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SYNERGY

Innovations and Strategies for Synagogues of Tomorrow

SYNAGOGUE ENGAGEMENT: REACHING OUT TO RUSSIAN-SPEAKING JEWS

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Introduction

The majority of Jews who emigrated from the former Soviet Union were keenly aware of their Jewish identity, despite growing up without religion. They were not allowed to practice Judaism in public spaces like synagogues, nor in the privacy of their own homes. With no formal Jewish education and only occasional glimpses of Jewish customs, rituals, and practice, keeping Judaism alive was a precarious endeavor.

In 2011, UJA-Federation of New York released The Jewish Community Study of New York, which established that 216,000 Russian-speaking Jews (RSJs) were living in the five boroughs of New York City, Long Island, and Westchester, comprising 14 percent of the eight-county Jewish population. This further strengthened UJA-Federation's interest in better understanding if and how RSJs were connecting with synagogues.

In 2011, UJA-Federation funded the Council of Jewish Émigré Community Organizations (COJECO), one of our beneficiary agencies, to create the Synagogue Outreach Network (SON). This initiative sought to identify and foster new and innovative programs that welcome RSJs into congregational life.

This paper shares some of the successes and challenges that the SON program grantees encountered. We believe that there is much to be learned from these reflections from the field, and we hope that the experiences of the SON synagogues will offer practical insights and inspiration that will inform the outreach and inclusivity work of other synagogues on their paths to thriving. A thriving congregation creates a culture in which all people matter and all people are included.

The expertise provided by COJECO, and the commitment of participating SON synagogues, have been essential to this work.

Have you had success engaging RSJs in your synagogue? Please share your story by e-mailing us at synergy@ujafedny.org.

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The Future of Russian-Speaking Jewish Identity

I will never forget the first time I accompanied a group of Russian-speaking Jews (RSJs) to Israel. The El Al security agent asked the trip participants his standard questions about Jewish identity and Jewish life: What synagogue do you belong to? What Jewish holidays do you celebrate? Do you speak Hebrew?

Virtually none of the people in my group could answer to his satisfaction. Frustrated, the security agent asked me, “Why don’t these people belong to a congregation or know anything about Judaism?”

“Try asking them what it was like being the only Jewish kid at their Soviet high school, or how they felt after a visit to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., or how they feel every time they hear *HaTikvah*,” I replied. “You are asking them what they know and what they do as Jews. What you are leaving out is how they feel as Jews.”

What is Jewish identity? How is it formed and developed? Can we, as community leaders, say with confidence that our programs have a positive impact on someone’s Jewish identity? Or do we just plant the seeds and hope that they fall on fertile ground?

The field of sociology is predicated on the idea that a person’s identity is developed through a combination of emotions, behaviors, and knowledge. Given the individual and collective experience of RSJs under the Soviet regime for nearly a century, it is understandable that Jewish identity-building was a nearly impossible feat. Generations of Jews were denied access to Jewish cultural, religious, and educational institutions, and all forms of public Jewish expression were forbidden.

Miraculously, and in part because of a complicated history and external pressures, RSJs maintained a deep emotional connection to our Jewish families, a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people, and a powerful affinity for the State of Israel and Jewish culture.

While Jewish identity based mostly on emotion can be very strong, it is rarely sustainable or transferrable without education or action. Since most RSJs today live in open and welcoming societies, the question of how to develop and transmit Jewish identity has changed.

In the next five to 10 years, while the sentimental attachment to Judaism is still strong among RSJs, we must seize the opportunity to engage them in Jewish identity-building. Without culturally relevant moments of learning and inspiration, their Jewish identity will weaken. We need to provide positive Jewish experiences, such as learning opportunities for all ages, Shabbat and holiday celebrations, and chances for authentic involvement in congregational life.

As lay and professional Jewish community leaders, we have an opportunity and responsibility not only to facilitate Jewish identity-building among RSJs, but to contribute to the development of a strong and vibrant Jewish life in which all of our community members feel that they belong and that their voices are heard and respected.

