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Appendix A: Participant Portraits

To round out some of the themes discussed in this report, we offer the following portraits of four individuals we interviewed. These four cases are not intended to be representative of all the families we spoke to. They do, however, illustrate some of the most common themes across participants. These include the challenges of geographic mobility, within and across cities or regions, and the logistical and other barriers to participation in organized Jewish life. These stories give a taste of the diverse paths taken to becoming a Jewish family and of different strategies and postures vis-à-vis parents' own upbringing and cultivating multiple traditions in the home.

1

MIKE

Logistical Barriers in a New City

2

ALLISON

Finding Support as a Jewish-And Family

3

ANA

Robust Infrastructure, Elusive Community

4

HELEN

Struggling in a Small Town

Portrait 1: Logistical Barriers in a New City

"**Mike**" is a Jewish man who recently relocated to a midsize city in the Southeast for a new job. His wife is Catholic, and they are both committed to raising their children as Jews. Mike wants his children to have the kind of Jewish upbringing he himself had. However, he faces challenges that his parents did not. For one, he grew up in the Northeast in close proximity to his synagogue, Jewish Community Center, and extended family. For him, the core of Judaism is celebrating holidays with family. Without that support, he finds it difficult to foster the kinds of Jewish experiences he wants for his children. He would like to participate more in local Jewish institutions, but distance and cost are major barriers, even though the family is not economically vulnerable at this time. Logistics are more of a challenge than presenting in Jewish settings as an interfaith family.

> *It's our first year here in a new city and the costs [of Jewish life] are exorbitant. It's crazy. We have not budgeted properly for it. We have not figured out exactly what we're going to do yet. But when I tell you it's two or three times what I envisioned spending for, whether that be a JCC involvement or the local synagogue, it's exactly that. And I know that things are totally different now than what they were in the eighties or nineties, but I know that on a one-to-one basis my parents couldn't have afforded the things that both of these resources would cost for me and my family. And that's been a real challenge. It's honestly been probably the biggest wrench in everything. Also, things are very spread out in the city ... the JCC happens to be on one side of town, it's about 25 minutes away. And the synagogue that we believe we belong the most is about 25 minutes in the other direction. The two are probably about 40 minutes from each other and both have, I mean, truly amazing programming for children and then for adults as well. ... All that's great, but when you factor in what it may cost just to kind of keep Jewish education in their lives, that's a real struggle for me right now.*

He goes on to say that he is considering alternatives to institutional participation; for example, hiring a tutor to prepare his children for their B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies. In addition to cost and distance, time is another limiting factor. His job requires him to work several weekends. Athletics are important to their family, and he foresees his children being active in club sports that will likewise require weekend commitments. In fact, sports have already involved a conflict with Jewish participation:

> *We didn't want this to occur, but at the same time that we were introducing them to the new synagogue down here, my daughter was told that the only night she could do gymnastics was Friday night. So, it's certain things like that that we're just trying to navigate and get used to while also balancing religion. ... How do I maintain a certain level of Judaism but also stay in the norm with where I work or how I'm raising the kids?*

For now, he's doing his best to make holidays fun and interesting for his children, often struggling to distinguish Jewish holidays from other popular American holidays they are exposed to at preschool. He notes, "It's been really hard for them to identify the difference between a Jewish holiday and a regular holiday or any other holiday. A Hallmark holiday, something like Valentine's Day, is fun because they get candy and there's hearts everywhere." He draws on resources like 18Doors and PJ Library, which he appreciates for providing ideas and materials for fun, home-based holiday celebrations. Still, he desires more regular Jewish experiences for his children: "I think the constant education, the constant week-to-week flow, that's really what's been missing."

Mike's story illustrates the challenge people in geographically dispersed metropolitan areas have to access Jewish institutions and how cost and other logistics can impede parents' most earnest desires for their children's Jewish lives—even when parents are pulling in the same direction.

