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Metro Chicago Hillel and Base Chicago

Annual Report



A Letter from our Board Chair

In my first year as MCH board chair, it's been a privilege to oversee this incredible organization and its talented, dedicated rabbis, lay leaders, and professionals. This year has been a particularly significant one, as we've seen an exciting return to in-person engagement post-COVID and to a vibrant, strong community reminiscent of pre-pandemic life.

Everything Metro Chicago Hillel does — every coffee meeting, every Shabbat meal, every learning cohort, every Israel trip, every Purim party — starts with a deeply relational mindset. Our professional team thoughtfully takes time to get to know every single participant and understand what truly matters to them. Those rich relationships provide a strong and resilient foundation upon which a lively, meaningful, and interconnected community flourishes. But it doesn't stop there. The Base community has built healthy connections and partnerships with many institutions — university partners, JUF, and other Jewish and non-Jewish organizations — helping to create a thriving ecosystem in the Chicagoland area of meaningful experiences steeped in Jewish values.

Overall this year, we've reached a substantial number of individuals, including:

- 520 students across 19 campuses at least once, and 113 six or more times
- 1,045 young adults, and 540 at least three times

Here are a few highlights from this past year that stand out to me across our student and young adult work:

- We launched a creative new project that brought out 90 students to see live theater shows with Jewish themes, which included deep debriefing conversations afterward to make sure the experience didn't end when the curtains came down.
- We sent 4 students to Memphis on an alternative winter break trip for a hands-on experience learning about the history of the civil rights movement and its present challenges and opportunities.
- We led two Base retreats in downtown Chicago and at Camp Nageela in Indiana, spending full weekends engaging in Jewish learning, singing, and feeling what it is to be in deep relationship away from the distractions of daily life with 52 young adults.
- We established a monthly Rosh Chodesh group that brings a community together to meaningfully mark, learn about, and connect to each new month in the Jewish calendar.

As you'll see throughout this Annual Report, this has been a fantastic, inspiring year — and FY24 promises to be even better. We're thrilled to open a fourth Base location in Logan Square, led by Ariana & Rav Moshe Webber, who are already hard at work creating a lasting, strong community for young Jews in an area where Jewish institutional life is much more scarce. And we're preparing for an impactful year across our entire community, armed with deep knowledge about our students and young adults that we'll use to deliver influential Jewish experiences.

Finally, **thank you** to everyone who has made this work possible and continues to support our organization day in and day out. Without your commitment, Metro Chicago Hillel and Base would not be able to touch so many lives and have such a strong impact on our students and young adults. Your investment is crucial to ensuring that this vital work continues, fortifying Jewish identities and the Jewish community in the Chicagoland area for years to come.

Thank you for your continued support,

Liza Apothekar-Chodosh
Board Chair of Metro Chicago Hillel
Base since 2017



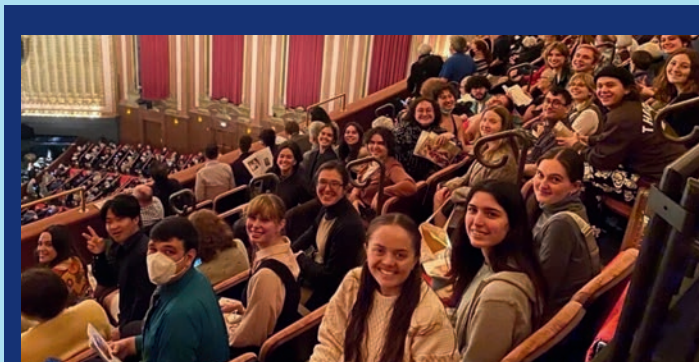


About Metro Chicago Hillel

Metro Chicago Hillel is a collection of Jewish communities of students and young adults around Chicago. We create inclusive, pluralistic, and welcoming spaces that engage and educate young folks across the spectrum of identity, background, and belief and enable them to reach their full potential. Through our classes, pastoral encounters, leadership development, and immersive experiences, we build communities committed to engaging with Jewish learning, living, justice, and Israel.

