



Evaluation Report

# Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!

A Signature Program  
from Moving Traditions



Empowering Stronger,  
More Confident and  
Connected Jewish Girls

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The Covenant Foundation

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Dobkin Family Foundation  
Drot Foundation  
Jack and Goldie Wolfe Miller Fund  
Jewish Women's Foundation of  
Metropolitan Chicago  
Lasko Family Foundation  
Neshamot

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

What does it take to keep girls healthy and Jewish?

In 2002, out of dedication to the next generation of Jewish women, a group of men and women took a risk and launched *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* We wanted to know whether a new girl-centric model of Jewish education could help girls to grow into adulthood with confidence and a lifelong commitment to Jewish community.

The building blocks of this new model? A trained adult mentor. A supportive peer group of about 10 girls from the same grade, from middle to high school. The safety to openly explore fundamental questions of identity and society. And most important of all, relevant, adolescent girl-focused content connected to enduring Jewish values.

The results? The evidence in this report, researched by respected independent evaluators Dr. Perl Beck and Dr. Tobin Belzer, shows that Moving Traditions has developed a model that in fact does keep girls healthy, confident, and Jewish.

These findings inspire us to redouble our efforts to reach more teen girls—and boys, and gender non-conforming youth—with Moving Traditions'

programs. We are committed to building new programs, training more adults as mentors, and exporting the effective building blocks of our model to other Jewish organizations.

We gratefully acknowledge the “founding mothers” of *Rosh Hodesh*—Dr. Lori Lefkowitz, Mindy Shapiro, Debra Brodlie, Barbra Berley-Mellits, and Rabbi Rachel Gartner. As always, we thank our Board of Directors for their wise counsel and generous support. We deeply appreciate the dedication of our talented staff who move forward Moving Traditions' work, especially Rabbi Daniel Brenner and Rabbi Tamara Cohen, who worked with the evaluation team to find the girls and group leaders, who wrote this report, and who will lead our efforts to translate the findings into new and improved Moving Traditions offerings.

Finally, we thank you for helping make this work possible and for moving forward together with us to deepen our impact and broaden our reach.

With your partnership and the guidance of Moving Traditions, more Jewish teens are growing into adulthood with confidence, compassion, and a lifelong commitment to Jewish community.



**Sally Gottesman**  
Board Chair



**Deborah Meyer**  
Executive Director

# Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!

*Rosh Hodesh* is a signature program from Moving Traditions, a national nonprofit that believes that when Judaism promotes self-discovery, challenges traditional gender roles, and celebrates a diversity of voices, it has the power to move our teens, our communities, and Judaism forward.

As an organization committed to delivering on our promises, Moving Traditions recently conducted independent research to determine the outcomes of *Rosh Hodesh* on the lives of Jewish teen girls.

The multi-year study determined that, through *Rosh Hodesh*, Moving Traditions is helping Jewish institutions engage more effectively with teenage girls and helping them grow into confident young women with a stronger connection and commitment to contributing to their Jewish and broader communities.

To determine the effects of the program on Jewish teen girls, the study looked at four key development milestones on the pathway to adulthood. These include: self-esteem, sense of empowerment, relationships with peers, and connection to their Jewish self and community.

This report delves deeper into the key findings from interviews and surveys conducted with past *Rosh Hodesh* participants, group leaders, and institutional partners five years after their participation in the program between 2008 to 2010.

The report also provides key insights into the unique and enduring contributions of the program, and uncovers wider implications for Jewish teen engagement and the health and empowerment of Jewish girls overall.

According to the study, which was comprised of qualitative and quantitative research, *Rosh Hodesh* is successfully achieving results in all four areas of development:

**1** *Rosh Hodesh* helps Jewish girls build greater self-esteem.

Research indicates that, as a result of the program, girls gain a greater sense of self-worth and confidence.

**2** *Rosh Hodesh* helps empower Jewish girls.

Research indicates that the open discussion of gender and women's issues empowers girls to believe that they can take action for themselves, other women, and their communities.

**3** *Rosh Hodesh* fosters positive peer-to-peer relationships.

Research indicates that the experience delivered through *Rosh Hodesh* enables girls to develop honest and supportive relationships with other Jewish girls.

**4** *Rosh Hodesh* cultivates deeper Jewish connections.

Research indicates that the program engages girls through relevant, meaningful, and dynamic Jewish experiences, and encourages them to stay connected to Jewish life.