Portrait 2: Finding Support as a Jewish-And Family

"**Allison**" is a Chinese woman who lives with her Jewish husband and four-year-old daughter in a major West Coast metropolitan area. She first came to the United States for college, where she met her husband. Through him, she had her first exposure to Judaism. After they had been married for two years, they went on a Honeymoon Israel (HMI) trip, which is where the couple concretized their decision to raise their future children as Jews:

> *That was the first time I really got a full exposure to how deep the culture is and how far back it traces. … It was the first time I felt like, whether I convert to Judaism or not, I would for sure need to make sure my child would have this Jewish identity. … I would definitely not want to see her losing this part of her identity and forgetting about the tradition, the culture. I want her to be very involved. I'm very proud that she's a Jew and I want her to know everything about it.*

According to Allison, although her husband had distanced himself from his Orthodox upbringing, the HMI trip inspired him to reconnect with his heritage. Now, "we are very much on the same page of how we should raise our child. … We're not raising her Orthodox or anything like that, but we would definitely make sure she knows everything, and she learns everything and she, in the future, would have her freedom to choose what she wants to do and be the kind of Jew she wants to be."

They are also on the same page about raising her with a strong connection to her Chinese heritage: "Religiously, for sure, we're raising her Jewish, but culturally I'd say half Jewish and half Chinese. … There's a big Chinese community here, and I want her to access both Chinese and Jewish culture." Allison doesn't experience contradictions or tensions in this combination. In fact, she finds overlap between Jewish and Chinese cultures, including the shared emphasis on family, education, and treating others with respect.

Although they live far away from her Jewish in-laws, Allison and her family have multiple resources for Jewish community. They are still in touch with their HMI cohort, although they find it increasingly hard to see one another, as families relocate to other parts of the city or move to completely different regions. When their daughter was first born, they lived in a part of the city with a lot of Jewish infrastructure. They participated in a large progressive synagogue, and Allison took classes on Judaism at an adult learning institution. After their child was born, they moved to an area with much less Jewish infrastructure. However, a Chabad synagogue recently opened up in their neighborhood, and that is where they now find their Jewish home. In addition to offering several activities for children, the rabbi's concerted efforts at relationship-building make it a welcoming place:

> *The rabbi, he's very responsible, he does things in person and he's very detailed and warm. He makes sure he remembers all of our names, he knows who we are. … He often stops by our house to bring us challah or apples and honey, things like that. He would knock on the door and give things to us in person and make sure to chat with us and make sure to see how we're doing. Even if he didn't do anything, we would still want to belong to this community. But when you do things like that, of course you feel like they care and they value your participation and your involvement. … So now we want to reciprocate even more.*

Allison had mentioned that her daughter had "done the mikveh;" that is, undergone a formal conversion ceremony, since Allison herself is not Jewish. While she did not state as much, it is likely that the child's conversion is important to the Chabad rabbi's welcoming of the family into their community, given the organization's adherence to Orthodox Jewish law. Even so, it is noteworthy that the family feels similarly welcomed in both their original, progressive synagogue and in the smaller Orthodox one, pointing to the importance of intentional practices of welcoming and relationship-building regardless of denomination.

Portrait 3: Robust Infrastructure, Elusive Community

Another HMI alum, "**Ana**" is a Catholic woman from Central America raising her children in a dual-faith household in a major Southeastern city. Although they live close to both ample infrastructure and her husband's institutionally connected family, they struggle to find Jewish community that works for them.

Ana loves many aspects of Judaism and is enthusiastic about raising her children both Jewish and Catholic. She teases her husband about being more knowledgeable about Judaism than he is. She believes that both faith traditions can coexist and co-flourish, although she struggles to convey this to others:

> *Neither of us is strict with religion, but we're both very strong in our faith, we both believe in God. I want my kids to see God as something that connects people, not divides, and see being Jewish and Catholic as the same as being bilingual, able to connect to and translate between people. … Especially being half Latin, half Jewish, and half Catholic in the South, [it's important to be] building up their sense of self, that it's okay to be different, that having these pieces is a good thing, and that other's beliefs are okay, too. … Being in [this state], one of the challenges is I feel like I'll say to people, I feel our Jewish and Catholic family have so much in common, and they'll say, but what about Jesus, you have to believe in Jesus. That's challenging. I spend a lot of time thinking about how to arm my kids, and even myself, with how to respond when people say this, how do I articulate how this works, and how do I make people open their heart and mind a little bit.*

Ana met her future husband in California. Once they were engaged, she read all she could about interfaith families, which led her to Honeymoon Israel. After they moved to a city in the Northeast, she persuaded her husband to apply for the program despite his fears that they may pressure her to convert. The trip was deeply fulfilling for both, and they formed close ties with other mixed-heritage couples. Upon their return, they participated in a regular Jewish Catholic shabbat with other couples in their cohort. Ana felt like she had really found "her people."

They had to leave this community behind, however, when they moved to their current, Southeastern city in 2019 to be closer to her husband's family. Ana immediately started a job with the local HMI chapter. Despite these familial and professional Jewish ties, finding community with other mixed-heritage families has been a struggle. During the pandemic, they joined HMI Zoom activities. Since these were open to everyone across the country, however, they did not necessarily facilitate connections to local interfaith families. They once participated in an 18Doors event, but "it was more like a 'do this activity' kind of thing versus 'meeting people' thing." Ironically, although they have multiple connections to Jewish institutions via her husband's family and childhood friends, the strength of these preexisting networks has made them difficult for Ana's dual-faith family to penetrate.

> *Many of [my husband's Jewish friends], their kids are going to Jewish school, and my husband's brother's kids go to Jewish school, and that has been really tricky. It feels like a very insulated community; you're either in the school or you're not. Before we got married, when we talked about school, we said we didn't want them to go to religious school, we wanted more neutral ground, and that's been hard. Friends we were [once] really close with [now] have birthday parties that are just classmates, or soccer teams, or whatever.*

While they occasionally attend services or programs at local synagogues or JCCs, this has not led to more sustained participation. She has, however, been more successful integrating into their local Catholic church. As reflected in her quotation in the body of this report, she was approached by a church representative about leading the church's interfaith mission after the baptism of her son, which had led to friendships with other local Jewish-Catholic families. The experience with her son's *bris* (Jewish ritual circumcision), in contrast, did not lead to further ties:

There's a local pediatric surgeon who is also a mohel, and he did a wonderful job [with their son's circumcision]. He was like, yeah, I've worked with interfaith families before. And he planned this really beautiful service and was just so thoughtful and inclusive, but he wasn't part of a synagogue who would've continued that conversation.

Ana's story demonstrates the importance of peer communities for mixed-heritage families, even when they have strong Jewish cultural and social capital—that is, the knowledge, experience, and connections that would theoretically facilitate a family's entrée into communal life. It also demonstrates that, absent intentional practices of welcoming and inclusion, Jewish institutions may fail to engage those who should be well within their geographic and social reach. Jewish institutions are wrestling with questions about how to welcome and integrate families that are raising their children in two faiths, as distinct from interfaith families raising their children as Jews. Ana's story helps with better understanding the experiences of a population that has not been extensively studied.

Portrait 4: Struggling in a Small Town

"**Helen**" has Jewish grandparents but grew up in a secular, "culturally Christian" family. She explored Judaism in college, eventually embracing Jewish identification and Orthodox practice. Helen met her future husband, who was raised Orthodox, at a modern Orthodox synagogue in a large Mid-Atlantic city. She shares that, "although our backgrounds are different, we were similar in the sense that as adults we had both sort of taken the time and the space to actually carve out something that was meaningful for us, and to sort of work out what we wanted Judaism to be in our own lives, which was quite different from our families." They lived in that city for 10 years, where they had their first child and enjoyed being part of an independent, traditional-egalitarian minyan. Then they moved to their current location, a small, Midwestern town, for their jobs in higher education.