These are the values upon which Metro Chicago Hillel is based:

- *B'tzelem Elohim* (In the image of the Divine) – Every student is created in the Divine image. Everyone across the spectrum of identity, background, and belief deserves respect and belongs in our community.
- *Tzedek* (Justice) – Jewish values and texts inspire students and young adults to pursue justice.
- *Limmud* (Learning) – Students and young adults actively engage with Jewish text and learning.
- *Yisrael* (Israel) – Students and young adults are committed to Jewish peoplehood and experience a deep engagement with the Jewish people all over the world, the state and land of Israel, and all of her inhabitants.
- *Yehadut* (Jewish Life) – Students and young adults are actively engaged with Jewish practice, holidays, and traditions.



Mission: To enrich the lives of Jewish students and young adults so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world.

Vision: Metro Chicago Hillel envisions a world where every student and young adult is inspired to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning, and Israel.

45

WE PARTNERED WITH
OVER 45 COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATIONS

287

DAYS MCH AND BASE
CHICAGO OFFERED
PROGRAMMING

10%

OUR SOCIAL MEDIA
PLATFORMS GREW 10%
THIS YEAR

52%

OF OUR STUDENT BOARD LEADERS IDENTIFIED
AS FEMALE OR NONBINARY

1,111

SHABBAT MEALS SERVED



Our Engagement Cycle



At Metro Chicago Hillel and Base Chicago, there is a progression to the work we do. It starts with relationships, grows in Jewish learning, and results in strong, vibrant communities.

Everything begins with relationships: with and among our students and young adults. This is the core of all of our work. By deeply connecting with the young Jews on our campuses and in our Bases, we establish lasting connections. Those connections yield strong bonds, which allow us to connect our constituents with deep Jewish content. *Limmud* (Jewish Learning) gives students' and young adults' relationships a foundation of meaning that stretches back thousands of years. Those relationships, now steeped in Jewish learning, result in inspired, joyous communities of meaning that begin on campus and continue, through Base, well into adulthood.

As you can see from the stories and programs below, this structure allowed us to more effectively engage our students and young adults than ever before.

Relational

Deep relationships are at the core of Metro Chicago Hillel. To create such a wonderful community of active members, our whole team nurtures individual connections with students, young adults, colleagues, and community partners to ensure our spaces feel welcoming and open to all.

In unplanned check-ins over bagels in a Jewish Life Space, meetings scheduled weeks in advance, or meeting up with our students for coffee, we get to know our students in a very intentional way from intimate, long discussions about antisemitism on campus, or just talking about the latest TikTok trends. Our students, living on and off campus, away from home, know that they have a Jewish space that they can turn to.



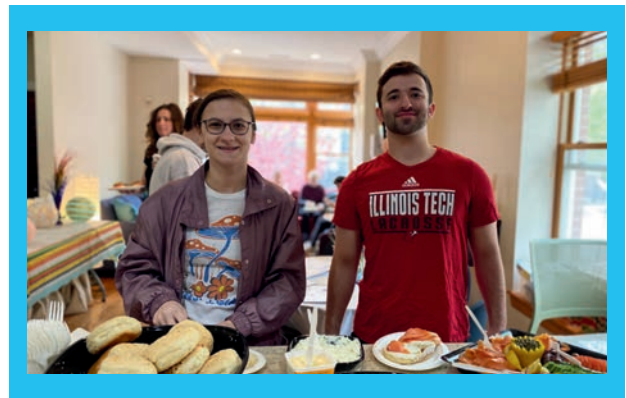
WE TOOK 111 STUDENTS TO COFFEE CHATS THIS YEAR ALONE!

“METRO CHICAGO HILLEL HAS CONNECTED ME TO AN AMAZING JEWISH COMMUNITY HERE IN CHICAGO AND I FEEL SO BLESSED AND SO LUCKY TO BE A PART OF METRO CHICAGO HILLEL AND TO BE JEWISH.
LAUREN VITERI
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY”





Highlights this year include DePaul Student Board President Sophia Klevit attending a DePaul women's basketball game with President Rob Manuel and Emily Lightman participating in a Student Government Panel about antisemitism.



Base rabbis make pastoral care the absolute heart of what they do. They create personal connections with our young adults and students by inviting the community into their homes and their personal lives. In coffee shops around the city, Rav Sarah, Rav Jonathan, and Rav Ezra, learn people's personal stories and hear about their Jewish journeys. Young adults planning weddings and baby namings seek out our rabbis, looking for guidance in navigating these lifecycle moments. Community members struggling with mental health seek support from rabbis who openly share their own stories, and students figuring out how to integrate their Judaism with other identities text our rabbis looking for guidance. In any week, our rabbis may hold space for people grieving the loss of a parent or sibling, stressing over finals or a job search, or wrestling with loneliness and the fear of remaining single.