**By The Numbers**

Since the launch of *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* in 2002:

**12,000+**

teen girls have experienced the program in intimate, monthly, ongoing groups, with between 6-12 girls per group.

**1,200+**

Jewish women—educators, clergy, and professionals from other fields—have been trained to facilitate *Rosh Hodesh* groups.

**388**

Jewish institutional partners, synagogues, JCCs, day schools, summer camps, and youth groups of all denominations have run *Rosh Hodesh* groups.

## How Rosh Hodesh Works

*Rosh Hodesh* is a field-tested program of Moving Traditions, offered in the format of small, mentor-led groups that meet once a month for two hours. The groups create safe and supportive experiences and are comprised of girls of one grade from middle through high school. Many groups meet for multiple years—most for two years, some for up to seven.

The girls are able to openly explore the fundamental questions of identity—that come with being a girl, teenager, and Jew—to realize their full potential and inspire their lifelong commitment and contribution to Jewish community.

### **Moving Traditions does this by:**

- ▶ Addressing the holistic needs of adolescent girls through a positive developmental approach.
- ▶ Providing a platform where girls can recognize and challenge gender roles and expectations in their own lives, in Judaism, and in society at large.
- ▶ Connecting enduring Jewish values with relevant, dynamic content to address the interests and challenges of girls today.
- ▶ Fostering communication skills and healthy relationships with other girls.
- ▶ Providing adult group leaders with training and curriculum to mentor teen girls with depth and nuance through the real concerns that they face.





### About the Research

Conducted by Pearl Beck, Ph.D. & Tobin Belzer, Ph.D., the national evaluation focused on girls, group leaders, and institutional partners who participated in *Rosh Hodesh* from 2008 to 2010. The assessment drew upon both qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate outcomes five years post experience. Drs. Beck and Belzer surveyed:

# 450

past participants—13% of the approximately 3,500 participants during that timeframe—with a median age of 18.

# 160

group leaders, representing 42% of all leaders active in that timeframe.

# 50

professionals from institutions that partnered with Moving Traditions.







# Key Findings



**1. *Rosh Hodesh* helps Jewish girls build greater self-esteem.**

Research indicates that, as a result of the program, girls gain a greater sense of self-worth and confidence.

Despite advances, Jewish girls today still face obstacles that prevent them from realizing their full potential as strong young women. Girls are often socialized to hold back from asserting themselves, which can prevent them from knowing and expressing their needs, feelings, and ideas.<sup>1</sup> As a result, many girls wrestle with challenges related to self-esteem, self-presentation, friendship, sexuality, and leadership.<sup>2</sup>

A higher percentage of Jewish adolescent girls suffer from eating disorders, perhaps because their body types do not typically match idealized images of women in the media and because they feel pressure to succeed in high-achieving sectors of American Jewish culture.<sup>3</sup>

That's where *Rosh Hodesh* comes in.



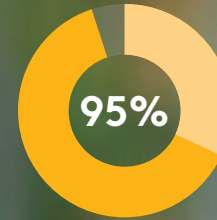
*“Rosh Hodesh*  
helped me with  
communication and  
self confidence.  
It made me more  
of a leader.”



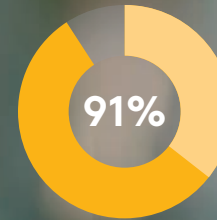
“I learned a lot about myself from listening to others and I learned what it means to be a strong individual, woman, and Jew.”

The evaluation research revealed that *Rosh Hodesh* meets all criteria identified as promising practices for girls’ health in a major study of girls’ groups, most notably “promotes the development of girls’ sense of self as a girl,” “is self-esteem building,” and “is strengths-based.”<sup>4</sup>

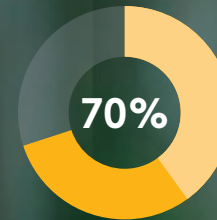
We found that all three groups of respondents—past participants, group leaders, and institutional partners—reported that the program’s greatest impact was “strengthening girls’ feelings of empowerment and social-emotional competence.”



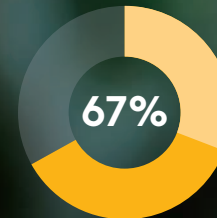
of group leaders reported that *Rosh Hodesh* helped girls develop stronger self esteem.<sup>5</sup>



of group leaders reported that the program helped girls gain the emotional skills to deal with life’s challenges.<sup>6</sup>



of past participants reported that the program helped them have a more positive body image.<sup>7</sup>



of past participants felt that *Rosh Hodesh* empowered them to be more confident taking leadership roles.<sup>8</sup>

■ somewhat   ■ a lot

*Data represents the top two responses on a four point scale.*



“

“I learned to be comfortable being vocal about my sexual, emotional, and spiritual needs with whomever I needed to speak.”





