

Bronfman Youth Fellowships in Israel 2008 Alumni Survey

Research and Analysis by
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5.09

OVERVIEW

Purpose

The 2008 BYFI Alumni Survey was designed to map the background, attitudes, and opinions of alumni of the Bronfman Youth Fellowships in Israel (BYFI), with a special focus on their involvement in the Jewish community. This data will inform strategic choices for BYFI alumni programming and support the identification of areas where BYFI alumni might be interested in enhancing their Jewish community involvement. The recent growth in the number and scope of leadership programs for young Jews highlights the relevance of studies such as this one, which considers the longer-term influence of one such initiative and explores the coherence of its alumni network. We hope it will help the BYFI alumni community to further develop its own networks and that it might inform conversation in the broader Jewish community about the needs and interests of the rising generation of Jewish leaders under the age of 45.

Methodology

540 invitations to complete the survey were emailed between 16 October and 30 November 2008 to all alumni for whom BYFI has email addresses; 421 respondents began the survey and 367 completed it. In addition to the 119 non-respondents, an additional 32 alumni were unable to be reached because their email addresses were not available. With respect to those who received an invitation, the overall response rate was 78% and the completion rate was 68%. With respect to the alumni community as a whole, 73% started the survey and 64% completed it. Responses, including from people who currently feel less involved in alumni life, were distributed evenly across the 22 years of the BYFI program. The overall high response and completion rates suggest that these findings represent the attitudes, opinions, and connections of BYFI alumni as a whole.

In the hope of yielding a more complex and accurate portrait of the individuals we surveyed, certain questions about identity and affiliation invited respondents to “mark all that apply.” This approach recognizes the fluidity of modern identity and the multiplicity of individuals’ organizational ties. The survey offers a nuanced and textured portrait of the lives and identities of BYFI alumni. The survey reveals a diverse network of young Jews leading busy lives, with multiple identities, commitments, and connections that shift with age, profession, and life stage.

KEY FINDINGS

I. DEMOGRAPHICS

Key Finding 1: Demographic Diversity

BYFI alumni come from diverse backgrounds.

Key Finding 2: Geographic Concentration

A plurality of all BYFI alumni are concentrated in New York and Boston, while BYFI alumni older than 22 years old also have a significant presence in Baltimore/Washington D.C. and San Francisco.

Key Finding 3: Broad Range of Professional Identities

BYFI alumni have multiple professional identities and are employed in a wide variety of fields: private/for-profit/corporate work.

Key Finding 4: Importance of Nonprofit Work

Many BYFI alumni are professionally committed to nonprofit work, Jewish communal work, and social entrepreneurship.

II. ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS

Key Finding 5: Powerful Sense of Jewish Identity

BYFI alumni are nearly twice as likely than 19 to 39 year-old American Jews in general to say that being Jewish is very important to them.

Key Finding 6: Clear Alignment with Core Values

BYFI alumni evidence a strong and apparently shared commitment to Jewish peoplehood, pluralism, and social obligation.

Key Finding 7: Beyond Denominational Labels

Not only do BYFI alumni tend to avoid denominational labels, but between childhood and adulthood they have shifted away from denominational labels far more dramatically than the general population of 19 to 39 year-old American Jews.

Key Finding 8: Strong Connection to Israel

Israel is important in the lives of BYFI alumni.

III. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP

Key Finding 9: Belonging and Believing

BYFI alumni are active as members of many different types of Jewish and non-Jewish communities and organizations.

Key Finding 10: Commitment to Social Change and Progressive Politics

BYFI alumni are deeply involved in both Jewish and non-Jewish nonprofit endeavors, but for strikingly different reasons.

Key Finding 11: Generosity to Jewish and Non-Jewish Causes Alike

Overall, BYFI alumni give slightly more time and money to non-Jewish causes than to Jewish ones—and between 10% and 15% give neither.

Key Finding 12: Moderate Levels of Volunteerism

In general, BYFI alumni are slightly more likely to serve as volunteers/lay leaders in non-Jewish organizations than in Jewish ones, although the nature of their involvement changes as they age, marry, and have children.

IV. PERCEPTIONS OF THE BYFI ALUMNI COMMUNITY

Key Finding 13: Building a Pluralistic Network

Alumni are near-unanimous in their agreement that the BYFI summer taught them to value Jewish pluralism and that the alumni community connects them with a diverse and pluralistic group of Jews.

Key Finding 14: Importance of Jewish Learning

Just over half of all alumni feel that the BYFI summer made Jewish text study important to their Jewish identity.

Key Finding 15: Staying Connected to Other Alumni Over the Long Term

The BYFI alumni network demonstrates the strength of loose ties.