At first, they tried living in a suburb of the nearby metropolis where they would have easier access to Orthodox community life. As first-generation college graduates who both work in education, however, they quickly realized they could neither afford the costs of participation, nor keep up with the class culture of their higher-SES neighbors.

> *There are Jewish communities here in [this state] that I think would be what we'd be looking for, but they're only in neighborhoods that we can't afford to live in, and we are not in that same socioeconomic demographic. When we first moved here, we lived in a much cheaper section of one of those neighborhoods so that we could be part of an [Orthodox] Jewish community. We ended up feeling really let down by it, because the reality was, we just didn't have anything in common with the folks who were part of the community. We were just from a very, very different socioeconomic place. So, if the conversations around the kiddush table were about the vacations people had gone on or the cleaners that they had coming to clean their house, we couldn't relate to any of that. My husband would get invited to play golf with the other guys and he's like, that's just not part of my cultural world. And so, we felt very alienated from the community, not to do with anything Jewish, but to do with the fact that we were just socioeconomically in a different place and ultimately decided to move away from the Jewish community and closer to work because we have more in common with people who live where we do because we share a socioeconomic situation.*

They now belong to the local synagogue in their small town and their child goes to Hebrew school, "but we don't really enjoy going there." Their previous, Shomer-Shabbat minyan had a culture of tolerating or accommodating young children during services; it was a "shul-going" culture, and all the children grew to know each other. In contrast, the more liberal synagogues in their current town are not so child-friendly, especially for her neurodiverse 3- and 6-year-old. "There is no Tot Shabbat and no babysitting. There's nothing for them to do, and so it's just uncomfortable all around." Because of this, "Judaism is mostly something we do at home." Although they are no longer Orthodox in practice, they try to keep Judaism alive in their home as much as possible, including hosting other families. However, being this center of gravity can be taxing:

> *I would really like my kids to grow up with this sense that Friday night is kind of special time and we have people in our home and we share a nice meal … we have a festive meal or as festive as I have the time to make it. Sometimes it's mac and cheese. We would have people in our home for Friday night dinner every Friday if I had the time and the physical and emotional bandwidth to do it. But it just takes a lot of energy when you're the only one doing the hosting to reach out to people and invite them in and plan a menu and go grocery shopping and cook their meal whilst also trying to hold down a full-time job and multiple part-time jobs.*

Helen's story resonates with many of our participants who live in small towns with sparse Jewish populations. In her words, we see the frustration and resignation that many such families—deeply committed to Judaism but utterly without support—expressed regarding their Jewish aspirations.

Appendix B: Methodological Approach

Overall Research Design

We conducted this research in two phases, separated by an interim analytic period of data collected during the first phase. We began by conducting 40 focus groups. The focus groups, held from September through November 2023, covered broad questions about how parents think of and define their families as Jewish and/or in other ways, the varieties of Jewish practices they engage in at home, the kinds of Jewish communities they seek and/or are part of, and from where they derive Jewish inspiration and support.

Some focus groups were made up of demographically targeted groups, including only parents who met a particular demographic characteristic (such as being in interfaith partnerships or living in areas with small Jewish populations) or who shared a particular life circumstance (as single parents, for example, or identified as economically vulnerable). Other focus groups were categorized as "general population" and included participants with a range of identities, backgrounds, and experiences.

The second phase of research involved follow-up one-on-one interviews with 40 individuals who had previously participated in the focus groups. These participants were hand-selected from the focus group sample to represent some of the stories, perspectives, and experiences we wanted to know more about based on the analysis of the focus group data. The interviews, conducted in early spring 2024 after an initial analysis of the focus group data, focused more deeply on what parents wanted and were finding vis-à-vis community and Jewish resources, and they also delved more into the role of Israel in Jewish identity and institutional relationships.

All focus groups and interviews were conducted by our team over Zoom. Focus groups generally had four or five participants and lasted 90 minutes; interviews ran for 45 minutes. Transcripts were uploaded to NVivo and coded using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Codes were generated based both on themes associated with the specific questions we asked and themes that emerged spontaneously in the conversations.

