

ISRAEL IMMERSION: THE KEY TO A STRONG JEWISH FUTURE

An Impact:NPO study on the impact of
long-term Israel programs on young Jewish adults

September 2022



Impact:NPO



הסוכנות היהודית
JEWISH AGENCY
FOR ISRAEL
ישראל
Every one of us, together.

מסע
masa
ISRAEL JOURNEY

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Executive Summary

"Israel Immersion," a report based on the study into immersive Israel experiences conducted by Impact:NPO, provides an unparalleled look into a powerful approach to engaging the next generation of Jews.

The study reveals stark differences between the beliefs and behaviors of three groups of American Jews between the ages of 20 and 45: alumni of long-term, immersive programs in Israel; short-term program participants; and individuals who have never been to Israel. The data paints a compelling picture that immersive long-term programs in Israel may be the single most effective tool to ensure Jewish continuity. Young Jewish adults who are often hardest to reach are transformed from uninvolved to extremely engaged community members active in local events and programs once they return home. While a vacation or short trip to Israel can lead to inspiration, a long-term experience is significantly more meaningful. A long-term experience, defined in this report as any fellowship facilitated by Masa Israel Journey lasting four or more months, cultivates a stronger Jewish identity, a lasting connection to Israel, and the greatest likelihood of living a Jewish life – personally and professionally.

Long-term programs in Israel are an essential investment in the next Jewish generation, cultivating personal growth, a desire to contribute to the global Jewish ecosystem, and a genuine motivation to lead. Nearly half (48%) of Masa alumni who work in nonprofits and educational institutions work for Jewish organizations, indicating a profound desire to give back to the Jewish world professionally following immersive Israel experiences. Across the board, alumni felt that their long-term programs in Israel improved their chances of success and provided valuable skills and knowledge, enabling them to further enrich the Jewish world in their careers.

Meanwhile, the behavioral impacts of long-term programs benefit the entire Jewish world. Long-term program alumni are nearly twice as likely to regularly participate in Jewish community programs or events after returning home than their peers who have never been to Israel (67% vs. 38% accordingly). A sizeable gap also exists in terms of young Jewish adults who regularly donate to Jewish-related charities and causes (45% vs. 33%) and Israel-related charities and causes (34% vs. 25%). These alumni are also more likely to agree strongly they feel comfortable sharing their opinions about Israel with others than short-term participants (42% vs. 31%), and they are over twice as likely to participate in Israel-related programs and events on a regular basis than both short-term participants and individuals who have never been to Israel (46% vs. 20%). At a time of increasing scrutiny of Israel, long-term programs in Israel provide effective and proactive solutions to the multilayered problems facing the Jewish world.

Introduction

Israel provides young Jewish adults with the means to develop deep and lasting connections to the Jewish people and Jewish heritage. At the same time, young Jews feel significantly less like they belong to the Jewish people than past generations (Pew Research Center, 2021). Additionally, most Jews between ages 25 and 40 have either disengaged with Israel entirely over disagreements with its policies or fear of social ostracization for supporting its existence.

Less than half of Jews 18 to 29 years old feel emotionally connected to Israel, the lowest share between all age groups surveyed by Pew in 2020. Long-term, immersive experience in Israel present the greatest opportunity to close this generational gap. The data in this study demonstrates that those who participate in a long-term experience in Israel are over twice as likely to feel strongly connected to the Israeli people and nearly three times as likely to agree strongly that Israel influences their Jewish identity than individuals who have never been to Israel. This connection has a lasting impact on Jewish communities at large—six-in-10 long-term alumni (62%) are active in their local Jewish communities, according to the data.

The Pew Study also shows that young Jews are less committed to raising a Jewish family than previous generations. Just one-third of American Jews are interested in whether their grandchildren will be Jewish. However, the data from this study indicates that 92% of long-term Masa alumni with children are committed to raising their children Jewish, compared with 62% of individuals who have never been to Israel.

Israel is the solution to these troubling trends. Young Jews from around the world visit Israel to pursue opportunities for educational and professional growth, often discovering additional layers of personal and spiritual growth in the process. **By authentically living like a local in Israel, young Jewish adults carve out a unique space in Israeli society and become inspired for a lifetime of active Jewish communal engagement that enriches the wider Jewish world.**

ABOUT LONG-TERM IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

Masa Israel Journey, a joint project of the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency for Israel, is the global leader in facilitating long-term, immersive experiences for young Jews around the world. With its vast network of program organizers, Masa has brought 90,000 young Jews from North America and 180,000 young Jews worldwide in total to Israel since its founding in 2004. 12,000 Masa Fellows arrive each year to pursue advancements in their careers, education, or personal journeys on specialized programs that vary in length, and their experiences impart a newfound motivation to engage with the Jewish world. While this study demonstrates that any amount of time in Israel can have significant impacts, those who participated in programs lasting four months or longer responded more favorably across virtually all survey questions.

ABOUT SHORT-TERM EXPERIENCES

For the purposes of this study, a short-term program is any peer group experience or program in Israel for young adults lasting under one month.

CONTROLLING FOR JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAMS

This study intends to gauge Jewish engagement among long-term Masa alumni, relative to short-term trip participants, and individuals who have never been to Israel. Masa alumni of Jewish Studies programs often begin their programs with deep connections to Jewish life evidenced by high rates of participation in early-age Jewish experiences such as summer camps, religious services, and Jewish day school and/or yeshiva programs.

To ensure an even analysis of differences between surveyed groups, responses from Masa alumni of Jewish Studies programs are not included in this report.



Career Explorers

Surveyed Masa alumni were segmented into subgroups based on a range of attitudes and behaviors.

The Career Explorers segment, largely consisting of millennials motivated by a potential career transition, mostly participated in a teaching fellowship or internship and engaged in supplemental leadership or professional training opportunities to advance their careers.

The Career Explorers segment best demonstrates the impact of long-term Israel experiences for individuals who lacked Jewish experiences in early life. While over nine-in-10 of the other respondents had a bar or bat mitzvah, just over a quarter of Career Explorers had one.