Key Finding 16: Positive Characterization of the BYFI Alumni Community

Across life-stages and interests, a majority of BYFI alumni uses the same two words to describe the alumni community -- intellectual and accomplished--and there is wide agreement that the community is ambitious, diverse, and high-quality.

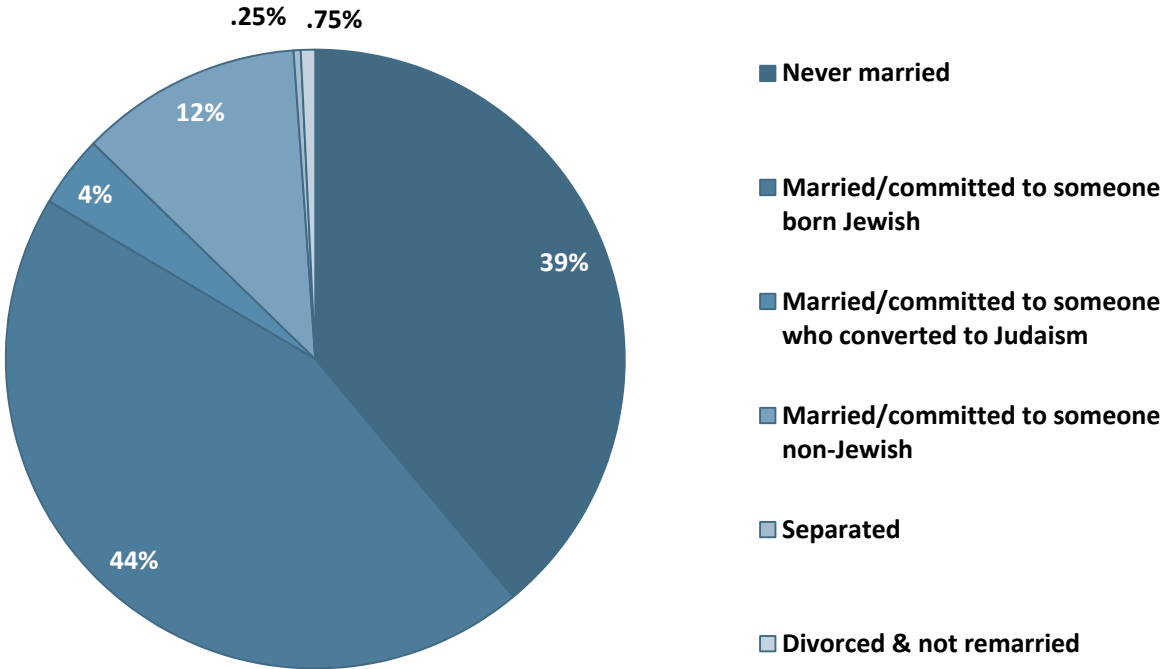
KEY FINDINGS

I. DEMOGRAPHICS

Key Finding 1: Demographic Diversity

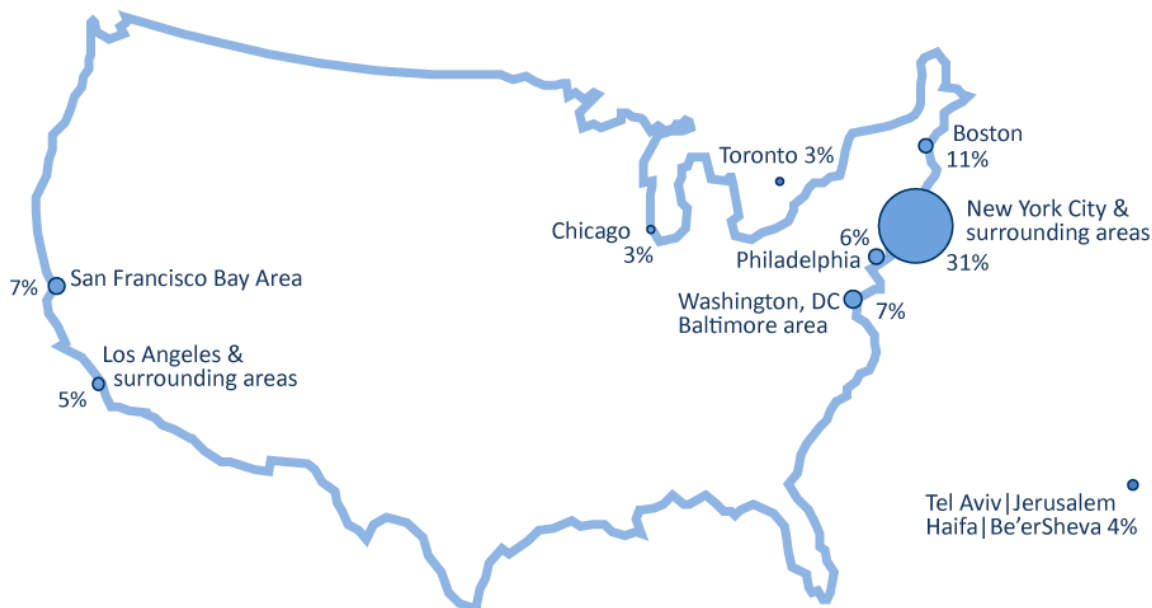
BYFI alumni come from diverse backgrounds. 85% were born in the United States, 7% in Canada, 2% each in Israel and the former Soviet Union, and the remainder elsewhere. They range in age from 17 to 41. 53% of respondents were female and 47% male; 1 respondent identified as transgender/intersex. 88% of respondents identified as heterosexual, 8% identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and 4% declined to state. Of those aged 23 and older, 39% never have been married/committed and 1% are separated or divorced. 73% of those married or committed have a spouse who was born Jewish, 7% have a spouse who converted to Judaism, and 20% have a non-Jewish spouse. 14% of alumni aged 23-32 and 73% of alumni 33 and older have children.