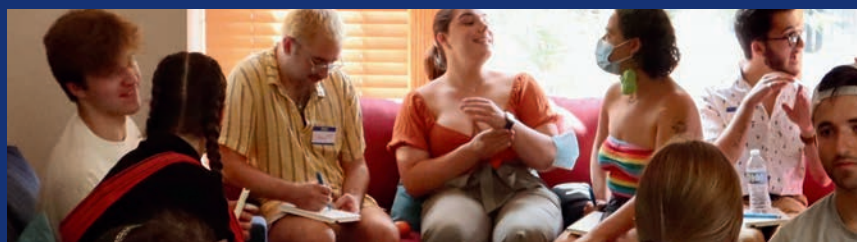


Learning + + + + + +

We bring our communities of students and young adults together to learn - about Judaism itself, but also about how its ideals, traditions, and rituals overlap and intersect with modern life. With it, we strive to create moments of teaching about Israel, social justice, and community practice. Some programs were single events, while others took place over multiple weeks or months throughout the year. Our campus staff gauges student interest, building programs around the Jewish calendar or current events. Our rabbis balance planning in advance to develop a thoughtful new curriculum while preserving the flexibility to respond to community needs with timely program offerings.

In August and September, Rabbi Sarah Mulhern of Silverstein Base Lincoln Park hosted “Jewish Perspectives on Abortion,” a six-part series for 48 participants and in November, she and Springboard Social Justice Fellow Sammi Galinson offered a modified version for 13 undergraduate students. In this series, participants brought their political views and individual experiences with abortion into conversation with traditional and modern sources of Jewish wisdom. The cohort dived deep into Jewish legal perspectives on abortion ethics and related issues like bodily autonomy and human dignity. As part of the course, a nurse practitioner in our community spoke about the impact of the new legal landscape on her work as an abortion provider and answered any medical or access questions participants had. Another Base community member and Ph.D. student in medical ethics taught how Jewish and Christian texts and ideas have been used in the American public conversation.

**WE HOSTED 225
LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES!**





With the increase in anti-Jewish incidents, students have sought out programming to better understand the history of antisemitism and to receive guidance on how to respond, should they encounter it on campus. Jewish Life Associate Katherine O’Neill hosted “Words to Action,” a session in partnership with the local Anti-Defamation League office. Seven students went through scenarios and shared their own experiences on campus while gaining hands-on skills in how to recognize and respond to instances of antisemitism with their fellow students. Rav Ezra of Luba & Bernard Friedman Base Loop and Katherine taught a three-part program called the Antisemitism Learning Fellowship. This cohort program was a direct response to our students’ expressed desire to learn more about how to address antisemitism. Thirteen students participated in the cohort, joining together over dinner to delve into the history of antisemitism, its many manifestations, and how we can combat and counter antisemitism together.

Many of our learning opportunities are driven by our students and young adults. UIC student Tim Graves proposed that MCH organize a group of 40 students to go see *Fiddler on the Roof* at the Lyric Opera and 30 students to Porchlight Theater’s production of *Cabaret*, since both concern history and topics of relevance to the Jewish community. In pre-show talk-backs and post-show reflection conversations, students learned about the history of each show and unpacked the artistic choices made in each production, as they considered what about each production remains relevant to our life today. DePaul Hillel President Sophia Klevit organized an Israeli dance class, led by DePaul contemporary dance professor Lin Batsheva Kahn, with eight students.



Community

The final component of the Metro Chicago Hillel experience is community. As a multicampus Hillel with three Bases all over the Chicagoland area, we build communities in each locale. For students, we are simultaneously bringing students together to create a city-wide MCH community, to bring more variety and diversity to our programs, our content, and our participants. This city-wide focus also allows us to bring students and young adults in contact with the broader Chicago Jewish community, preparing them for life beyond our MCH and Base worlds.

