North American Participants in High School Age Travel Programs to Israel

SUMMER 2011
Elan Ezrachi, PhD
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2010 and 2011 two consecutive research projects were conducted on high school age travelers to Israel. The overall goal of these two studies was to learn about the profile of high school age travelers and gain better understanding about their perceptions of the trips in the context of their Jewish and personal growth.

The 2010 study was based on two sources: a) Survey questionnaires from 1970 respondents and b) Eight Focus Groups. The 2011 study was based on survey questionnaires, 1250 altogether (750 of them from North America). The 2011 survey questionnaire included additional questions that were added to the 2010 study in consultation with JAFI, the iCenter and Lapid (the coalition for high school age travel to Israel).

This report presents the results of the 2011 study with a focus on the North American participants. Participants in the study, presented here, were mainly from the following programs: AMHSI (Alexander Muss High School in Israel), BBYO, BBYI-ILSI, JCCA, NCSY, NFTY, NFTY-EIE, Shorashim, USY and Young Judea. Survey forms were administered by the program organizers and were handed out to the participants toward the end of the stay in Israel. This report is based on processing of around 750 survey forms representing around 15% of the estimated total North American population of high school age travelers during the summer.

Elan Ezrachi, PhD is an independent consultant with Effective Partnerships in Today’s Jewish World and a Fellow at the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education. Elan has served in various executive roles with organizations such as The International Dept of Melitz – Center for Jewish Zionist education, the Charles Bronfman Mifgashim Center, Masa – Israel Journey (founding CEO), and the International School for Jerusalem Studies at Yad Ben-Zvi. He received his BA and MA from Hebrew University in Education and Jewish Thought and his doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Elan was born in Israel and lives there with his wife, Rabbi Naamah Kelman. They have three children and one grandson.

1 The 2010 study was funded by the Jewish Agency for Israel and the 2011 study was funded by The iCenter.
2 Summer programs are typically designed for high school age students ages 15-18, and their duration is 3-6 weeks. Programs in the summer are usually conducted within the non-formal experiential educational frameworks.
3 There is no official data on the numbers of high school age travels to Israel.
General information on participants:

750 surveys were received and analyzed, 57% male and 43% female, average age 16.5.

History of prior visits to Israel:

49% of all participants have visited Israel before. This finding is contrary to common beliefs in the travel industry that the vast majority of high school age travelers are in Israel for the first time.

One out of three participants in 2011 has been to Israel after age 12 (34.3%), two thirds of those who had been before. This means that within the travel cohort, there are in essence two populations, with differences in dispositions and memories of Israel.

84% of all participants reported that at least one parent had visited Israel before, while 16% of all participants were the first in their families to have traveled to Israel.

Affiliation and Jewish Educational background:

Synagogues affiliation:
95% of all participants answered that they, or their parents, belonged to a synagogue. From those who indicated synagogue affiliation, 91% reported that the families’ synagogues were non-Orthodox.

Main forms of Jewish Education until age 13:
Most of the surveyed participants received some form of Jewish education in their childhood. Only 2% reported no Jewish education in their personal background. 65% of all participants attended supplementary schools, while only 26% attended Day Schools. 7% chose Jewish summer camp as their main form of Jewish Education.

Summary of participants’ profiles:*

- North American participants in Israel programs are highly affiliated, predominantly non-Orthodox Jews.
- Almost all participants have received some form of formal Jewish education, mostly in the supplementary system.
- Half of the participants have been to Israel before the current high school trip, two thirds of them after age 12.
- Most participants are pre-disposed to the idea of Israel travel through parents, friends and youth activities.

*These findings were collected over a period of two summers

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Motivation and Marketing:
Participants were asked to address several questions that shed light on motivation to travel and access to information about travel possibilities.

Most participants were predisposed to Israel travel as part of their growing up in Jewish families and communities. Family members and friends are the key influential agents for travel. In the second tier we find the summer camp and youth movement as settings that encourage travel. The category that received the least results was advertisements that do not serve as a significant tool for recruitment of this population.

Participants were asked to report on the reasons that discouraged their friends from travel. 70% said that those friends had other plans; an indication that their friends might not be engaged in Jewish frameworks that offer Israel programs, or are not even Jewish. The second largest response indicated that the programs were too expensive (54%). All other suggested categories drew low responses; the lowest was the fear factor. Only 8% thought that their friends were afraid to travel.

Similar to the previous question, participants were asked to predict what could encourage their Jewish friends to choose to travel. 74% thought that lowering prices would encourage their friends to come. All other categories received significantly lower responses. Categories such as "Convincing the friends' parents" (38%) providing "college credit" (37%) and "new program options" (22%) indicate that hindrances can be overcome with concrete practical steps.