Marital Status 23+



Key Finding 2: Geographic Concentration

A plurality of all BYFI alumni are concentrated in New York and Boston, while BYFI alumni older than 22 years old also have a significant presence in Baltimore/Washington D.C. and San Francisco. 20% live outside the largest Jewish population centers worldwide, while 4% live in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, or Be’ersheva, and 3% live in Toronto.



Key Finding 3: Broad Range of Professional Identities

I think my work could be of great value to a lot of alums who are engaged in social ventures of various kinds and would welcome opportunities to share/contribute to the alumni community in that way.¹

BYFI alumni have multiple professional identities and are employed in a wide variety of fields: private/for-profit/corporate work (20%), government work (6%), and the arts (9%). 10% are self-employed, and 4% identify as stay-at-home parents or caregivers. 45% of BYFI alumni say they are full- or part-time students; as of October-November 2008, 2% were neither employed nor students.

Key Finding 4: Importance of Nonprofit Work

Many BYFI alumni are professionally committed to nonprofit work, Jewish communal work, and social entrepreneurship. 29% work for nonprofit organizations, and 19% self-identify as social entrepreneurs (whether as founders, funders, employees, or board members). About one fifth of alumni work for Jewish organizations; 25% of them are clergy, 27% are in Jewish education, and the remaining 48% work in other areas of Jewish organizational life.

¹ All quotes in this report are from the open-ended answers portion of the 2008 BYFI Alumni Survey

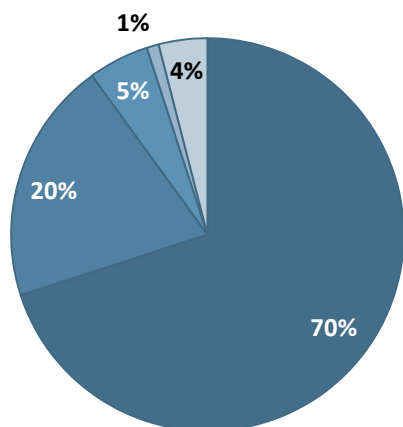
II. ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS

Key Finding 5: Powerful Sense of Jewish Identity

I loved my time as a Bronfman Fellow in Israel and do believe it helped me understand who I am as a Jew today.

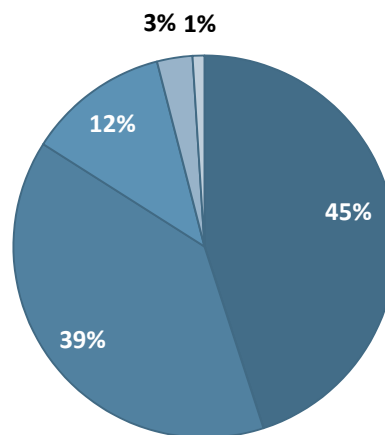
BYFI alumni are nearly twice as likely than 19 to 39 year-old American Jews in general to say that being Jewish is very important to them.² Virtually all BYFI alumni agree, and many strongly agree, that being Jewish involves celebrating Jewish holidays, being part of a Jewish community, and feeling part of the Jewish people. Among college-age alumni, being Jewish most strongly involves engaging in Jewish learning, as well. For alumni 23 and older with children, it very much includes caring about Israel and having a rich spiritual life.