Prior to their Masa programs, only 16% of Career Explorers attended a Jewish camp; 9% regularly attended religious services; 14% attended Hebrew or religious school; 12% attended a Jewish day school or yeshiva; 17% participated in a Jewish youth group; and nearly half (48%) did not participate in any of the above.

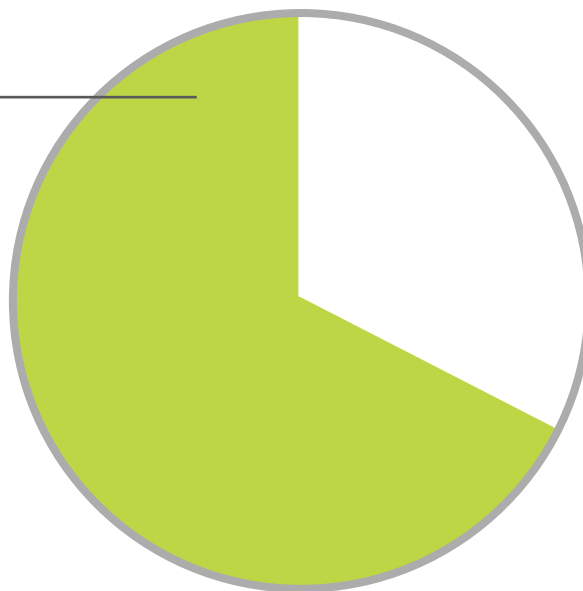
The Career Explorers group are also far less likely to affiliate with a specific Jewish denomination and are more than twice as likely to identify as "just Jewish" than other Masa alumni (48% vs. 21%).

While they enter with substantially fewer Jewish experiences than other long-term Masa Fellows, the majority of Career Explorers leave their programs feeling connected to Jews around the world, the Israeli people, and the state of Israel itself. 59% of Career Explorers agree strongly with the statement "I feel a strong connection with the Israeli people," and 53% agree strongly with the statement "Israel influences my Jewish identity."

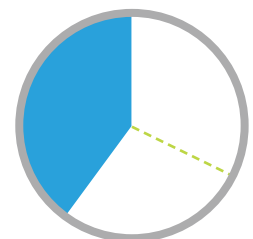
63%

of alumni in the Career Explorers segment say **BEING JEWISH IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THEIR LIVES,**

which is significantly higher than the proportion among individuals who have never been to Israel (36%).



Career Explorers

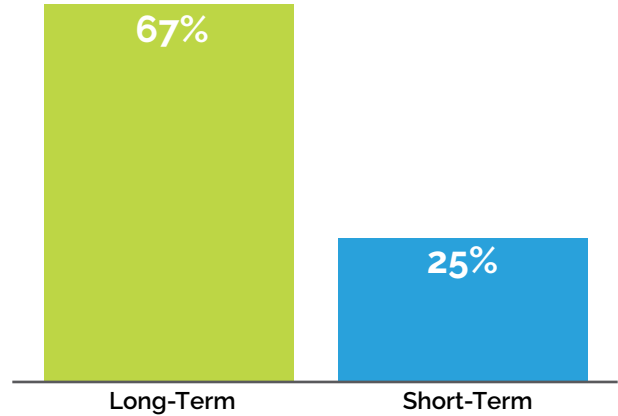


Never Been to Israel

Despite their low levels of Jewish engagement prior to the age of 18, **Career Explorers expressed high rates of Jewish connectedness and significant contributions to the Jewish world** long after their programs ended. This segment demonstrates that long-term, immersive experiences in Israel can be an effective tool for transforming unengaged young Jewish adults into active and engaged members of a wider Jewish community.

CAREER EXPLORERS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY

to have returned to Israel or prolonged their stay after their long-term program than short-term participants (67% vs 25%).

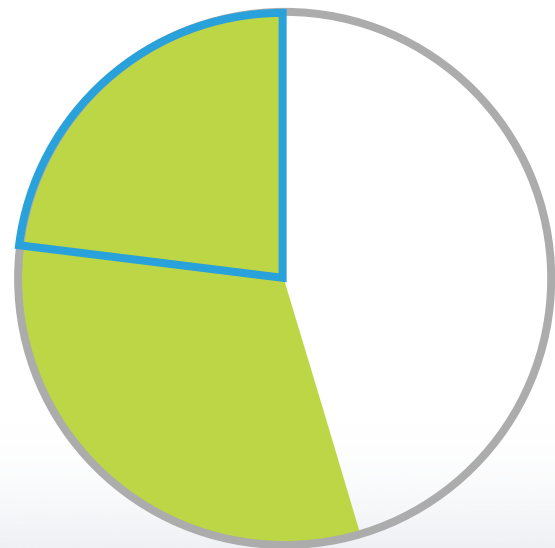


Additionally,

MORE THAN HALF OF THE CAREER EXPLORERS WHO WORK IN NONPROFITS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

work for Jewish organizations (59%).

A significantly higher percentage than among short-term participants who work for Jewish nonprofits and educational institutions (23%).

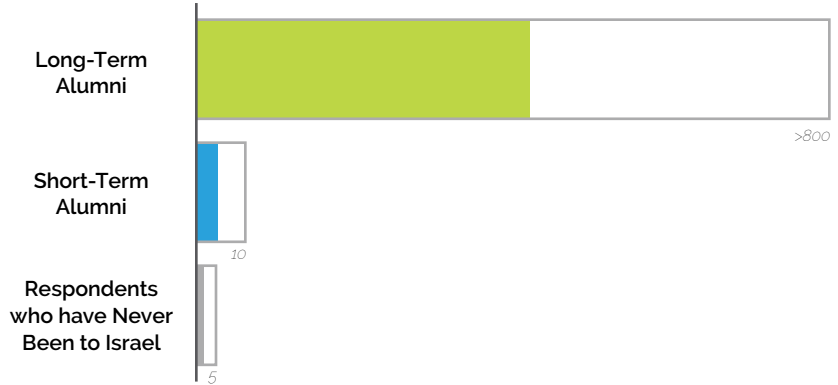


Inspiring Confidence and Activism

Survey data shows that **long-term programs in Israel embolden alumni's Jewish identities and encourage Jewish and pro-Israel activism.**

NEARLY HALF

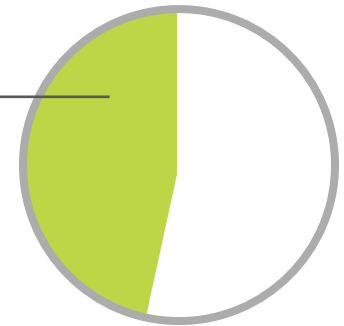
OF LONG-TERM ALUMNI are active in Israel-related causes/advocacy, compared with **three-in-10 short-term participants** and **one-in-five respondents** who have never been to Israel.



