

Jewish Festivals and Shabbat: Engaging and Educating the Wider Community

Report Write Up of Courses 1 and 2

We have so enjoyed rolling out these two courses across the year for our Jewishly adjacent and non Jewish family members who are drawn to our synagogue and these opportunities enabled by NCEJ.

We wanted to create a safe space to learn about Judaism. We wanted to empower our mixed families to be confident in their Jewish practice and ensure we were demystifying while being as welcoming as we could possibly be. This is extended to all ages and all demographics.

*Delving into Judaism is a class that encourages learning about and practice of Judaism for those who are not Jewish and interested.



Shabbat learning and Friday night dinner with our Delving into Judaism group.



Teaching the Shabbat prayers to children,

COURSE 1 - PESACH AND SHAVUOT

PESACH SEDER:

We began our Pesach learning with preparatory sessions: teaching about passover's centrality in the Jewish story of having been strangers and the empathy that comes from it being the leitmotif of our Jewish lives.

We put together a large communal Seder where interfaith families and Jewish-adjacent and interested folk were encouraged to come along, and were invited to play a part in the evening.



This is the children singing the Ma Nishtana, reading from the Haggadah – fruition of the course, Pesach learning, where children from our mixed families led the Ma Nishtana.



Family activity on the last day of Passover, crossing our local brook with matzah on our heads and teaching about Sephardic customs, followed by a picnic in the park.

The Conversion/Delving class prepared, cooked and served the Pesach meal as a means of 'leaning in' to practice. This acted as a culmination of a month long course of learning, demystifying and teaching the story and world traditions of Passover.

SHAVUOT:

Shavuot term was all about Torah engagement and ways of teaching families and individuals the power and resonance of story telling and the connections we make between Torah and our contemporary lives.

We hosted ice cream parties for the children and learnt lots about baby goats and cows! We made paths up to Sinai for the toddlers to make coloured footprints with their feet. Every activity had one main goal in mind: how to expand and broaden the experience of Jewish life.



Learning about Shavuot and the intersection about what is happening in Israel for adults and younger couples to explore this in more depth.

We brought the reality of Israel parallel to life at FPS to enable and encourage those conversations.

Rabbi Rebecca chose to teach about the book of Ruth and the art of joining community, which fitted very well into our theme for the course.

Part of the course was to do some physical walking between Pesach and Shavuot to teach about the *omer* which was particularly attractive to families.

COURSE 2 - SHABBAT ENGAGEMENT, INCLUDING HIGH HOLY DAYS

HIGH HOLY DAY LEARNING:

After the summer and during September we took the opportunity to teach about the High Holy Days to both our mixed group of learners and our children. The goal was to make central the idea of belonging and being at ease during the Sabbath of Sabbaths, which is how High Holy Days can be known as.

Rabbi Rebecca used the verse from Deuteronomy Parashat Netzavim as a 'mantra of accessibility' and the importance of every generation mattering and bring contributions to Jewish life:

כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִּי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם לֹא־נִפְלְאָת הִוא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא רִחֲקָה הִוא:

Surely, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach.

וְלֹא אִתְּכֶם לְבַדְכֶם אֶנְכִּי כֹרֵת אֶת־הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֹּאת:

I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone,

כִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁנֹו פֹה עִמָּנוּ עַד־מָד הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר אֵינְנוּ פֹה עִמָּנוּ הַיּוֹם:

but both with those who are standing here with us this day before our God יהוה and with those who are not with us here this day.

It was extraordinary to carve out entry points with these creative sessions; having the funds to publicise and feed and make these opportunities comfortable and a little bit special.

TASHLICH:

We made an open invitation on the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to do communal and private Tashlich as we took rice paper to our local brook. This was a particularly powerful activity to align and integrate contemporary issues of living thoughtfully with Jewish tradition.

SHABBAT OF SUKKOT:

A home garden Sukkah and fire pit-roasting marshmallows whilst we waved the lulav.



Shabbat chol ha'moed Sukkot. Spiritual aspects of light and rest.

CREATIVE SIMCHAT TORAH READING:



FPS, as part of our course, hosted a black history month event for our local area, where we welcomed fantastic black, female journalist, Nadine Batchelor-Hunt, who has gone on a journey to become Jewish. This was an extraordinarily well attended event, after the High Holy Days, particularly aimed at Jewish adjacent folk, alongside the congregation.

Picture of Rabbi Rebecca and a member of our council, who has gone on this journey too.

COSTINGS:

As we wrote in our application, our funds were spent on renting of spaces, security, publicity and marketing, programme materials, educational resources, food, drink, ritual items and teaching time.

A few images from across the year of learning:



Conversion class prepare and have Friday night dinner.



Delving into Judaism group learning blessings for Friday night dinner.



Challah making workshop with our tots and their parents.



B'yachad Family Service, inclusive for all the community. Rabbi Rebecca uses these opportunities to make the service as inclusive and accessible as possible to encourage questions, exposing Torah in a more open way.



Interfaith couple in the synagogue who chose to Bat Mitzvah their daughter, and have remained part of the community. This is them offering a tango as part of a festival celebration.



This is a group of teenagers, some of whom come from interfaith families, and our outreach to the non-Jewish parents, who have been learning about Shabbat in their modern lives, enabled three extra young people to join this group.

THANK YOU

We were absolutely delighted and so grateful to receive the funds that you sent in April of £9,767.72. Our programmes had the aim of providing outreach for non-Jewish friends and families of people already associated with the synagogue.

The programmes were so successful that we ended up extending them for further outreach and continued learning (spending a little bit more). We feel extremely proud that we are known as a congregation where non-Jewish family members and friends feel welcome, included and seen and spread the word of learning about Judaism. During these piquant times, this has yielded such extraordinary results of creating a benign, positive face of the Jewish community. We couldn't be more grateful to you for enabling these extra programmes.

Please advise if there is a way we can apply for future funding for a continuation of these activities.

Thank you so much again for your generous support.