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European Center for Jewish Students – ECJS-2011

Name of program

46

Year of activity

2011

Name of the report's writer

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Function of the report's writer

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Status of program

Over the year 2011, ECJS has continued its programs which are popular among our demographic of European Jews ages 18-35. These students and young professionals depend on ECJS activities for the opportunity to be part of the European Jewish community. Most of these participants had little to no involvement in Jewish life on a regular basis prior to their involvement to ECJS. We have created a close nit network between these young adults and have bridged the gap of physical distance with the emotional closeness of an extended family.

Main achievements during the last year of activity

The main ECJS achievements in 2011 include European conventions, summer trip to Israel,

conferences, and local Jewish life activities.

European Conventions – each follows a city trip/conference model which ECJS has established through years of experience; ECJS organizes plans and tailors each event to the local city and to the specific time of year. Each event includes a traditional Shabbat, lectures on contemporary Jewish issues, and touring of the local city with an emphasis on the Jewish history and historical sites:

- Just One Shabbat – New Year's 2011 event took place in Bucharest on December 30, 2010-January 2, 2011 with approximately 200 European and 80 Romanian attendees.
- Purim on the Rocks took place in Seville on March 18-21 with 400 attendees.
- Summer Is Here event took place in Budapest on July 14-17 with approximately 350 European and 150 Hungarian attendees.
- Party Like a Jew annual Brussels weekend took place on November 11-13 with approximately 500 in hotel and an additional 500 for activities.

Other Activities:

- Local events including Shabbat services and meals, Jewish festival celebrations including a concert for Sukkot, Judaic classes, twice weekly morning prayers and breakfast, etc. Approximately 800 people participate in these events over the course of the year.
- Jewish festival activities including packages for Chanukah and Pesach, finding services and meals for high holidays and Shabbat dinners for people traveling all over Europe. Approximately 1500 people benefit from these activities.
- ECJS Taglit-Birthright Israel trip took place July 18-26 with 150 attendees.

Evaluation

Hosting Jewish events which are popular and attract European students and young professionals is no easy feat among our target group. ECJS has succeeded in creating an atmosphere that combines a homey, welcoming feeling within large and diverse groups. Events have an abundance of unity, friendship and pride. The balance of fun outings, tours, and parties together with Jewish traditions, education, and culture are part of what makes the events so popular. Attendees are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the program, but there is no pressure to do so. This facilitates internal development and exploration of Jewish values.

17 couples that we know of got married in 2011 who met through ECJS events. Results are displayed through positive feedback from participants. After participants attend their 1st ECJS event there is a major increase of Jewish friends on facebook. Turnover at events is approximately a third to half new participants. New participants are constantly needed to replace those who have met their significant other, moved out of Europe and those who have passed our age limit.

One of our conclusions for the future is that we need strong headquarters; where we can host monthly European weekend getaways as a regular follow up to the large ECJS events. We have also launched a sister organization in 2012 called JEP, Jewish European Professionals for a slightly older and more mature contingent at their behest. JEP deals more directly with issues regarding relationships and a fusion of Jewish values with professional life.

Others

Due to the success and popularity of ECJS events, we do not suggest making any changes to the organization of the programs. Unfortunately, we are currently limited to the number of programs we are able to hold per year due to limits in financial backing.

More follow up needed with monthly get-togethers. We are also working on creating "The Kindness Project" which will channel the values learned and inspiration received at the European events into taking an active role in initiating their own programs for the benefit of local Jewry and/or that of the wider community.

Kiss me, I am Jewish - ARTE Documentary

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