47%

OF LONG-TERM MASA ALUMNI

are active in social or environmental change causes/advocacy, indicating a strong interest in contributing to a stronger future after their programs end.



Arriving in Israel with Masa Israel Teaching Fellows (MITF), I didn't have the first idea of what to expect. While officially teaching English in Be'er Sheva, I personally spent the year discovering what identity means in a Jewish country that's also ethnically diverse. As a Jew of Color, I feel at home in Israel. When I walk down the street, I see people who look and pray like me. I found space for both of my identities—as a Black and Jewish woman—to coexist fully. Inspired by this experience, I continue to dedicate my professional and personal passions to making progress on racial and ethnic diversity in the States, particularly in the Jewish community in my role as Senior Jewish Life Associate at Metro Chicago Hillel.

- Caroline Spikner

Masa Israel Teaching Fellows alum, 2019; pursuing a dual degree – Master of Social Work and Master of Nonprofit Organizations at Case Western Reserve University



Jewish Communal Support

Long-term alumni are also inspired to participate in their local Jewish communities, donate to Jewish- and Israel-related charities, and engage in Israel-oriented programs or events—reinforcing the idea that alumni will propel the future of Jewish engagement and philanthropy.

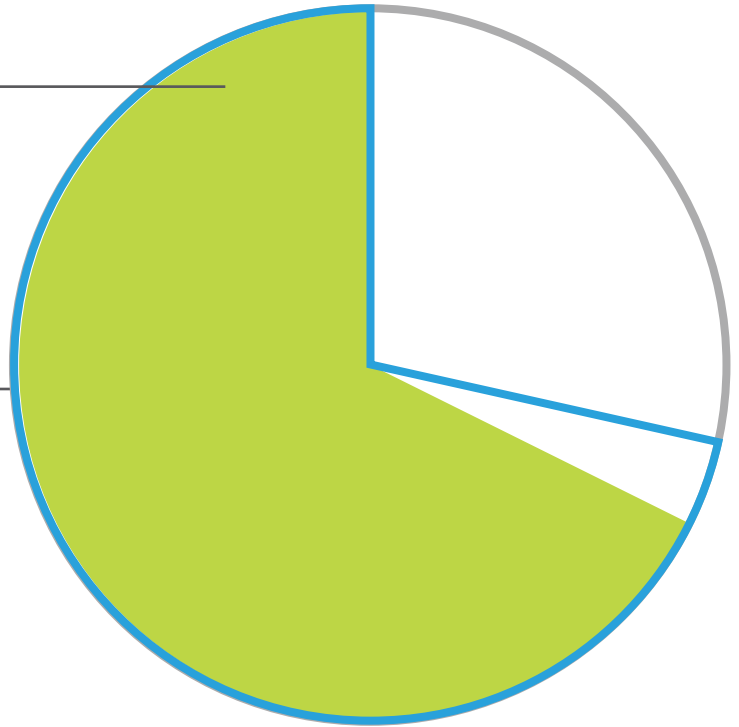
62%

of long-term Masa alumni are **ACTIVE IN THEIR LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITIES**

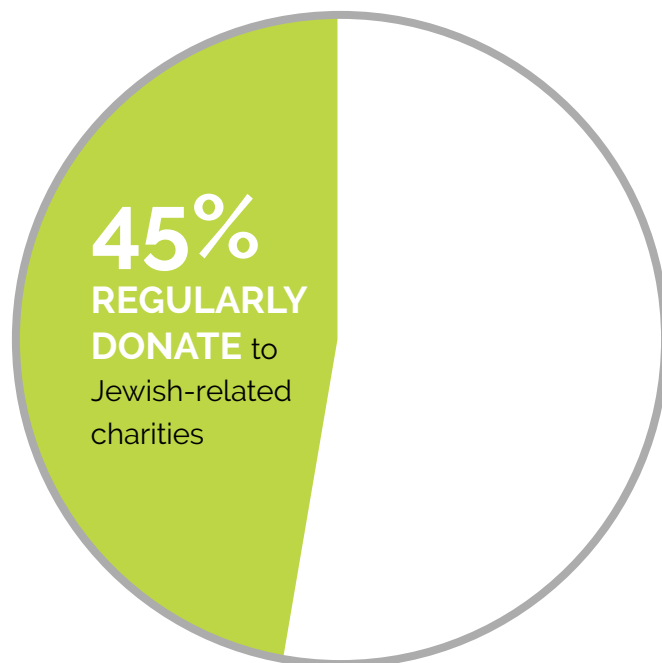
and

67%

of long-term Masa alumni **REGULARLY PARTICIPATE** in Jewish community programs or events



Long-term alumni also support their local communities and the entire Jewish world through philanthropy. Nearly half (45%) regularly donate to Jewish-related charities or causes outside of Israel.



These trends extend to support for Israel. Nearly half of long-term alumni regularly participate in Israel-oriented programs or events, and one third regularly donate to Israel-related charities.



When I returned to the States, my personal experience abroad made me feel more confident speaking about Israel on campus. I became more active in on-campus Israel advocacy and Jewish social events which resulted in me connecting with more Jewish peers on campus. Now, a larger majority of my social circle is made up of other Jews – something I wasn't intentionally seeking but found happily once my experience in Israel showed me how valuable and special the Jewish connection is.

- Jessie Sigler
Masa Career Alumnus, 2018

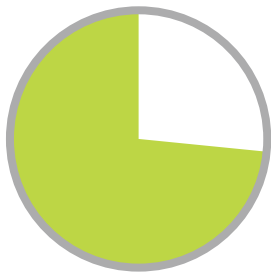


Personal Growth

A long-term program of 4 months or more provides significant growth opportunities throughout the generous timeframe.