Recruitment

Recruitment for the focus groups was conducted using an online screening survey, in partnership with a number of local and national Jewish organizations. In addition, we employed a research panel management company to assist us with recruitment, in the hope that such a company would aid us in reaching relatively unengaged Jewish families that had little-to-no connection with Jewish organizations. Ultimately, the latter effort was less successful than we hoped, and we turned back to our recruitment partners from within the Jewish communal space to complete our efforts. A list of Jewish organizations that assisted these efforts is below (see Figure B-1). We would like to thank PJ Library, in particular, for their recruitment assistance—they were generous with outreach to their subscribers who live in areas far away from Jewish institutional centers, and their recruitment help was indispensable for garnering the diverse sample we recruited.

The online screening survey ("screener") contained information about the study and 20 questions designed to elicit specific information for a complex sampling design, described below. Participants received a link to this screener from one or more of our recruitment partners (in a newsletter, posted on

Figure B-1: Recruitment Partners

social media, or in a designated email invitation). The screener began with basic eligibility questions (to make sure respondents had children and were raising them with Jewish experiences). Those who were eligible were then shown additional questions designed to capture the information needed for sampling and scheduling purposes. As noted above, individual interview participants were recruited directly from the focus group sample, and their selection was guided by both what participants had shared initially in focus groups and the questions that emerged from our initial analysis of focus group data.

Sample

Our recruitment efforts were guided by somewhat complex sampling goals, most of which we were able to meet. The original sample design included splitting the 40 focus groups into two main sample groups, each of which was to have a parallel sampling structure. We aimed to hold 20 focus groups with more institutionally engaged families, and 20 focus groups with less-engaged or unengaged families. Within each of those main sample groups, we hoped to have two each of the following groups: interfaith families; families with members who identify as LGBTQ+; families with members who identify as PoC; families living in sparse Jewish communities; families experiencing economic vulnerability; and families headed by single parents. The remaining eight groups were general groups, containing parents who didn't fit any of those other categories, and others who may fit any one or more of those other categories.

We were ultimately unsuccessful in building two discrete sample groups differentiated by engagement level. On the other hand, we were quite successful in composing the complex sampling structure that we had developed within each group (shown in Figure 1 in the body of this report).

Notes on Engagement

Our research included an important focus on levels of "engagement," and identifying distinct levels of engagement was an intrinsic part of our sample design at the outset of this study. While engagement continues to be an important concern of the study, we have run into numerous challenges in defining and measuring this concept in ways that

Figure B-2: Screener Question to Determine Engagement Level

People connect with Jewish communities, Jewish identity, and Judaism in different ways. Which of the following statements is true of your family? (By "your family," we mean yourself, your child(ren), and your spouse/partner, if you have one.) Please select all that apply.

- We do Jewish things and/or talk about Jewish topics at home, at least occasionally.
- We celebrate Jewish holidays or other Jewish traditions with family and/or friends.
- We combine Jewish traditions/rituals with those from other cultures or faith traditions at home or with family and/or friends.
- We talk or learn about Israel at home or with family and/or friends.
- We belong to or attend a synagogue or other kind of Jewish religious community, or attend services/events at least once a year.
- We participate, at least once a year, in events organized by Jewish organizations (including, but not limited to synagogues, Chabad, JCCs, and Federations).
- Our/my child(ren) attend or have attended a Jewish child care program, preschool, day school, Jewish camp, or afterschool/weekend Jewish educational program (e.g., Hebrew school).
- We connect with Jewish communities, Jewish identity, or Judaism in a different way. Please describe: _____
- None of the above.