Looking back and projecting into the future:
Generally, participants were not asked to evaluate their program. Instead they were asked a few questions about experiences that inform their future expectations after returning to their home communities.

Did you meet young Israelis during your trip?
50% of all participants reported having an organized encounter with Israelis, either in the form of a peer mifgash program or through home hospitality. However, 50% did not have a structured-direct encounter and their encounter was more random or absent. This low rate of engagement with Israelis should be brought to the attention

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4 In some cases there were Israelis embedded in the program as a standard policy of the program organizer.

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After the trip my understanding of Israel... –  
Participants were asked to assess how their understanding of Israel was at the end of the trip. Almost all participants felt that as a result of the trip their understanding of Israel had risen to "much better" (64%) or "I really get it now" (20%), totaling 84%. 14% chose a category that reflects a sense of confusion from what they saw and only 1% chose: "I really don't get it".

I want to know more about Israel in the following areas...  
Participants are motivated to continue to expand their knowledge, and the trip stimulated a thirst for further learning. Participants are interested in gaining more knowledge about Israeli culture (77%), political and historical issues (65%), minorities and social conflict (50%) and State and Religion issues (47%).

I see myself coming back to Israel...  
Participants were asked to imagine when they would return to Israel. Only 1% said that they will never return to Israel, bringing this figure to virtually zero. All other participants saw themselves coming back in the coming five years. This figure is a haven for program organizers and Israeli engagement policy makers, who can benefit from this a highly motivated cohort of candidates for future Israel programs. The Masa Israel Journey project in particular can benefit from this high level of motivation to return. Additional investigation is required to find out what types and lengths of programs would be suitable for these returnees.

Open-ended question: "If I had a chance to meet the Israeli Prime Minister and key Jewish leaders of the Jewish People, and they would ask me about my experience in Israel I would tell them that...”

The survey ended with an open-ended question soliciting a statement from the participants regarding their overall experience. 85% of all respondents complied with this assignment and answered the question. The answers were grouped into seven categories: 1) Life changing experience; transformative; changed my life; I will never be the same; I will never forget this experience; it will be with me for the rest of my life; 2) I love Israel; I admire Israel; identification with the Israeli/Zionist narrative 3) It was fun; enjoyable; loved every moment; had a great time; amazing; 4) Appreciation of the program; great program; I loved the program; learned a lot. 5)
Criticism of Israel; disappointment in Israel; 6) Criticism of the program; disappointment in the program. 7) Other

The answers to the open-ended question were overwhelmingly positive, and often very enthusiastic. **89% of those who responded chose categories 1-4,** all categories that praise the experience and highlight the overwhelming satisfaction and appreciation toward Israel and toward the program. The largest group was in category 2 (30%): "love of Israel, admiration of Israel, identification with the Israeli Zionist narrative.

The participants' answers were mostly rich with content, relatively long, and showed serious attitudes and concerns. It is worthwhile to look at the full range of content that these answers generated as they provide information beyond the quantitative analysis that is presented here.

**Conclusions and policy recommendations:**

The 2010 and 2011 studies of participants in Israel travel programs reveal a rich and distinct universe. This universe tends to attract and serve populations with high affiliation rates, some Jewish education backgrounds and a family legacy of travel to Israel. A strong component in the teens' motivation and interest in the programs stems from their peer connection through youth movements and Jewish summer camps. Many of the teens have been to Israel prior to their high school years.

These finding suggest that the growth potential of teen travel to Israel is limited to those populations. The gap between those who travel and those of similar backgrounds who do not travel should be **the first target population for growth and expansion** of the field. Social research followed by social marketing could determine the potential of growth within the engaged teen cohort. Once the potential will be discovered, efforts should go into improvements in the field in the following ways: **lowering prices, adding new program options, improving mifgash with Israelis and offering pre college credits.**

The most significant revelation of these studies is not in the numbers of teens who visit Israel and the potential for growth. The studies show **the value and significance of the way the teens perceive their experiences.** While being a defined (minority) segment of the North American Jewish youth cohort, the thousands of teens who do travel to Israel demonstrate a **high degree of awareness and appreciation of the experience.** They are attuned, engaged, and curious and they internalize the
experience into their worldviews and commitments. These teens are an unrecognized and untapped network of Israel engaged individuals who show interest in continuing and furthering their connection to Israel as individuals and eventually in organized communities.