Roman Shmulenson
Executive Director, COJECO

The Measures of Jewish Identity

Russian-speaking Jews (RSJs) share a common history of more than 70 years of systematic, government-sponsored suppression of religious expression. This shared experience permeates the fabric of the RSJ experience today; RSJs report that being Russian and Jewish are equally important to their identity, and that Jewish identity is even more important for their children than Russian identity.

UJA-Federation's "Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011" surveyed a cross-section of Jewish New Yorkers, including many RSJs, and many of the questions dealt with different measures of engagement in and connection to Jewish life.

About half of second-generation RSJs remain religiously distinctive for their low levels of synagogue membership, their reluctance to identify with "mainstream Jewish denominational identities," and their insistence that they can be Jewish without observing rituals or affiliating with religious institutions. While individual RSJs may be found in Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox synagogues, an astonishing 46 percent of RSJs in New York described their religious denomination as "other."

They also outscore their non-Russian-speaking counterparts when it comes to attitudes toward in-marriage and Israel. Some 61 percent of Russian speakers vs. 36 percent of American Jews responded that they would be upset if their children married non-Jews. These responses are supported by their actual in-marriage rate of 87 percent, compared to 76 percent among all other Jewish households. And 59 percent of Russian speakers felt a strong attachment to Israel, compared to 34 percent of American-born Jews.

Perhaps most significantly, Russian speakers overwhelmingly report having Jews as their closest friends, exceeding non-Russian-speaking, non-Orthodox Jews by a 2:1 ratio: 73 percent to 38 percent.

All of this reinforces the fact that RSJs have a strong sense of "peoplehood." A qualitative study of young RSJs quotes one respondent who defines Jewish identity as "primarily ethnic and cultural." The overwhelming number of young RSJs interviewed expressed a strong "ethnic" Jewishness, "a sense of pride and belonging to a people with a rich history and culture." This sense of pride and connection is particularly noteworthy as it appears to be the reverse of the current trends in the younger, Jewish generations at large when compared with non-RSJs of the same age.

How the Synagogue Outreach Network Worked

Initially, most émigrés who arrived from the former Soviet Union (FSU) to the New York area in the 1970s and 1990s settled in Brooklyn and Queens. Though those boroughs continue to have the largest proportion of all Russian-speaking Jewish (RSJ) households, the younger RSJs are moving out of these boroughs and heading to Manhattan, Long Island, Staten Island, and Westchester.

In the 12 years leading up to the creation of the Synagogue Outreach Network (SON), COJECO witnessed the anxieties, uncertainties, and alienation that traditional programming by Jewish institutions evoked for the RSJ community. COJECO also had success in addressing and alleviating these responses through customized, culturally-sensitive programming.

In 2011, UJA-Federation funded COJECO to launch SON as recommended by UJA-Federation's Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal. SON's main goal was to assist congregations across the denominational spectrum as they created and implemented effective engagement programs for unaffiliated RSJs. SON employed a variety of outreach methods to bridge the gap between RSJ residents and their local congregations.

The SON network was comprised of a diverse group of synagogue professionals who came together throughout the year to learn from each other, share successes, discuss challenges, brainstorm new programming ideas, and explore opportunities for collaboration.

SON helped synagogues become welcoming entry points into Jewish life for RSJs, offering them meaningful ways to engage with Judaism. COJECO's bicultural, bilingual staff was an important source of support in that process, because they understood the nuances of the émigré community. Congregations received ongoing consultation on program development, leadership development and financial support, publicity, marketing, and reporting.

SON congregations discovered early on that as more members of the RSJ community became involved in synagogue life, their congregations experienced valuable benefits from the infusion of culture, community, and Zionism that are at the heart of the RSJ identity.