BYFI Alumni



Very Important
 Fairly Important
 Not Very Important
 Not At All Important
 Not Sure

NSAJ 2007



Very Important
 Fairly Important
 Not Very Important
 Not At All Important
 Not Sure

BYFI was an unbelievably formative experience, and continues to play a tremendous role in my life

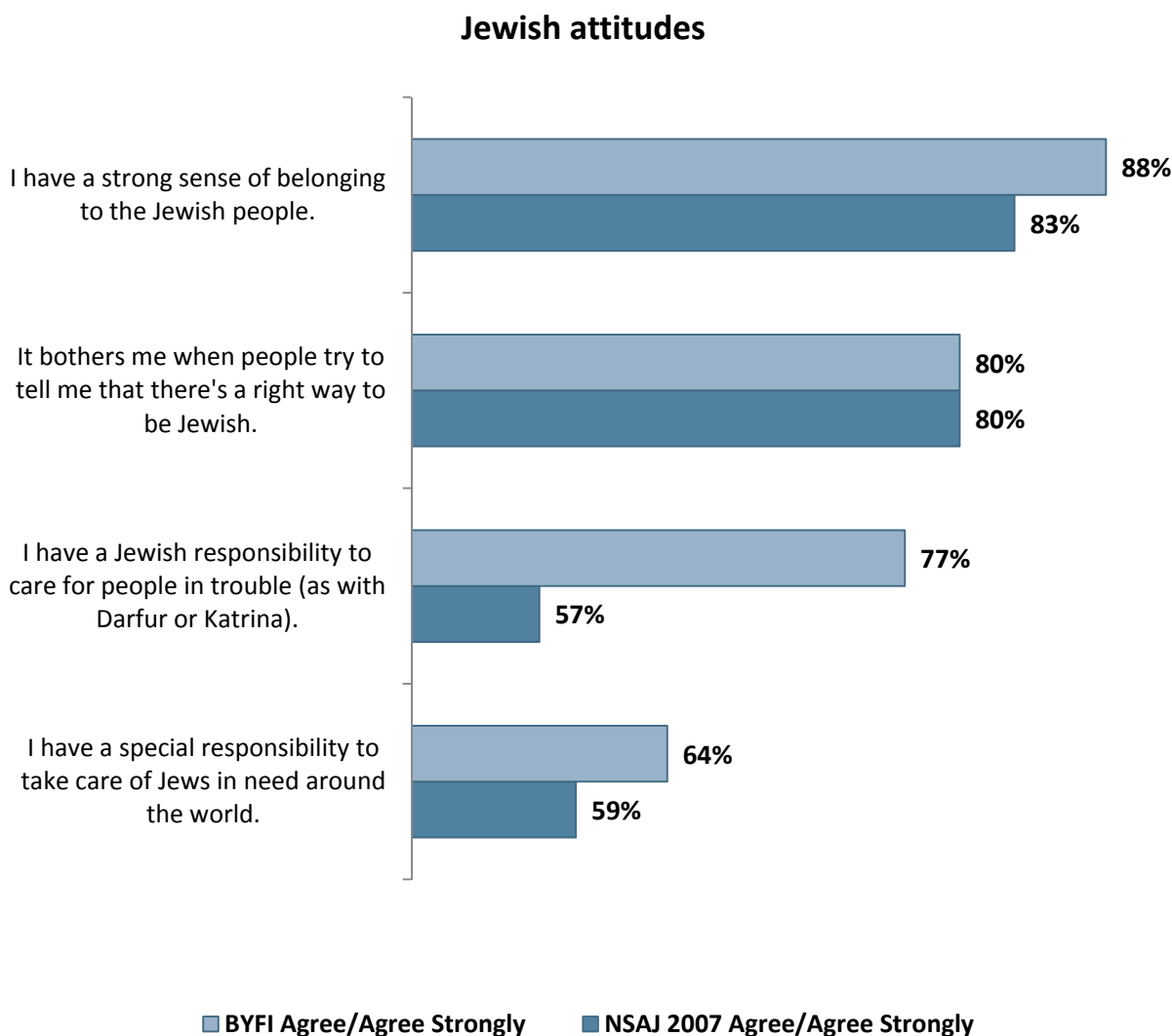
² Source: Cohen, Steven M. (2007). National Survey of American Jews.

Key Finding 6: Clear Alignment with Core Values

BYFI alumni evidence a strong and apparently shared commitment to Jewish peoplehood, pluralism, and social obligation. At every life-stage, they strongly agree with the following statements:

1. I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people;
2. It bothers me when people try to tell me that there's a right way to be Jewish; and
3. I have a Jewish responsibility to care for people in trouble (as with Darfur or Katrina).

On the first two of these statements, they strongly agree at similar rates as their 19 to 39 year-old Jewish peers, but on the 3rd statement—the commitment to helping non-Jews—they outpace their peers by 77% to 48%.