The population that travels to Israel is a great asset for the organized Jewish world. First, there is a window of opportunity to engage these youth in Israel related activities while they are still with their families and communities and before going to college, a window that is one to two years long. Soon after, the teens will go on to their next phase, typically to college. Once they are out of their homes and communities, they can continue their engagement with Israel by way of activities on campuses and return trips to Israel. Our studies show that the Jewish world can only gain if the high school travel domain will expand and deepen what is clearly an effective Israel experience.
1. General information

Number of North American respondents in the surveys of 2010 and 2011:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender Ratio: Females: 57%, Males: 43%; Average age: 16.5

*In addition to the North Americans who were surveyed there were around 1,000 British youth who participated in the surveys over the two years. The results of the British survey are not presented in this report.

2. History of prior visits to Israel

Visiting Israel before the current trip:

Participants were asked a series of questions about their travel history to Israel. The first question was whether they had ever been to the country before this summer. In 2011 the participants were split into two halves. One half of all participants had been to Israel before. This finding is contrary to common beliefs in the travel industry that the vast majority of high school age travelers are in Israel for the first time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prior visit to Israel</th>
<th>No prior visit to Israel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visiting after age 12*:

Following the question on prior visits, participants who had visited before were asked to check whether the visit took place after age 12. The results show that one out of three participants in 2011 has been to Israel after age 12 (34.3%), two thirds of those who had been before. It is assumed that most who visited after age 12 did so either as
part of their eighth Grade Day School trips\(^5\) or within a family Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience.

Once again, it appears that the high school age travel domain contains a large group of second timers, many who came to Israel in recent years. This means that within each group, there are in essence two populations, with differences in dispositions and memories of Israel. Organizers should take this finding into consideration as they plan itineraries and educational activities for future travelers.

**At least one parent visited Israel before:**

84% of all participants had at least one parent who had visited Israel before, clearly a statement that the travel to Israel is considered a family legacy and norm. On the other hand, *16% of all participants were the first in their families to have traveled to Israel.*

As far as the majority of those who had a parent in Israel before, we do not have information about the time that has passed since that parent had been to Israel nor the number of prior visits. We assume that there is a wide range of prior visits among parents of teens who travel, from parents who traveled to Israel when they were teens themselves and never returned to parents who are frequent travelers.

### 3. Affiliation and Jewish Educational background

**Synagogues affiliation:**

Participants were asked if they or any of their parents belonged to a synagogue. Participants were not asked to label their Jewish identification nor were they asked to reveal their personal beliefs.

95% of all participants answered that they, or their parents, belonged to a synagogue. From those who indicated synagogue affiliation, 91% reported that the families’ synagogues were non-Orthodox.

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\(^5\) Most Day Schools in North America offer a trip to Israel in the second half of the eighth grade year, which is also the last year in these schools, as a peak experience of the graduating class.
Main forms of Jewish Education until age 13:
Most of the surveyed participants received some form of Jewish education in their childhood. Only 2% reported no Jewish education in their personal background. 65% of all participants attended supplementary schools, while only 26% attended Day Schools. 7% chose Jewish summer camp as their main form of Jewish Education.

Knowledge of spoken Hebrew:
From looking at the results of a question about knowledge of spoken Hebrew, it is evident that the vast majority of Israel program participants could not converse in Hebrew while in Israel. Only 4% said that they were fluent in Hebrew. 60% said that they had no knowledge of Hebrew or only a "few words". 36% checked "simple sentences" or "mostly capable in conversation" as their Hebrew competent level. Though this finding does not come as a surprise to anyone who is familiar with the state of Jewish education in North America, it does shed light on the fact that while in Israel, the participants are essentially incapable of functioning in Hebrew and they would therefore require the assistance of translators or English speaking staff.

Summary of participants' profiles:*
- North American participants in Israel programs are highly affiliated, predominantly non-Orthodox Jews.
- Almost all participants have received some form of formal Jewish education, mostly in the supplementary system.
- Half of the participants have been to Israel before the current high school trip, two thirds of them after age 12.
- Most participants are pre-disposed to the idea of Israel travel through parents, friends and youth activities.
- Most participants are incapable of communicating with Israelis in Hebrew.

*These findings were collected over two years
4. Questions on motivation and marketing

Participants were asked to address several questions that shed light on motivation to travel and access to information about travel possibilities.

What influenced you to go on the trip*?

Most participants were predisposed to Israel travel as part of their growing up in Jewish families and communities. Family members and friends are the key influential agents for travel. In the second tier we find the summer camp and youth movement as settings that encourage travel. The category that received the least results was advertisements that do not serve as a significant tool for recruitment of this population.