Case Studies and Lessons on Reaching Out to RSJs

“It has been the goal of the Synagogue Outreach Network to develop a way for diverse congregations to meaningfully engage Russian-speaking Jews in synagogue life and attendance. Our findings indicate that through an open-minded, collaborative approach, not only can developing a bond between the Russian-speaking and American communities be accomplished, but it is sure to enrich the synagogue experience for all involved.”

Rabbi Shlomo Uzhansky
Russian Outreach Director
Young Israel of Staten Island

The following section consists of learnings and recommended practices gleaned from the successes, challenges, discussions, and program observations of the congregations that participated in the SON initiative from 2011 through 2015.

Beginning the Process

The first step in planning outreach efforts to Russian-speaking Jews is to understand the local community by identifying and evaluating current programs and services, and discovering the gaps in the types of events that might appeal to RSJs.

Case Study: Starting With a Focus Group

Congregation Sons of Israel is a traditional Conservative synagogue that demonstrated previous success engaging the local Israeli population with a supplemental Hebrew school program. “Having witnessed in recent years a marked increase in the RSJ population in the Five Towns and surrounding communities, we were interested in identifying the needs of this emerging population, and creating programming that would successfully serve these families,” says Harriet Gefen, the congregation’s executive director.

With the assistance of the COJECO SON coordinator, who conducted a focus group of Russian-speaking parents, a task force of key congregants representing the RSJs and members of the board of education was formed. Funding was secured from the synagogue board of directors, and a Russian-speaking coordinator and classroom teacher were hired, providing curriculum tailored to the RSJ community.

Now in its third year, the J-STAR Russian Jewish Hebrew School track has more than 15 students enrolled in the program. By popular demand, the program has since expanded to include pre-K and kindergarten.

Case Study: Starting With Music

Natasha Hirschhorn and Maria Dubinsky, Russian-speaking cantors at two different synagogues in Manhattan, identified a need to build a sense of community within their religious institutions that would be attractive to the growing population of young RSJ families.

Dubinsky and Hirschhorn started Firebird/JAR-Ptitsa, a collaboration between Congregation Ansche Chesed (a Conservative synagogue on the Upper West Side) and Temple Shaaray Tefila (a Reform synagogue on the Upper East Side). The name Firebird/JAR-Ptitsa is an acronym – Jewish/American/Russian – representing the identity of the program’s constituency, along with the Russian word *ptitsa*, meaning “firebird,” a character from Russian folklore.

Knowing that the RSJ community responds favorably to art-based, family-friendly Jewish experiences, such as picnics, concerts, and holiday parties, the two cantors drew on their musical backgrounds to create new programs and reached out to a wider network of Manhattan RSJ families. Program locations rotated monthly, balancing families’ desire to connect with friends across town and their limitations, such as the challenges of traveling with small children.

In the first year, the primary goal was locating and reaching out to the RSJ community of Manhattan, as well as bringing Russian speakers closer to synagogue life and gaining their trust. In year two, there was greater investment in maintaining and nurturing the existing community. Both congregations have become cultural havens, welcoming and intermingling the RSJ community from the east and west side of Manhattan. Each has seen their first RSJ success stories – families joining as full members – and synagogue lay leadership is appreciative of the benefits that Russian outreach has brought to their community. Finally, there has been noticeable growth in the number of committed volunteer members invested in this work.

Case Study: Don’t Be Afraid to Ask

At the Young Israel of Staten Island (YISI), the Russian Jewish Outreach Initiative staff know that prayer, Hebrew, membership dues, and board participation are not motivating factors for the RSJ community. Neither are rummage sales, sisterhood meetings,

baked goods drives, or auctions. Many Jews from the FSU are Jews “at heart,” so their connection to Judaism isn’t always easily matched to traditional organizational structures.

Rabbi Shlomo Uzhansky believes that, since RSJs are extremely wary of organized religion and religious institutions, “It is imperative to understand the inner conflict that occurs for every Russian-speaking Jew when he or she is about to enter into a synagogue. A thoughtful, welcoming plan should be developed to make RSJs feel at ease after they walk through the doors. To properly welcome an RSJ person, one must always remember it is not what you wish to bestow upon them, but what they wish to gain.”