Nearly three quarters of long-term alumni (72%) strongly agree that their Israel program "Helped me grow as a person."

Nearly half of long-term alumni strongly agree that their program "Helped me gain valuable skills and knowledge," "Helped me figure out who I want to be," and "Helped me move forward," indicating that long-term programs play a significant role in personal growth for most Masa alumni.



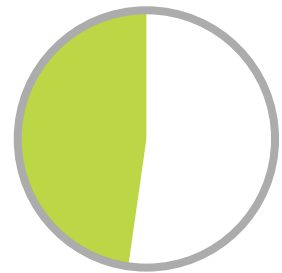
"Helped me grow as a person."



"Helped me gain valuable skills and knowledge."



"Helped me figure out who I want to be."



"Helped me move forward."



I never would have imagined what a profound impact studying abroad in Israel would have on me. Five years after my time at The Hebrew University, I am now the Director of Jewish Student Life at Gann Academy. Without my time on Masa, I wouldn't have taken the path to where I am today. During my time in Israel, I learned the value of investing in oneself. By virtue of surrounding yourself with new experiences and people from the global Jewish community, you have no choice but to grow both professionally and personally.

- **Simon Luxemburg**

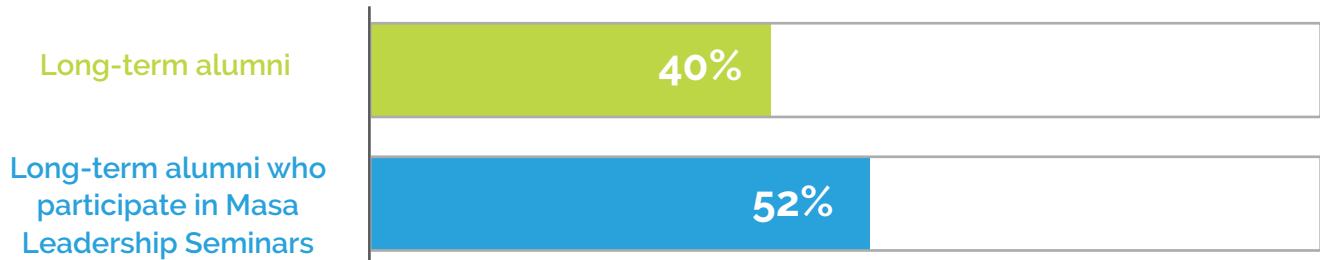
Masa Academic Alumnus, 2019

Director of Jewish Student Life at Gann Academy



Every year, 500 Masa Fellows are uniquely selected to participate in leadership summits that develop their leadership capabilities through plenaries, group activities, and workshops. Masa has partnered with the Kansas Leadership Center and utilizes the Adaptive Leadership framework developed by the Harvard Kennedy School to provide world-class leadership training opportunities for Masa Fellows.

Respondents who participated in a Masa Leadership Seminar were more likely than other long-term alumni to agree that others would ascribe various leadership skills to them. While 40% of long-term alumni believe others would very likely describe them as leaders, the number jumps to 52% among those who regularly participated in Masa Leadership Seminars.



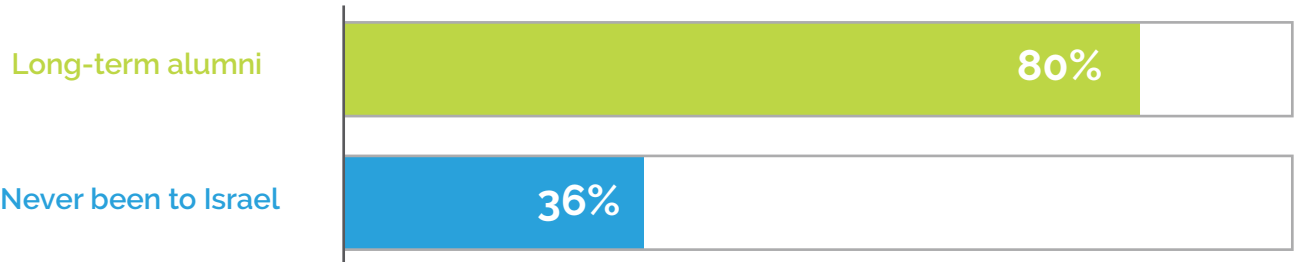
Leadership Seminar graduates are also more confident and purposeful in their leadership abilities—including communication, listening, embracing diversity and making change.



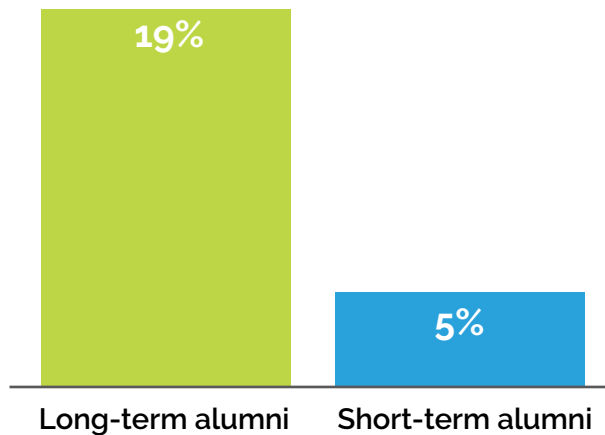
Building the Future of Jewish Communities

Long-term alumni are far more likely to contribute to their local Jewish communities and the Jewish world at-large once they return to their places of origin. This is demonstrated by several data points. Masa alumni are more than twice as likely to agree strongly that being Jewish is an important part of their lives than respondents who have never been to Israel. (80% vs. 36%).