In the category "other" 93 participants suggested sources such as: "myself, the web, personal interest, wanting to Israel, I love Israel and, just cuz".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Group</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Respondents were asked to check all that apply

The reasons your closest friends did not travel to Israel this summer*:

In this question we wanted to learn about the hindrances to Israel travel by asking participants to report on the reasons that discouraged their friends from travel. The highest number of respondents (70%) said that those friends had other plans; an indication that their friends might not be engaged in Jewish frameworks that offer Israel programs, or are not even Jewish.

The second largest response indicated that the programs were too expensive (54%). All other suggested categories drew low responses; the lowest was the fear factor. Only 8% thought that their friends were afraid to travel.

16% chose "other" as their answer. Among the "other" reasons: already went, the friends are in Israel on another program, the friends are not involved in the youth movements and "I don't have Jewish friends".
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too expensive</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had other plans and obligations</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest in Israel</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program/Israel did not appeal to them</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were afraid</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their parents were not supportive</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Respondents were asked to check all that apply

What would encourage your Jewish Friends to travel to Israel*?

Similar to the previous question, participants were asked to predict what could encourage their Jewish friends to choose to travel. Here, the cost factor seemed salient. 74% thought that lowering prices would encourage their friends to come. All other categories received significantly lower responses. Categories such as "Convincing the friends' parents" (38%) providing "college credit" (37%) and "new program options" (22%) indicate that the hindrances can be overcome with concrete practical steps.

The previous two questions could serve as a starting for some policy decision regarding the changes that should take place in the field, though further market research will be required.
5. Looking back and projecting into the future

Generally, participants were not asked to evaluate their program. The following are questions about experience that inform their future expectations after returning to their home communities.

Did you meet young Israelis during your trip?

Program organizers have different approaches and methods regarding meetings with Israeli peers while in Israel. Participants were asked to report on the types of meetings they had with Israelis. 50% of all participants reported of having an organized encounter with Israelis, either in the form of a peer mifgash program or through home hospitality. However, 50% did not have a structured-direct encounter and their encounter was more random or absent.

This low rate of engagement with Israelis should be brought to the attention of program organizers. The Lack of significant engagement with Israelis in programs that aspire to create a connection to the country and its people is a challenge that should be addressed.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowering the prices</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter programs</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better marketing; clearer information</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College credit</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convincing their parents</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New program options</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Respondents were asked to check all that apply

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6 In a some cases there were Israelis embedded in the program as a standard policy of the program organizer

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After the trip my understanding of Israel... –

Participants were asked to assess how their understanding of Israel was at the end of the trip. Almost all participants felt that as a result of the trip their understanding of Israel had risen to "much better" (64%) or "I really get it now" (20%), totaling 84%. 14% chose a category that reflects a sense of confusion from what they saw and only 1% chose: "I really don't get it".

Clearly, program organizers managed to create a perception of understanding among the participants and an ability to contain the intellectual stimuli that the program generates. This is an educational achievement, considering Israel's complexity and cultural diversity.

I want to know more about Israel in the following areas* –

This question tested the motivation of the participants regarding further study and exploration of Israeli related topics. It is evident that the participants are motivated to continue to expand their knowledge and that the trip stimulated a thirst for further learning.

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Participants are interested in gaining more knowledge about Israeli culture (77%), political and historical issues (65%), minorities and social conflict (50%) and State and Religion issues (47%).

The answer to this question could inform follow-up programs providers, and community organizations in mobilizing alumni to further expand their knowledge and become more engaged in Israel related activities. It is clear that alumni are interested in contemporary Israeli subject matter and as a result this motivation can be the foundation of leadership roles in advocacy and work on behalf of Israel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advancements in science, medicine and environment</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture, language and music</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service organizations</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Israeli history and current events</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minorities and social conflicts</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and Religion</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Respondents were asked to check all that apply

**I see myself coming back to Israel**

Participants were asked to imagine when they would return to Israel. The answers to this question rely on their motivation to return, coming out of what they had just experienced as well as to their practical expectations of when and how the next trip would be feasible and plausible.

**Only 1% said that they will never return to Israel**, bringing this figure to virtually zero. All other participants saw themselves coming back in the coming five years. This figure is a haven for program organizers and Israeli engagement policy makers, who can benefit from this a highly motivated cohort of candidates for future Israel programs. The Masa Israel Journey project in particular can benefit from this high level of motivation to return. Additional investigation is required to find out what types and lengths of programs would be suitable for these returnees.
6. Open-ended question: “If I had a chance to meet the Israeli Prime Minister and key Jewish leaders of the Jewish People, and they would ask me about my experience in Israel I would tell them that…”

The survey ended with an open-ended question. This question was aimed at soliciting a final statement from the participants regarding their overall experience. 85% of all respondents complied with this assignment and answered the question (something that required additional effort), a very high rate. Many of the answers were long and indicated that serious thinking went into drafting the answers.