And the simple act of asking what they would like to see a synagogue offer is a crucial, but often overlooked, step. “It’s important to know that, just like the American community, the Russian-speaking community is multifaceted and varies greatly in its needs, likes, and wants,” Uzhansky adds. “We need to listen, to be flexible, and to set reasonable expectations in order to succeed.”

The Young Israel of Staten Island Russian Jewish Outreach Initiative has created many programs that speak to the interests of the RSJ community. These include monthly Shabbat hospitality programs, lectures by renowned speakers on contemporary Jewish topics, family educational events, and young-adult seminars on contemporary issues in Jewish life.

Checking the Basics

It is important to look at the core strengths of the synagogue and find ways to leverage them to better address the needs of RSJs. When creating a program with Russian-speaking Jews in mind, synagogues must determine if they have three key ingredients: realistic expectations and goals, organizational resources, and bilingual capacity.

1. Realistic Expectations and Goals

Synagogue outreach efforts, traditionally, have a very clear goal: to add new members to their roster. A congregation that looks at outreach to the Russian-speaking community as an opening to add new members is likely to be disappointed.

RSJs are leery of formal institutions, yet are very interested in becoming part of a community of like-minded individuals that can provide them and their family with meaningful Jewish experiences in a welcoming and nonjudgmental environment. Engaging the RSJ community should be seen as a valuable tool in and of itself, strengthening the congregation as a whole,

increasing the synagogue’s visibility, and offering more diverse programming, which will make the synagogue more welcoming and inclusive to all.

Just like the American community, the Russian-speaking community is multifaceted and varies greatly in its needs, likes, and wants.

2. Organizational Resources

A congregation’s management, infrastructure, and human and financial resources are key factors in making any project succeed. The planning and execution of such an important initiative requires time and effort from the congregation’s staff in managing all components of quality programming, including PR and marketing; grantwriting; financial management; and maintaining an online presence, client database, website, and calendar. Staff and volunteers need to be fully aware of and ready for the additional responsibilities and the cultural sensitivities that these new initiatives require.

After struggling the first year with time management, JAR-Ptitsa hired an administrative assistant in the second year to manage day-to-day tasks and marketing. This allowed senior staff to focus on creating and implementing programming and cultivating broader community support. “Implementing a program from scratch is a highly time-consuming project and having the help of a skilled professional is essential,” says Cantor Dubinsky.

A different SON project did not continue past the pilot year simply because congregational resources were stretched too thin. Despite strong program planning and the best of intentions, there was not enough staff capacity to continue to run the project.

Another synagogue in the initial SON cohort outsourced its outreach initiative to a professional unaffiliated with the synagogue instead of actively involving the synagogue leadership, staff, and members in the engagement effort. While the program was attended by some RSJs, it never became a natural part of synagogue programming, and thus did not succeed beyond the first year.

3. Bilingual Capacity

From COJECO staff members’ many years of experience in the field, one of the main lessons learned is about the strong correlation between the presence of a bilingual project coordinator and the success of a new RSJ initiative. The coordinator doesn’t just bridge potential language barriers, but he or she often understands the nuances and sensitivities of the

target audience because of a shared culture and language. Every current SON congregation has a bilingual staff person directly involved with the programs.

The bilingual staff people are not typically members of the local community. As a result, the staff is usually recruited through a more traditional job search, using internal connections, social media, word of mouth, and standard job posting sites.

It is equally crucial that this project lead becomes closely connected to the congregational community and considers this initiative as integrated programming that strengthens the synagogue overall.

Getting Organizational Buy In

The dedication, excitement, and “buy in” from lay and professional leadership puts an initiative at the top of a congregation’s priority list and provides crucial inspiration, empowerment, and support to both staff and members. Invested lay leaders become the best advocates. Community awareness and engagement within the congregation from the onset of the project ensure continuity, cohesion, and successful integration of the initiative into greater congregational life.