Community happens in Jewish spaces and all over the city. This starts right at the beginning of the program year where we use the High Holidays to bring participants together during the most solemn period of the Jewish calendar. Among the 32 High Holiday programs we ran last year, we offered services ranging from reform to traditional to social justice, giving space for the community to come together in prayers, meals, or learnings. Rabbi Jonathan Posner of Anna & Fred Doppelt Base Andersonville used the tradition of tashlich, a ritual of spiritual cleansing by a body of water, to bring 50 participants together on the gorgeous lakefront at Foster Beach, located conveniently near their Base.

Our programming this year was incredibly diverse. In our community, Rav Ezra is known for his big holiday bashes. He hosted a Moroccan tea party with 41 individuals and a Yom Ha'Atzmaut barbecue with 35 participants. Rav Jonathan hosted Rabbi Deborah Sack Mintz for an artist-in-residency weekend. Her melodies drew in 251 students, young adults, and community members for a weekend filled with Torah and spiritual expression.



CHECK OUT HOW MANY HOLIDAY EVENTS WE HOSTED:

10 ROSH HASHANAH	8 YOM KIPPUR	16 SUKKOT
5 HANNUKAH	10 PASSOVER	4 PURIM



Our students and young adults have lives beyond MCH and Base. To embrace that, and to give them access to other spaces and stories, we are regular collaborators with student groups and other organizations all over the city. On campus we partner with university administrators, religious organizations, clubs and groups, as well as other Jewish student organizations. These are driven by the relationships held by our students, and the partnerships they themselves create. One of our most successful perennial partnerships (lasting over a decade) has been with the Hindu Student Organization at Loyola University. We host an annual Hindu Shabbat, and this year, it brought over 100 students, and administrators together for a Shabbat meal where Jewish and Hindu students discussed the similarities and differences between their respective traditions.



Our young adult communities are often built in partnership with other organizations. Our most vital partner continues to be JUF's Young Leadership Division. From Shabbat dinners to full LEARN cohorts, our Base couples regularly connect with YLD to deepen the content of their programs, and reach a wider audience. Rav Sarah at Silverstein Base Lincoln Park works closely with JCFS Chicago, with whom she runs a monthly grief support group. And every Base couple connected with Moishe House and Repair the World on social and service activities.

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BASE HAS BEEN AN INCREDIBLE HOME FOR ME IN CHICAGO. BASE HAS PROVIDED A SPACE FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH, FROM SONG AND PRAYER TO LEARNING AND DISCUSSION. THROUGH BASE, I HAVE MET FRIENDS AND BUILT A COMMUNITY. I HAVE ALSO RECEIVED VALUABLE SUPPORT FROM THE BASE RABBIS. I ALWAYS LOOK FORWARD TO ATTENDING EVENTS AT BASE AND AM GRATEFUL TO HAVE BASE AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE CHICAGO JEWISH COMMUNITY.

JOEY BECKER, LAKEVIEW NATIVE

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WE ARE SO
EXCITED TO
SEE WHAT
NEXT YEAR
BRINGS!

Metro Chicago Hillel Staff

 Sarah Abrams Development Associate	 Rav Ezra Balsler Luba & Bernard Friedman Base Loop	 Rabbi Nicole Berne Assistant Director	 Charles Cohen Executive Director	 Laura Elkayam Luba & Bernard Friedman Base Loop
 Rav William Friedman Silverstein Base Lincoln Park	 Sammi Galinson Social Justice Fellow and Jewish Life Associate	 Lidor Ishayah Israel Fellow	 Matthew Levitt Director of Student Engagement	 Lizzie Mintz Jewish Life Associate
 Rav Sarah Mulhern Silverstein Base Lincoln Park	 Katherine O'Neill Jewish Life Associate	 Rav Jonathan Posner Anna & Fred Doppelt Base Andersonville	 Melissa Prober Operations Manager	 Hannah Swirnow Anna & Fred Doppelt Base Andersonville

Metro Chicago Hillel Board

Lisa Apothaker, Board Chair

Pierce Boyd-Bagby
Robert Footlik
Lisa Jericho

Suzie Lampert
Joshua Liss
Shira Marcks

Sam Melton
Nathan Redisch
Joshua Rinkov

Todd Roland
Andrew Rudick
Jonathan Rutman

Shoshi Shapiro
Ruth Wenger
Matthew Wolfson



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

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

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