Based on a sample content analysis, the answers were grouped into **seven categories:**

1. **Life changing experience; transformative; changed my life; I will never be the same; I will never forget this experience; it will be with me for the rest of my life**

2. **I love Israel; I admire Israel; identification with the Israeli / Zionist narrative**

3. **It was fun; enjoyable; loved every moment; had a great time; amazing**

4. **Appreciation of the program; great program; I loved the program; learned a lot**

5. **Criticism of Israel; disappointment in Israel;**
6. **Criticism of the program; disappointment in the program**

7. **Other**

The answers to the open-ended question were overwhelmingly positive, and often very enthusiastic. **89% of those who responded chose categories 1-4**, all categories that praise the experience and highlight the overwhelming satisfaction and appreciation toward Israel and toward the program. The largest group was in category 2 (30%): "love of Israel, admiration of Israel, identification with the Israeli Zionist narrative.

The minority who chose categories 5-7 often added positive statements coupled with some critique of Israel or of their programs.

The participants' answers were mostly rich with content, relatively long, and very serious in their attitudes and concerns. It is worthwhile to look at the full range of content that these answers generated as they provide information beyond the quantitative analysis that is presented here.

See Appendix I for a selection of answers to the open-ended question.
Conclusions and policy recommendations:

The 2010 and 2011 studies of participants in Israel travel programs reveal a rich and distinct universe. This universe tends to attract and serve populations with high affiliation rates, Jewish education backgrounds and a family legacy of travel to Israel. A strong component in the teens’ motivation and interest in the programs stems from their peer connection through youth movements and Jewish summer camps. Many of the teens have been to Israel prior to their high school years.

These finding suggest that the growth potential of teen travel to Israel is limited to those populations. While this conclusion might be true in principle, it is clear that in North America there is still a market of Jewish teens who are Jewishly engaged in similar ways to those who have travelled that refrain from travelling to the Israel. The study offers some explanation as to why such teens do not travel but there needs to be a more systematic way to find out what stops these teens from travel.

The gap between those who travel and those of similar backgrounds who do not travel should be the first target population for growth and expansion of the field. Social research followed by social marketing could determine the potential of growth within the engaged teen cohort. Once the potential will be discovered, efforts should go into
improvements in the field in the following ways: lowering prices, adding new program options, improving mifgash with Israelis and offering pre-college credits.

But the most significant revelation of these studies is not in the numbers of teens who visit Israel and the potential for growth. The studies show the value and significance of the teens' perceptions of their experiences and how much they gain from it. While being a defined (minority) segment of the North American Jewish youth cohort, the thousands of teens who travel to Israel demonstrate a high degree of awareness and appreciation of the experience. They are attuned, engaged, and curious and they internalize the experience into their worldviews and commitments. These teens become an unrecognized and untapped "network" of Israel engaged individuals who show genuine interest in continuing and furthering their connection to Israel as individuals and through organized communities.

The population that travels to Israel is a great asset for the organized Jewish world. First, there is a window of opportunity to engage these youth in Israel related activities while they are still with their families and communities, prior to going to college, a window that is one to two years long. Soon after, the teens will go on to their next phase, typically to college. Once they are out of their homes and communities, they can continue their engagement with Israel through activities on campuses and return trips to Israel. Our studies show that the Jewish world can only gain if the high school travel domain will expand and deepen what is clearly an effective Israel experience.

The study showed a substantial motivation for follow-up activities that can only deepen the engagement with Israel and serve as a catalyst for other youth to follow in the footsteps of those who returned from Israel.
APPENDIX I

Select quotes from the answers to the open-ended question

1. Life Changing Experience:
   - “I’ve never felt more at home in my life than I do in Israel” (USY)
   - “This was the best choice I could have made for my summer before going to college” (USY)
   - “It changed my life” (AMHSI)
   - “When first coming to Israel I did not have a strong Jewish faith nor a connection to Israel. Leaving, I leave with a strong connection and a hope of coming back soon” (BBYO)
   - “I had an amazing time and my Jewish identity was ever stronger and I learned a lot and there is no doubt in my mind that I will be coming back in the near future” (BBYO)
   - “It was an experience unlike any others. I felt very safe and secure” (BBYO)
   - “It was a transformative experience that connected me to the land culturally, religiously and physically. I hope my friends/relatives have this opportunity” (NFTY EIE)
   - “It influenced me to join the Israeli army” (Young Judaea)
   - “Because of this country I have discovered my true identity and purpose/place in life as a Jew” (JCC)
   - “I found my Jewish home” (BBYO ILSI)
   - “Before this trip my feeling in God was very weak. After this trip I believe in God and faith in God. I want to be Kosher and truly believe this trip influenced my Jewish life” (USY)
   - “It is the most refreshing opportunity that I have ever had the chance to partake in. It's a trip of a life time, and I would recommend it 100% to those skeptical about going on the trip” (USY)