*“Rosh Hodesh gave the girls a stronger sense of confidence to stand up for themselves among their peers. The program helps them to understand that they don’t have to do what everyone else is doing but can be their own person.”*

- A group leader

**2. *Rosh Hodesh* helps empower Jewish girls.** Research indicates that the open discussion of gender and women's issues empowers girls to believe that they can take action for themselves, other women, and their communities.



Research shows that girls educated about gender issues, women's rights, and feminism are more likely to recognize harassment as an experience of sexism rather than blaming themselves or their own behavior.<sup>9</sup>

When girls learn to think critically about the media and advertising messages targeting them and promoting a very limited and sexualized ideal of femininity, and when they connect their own experiences to larger societal issues, they are less likely to feel that they need to alter themselves to fit into restrictive and restricting norms. They are instead more likely to see that it is society that needs to change.<sup>10</sup>

Learning about others who have been agents of social change and shaping their own activist projects can help girls direct their desire to challenge the status quo toward positive ends.

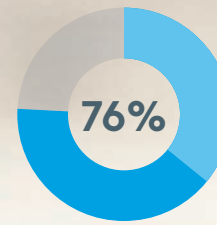


“It helped me view feminism in a more integral way to my daily life and especially made me realize how Jewish women have been a huge factor historically and currently.”

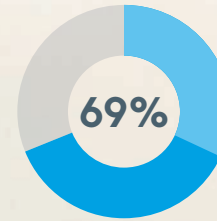
Given the transformative power of this kind of learning, it is perhaps not surprising that past participants rated their learning about “women’s and gender issues” as an enduring benefit of the *Rosh Hodesh* program.



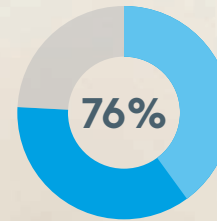
“*Rosh Hodesh* allowed me to notice the issues with the gender gap in today’s society and allowed me to try to make an effort to stand up for myself.”



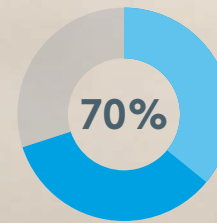
of past participants reported that *Rosh Hodesh* helped them to think critically about societal ideals about women’s appearance and behavior.



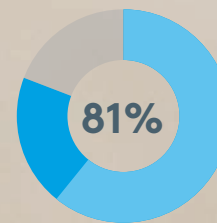
of past participants believe that the program empowered them to know they could effect social change.



of past participants said that a significant impact of *Rosh Hodesh* was that it helped them become aware of gender stereotypes.