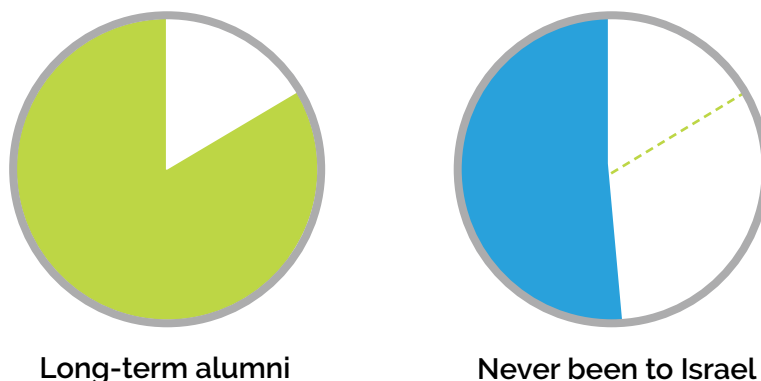
“Being Jewish is an important part of my life,”



Among full-time workers, nearly four times as many Masa alumni work for a Jewish organization or educational institution versus short-term participants (19% vs. 5%), **indicating a strong desire to contribute to the Jewish world** following a long-term, immersive experience in Israel.



Nearly nine-in-ten long-term alumni with a partner or spouse report that **their partner or spouse identifies as Jewish**, compared to just over half of individuals who have never been to Israel (87% vs. 54%).



92% of long-term alumni with children **plan to raise their children solely as Jewish**, compared to 62% of individuals who have never been to Israel.

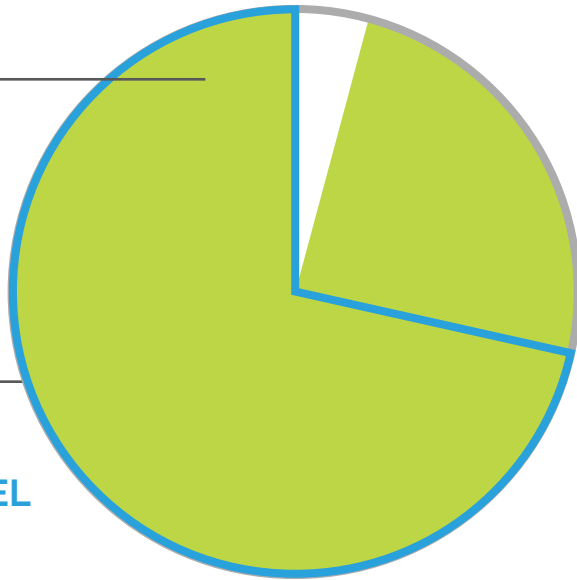
92%

of long-term alumni **WILL RAISE THEIR CHILDREN JEWISH**

compared to

62%

of individuals who have **NEVER BEEN TO ISRAEL**



Before my Masa program in Israel, I was disconnected from my Jewish roots and felt something was missing from my life. When I moved back to the United States, I knew I wanted to keep nurturing the part of my Jewish soul that blossomed in Israel. This led me to find fulfilling employment building Jewish community in North America, sharing the passion and love of Judaism I discovered in Israel. I 100% attribute my lifelong work as a Jewish nonprofit professional to my Masa program.

- Charlene Green

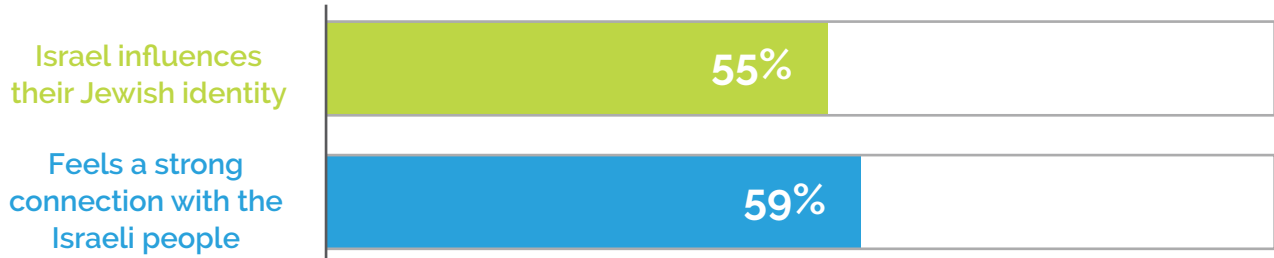
Masa alumnus, 2008; Director of Changemaker Growth and Experience at the Jewish Federations of North America



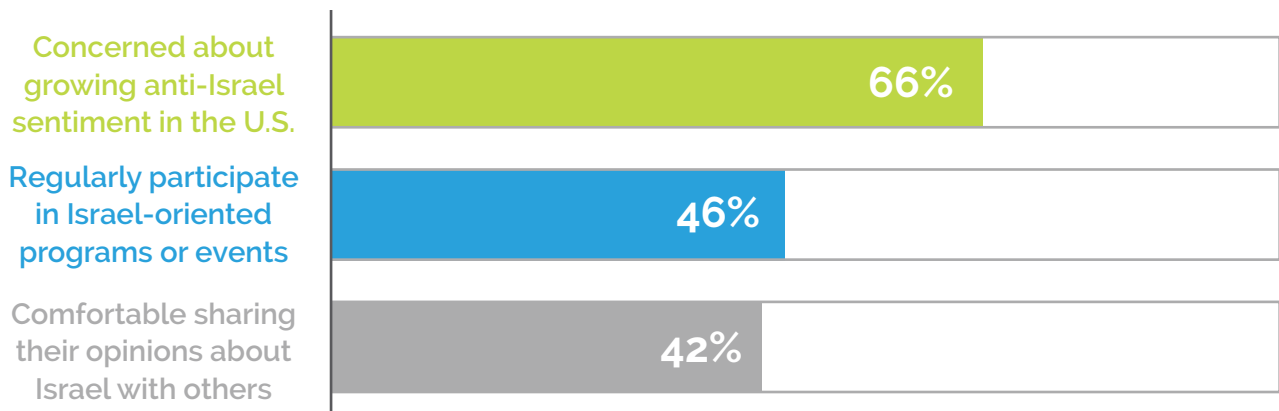
Advocacy and New Conditions

Long-term Masa alumni are likely to maintain Jewish relationships, in friendship, romance or in professional connections. They are also significantly connected to Israel and Israelis, express concern for Israel, and advocate for Israel through personal and organized efforts.