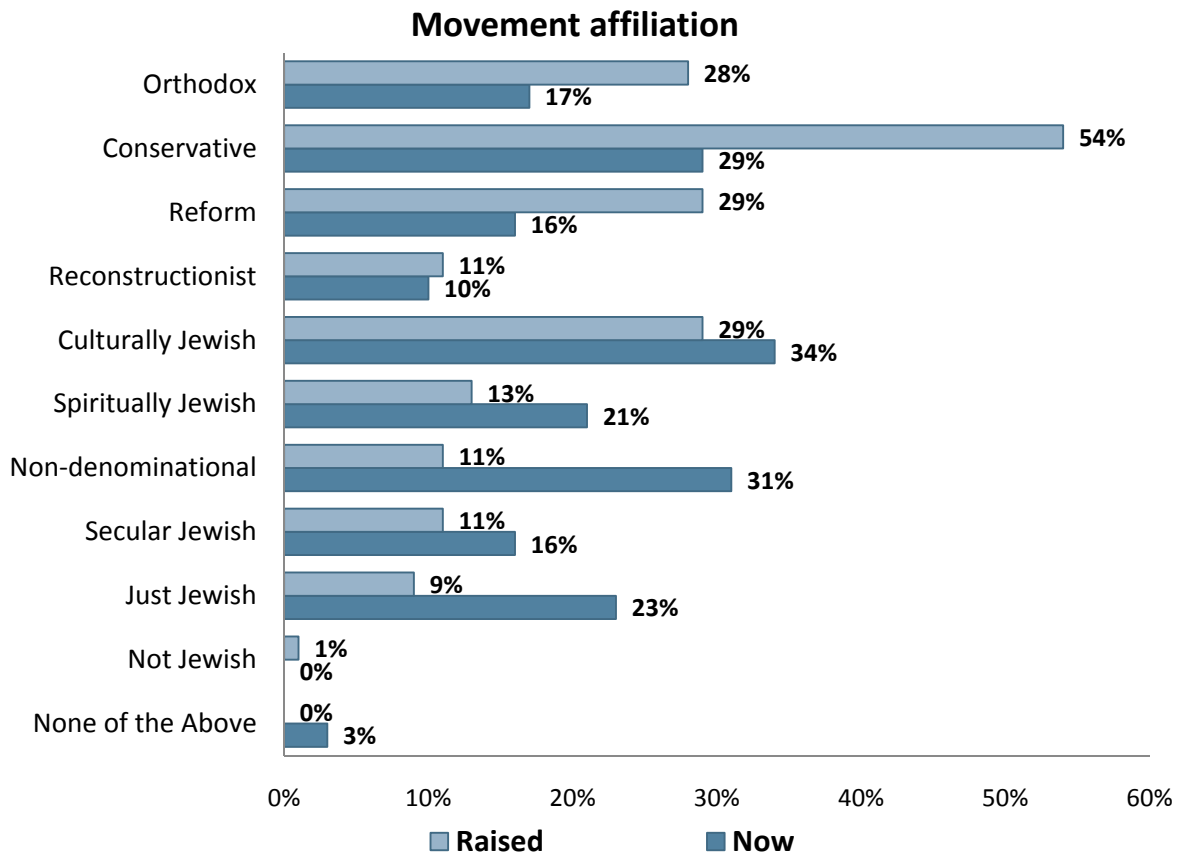


Key Finding 7: Beyond Denominational Labels

The BYFI summer was one step on my search for my own place within Judaism; the search has proven to be a long one and the ‘right fit’ did not come quickly or immediately after the summer, so although I am not currently involved with many BYFI alumni and events, I treasure the experience and perhaps the Jewish dots will be connected sometime in the near future.


Not only do BYFI alumni tend to avoid denominational labels, but between childhood and adulthood they have shifted away from denominational labels far more dramatically than the general population of 19 to 39 year-old American Jews. While more BYFI alumni (92%) than their peers (78%) describe themselves as having been raised in a denomination, fewer of them (59%) currently identify with one than their peers (61%)—a 36% decline among BYFI alumni, as compared with a 21% decline overall. BYFI alumni are more likely to

describe themselves as “culturally Jewish” or “non-denominational” than as affiliated with any one movement. They were also more likely to describe themselves as “just Jewish” or “spiritually Jewish” than as affiliated with the Orthodox, Reform or Reconstructionist movements.