Case Study: Find Common Ground

Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST) serves as a bridge for the Russian-speaking community to both Judaism and the LGBTQ world. This work at CBST is sustained by regular collaboration among lay and professional leaders. Senior Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, Assistant Rabbi Rachel Weiss, Director of Social Justice Programming Rabbi David Dunn Bauer, and lay leader Yelena Goltsman work closely with congregants, community leaders, and émigré activists to make sure that events are appropriate for, and welcoming to, the RSJ community.

One of the main lessons is about the strong correlation between the presence of a bilingual project coordinator and the success of a new RSJ initiative.

Senior Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum dedicated last year’s Yom Kippur sermon to the challenges of the LGBTQ RSJ community, both in New York and in Russia. This is but one demonstration of the dedication of congregational leadership to making Russian speakers feel at home as part of their larger mission for social justice. “CBST carries communal awareness of Jewish oppression

throughout history, including and through the rescue of Soviet Jewry from the 1960s to the 1980s,” she said that night. “Political oppression in Russia today is consequently not an unfamiliar concept to us, nor is the ongoing denial of human rights to LGBTQ people worldwide. While we as a community have much to learn about Russian culture and the experience of LGBTQ and RSJs, the process enriches our practice of Jewish tradition and our sense of connection to our Jewish and LGBTQ family.”

Case Study: Synagogue Leadership Should Show Up

At Temple Sinai, a Reform congregation in Roslyn Heights, the community, including the senior staff and lay leadership, is very excited about and fully supportive of the new Sinai Russian Club. The Temple plans to continue offering free participation in all cultural, educational, and social events to all members of the Sinai Russian Club.

The Sinai Russian Club finds opportunities for innovative outreach that can infuse the congregation with knowledge of the valuable contribution of RSJs. The club also finds ways of connecting with the “second-stage” Russian-speaking population in Nassau County. It offers families a variety of spiritual, cultural, and educational programs with a social component, and Sinai Shkola for children in first to seventh grades.

The temple leadership is fully devoted to these efforts. Rabbi Michael White and Rabbi Andy Gordon attend Russian Club-sponsored events, and Howard Berrent, president of Temple Sinai, highlights the importance of outreach efforts in his monthly newsletter column. All Sinai Russian Club events are promoted by the PR department on an ongoing basis.

Planning Content and Marketing Programs

Putting together welcoming, engaging, culturally sensitive programs is just one part of addressing the challenge of engaging RSJs. Determining the most effective marketing strategies is instrumental to the success of those programs.

Case Study: Getting Rid of Preconceptions

Park East Synagogue’s leadership recognized that when an RSJ says they know nothing about Jewish tradition or religion, it’s very different from when Americans say that they know nothing about Jewish tradition. Synagogue leadership’s observations showed that even unaffiliated American Jews often know the meaning of many Hebrew words, Yiddish sayings, and biblical stories, and have a basic understanding of the major holidays. To Russian-speaking Jews the rituals, language, and folklore often feel completely foreign.

To Russian-speaking Jews the rituals, language, and folklore often feel completely foreign.

Park East Synagogue created Sunday Shkola, a Russian language program that teaches children and parents Jewish subjects in Russian. “We understand that the sanctuary is often very foreign to them, so we focus on social, educational, Israel-based programming. A Shabbat dinner is always good!” Rabbi Benjamin Goldschmidt says. “We don’t dilute the message, we just make it more accessible. We translate each Hebrew word and explain the most basic concepts. We have no preconceived expectations about basic observances, and we allow our learners to go at their own pace. We encourage our colleagues in the field to embrace the differences and open the doors. We listen to the newcomers, hear out their ideas, and appreciate how they would like to take their first steps in community life.”