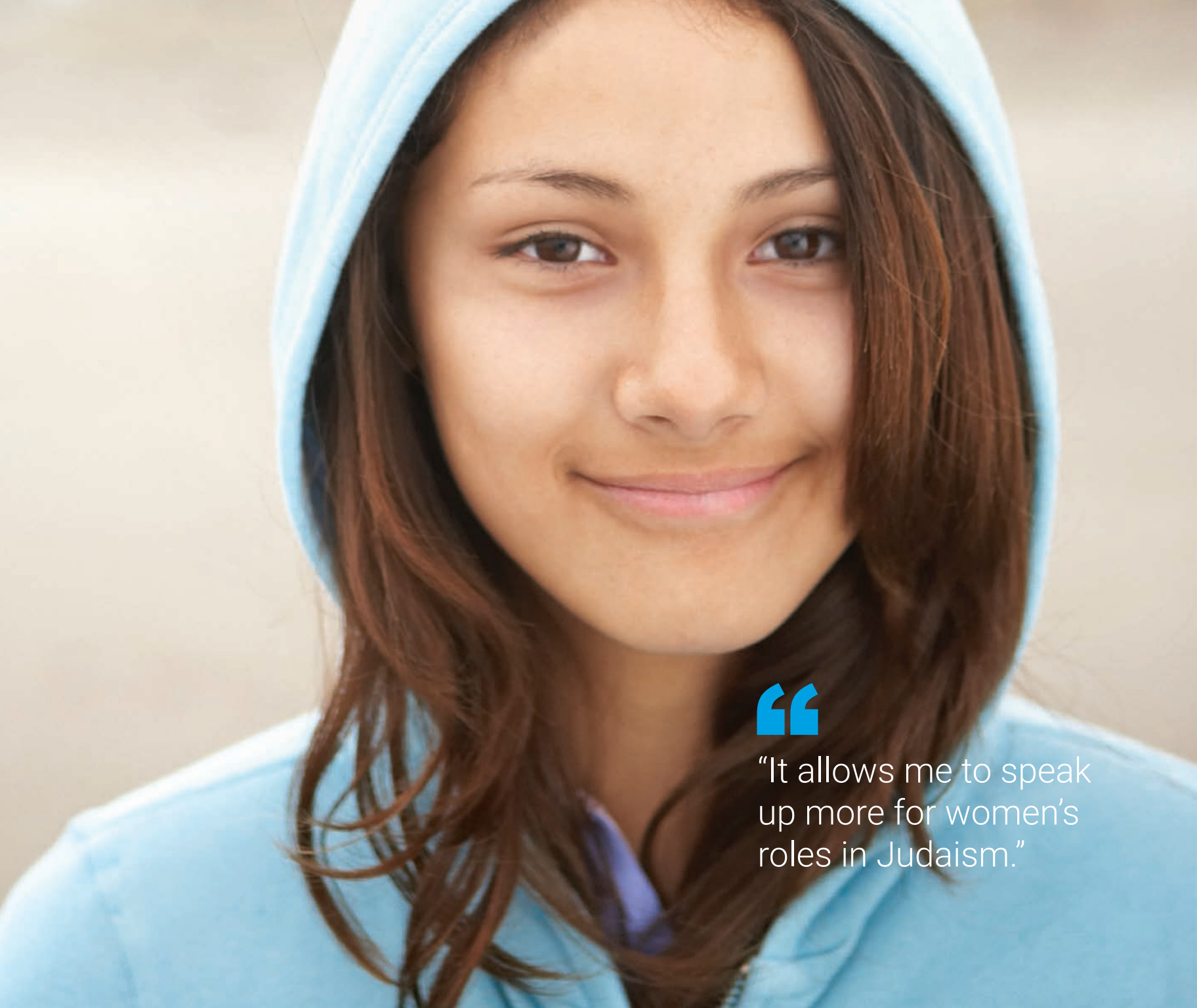


of past participants said that a significant impact of *Rosh Hodesh* was learning about issues facing Jewish women.



of past participants said that *Rosh Hodesh* helped them acquire or strengthen their leadership skills.<sup>11</sup>

■ somewhat    ■ a lot



“

“It allows me to speak up more for women’s roles in Judaism.”

### **3. *Rosh Hodesh* fosters positive peer-to-peer relationships.**

Research indicates that the experience delivered through *Rosh Hodesh* enables girls to develop honest and supportive relationships with other Jewish girls.

Girls are taught to “be nice” and to avoid direct conflict, yet also to see each other as social competitors and to strive to be the most popular, perfect and desirable.<sup>12</sup> These messages are exacerbated by the increased competition with peers in high school<sup>13</sup> and by popular media’s espousal of the “mean girl” trope.<sup>14</sup> In one study, Jewish girls were found to carry particularly negative perceptions of other Jewish girls.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of these dynamics, girls can become alienated from one another rather than viewing each other as sources of support and solidarity, and often miss out on the important psycho-social learning that comes from enduring friendships.

This is an area where *Rosh Hodesh* has a significant impact. The groups, especially those that meet for multiple years, bring Jewish girls together in a carefully structured environment where, under the guidance of a skilled mentor, girls open up to one another, learn together, and bond as a group. This is facilitated by activities that engage girls emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, physically, and creatively.

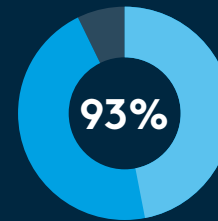


*“Rosh Hodesh* has shaped how I feel and act toward other girls on a daily basis and has given me leadership skills and friendships that have completely changed my life for the better.”

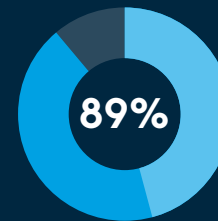
Girls learn specific relational and communication skills, and they engage with Jewish values that are foundational to building friendship and community. The *Rosh Hodesh* group becomes a community where these values and skills are practiced, honed, challenged, and internalized.