Over half (55%) of long-term alumni strongly agree that Israel influences their Jewish identity, and six-in-ten (59%) feel a strong connection with the Israeli people.



Two thirds of long-term alumni (66%) are concerned about growing anti-Israel sentiment in the US, and nearly half (46%) regularly participate in Israel-oriented programs or events. Additionally, four-in-ten (42%) long-term alumni strongly agree that they feel comfortable sharing their opinions about Israel with others, indicating a long-term program's ability to inspire pro-Israel activism.



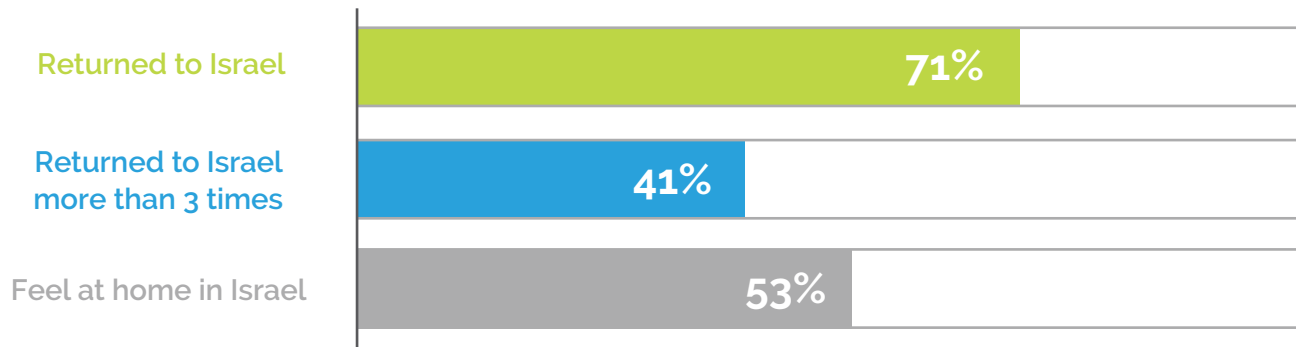
My Masa program changed my life forever. Although I grew up in a Jewish household, it was not until my trip to Israel that I felt this immense connection to Israel and Jewish culture. My husband, who also went to Israel on an educational trip, shares my deep connection to Israel. We recently returned from 10 days in Israel with our 10-month-old son and we will have these memories forever. I loved being able to share this special country with my family, and I look forward to many more trips with my family in Israel in the future.

- Molly Brandes

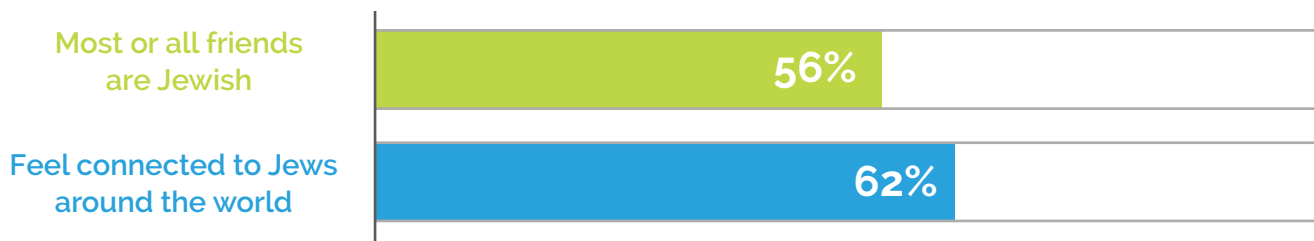
Masa Academic alumnus, 2012



Long-term alumni demonstrate their connectedness to Israel and the wider Jewish world in several other ways. 71% returned to Israel after their program with 41% returning three or more times or prolonging their stay. Most long-term alumni (53%) strongly agree that they feel at home in Israel.



Over half of long-term alumni (56%) report that most or all of their friends are Jewish, and nearly two thirds (62%) strongly agree that they feel connected to Jews around the world.



There's arguably no more powerful platform to reconnect young adults with their Jewish roots than through long-term experiences in Israel. I emerged from my Masa program with a defined Jewish identity and solidified sense of belonging to the global Jewish community. I have channeled the enduring power of our long-term experiences in Israel into my professional and personal life back in the United States, inspired by the transformative journey that has indelibly shaped my life as a Jewish woman.

- Roxanna Donay

Masa Gap Year alumna, 2008; Senior Director, NuRoots Strategic Partnerships at The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles



The “So What” Behind the Data

A long-term program in Israel is more than an internship, a volunteer opportunity, or an academic step. Insights from this survey indicate that long-term alumni feel much stronger about their Jewish identity, sense of belonging to the Jewish people, and connection to Israel and Israelis than those who participated in short-term programs or no trip at all. There are also significant behavioral differences. Long-term Masa alumni are also significantly more engaged in their local Jewish communities and with Israel than their peers in either of these groups.

A young Jewish adult who is more inclined to live a Jewish life and secure the Jewish future makes waves throughout the entire Jewish world. The findings from this study point to the potential for the tens of thousands of young Jewish adults from the United States and around the world who return from Masa programs every year to lead lives of Jewish communal contribution. Their experiences in Israel provide clear and direct benefits within their local communities and throughout the entire Jewish world.

Conclusions

The impact of a long-term program stretches far beyond the individual. In many cases, the entire Jewish world benefits. Long-term alumni provide solutions to the problems facing the Jewish world, and the programs they participate in are the key to the unlocking the Jewish future.

The data in this study demonstrates that long-term, immersive experience in Israel create genuine behavioral changes among alumni, helping them unlock their full potential as future Jewish leaders and active community members. These alumni go from tourists to natives in the process of becoming actively engaged with their Jewish identities. In many cases, they go from unengaged to engaged, enriching their Jewish communities and the entire Jewish world in the process.

Whether young Jewish adults are inspired to volunteer, build their academic credentials, develop their professional skills and boost their careers through internships, or gain other valuable life experience before launching into their next steps, evidence shows that long-term, immersive programs in Israel are much more than vehicles for personal development – they are a proactive solution to the challenges facing Jewish continuity.