2. Love of Israel:
   - “I love Israel with all my heart and wish to live here one day” (USY)
   - “That I have never seen anything more perfect, beautiful and holy in my life and that I will be returning by all means soon” (USY)
   - “Israel is a fantastic place, but I didn’t understand this until I got here – more needs to be done to promote Israel to young Jews in the US who...
do not feel a connection to their homeland, or understand the need for one” (AMHSI)

- "This country is worth fighting for" (BBYO)
- "Israel is so important to the Jewish people, please try and garner support from the US” (Shorashim)
- "It is the most amazing place on earth. I would love to make Aliyah after high school. This program is such an amazing experience and I can't wait to come back" (NFTY EIE)
- "Israel Rox !!" (NFTY)
- "I never felt more at home than here" (NCSY)
- "My experience was unbelievable and I loved the support, hospitality and kindness of the Israeli people. I can't wait to come back and convince others to come too” (Young Judaea)
- "I lover visiting my Jewish homeland, and I wouldn't change a thing, just hope for peace" (Young Judaea)
- "Stay strong, you have more support than you think” (AMHSI)
- "I am in love with Israel, I am a passionate Zionist and those are the results of my observations of Israel” (AMHSI)
- "I love the country and am so thankful that the Jewish people have a place like this" (Shorashim)
- "So amazing. Israel and its people are so welcoming and I feel so safe here" (JCC)
- "Israel is without a doubt my homeland and I feel a deep spiritual connection with the people" (NFTY)
- "USA supports you, be better with the press and the media because Israel gets really bad press. Keep it up being awesome in nearly every aspect and being a beacon of light in the Middle East” (Young Judaea)
- "I love Israel" (NFTY)
- "Israel is for winners!” (JCC)
- "Israel is my favorite place on earth and I will come back as often as I can. I love the country and what it believes in" (JCC)
- "I am happy that I feel safe in my home away from home" (JCC)
- "I was really amazed by the Jewish State and inspired by the fact that after 2,000 years of exile, the Jews finally have a home" (USY)
- "I officially feel like Israel is my home" (BBYO ILSI)
- "I love this country. Serving it will be an honor and a pleasure. I can't wait to live here." (USY)
3. Fun; Enjoyable:
   - “It was fun” (BBYO)
   - “It was awesome” (BBYO)
   - “It was nice” (NFTY)
   - “It was incredible” (NCSY)
   - “It was phenomenal” (NFTY)
   - “It was a good experience. The majority of Israelis that we met were very welcoming” (Young Judaea)
   - “Unique” (NFTY)

4. Appreciation of the program:
   - "I learned so much more than I would have in America. Also that things with war are not as black and white and they seem" (USY)
   - "I got as much as I could out of being based in a Jewish society (kibbutz). While studying the Judaic culture and language while socializing with people of Israel" (NFTY EIE)
   - "My time in Israel affected me in two ways. The first is that I came to understand much better that Judaism is more than a religion, that I am part of עם ישראל, the Jewish people. Coming to Israel also demonstrated to me the importance of the Hebrew language, reminded me that I love Hebrew and motivated me to learn more" (NFTY EIE)
   - "It was unforgettable. I made a bunch of Jewish friends, I did activities I would have never done anywhere else and I got to see the beautiful country from where Hashem created us" (NCSY)
   - ""It has been amazing; honestly I couldn't be any happier to be HOME! I have learned so much and I know I will continue to grow. No words can describe my feelings while on this trip" (NCSY)
   - "I didn't exactly understand Israel or the government's actions prior to this trip, but now I do and I am a supporter" (Shorashim)
   - "It was eye opening, educational, fun and hot" (NFTY)
   - "This program helped me learn why me, as a teenager must be informed in order to advocate! I will continue to influence my friend to visit and will continue to advocate and speak up for my Jewish homeland" (BBYO ILSI)
   - "Israel has taught me a lot of what my ancestors had to go through so that I had the opportunity to go to Israel and I want my kids to say they have a Jewish homeland.” (BBYO ILSI)
“I have gained an entirely new perspective about Israeli history/events. I understand that Judaism is more than just a religion. It is a beautiful culture and a way of life” (BBYO ILSI)