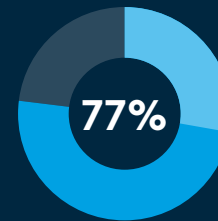
“The bonds I forged between myself and the other girls were the strongest I had ever experienced until I went to a women’s college. I truly felt accepted, loved, and free to be who I was (which was definitely not how I felt at my high school).”



of past participants said that *Rosh Hodesh* increased their sense of connection with Jewish girls and women.<sup>16</sup>



of past participants said the program helped them think about how they treat other girls.<sup>17</sup>



of past participants indicated that their participation in *Rosh Hodesh* helped them have more honest and direct communication with their peers.<sup>18</sup>



“

“It taught me to see myself as a part of a community of Jewish girls and women.”



#### **4. *Rosh Hodesh* cultivates deeper Jewish connections.**

Research indicates that the program engages girls through relevant, meaningful, and dynamic Jewish experiences, and encourages them to stay connected to Jewish life.



Over three-quarters of high school age teens do not participate in ongoing Jewish learning,<sup>19</sup> and a recent study of highly engaged Jewish teens in New York found that less than half placed a high value on being actively involved in the Jewish community.<sup>20</sup>

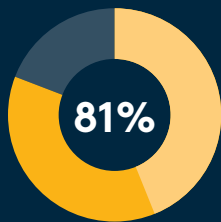
Given the significant, positive influence that being part of a religious community can have on teens, providing them with ongoing Jewish education is critical.<sup>21</sup>

The *Rosh Hodesh* experience in its entirety is effective at maintaining girls' connections to ongoing Jewish community because it provides girls with meaningful and relevant experiences of Jewish community and ritual. *Rosh Hodesh's* experiential approach makes Jewish learning fun and easy to engage with, while also being content rich.

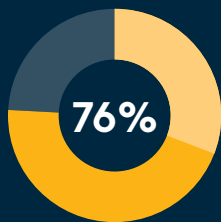


“I participated in *Rosh Hodesh* at a time when I was struggling with my Jewish identity and it helped me find my place in the Jewish community.”

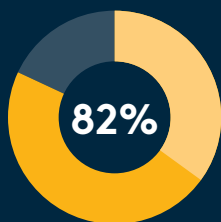




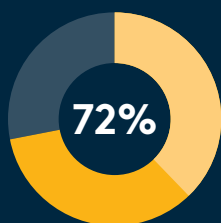
of institutional partners believe that *Rosh Hodesh* helped them retain girls post bat mitzvah.<sup>22</sup>



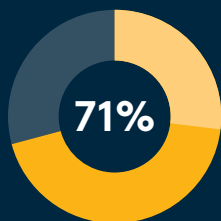
of past participants reported that *Rosh Hodesh* strengthened their pride in being Jewish.<sup>23</sup>



of past participants defined *Rosh Hodesh* as a Jewish experience with educational value.<sup>24</sup>



said that *Rosh Hodesh* helped them think of new ways women can get involved in Jewish life and leadership.<sup>25</sup>



of past *Rosh Hodesh* participants have continued to be involved in Jewish or women's activities after *Rosh Hodesh*.<sup>26</sup>

■ somewhat   ■ a lot



“The *Rosh Hodesh* experience provided me with the opportunity to become close with other Jewish girls and women. I come from an interfaith family and my mother is not Jewish so this aspect of *Rosh Hodesh* has greatly influenced my life.”



“I have joined a group at college in an attempt to recreate the bonds I made through *Rosh Hodesh*. I now meet with a group of girls once a week to discuss what it means to be a Jewish woman today.”





“

“We went to Jewish school to learn Jewish facts and we went to *Rosh Hodesh* to use them.”

The evaluation found that *Rosh Hodesh* has a particularly strong effect on girls who have a typical afternoon Hebrew school background as opposed to those who attend Jewish day school.

**53%**

of *Rosh Hodesh* participants who attended supplemental school reported that the program had a “great” or “transformative” impact on their Jewish identity compared to 33% who attended day schools.

**45%**

of *Rosh Hodesh* participants who attended supplemental school reported being highly involved in Jewish life in college, equivalent to the involvement of 46% of day school graduates.

