When I returned home to Chicago during my spring semester of college due to COVID-19, I was very sad that my college career ended the way it did. I signed up for a LEARN class with Rabbi Megan near the beginning of the summer; this was one of the best decisions. I made many connections and am happy to say that I have begun to create my own Jewish community of recent college graduates in the Chicagoland area. Rabbi Megan has been extremely welcoming and has called on me to take on some leadership positions. I cannot imagine what I would do without Base."



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Metro Chicago Hillel is a division of The Hillels of Illinois, a partner in serving our community, supported by the Jewish United Fund and Hillel.

**JUF amplifies our collective strength
to make the world a better place — for everyone.**

Community powered, we consider the totality of local and global Jewish needs and how to address them. From generation to generation, we help people connect to Jewish life and values, fueling a dynamic, enduring community that comes together for good.