feel meaningful, reliable, and valid; as a result, we have had to redefine the concept along the way. We began with an institutionally oriented definition of engagement measured in a quite simplistic way, essentially viewing membership in or attendance (to any frequency) at events organized by Jewish organizations as an indicator of engagement, and categorizing those who are not involved with Jewish institutions in some way as unengaged or less-engaged, regardless of other ways they are connected with Judaism, Jewish identity, or informally organized Jewish community. We were determined to use a single question with numerous options to measure engagement for two reasons. One, because of our complex sampling goals, our screener was quite long, and we wanted to minimize the number of questions as much as possible. And two, because we were particularly focused on including families that are at the margins of organized Jewish life, we were attentive to the possibility of alienating those with little or no connection to Jewish institutions or conveying the impression that the study was not for them. For this reason, we included a number of items that spoke to more informal involvement with Jewish activity or practice and tried to minimize the number of items that spoke to institutional involvement. Our attempt to balance these concerns with our desire to accurately represent and measure engagement level resulted in the screener question displayed in Figure B-2.

Once we recruited people and spoke with them, we began to find that our criteria were not sufficiently sensitive to the personal or contextually circumscribed Jewish journeys that families often take. A large number of people with whom we spoke deeply desire connection to Jewish community but simply have no resources or infrastructure in their geographic vicinity with which to create it, thereby complicating the meaningfulness of assessing engagement in terms of membership or attendance in Jewish institutions. On the other side of the coin, some families were members of synagogues, which would have put them in the "engaged" category, but rarely attended due to distance, lack of offerings for families with infants, or other reasons. Ultimately, we came to understand that observed degrees of engagement with institutions are the result of the interaction between (1) interest and desire to engage; (2) the availability of institutions that are resonant

Figure B-3: Revised Engagement Metric Based on Selected Engagement Items from Screener

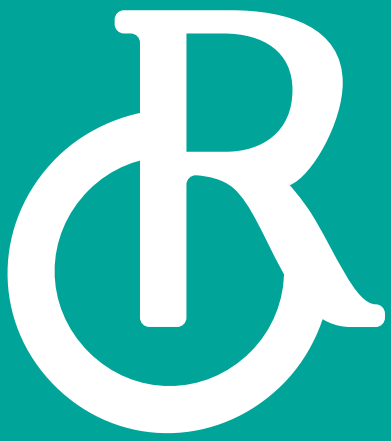
- Child attended Jewish childcare, preschool, or other school = 3 points
- We belong to or attend events at a synagogue at least once a year = 3 points
- We participate at least once a year in events organized by Jewish institutions = 2 points
- We celebrate Jewish holidays or other Jewish traditions with family/friends = 2 points
- We do/talk about Jewish things at home = 1 point
- We talk about or learn about Israel at home = 1 point

Scoring:
9–12 points = More Engaged
5–8 points = Somewhat Engaged
0–4 points = Minimally Engaged

with families' identities, values, and goals; and (3) the degree to which families actually have access to such institutions (particularly their geographical proximity).

Complex questions about the meaning of engagement and its measurement presented a temptation to dispense with the concept altogether, but its centrality to our research questions and research design forced us to continue reckoning with it. The construct was important in helping guide recruitment for the second interview-based phase of our research, in part so that we might continue grappling with the nuances of this construct. We still wanted to learn about the least-engaged people in our sample, albeit ones that do care about building Jewish lives for their children. Ultimately, we used the screener question we began with in a new and more granular way to identify three groups: Minimally Engaged, Somewhat Engaged, and More Engaged. This metric defines engagement more broadly by encompassing experiences with Jewish culture or traditions at home *and* participation in informal Jewish community, but it still privileges institutional engagement by more heavily weighting actions such as enrollment in day schools or synagogue membership (see Figure B-3).

The engagement breakdown of the full focus group sample based on this new measurement scheme is shown in Figure 2 in the body of this report. While we did not fully meet our recruitment goals pertaining to engagement, we were still able to talk to many parents who find themselves on the margins of institutional life for a variety of reasons, an important goal of the study. Ultimately, the rich data we generated in this research suggests to us that hearing from Jewish families who depart from many of the normative categories that often accompany Jewish identity provided much of the kind of nuance that we were looking for when seeking unengaged participants.



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