Marketing to Russian-Speaking Jews

Developing a marketing plan, including effective language, marketing tools, and communication strategies, will vary from synagogue to synagogue, based on a congregation’s unique culture, capacity, location, and character. Still, there are three concepts that appear uniformly effective:

1. Highlight the social and communal aspects of the synagogue rather than religion and ritual.
2. Emphasize the importance of children’s and family education.
3. Use colloquial (rather than Hebrew or biblical) language and terms.

Social Media and Word-of-Mouth

The younger generation of RSJs, like the younger community in general, is quite adept at social media and online resources, using them as primary tools for community, networking, and advice. There is a plethora of Russian Facebook groups, ranging from 30 to 11,000 members, defined by geography, demographics, and general interests (for example, Russian Parents of Long Island, Brownstone Brooklyn Russian Jews, Russian Professional Network). Typically, a Russian-speaking program coordinator will know of many of these groups and will be able to find others with a bit of effort. Meetup.com and VKontakte (a Facebook-like social media platform in Russian) are also popular platforms.

One Synagogue’s Secrets to Success

“Outreach is not an exact science, and Russian-speaking Jews come in all different types and shapes,” says Rabbi Benjamin Goldschmidt from Park East Synagogue. From working on the Park East Sunday Shkola for the last two years, here are some of the insights Rabbi Goldschmidt has gained into the RSJ community:

1. Entice people to walk in the door.
2. Once people are in, make sure they are not turned off.
3. Make RSJs want to take leadership roles and get involved.

Focus on children’s programming and education. No one wants to broaden their children’s horizons more than the RSJ community. We started a Sunday school that teaches Jewish subjects in the Russian language. Our assumption was that parents don’t only want their children to nurture their religious identity, but also their language and culture. An important distinction is between the culture and literature RSJs love, and the country that often they did not, so don’t refer to them as “Russian”; “Russian-speaking” is more appropriate.

Understand that the sanctuary is often very foreign to RSJs, so focus on social, educational, and Israel-based programming, and let them go at their own pace. Rather than guilt them into Judaism, inspire them to explore and search.

Don’t constantly remind RSJs how much American Jewry did for Soviet Jews! Although true, it is annoying to hear it over and over.

Finally, just listen to the RSJs in your community; hear out their ideas and how they would like to take their first steps in community life. You’ll be impressed at the creativity and willingness to help that you’ll discover. They might not feel compelled to pay membership, but they will be happy to contribute to projects that are close to their heart. Embrace their differences and open your doors — and your hearts.

While social media is useful for visibility and general outreach, there is nothing more effective than word of mouth. Many RSJs remain close-knit and connected to one another, and rely heavily upon the recommendations of their peers. Therefore, the most effective outreach lies in cultivating community connectors who will advocate on behalf of your program. While many communities rely primarily on word of mouth and the recommendations of the community, friends, and peers, this is especially true of the Russian-Jewish community, as so many of them know and trust one another, and share similar sensibilities and priorities.

Newspapers and other published materials have not proven to be effective marketing tools.

Finally, the key concepts that have proven helpful in crafting for marketing materials RSJ programming include: arts and culture, family programming, education, food and drink, networking and forming friendships, and learning about history.

The Do's and Don'ts of Welcoming Russian-Speaking Jews

Recommended “Do’s”

- Identify a Russian-speaking member of your congregation or a professional who possesses a thorough understanding of both the nature of your congregation and the local Russian-speaking Jewish community.
- Conduct a meeting with your general membership. Explain what you are trying to accomplish, and have an RSJ person share their experiences and thoughts with the congregation. Make sure that programming for the RSJs is part of the congregational website, calendar, newsletter, etc.
- Develop programming by listening to what is needed and then create programs to address the needs expressed. Some examples of “needs” might be seeking social connections to other Jewish families or continuing Russian language exposure and exposure to Jewish holidays. Each of these examples would suggest different programmatic tactics. How is your community best able to do this? As we saw in a few instances, modifying or expanding existing programming can work quite well, too.