Key Finding 8: Strong Connection to Israel

Israel is important in the lives of BYFI alumni. While 36% have returned to Israel for a long stay of 4 months or more since graduating high school, 64% plan to visit Israel in the next three years. About half say they are always or often proud or excited about Israel, and about three quarters say they are never ashamed of Israel. When asked for the many reasons they attend activities in Jewish organizations, about 41% say that their wish to support Israel is “to some extent” or “to a great extent” one of those reasons. 38% say that being Jewish “very much” or “somewhat” involves “supporting Israeli organizations.” However, BYFI alumni reported feeling somewhat closer to non-Jewish Americans than they do to Israelis.



Bronfman provided me with my first adult, critical experience of Israel, which was very important for me.

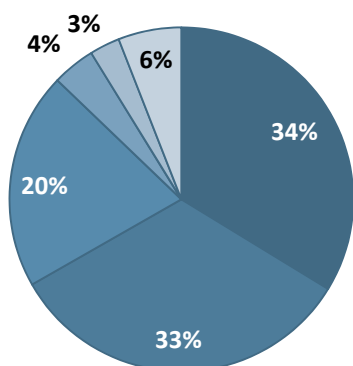


III. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP

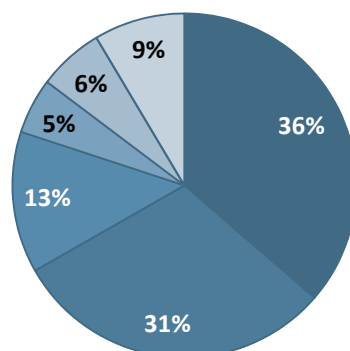
Key Finding 9: Belonging and Believing

BYFI alumni are active as members of many different types of Jewish and non-Jewish communities and organizations. More than half of BYFI alumni are members of more than one Jewish organization or congregation. About a quarter are members of more than two, and 38% are affiliated with two or more non-Jewish groups. 60% are members of one or more Jewish congregation or spiritual community, 54% of one or more other type of Jewish organization, and 61% of one or more non-Jewish community or organization. Just over a quarter are members of two or more congregations.

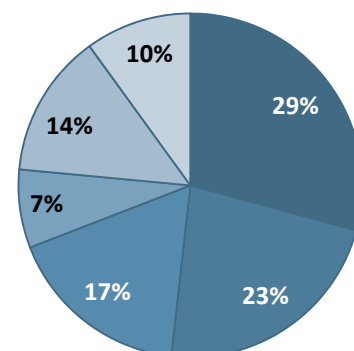
Do you see yourself as a part of or a “member” of a Jewish congregation, minyan, spiritual community or chavurah?



Do you see yourself as a part of or a “member” of any other type of Jewish organization?



Do you see yourself as a part of or a “member” of any non-Jewish community or organization?