A cohort of young Jewish adults that is engaged, active within their communities, and deeply connected with the entire Jewish world will provide significant benefits locally and internationally. This study demonstrates the limitless benefits unlocked from Israel immersion, beginning with inspiring engagement among the unengaged. In considering which tools are necessary to secure the Jewish future, one must consider the evidence that long-term programs in Israel are key.

Appendix

METHODOLOGY

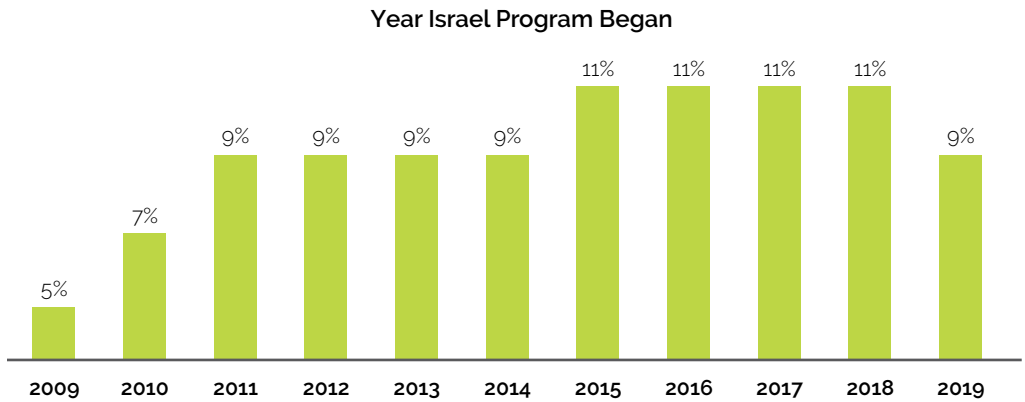
1,256 interviews were conducted among relevant respondents:



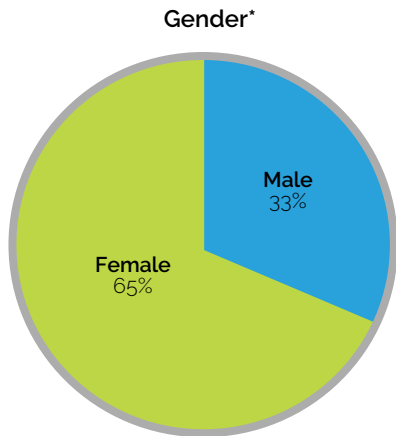
*Note: A total of 2,433 interviews were conducted. Respondents who took part in long-term Jewish Studies or Yeshiva programs (n=344) or non-Masa Israel programs of 1-3 months (n=114), as well as who participated in non-peer trips (n=464) or who visited Israel only as kids/teens (n=255), were all excluded from this analysis

Who are the Masa alumni?

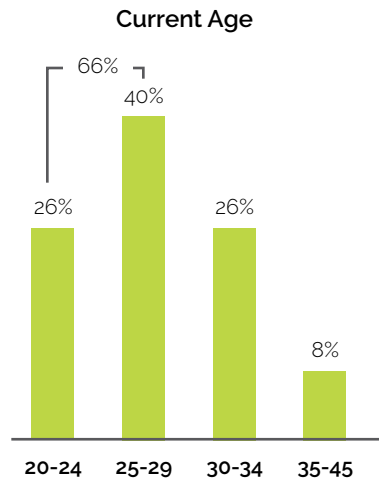
The Masa sample included a range of alumni from 2009-2019.



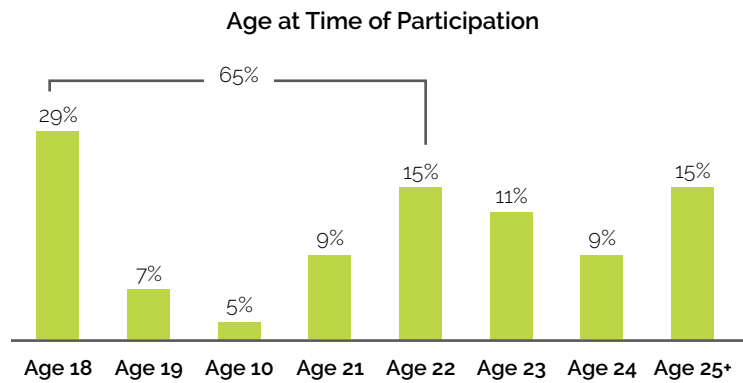
Two-thirds of the Masa alumni respondents were female, and two-thirds were under age 30 at the time they completed the survey.



*2% non-binary or no response



The alumni had most often participated in a Masa Israel Journey immediately after high school (at age 18), and two-thirds had taken part in a program by the time of college graduation or soon thereafter (age 22).