- Find a core group to help with the development of and recruitment for your program. The core group should consist of both current synagogue members and a few representatives from the RSJ community. The friendships that will emerge between these two groups will go a long way in streamlining the integration process.
- Make friends, many friends. More than any service your congregation can provide for the Russian-speaking community, it is the relationships between synagogue members and RSJs that will pave the way for your congregation’s membership to expand. Let people know the many benefits of belonging to a community, such as networking, having a support base, or just having a nice social group.

Recommended “Don’ts”

- Don’t be afraid to say hello. You might feel awkward in approaching someone from a different background, but encouraging synagogue members to greet newcomers is a sure way to make them feel welcome.
- Don’t overuse stereotypical references to break the ice. While caviar may be a nice addition to any Kiddush, having a vodka party might not attract the crowd you’d like.
- Don’t expect RSJs to understand or be familiar with services or other ritual observances. At the same time, make sure that the guidance you provide is respectful and not intrusive.
- Don’t solicit RSJs to become synagogue members. Let the decision come from them, after having been exposed to the benefits of belonging to a community.
- Don’t judge. RSJs went through 70 years of spiritual persecution, and this is reflected in their attitudes and expectations toward Judaism. It is the first step of walking into a synagogue that is the most difficult one, and with much warmth and genuine care it can be a foundation for a change that will last a lifetime.

Programs Started by SON Grantees

<p>Congregation Ansche Chesed</p> <p>Conservative Manhattan</p> <p>Cohort 2013, 2014, 2015</p>	<p>FIREBIRD/JAR-Ptitsa Птица@Ansche Chesed (Jewish-American-Russian) (in collaboration with Shaaray Tefila and the Arlekino Theater Troupe)</p> <p>Program includes Sunday educational programs for RSJ families, Friday night and pre-holiday dinners, picnics and Friday night celebrations, Shabbat dinner with a concert featuring Russian-speaking cantors, pre-holiday Learning Passover Seder, socializing and learning for parents/grandparents.</p>
<p>Temple Shaaray Tefila</p> <p>Reform Manhattan</p> <p>Cohort of 2013, 2014, 2015</p>	<p>FIREBIRD/JAR-Ptitsa Птица@Shaaray Tefila (Jewish-American-Russian) (in collaboration with Ansche Chesed and the Arlekino Theater Troupe)</p> <p>Program includes Sunday educational programs for RSJ families, Friday night and pre-holiday dinners, picnics and Friday night celebrations, Shabbat dinner with a concert featuring Russian-speaking cantors, pre-holiday Learning Passover Seder, socializing and learning for parents/grandparents.</p>
<p>Park East Synagogue</p> <p>Orthodox Manhattan</p> <p>Cohort of 2013, 2014, 2015</p>	<p>Park East Sunday Shkola</p> <p>Weekly Sunday morning classes for children 3 – 8 years old, Jewish holiday programs and events for families</p>
<p>Congregation Sons of Israel</p> <p>Conservative Woodmere</p> <p>Cohort 2013, 2014, 2015</p>	<p>J-STARS (Jewish South Shore Teaching Academy for Russian Students)</p> <p>Twice a week (Mon., Wed.) after-school program for Russian-speaking Jewish children grades K – 8. Session 1 includes Russian interest clubs and enrichment in academics; session 2 offers Hebrew school track with curriculum designed specifically for Russian-speaking students. Holiday celebrations, family events with Jewish and/or Russian content, and a PJ library component.</p>
<p>Young Israel of Staten Island</p> <p>Orthodox Staten Island</p> <p>Cohort 2013, 2014, 2015</p>	<p>Young Israel of Staten Island Russian Jewish Outreach Initiative</p> <p>The YISI Russian Outreach program includes monthly Shabbat hospitality programs, lectures on contemporary Jewish topics, family educational events, and young-adult seminars on contemporary issues in Jewish life, Jewish holiday celebrations, and biweekly <i>minyanim</i>.</p>
<p>Temple Sinai of Roslyn Heights</p> <p>Reform Long Island</p> <p>Cohort 2014, 2015</p>	<p>The Sinai Russian Club</p> <p>The Sinai Russian Club offers spiritual, educational, and social programs on Jewish holidays; Shabbat programs and picnics; weekly Sinai <i>Shkola</i> classes for children in first through seventh grades to explore the meaning, key values, and concepts of the Jewish tradition, basics of Hebrew language, and essential tools for preserving Russian language and culture; Russian language; chess and art; and weekly Hebrew language class for adults.</p>