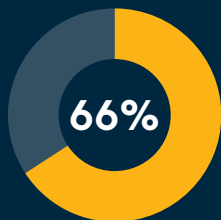
# Key Factors for Program Success

Mentors, field-tested curriculum, and effective training

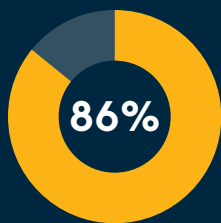
The evaluation underscores the importance of a mentor-led approach in working with teens. To make a deep impact, Moving Traditions has learned that it is critical to:

- 1 Identify dedicated adult mentors who relate well to teens.
- 2 Provide mentors with training and a field-tested curriculum.
- 3 Charge mentors with guiding an intimate peer group.
- 4 Coach mentors to form strong and enduring bonds with the teens in their group.

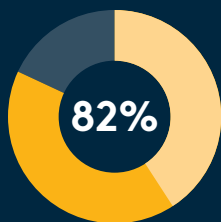
*Rosh Hodesh* is unique in the Jewish community by offering a five-year, field-tested curriculum and an intensive, pre-service training. In this approach its success puts it in the cadre of secular organizations, such as *Facing History and Ourselves* and the *Girl Scouts*, who invest heavily in curriculum and training educators and volunteers.



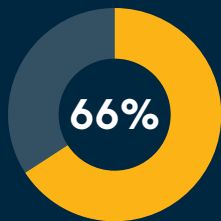
of group leaders were still in touch with some or all of the girls in their group five years after their groups had completed.<sup>27</sup>



of group leaders use the curriculum "always or often."



of past group leaders reported that the training was effective in preparing them to serve their groups.<sup>28</sup>



of group leaders would be willing to mentor new group leaders.

■ somewhat   ■ a lot



"I loved having a Jewish woman like that to look up to, and thinking about that experience sometimes drives me to be more active Jewishly and/or to create that kind of relationship with younger Jews."



“Working with the girls was fantastic. I learned how rare this connection is for girls today—to have a meaningful, consistent, rich relationship with an adult who has made Jewish practice an integral part of their lives.”

- A group leader







“

"I felt energized after every meeting because I learned from the girls as much as I hope they learned from me."

- A group leader

# Key Implications for Jewish Organizations

For the past decade through *Rosh Hodesh*, Moving Traditions has created compelling experiences wherein thousands of Jewish girls have openly explored the fundamental questions of identity. Moving Traditions already has applied learnings from this model to our signature program for boys, *Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood*, adopted by 101 Jewish institutions across the United States.

For other Jewish organizations and programs that are looking to more effectively engage and inspire Jewish teens, a number of implications arise from this evaluation:

- ▶ To make Judaism more relevant and resonant for teens, address the social and emotional issues that matter most to teens within a Jewish context.
- ▶ To address their social expectations and pressured lives, provide ethical and spiritual responses for teens to consider and encourage their critical thinking.
- ▶ To increase participation in and commitment to Jewish life and leadership, help teens experience the value of communal responsibility and encourage them to explore ways to get more involved.
- ▶ To provide compelling communal experiences, create small, ongoing, mentor-led groups that employ field-tested curricula and trained, trusted adult mentors.
- ▶ To supplement clergy and teen professionals who currently work with teens, identify and train adults who have the ability to mentor teens.



# Move Forward with Us

Moving Traditions is energized by the results from the *Rosh Hodesh* evaluation. We are poised to take on a greater role in helping the Jewish community engage and inspire the next generation.

After reflecting on the evaluation, conducting additional field research, and exploring various opportunities, Moving Traditions completed a strategic plan that envisions the next steps for the organization.

To continue and build on the accomplishments of *Rosh Hodesh* and *Shevet Achim*, our program for teen boys, and to broaden our reach and impact, over the next several years Moving Traditions will implement the following new initiatives.

- 1** Update the *Rosh Hodesh* curriculum and training to ensure relevance for girls going forward.
- 2** Ensure that our programs are fully inclusive and open to a diversity of teens: Jewish boys, girls, and gender non-conforming youth.
- 3** Extend into neighborhood-based community groups and multi-institutional partnerships to better reach teens whose families are less connected to Jewish institutions.
- 4** Help congregations strengthen their relevance and engagement with pre-teens and their families during b'nai mitzvah preparation.
- 5** Empower older high school teens to take the lead in engaging their younger peers on the issues that matter to them.
- 6** Greatly expand the number of qualified adults we train as mentors—working with national and local organizations.