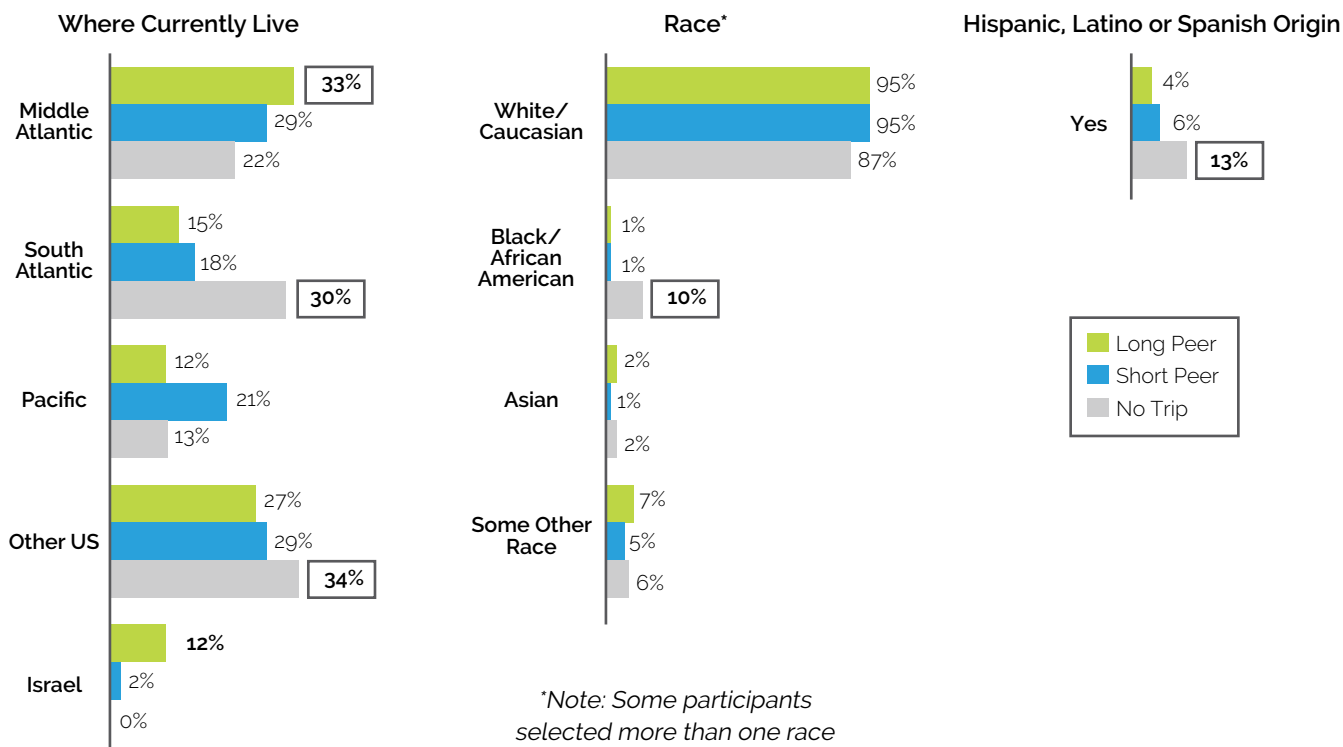
Most younger alumni participated in Gap Year study programs.* Post-college alums most often took part in internships or English teaching fellowships.

Study	<p>GAP YEAR (29%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participated right after high school (age 18) • Most raised Orthodox or Conservative • Highest concentration of Jewish youth group participants • Actively engaged in their Jewish community • Most likely to have visited Israel previously; 9% stayed/Aliyah 	<p>INTERNSHIP (27%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participated after college • Most raised Reform, Conservative or just Jewish • Most likely to say program made resume more competitive • 21% stayed on in Israel or made Aliyah 	Work
	<p>STUDY ABROAD (12%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participated at ages 19-22 • Raised in a mix of denominations • 7% stayed on in Israel or made Aliyah 	<p>TEACH ENGLISH (26%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participated after college • Most raised Reform or just Jewish • Most likely to have participated in Masa Leadership Summit • Most likely to be described by others as a leader • 18% stayed on in Israel or made Aliyah 	
	<p>VOLUNTEERING (15%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participated before or right after college • Raised in a mix of denominations (non-Orthodox) • Most likely to be active in social/environmental change causes • 15% stayed on in Israel or made Aliyah 		

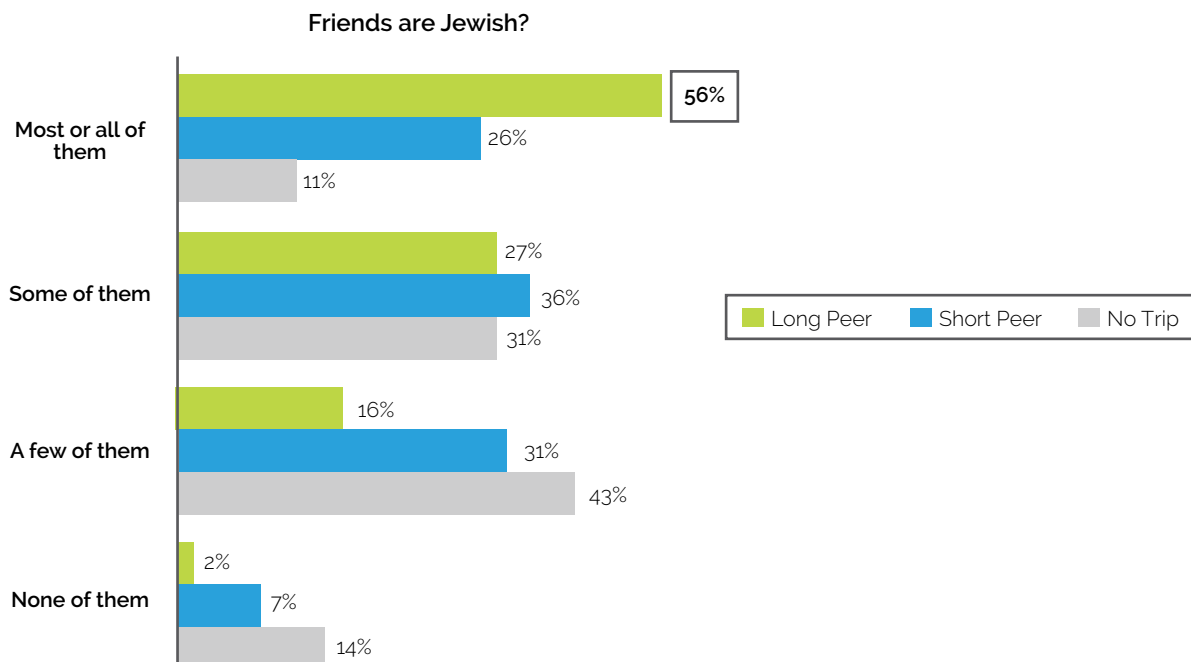
*Note: Some participants of the survey took part in dual or multiple programs

HOW DO RESPONDENTS COMPARE?

Long Peer participants of the survey are more concentrated in the Middle Atlantic than other groups. They are also the most likely group to have made Aliyah/currently live in Israel. No Trip participants are the most geographically, racially and ethnically diverse group.



Long Peer participants are fairly evenly distributed across the denominational spectrum, though they are far more likely to be Orthodox and/or to have mostly Jewish friends than Short Peer participants or those who did No Trip.



Unlike Long Peer participants in general, Career Explorers were most often raised 'Just Jewish' and with few if any Jewish formative activities, like bar/bat mitzvah.