<p>Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST) Unaffiliated Manhattan Cohort of 2014, 2015</p>	<p>SON The SON program is centered on outreach to the Russian-speaking Jewish community, specifically those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender and/or identify as queer, and includes classes, social outings, and sponsored trips to the annual retreat.</p>
<p>The Village Temple Reform Manhattan Cohort 2015</p>	<p>The Russian Keshet Club The Russian Keshet Club offers social and educational Jewish holiday family programs, Russian Jewish Synaplex Shabbat (Synaplex is an innovative, monthly Friday night program that explores the Jewish cultural, educational, spiritual, and social experience), Jazz Synaplex Shabbat, Village Temple Film Series, and Kites for a Cure/ The Village Temple Mitzvah Day.</p>
<p>Temple Israel Center Conservative Westchester Cohort 2015</p>	<p>Jew-sovka <i>Tusovka</i> is slang for both hanging out and for a group of people who enjoy doing so together; it connotes familiarity, informality, trust, and shared experience. Jew-sovka offers bimonthly informal gatherings, along with a forum for discussing Jewish/Russian topics</p>
<p>Town & Village Synagogue Conservative Manhattan Cohort 2013</p>	<p>We belong together – Мы должны быть вместе Social and educational programming leveraging PJ Library as a primary recruiting tool to attract Russian-speaking Jewish families, matching Russian-speaking Jews with current members for better integration in the community, Jewish music for parents and tots, book groups, Russian language and culture events, Jewish holidays/customs and Shabbat/holiday meals, chess club.</p>
<p>Merrick Jewish Center Conservative Long Island Cohort 2013</p>	<p>Kinofabrika (in collaboration with the Russian Project of the Institute of Jewish Learning at the Jewish Theological Seminary) Kinofabrika is an innovative adult education series of four sessions that offers Russian-speaking Jews an opportunity to explore their Jewish identity through the art of film.</p>
<p>Riverdale Temple Reform Bronx Cohort 2013</p>	<p>Open Hearts, Open Minds – Открытое сердце, открытый ум Social, cultural, and educational Jewish programming for preschool and school-age children, including weekly Tot Shabbat and monthly Kabbalat Shabbat Children's programs; "big brother, big sister" system for existing members to welcome newcomers; and lectures for adults exploring Eastern-European Jewish identity in the modern age.</p>

About the Authors

“**Synagogue Engagement: Reaching Out to Russian-Speaking Jews**” was prepared with contributions from Roman Shmulenson, executive director of COJECO (Council of Jewish Emigré Community Organizations), Olga Markus, assistant executive director of COJECO, and Rabbi Shlomo Uzhansky, Russian outreach director at Young Israel of Staten Island and was edited by Susan Kohn, marketing executive at UJA-Federation of New York, and Josh Spiro, writer at UJA-Federation of New York. Olga Markus directed the Synagogue Outreach Network (SON) an initiative funded by UJA-Federation of New York designed to identify and foster new and innovative programs that welcome Russian-speaking Jews into synagogue life from 2011 to 2015.

COJECO, a UJA-Federation beneficiary agency, is the central coordinating body of the Russian-Jewish community of New York. Its mission is to facilitate the successful integration of Russian-speaking Jews into the greater American Jewish community, while preserving their unique cultural heritage.

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