■ No, none ■ Yes, one ■ Yes, two ■ Yes, three ■ Yes, four + ■ Not sure

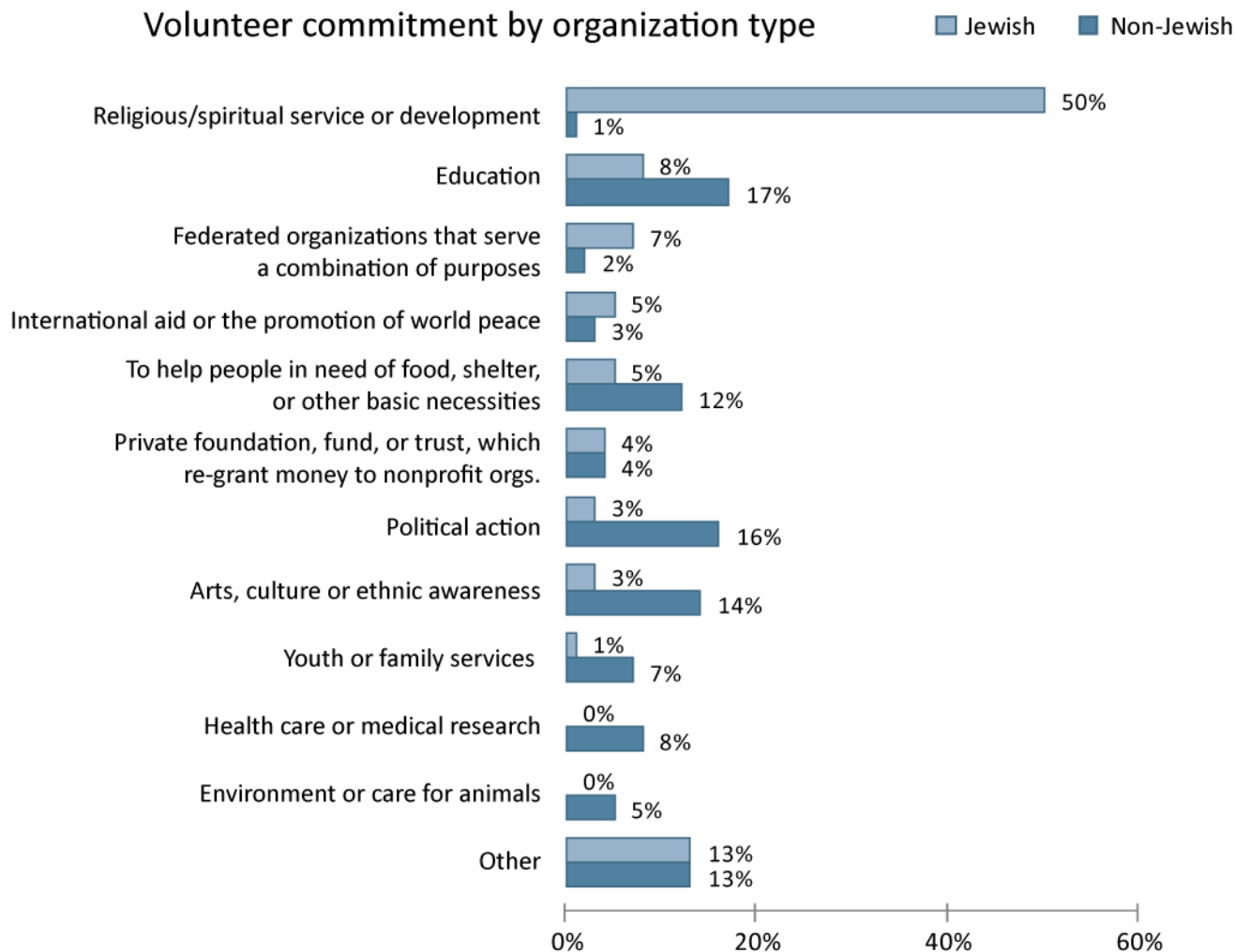
I've gone to some lengths to create Jewish community for myself-- I have monthly shabbat dinners with a group of Jewish women (including some BYFI alums), have organized weekly text study sessions (actually, with 2 BYFI alums), attend an informal minyan two or three times a month. I feel immersed in a Jewish community, but I've had to make it myself.

Key Finding 10: Commitments to Social Change and Progressive Politics

BYFI alumni are deeply involved in both Jewish and non-Jewish nonprofit endeavors, but for strikingly different reasons. Among the Jewish organizations with which they are most involved, the top classification was religious/spiritual service or development groups (50%), education (8%), federated organizations (7%), and international aid/peace (5%). Among non-Jewish organizations, the top classifications were education (17%), political action (16%), and arts/culture/ethnic awareness (14%). Although direct service to the needy connects to their core Jewish values, this interest was expressed almost twice as much through non-Jewish groups (12% of non-Jewish groups) as through Jewish ones (5% of Jewish groups). With respect to political views, 71% of alumni

I am committed to a career related to social justice / civic engagement - in part inspired by my Jewish identity.

Volunteer commitment by organization type



identify as liberal, 24% as moderate, and 5% as conservative.

Key Finding 11: Generosity to Jewish and Non-Jewish Causes Alike

Overall, BYFI alumni give slightly more time and money to non-Jewish causes than to Jewish ones—and between 10% and 15% give neither. While younger BYFI alumni without children are much more likely to give more time and money to non-Jewish causes, volunteer time and contributions to non-Jewish organizations tend to decrease with age and the transition to parenthood. The same drop-off occurs with Jewish organizations among BYFI alumni without children. Alumni with children are much more likely to return to giving and volunteering in Jewish organizations.



The BYFI Alumni Venture Fund has been extremely influential in my life, and has allowed me to start several different projects that then employed / engaged me for years.

Key Finding 12: Moderate Levels of Volunteerism

In general, BYFI alumni are slightly more likely to serve as volunteers/lay leaders in non-Jewish organizations than in Jewish ones, although the nature of their involvement changes as they age, marry, and have children. More alumni describe themselves as occupying volunteer leadership roles in non-Jewish organizations. They are also more likely to be involved in volunteer teaching, coaching, mentoring, or advising through non-Jewish organizations (43% to 25-26%). For Jewish volunteer involvement, they are more likely to be involved in caring for others in a Jewish community circle (42%) than a secular community circle (25%) (visiting, bringing food, and/or assistance around births, deaths, illness, etc.).

IV. PERCEPTIONS OF THE BYFI ALUMNI COMMUNITY

Key Finding 13: Building a Pluralistic Network

Alumni are near-unanimous in their agreement that the BYFI summer taught them to value Jewish pluralism and that the alumni community connects them with a diverse and pluralistic group of Jews. Additionally, college-age alumni and older alumni with children agree strongly that BYFI alumni programming encourages them to get involved with other Jewish organizations. Nonetheless, very few alumni of any age depend on BYFI alumni programming for their involvement in the Jewish community.

