



Enter the Young

by By Ilene Schneider | [November 2010](#) | [Post your comment »](#)

In these uncertain times, it always feels good to have good news to report. What appears to be clear in a national study certainly mirrors the situation on the local scene.

Under the auspices of The AVI CHAI Foundation, Professor Jack Wertheimer and a team of researchers have collaborated on a study, to learn about women and men between the ages of 22 and 40 who serve as leaders of Jewish programs, initiatives, and organizations. The report entitled, *Generation of Change: How Leaders in Their Twenties and Thirties Are Reshaping American Jewish Life*, sheds some light on how these new-generation leaders think about Jewish concerns and the experiences that have shaped them.

According to Wertheimer, “It is simply not true, as some contend, that the American Jewish community is suffering from a dearth of committed and knowledgeable leaders among its younger populations.” The study revealed that nearly 40 percent of young Jewish leaders have attended day school, more than two-thirds attended Jewish overnight summer camps, and more than half spent four or more months of study or work in Israel. Added Arthur W. Fried, Chairman of The AVI CHAI Foundation, “These data demonstrate that investment in intensive forms of Jewish education yields great returns for the American Jewish community.”

Furthermore, the study showed that “leaders in their 20s and 30s are reinvigorating established organizations or starting new ones of all kinds to appeal to niche subpopulations of their peers. They are acutely attuned to the diversity of Jewish needs and interests.” Wertheimer said that, “Due to the efforts of young leaders, Jews in their 20s and 30s who wish to get involved have hundreds of options.”

The younger Jewish leaders have chosen to be engaged in existing, mainstream organizations such as AIPAC, the AJC, ADL, Friends of IDF, and Federations, as well as start-up organizations. Some have chosen to help their peers find personal meaning in being Jewish, while others have selected causes that interest them. The young leaders differ on the issues and differ from other generations on the issues as well.

The important factor is that the younger generation has chosen to get involved with the Jewish community, has done so from a basis of knowledge, and has made a commitment to doing so. What it means is that there will be a Jewish future, with a capable cadre of leaders, and that future may look very different from the scope and structure of current or past Jewish organizations.

Here in Orange County an impressive youth movement is afoot. Young leaders have reached the top positions in several Jewish organizations, and others are on their way. They have brought new ideas on how to reach even younger people, including teens and college students.

Events sponsored by the Moishe House, the Nefesh Minyan, and the Young Leadership Division are packed. (See “Fresh Orange Jews” to get a taste of these events.)

New people join the e-mail lists for these groups on a daily basis as people move to Orange County or come back after college. They have their own ideas on how to relate to their peers, party, and pray, and they get to express them.

It may not look like your grandparents’ Jewish community, but it’s working, and it’s here to stay.