5. Critique of Israel:

- “I didn't like when we would go to the grave center. I felt like I didn't have an interest in seeing where an important Israeli's grave was and why it was there” (AMHSI)
- "It's great but things are too expensive, more local stores and more cultural things, and less touristic gift shops" (AMHSI)
- "It continually shocks and appalls me the horrid and pigish behavior of Israelis. Also the endless discrimination and the dysfunctional government" (BBYO)
- "That while I had a great time, the police at the Western Wall partially ruined my experience by their forcing of their beliefs on me" (AMHSI)
- "It was amazing but you need to solve peace problems and think of Gilad (Shalit). Also lower apartment prices for young people but it's amazing". (JCC)
- "Everything is too expensive" (BBYO)
- "I loved it. It was a great experience and I learned a lot. The only thing that really bothers me is the control the Ultra-Orthodox rabbis seem to have and the bias against Conservative Jews" (AMHSI)
- "You have a beautiful country but you should separate religion and government" (NFTY)
- "I had an amazing time, but something that needs work is the government structure" (NFTY)
- "This is an amazing place however, after this trip I realize that there are major problems with the government for example the party system and Orthodox influence" (NFTY)
- "Low apartment prices and free Gilad Shalit" (JCC)
- "It is a beautiful country with so much diversity that needs to be protected. The only thing I don't like seeing is the trash everywhere and dirty streets. It ruins the experience" (JCC)
- "Israelis need to be less biased and racist toward the Arabs, and need to understand the very similar story which they are going through" (USY)
- "They should make better political decisions" (Young Judaea)
- "The Israeli girls were whores" (NFTY, male)
- "The Orthodox in control is stupid" (NFTY)
"They clearly need to lower real estate prices" (NFTY)
"I wish the Kotel would have equal sides. Israel is fun" (NFTY)
"They need to solve the Arab Israel conflict very soon" (USY)
"It is a beautiful country, but social issues must be resolved" (USY)
"I am very proud of Israel and its inhabitants, but I think it is important to treat minorities with more respect. Otherwise, Israel is very beautiful and successful" (BBYO ILSI)

6. Critique of the program
"My BBYO trip barely touched the surface of the State of Israel. I enjoyed it but would prefer to travel again by myself because of the large group" (BBYO)
"Israel is very complex and it is very hard to understand on your first trip" (BBYO)
"It was boring" (BBYO)
"It was great but I didn't experience all over Israel (Gaza, Muslim quarter, etc.)" (NFTY)
"It was not what I expected. ??? program ruined it for me"
"I did not like my experience in Israel. I felt that being in an American youth group took away from the cultural experience. I hope to one day come back and experience it for myself" (AMHSI)
"I had an OK time, but want to experience birthright" (Young Judaea)
"Although Israel is an amazing place, I didn't like the hiking, but had a good time otherwise" (Oranim)
"It was enjoyable, but I would like to see more like Haifa. Also, when someone's sick / feels sick let them rest. I feel like we should have received more sleep" (NFTY)
I didn't enjoy it, not fun a group. Needed to do more physical activity" (NFTY)
"It was amazing but I wish I got to meet more Israelis" (BBYO ILSI)
"There were rough patches and some boring days but for the most part it was amazing" (USY)
"It was an amazing experience, but I feel that some things were done last minute, and it could have been a little more structured" (BBYO ILSI)
"Israel is confusing, but beautiful and I want to see it with less structure" (USY)
"It has been a great experience but hard when you do the same things you have done on previous trips" (USY)

"It was hard to feel like I lived in Israel and it was hard to experience the culture because of being in a big tour group. However, I learned a lot and really enjoyed the experience, places and people" (USY)

"It was amazing. I wish I had met Arabs. I wish I had more discussions" (USY)

7. Other

"There were no booklets or talks that prepared me for the incredible Israel experience" (USY)

"Free Gilad Shalit, we can defend ourselves" (AMHSI)

"Keep doing what you are doing, no two state solution" (AMHSI)

"It was pretty solid" (AMHSI)

"More housing settlements need to be developed" (AMHSI)

"Had I had the ability to see the country in an orderly manner it would have been twice as amazing, and that our tour guide is the best" (BBYO)

"I would tell them that from a foreigner's perspective, you can never fully experience. Each time you will learn something new, meet someone new and be the best for what you experienced (unclear ending, EE)" (NFTY EIE)

"It was an honor to meet them" (NCSY)