Bronfman provides intellectual stimulation and deep examination of tough questions that I rarely find elsewhere, plus refreshing and educational diversity that I don't get otherwise in my comfortable Orthodox life.

Key Finding 14: Importance of Jewish Learning

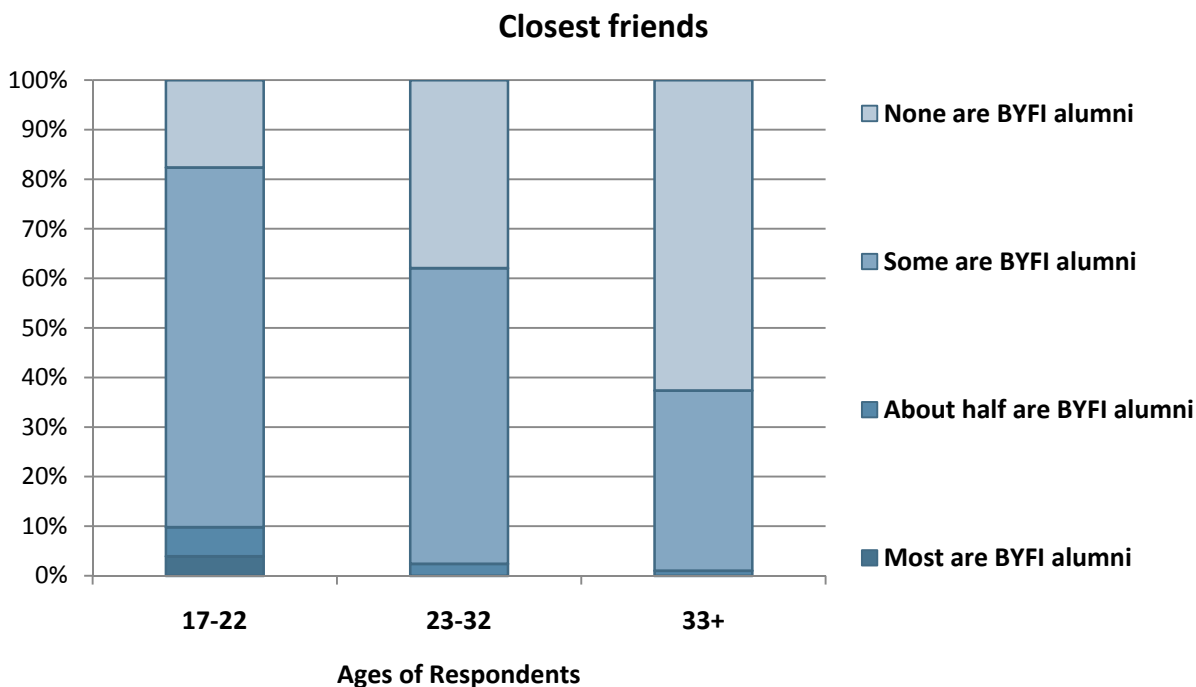
Just over half of all alumni feel that the BYFI summer made Jewish text study important to their Jewish identity. 24% say they regularly participate in Jewish text study, and another 29% do so infrequently. About 67% say that their wish to engage in Jewish learning is “to some extent” or “to a great extent” the reason they attend activities in Jewish organizations, a reason more important than any other except being involved in a community.

Key Finding 15: Staying Connected to Other Alumni Over the Long Term

The BYFI alumni network demonstrates the strength of loose ties. As alumni age, decreasing numbers count BYFI alumni among their closest friends. Put another way, 82% of 17 to 22 year-olds say that BYFI alumni count for most, half, or some of their closest friends, but 63%

I am grateful for the experience that BYFI gave me and for the windows it has opened up in my life. I value the pluralism I was first exposed to on BYFI and think about issues of pluralism often.

of alumni 33 and older say that none of their closest friends are BYFI alumni. However, the vast majority are in at least annual contact with members of their year cohort, including 69% of those 33 and older. Among alumni younger than 33, 80% are in contact with two or more fellow alumni.



I do remain active through reading listserv discussions and divrei torah on the alumni website and going to events when I can, as well as being in touch with other fellows from my year and other years and by donating to BYFI every year.

Key Finding 16: Positive Characterization of the BYFI Alumni Community

Across life-stages and interests, a majority of BYFI alumni uses the same two words to describe the alumni community -- intellectual and accomplished--and there is wide agreement that the community is ambitious, diverse, and high-quality.