Through Moving Traditions' current and planned programs, and together with our partners, more Jewish teens are growing into adulthood with confidence, compassion and a lifelong commitment to Jewish community.

To support Moving Traditions or to learn more about how you can help move Jewish teens, communities, and Judaism forward, please contact us at:

[www.movingtraditions.org](http://www.movingtraditions.org)

# Endnotes

- 1 Deborah A. Cihonski, "Finding my voice: Adolescent girls' experiences with speaking up and how recounting these experiences impacts future expression," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Florida, 2005).
- 2 Clea McNeely, MA, DrPH and Jayne Blanchard, The Teen Years Explained: A Guide to Healthy Adolescent Development (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, March, 2010).
- 3 Pinhas L, Heinmaa M, Bryden P, Bradley S, Toner B, "Disordered eating in Jewish adolescent girls," Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 53 (9) (2008): 601-8.
- 4 Centre of Excellence For Women's Health, A Study of Girls' Perspectives on Girls' Groups and Healthy Living (British Columbia. 2012).
- 5 Responses to an online survey (designed and administered by Pearl Beck Ph.D. and Tobin Belzer Ph.D.) were presented on a four point scale. The data reflects the two affirming responses on the scale, "somewhat" and "a lot". Survey data: 32% somewhat, 63% a lot.
- 6 Survey data: 35% somewhat, 56% a lot.
- 7 Survey data: 40% somewhat, 30% a lot.
- 8 Survey data: 31% somewhat, 36% a lot.
- 9 Campbell Leaper and Christia Spears Brown, "Perceived Experiences with Sexism among Adolescent Girls," Child Development, Vol. 79, No. 3 (May-June, 2008): 685-704.
- 10 Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, "Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy" Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education, Vol. 26, No. 3 (September 2005): 370.
- 11 Survey data from top, down: 36% somewhat, 40% a lot; 32% somewhat, 37% a lot; 40% somewhat, 36% a lot; 36% somewhat, 34% a lot; 61% somewhat, 20% a lot.
- 12 Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992).
- 13 American Psychological Association, Stress in America: Paying with our Health (February, 2015).
- 14 Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana E. Mastro, "Mean Girls? The Influence of Gender Portrayals in Teen Movies on Emerging Adults' Gender-based Attitudes and Beliefs," J & MC Quarterly Vol. 85, No. 1 (Spring, 2008): 131-146.
- 15 Hayim, H. & Leffert, N. 1998. Shema: listening to Jewish youth. Day School Evaluation Reports, Minneapolis Jewish Federation, Search Institute,1.
- 16 Survey data: 47% somewhat, 46% a lot.
- 17 Survey data: 46% somewhat, 43% a lot.
- 18 Survey data: 24% somewhat, 49% a lot.
- 19 Kadushin, C., Kelner, S., Saxe, L. (2000). "Being a Jewish Teenager in America: Trying to Make It." Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University. Boston: MA
- 20 Amy L. Sales, Nicole Samuel and Alexander Zablotsky, "Engaging Jewish Teens: A Study of New York Teens, Parents and Practitioners," Maurice & Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, November 2011.
- 21 Robert Blum and Peggy Mann Reinhardt, Reducing the risk: Connections that make a difference in the lives of youth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Division of General Pediatrics, Adolescent Health, 1997).
- 22 Survey data: 44% somewhat, 37% strongly.
- 23 Survey data: 31% somewhat, 45% a lot.
- 24 Survey data: 35% somewhat, 47% by a great extent.
- 25 Survey data: 38% somewhat, 34% a lot.
- 26 Survey data: 27% one activity, 31% two activities, and 13% three or more activities.
- 27 Survey data: 17% are in touch with "many or most" girls, 49% are in contact with "some."
- 28 Survey data: 41% "some extent", 41% "a great extent."

At Moving Traditions, we believe that when Judaism promotes self-discovery, challenges traditional gender roles, and celebrates a diversity of voices, it has the power to move our teens, our communities, and Judaism forward.

Through our field-tested programs *Rosh Hodesh* and *Shevet Achim*, Moving Traditions creates experiences that inspire Jewish teens to openly explore fundamental questions of identity and society. We help teens reach their full potential by connecting relevant content with enduring Jewish values, and by fostering positive peer-to-peer relationships through our trained mentors.

Together, with the guidance of Moving Traditions, more Jewish teens are growing into adulthood with confidence, compassion and a lifelong commitment to Jewish community.

[www.movingtraditions.org](http://www.movingtraditions.org)

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