"It was great and more people need to come. Lowering cost of Israel programs is crucial" (Young Judaea)

"The immigrant need more help, but otherwise it's great" (Young Judaea)

"They're doing great, given their situation" (Young Judaea)

"It's been such a surreal experience. I am so fortunate to have had this opportunity" (NFTY)

"Nice place. I really like the shawarma…what does Israel need from people like me?" (Young Judaea)

"There is never a dull moment" (AMHSI)

"Save Gilad" (Young Judaea)

"No comment" (Young Judaea)

"I don't know !!!" (Young Judaea)

"They should encourage every teen to take a trip to Israel and to make it as accessible as possible" (Young Judaea)

"I love Shawarma ! oh, and I am a Zionist and I want to help my people" (Young Judaea)
- "What they do affects so many more than their country and I thank them for it" (JCC)
- "NONE" (Young Judaea)
- "Why does anyone hate you guys?" (NFTY)
- "I have no idea" (NFTY)
- "I loved being able to experience an Israeli Kibbutz at Hannaton" (USY)
- "It was totally wicked" (USY)
- "They should bring Gilad Shalit home" (USY)
- "Judaism, religion as a whole is corrupt and ruins the youth’s potential to contribute to society, it teaches people to blindly follow authority regardless of competence" (Oranim)
- "Don't give land back because your enemies are not sincere about peace" (USY)
- "Peace should be the most important item on the agenda" (USY)
APPENDIX II

The Survey Questionnaire

Name (optional): ____________________________________________

Email (optional): ____________________________________________

Name of Israel Program (mandatory): __________________________

Male / Female (circle)       Age: ________

Your country of origin:

□ Australia or New Zealand      □ United States or Canada
□ Former Soviet Union          □ Latin America
□ Other: ______________________ □ South Africa
                        □ Europe

Have been to Israel prior to this summer?

□ No          □ Yes

If you've been to Israel before, were you older than 12?

□ No          □ Yes

How many times have you been to Israel prior to this summer?

□ 0 times
□ 1-2 times
□ 3 or more
Have either of your parents ever visited Israel?

□ No  □ Yes

Do you, or either of your parents belong to a synagogue?

□ No  □ Yes

If the answer to the previous questions was “yes”, what is the synagogue affiliation? (check all that apply)

□ Reconstructionist  □ Orthodox
□ Don’t know  □ Conservative
□ Other: __________________  □ Reform

What is the main form of Jewish education you received before the age of 13?

□ None
□ Synagogue/Religious school/Hebrew school
□ Jewish Camp
□ Day school/Yeshiva (a Jewish private school)

How well, if at all, do you understand spoken Hebrew?

□ Not at all
□ A few words
□ Simple sentences
□ Mostly capable in conversation
□ Fluent in Hebrew
What influenced your decision to participate on an Israel trip this summer? 
(check all that apply)

- □ Youth Group  
- □ Advertisement  
- □ Other ________________

The reasons your closest Jewish friends did not travel to Israel this summer:
(check all that apply)

- □ They were afraid  
- □ Their parents were not supportive  
- □ Other: _____________

- □ Too expensive  
- □ Had other plans and obligations  
- □ Lack of interest in Israel  
- □ The program/Israel did not appeal to them

What would encourage your Jewish friends to travel to Israel?
(check all that apply)

- □ College credit  
- □ Convincing their parents  
- □ New program options  
- □ Other: _____________

- □ Lowering the prices  
- □ Shorter programs  
- □ Better marketing; clearer information

Did you meet young Israelis during your trip?

- □ Not really  
- □ Just the staff and officials in the program  
- □ In a few occasions without a specific structure  
- □ Home hospitality with Israeli families  
- □ Joint program (mifgash) with Israeli peers

After the trip my understanding of Israel (answer that seems closest to what you feel):

- □ Will be much better  
- □ Now I know what I don't know and what I really need to learn  
- □ The more I am in Israel the less I understand it  
- □ I really get it now  
- □ I don't get it
I want to know more about Israel in the following areas:
(check all that apply)
- Advancements in science, medicine and environment
- Sports
- Culture, language and music
- Service organizations
- Modern Israeli history and current events
- Minorities and social conflicts
- State and Religion
- Other: _______________

I see myself coming back to Israel:
(check all that apply)
- Within the next year
- After I graduate from high school
- During college
- After college
- I don’t know
- I will never come back

If I had the chance to meet the Israeli prime minister and key leaders of the Jewish People, and they would ask me about my experience in Israel, I would tell them that….

________________________________
________________________________
________________________________
________________________________
________________________________

Todah Rabah!