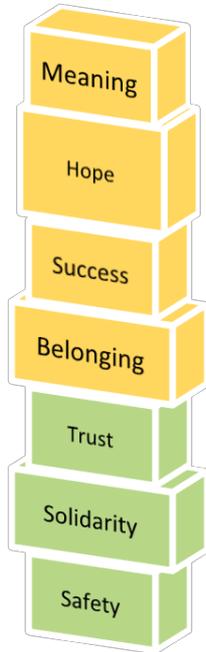


4.7 Sense of Community



The community narrative that has been deeply internalized by most members emphasizes that “we are a small and united community – we are one!” The sense of community is strong.

The community leadership – past and present – has always prioritized preserving a sense of community. Leadership has made strong efforts to ensure that all of the components of what they consider integral to a “Jewish community” exist and are vibrant – e.g. synagogues, education, youth, welfare, and kashrut.

As most of the Jewish population lives in the same area of the city, there is a feeling that most of Leeds’ Jews are identified and connected to some degree to the community.

The community is comprised of numerous sub-communities – the different synagogues and organizations - each with its own sense of community. While for many the main source of identity is their particular sub-community, most hold both identities with a sense of pride and importance.

As described above, there is a gap in the narratives of long-term community members and that of newcomers. This has an impact on the sense of community, especially regarding themes like “sense of success” or “sense of hope.”

Several interviews pointed to two areas of concern:

1. A growing number of people place themselves at “the edge” of the community with minimal to no involvement.
2. Pockets of self-identified Jews in other areas of the city (as shown by census reports) have no connection or affiliation to the community.

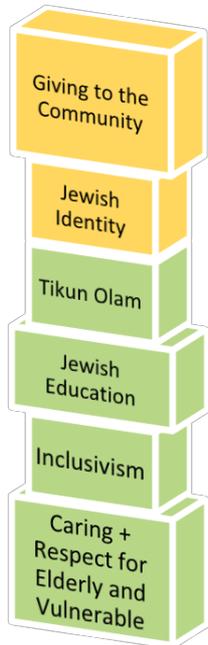
There is currently no dedicated mechanism to identify and attempt to connect these groups.

In this time of lower participation in religious activities, there is a growing discussion in the community around “what is the meaning of the community” for its members. Some point to the need to strengthen alternative, non-religious venues, allowing Jews to express their belonging to the community.

In recent years, much effort has been made to promote collaborative Jewish events to strengthen the connections and the feeling of one community. There is a growing understanding that this is an important issue to promote.

As mentioned earlier, the last community profile was carried out 10 years ago, and many speak of the need to conduct an updated survey/focus groups. This should emphasize Jews who are on the ‘edge’ of the community or totally unaffiliated, to better understand their needs and perceptions.

4.8 Shared Values



A number of core community values were mentioned by numerous interviewees ('values in theory'). These can also be easily distinguished from the community's priorities and activities ('values in practice').

These include:

- ▲ Taking care of the vulnerable
- ▲ Caring and respecting the elderly
- ▲ Jewish education
- ▲ Jewish identity
- ▲ Inclusiveness
- ▲ Tikun Olam
- ▲ Giving to the community (time and resources)

Several community mechanisms dedicated to these values include:

Welfare Board

Founded over 140 years ago, the board has a staff of more than 100 employees and 200 volunteers. It is run by a seven-member lay board and a professional chief executive.

The board assists the community in three main areas:

- ▲ Registered care - Providing home care and residential assisted living for people with learning disabilities
- ▲ Community support - Mental health, helplines, wellbeing, dementia, sensory impairment, etc.
- ▲ Running the community center - Community programming, social meetings, food, and beverage

In recent years, the Welfare Board has prioritized becoming a high quality, professional body with the highest standards. It has also made progress towards financial sustainability through community fundraising and successfully applying for government funds.

The main challenge facing the Board is the ability to continue to provide a wide array of community support activities which are not government funded and rely completely on community donations.

Housing Association

The Housing Association's goal is to provide housing for community members at subsidized rents in the community-owned real estate.

The target groups of the Association are the elderly, younger families (as a first home), and other community members.

The association is governed by a lay board and a professional chief executive.

Today, the available housing is used to house elderly in protected living (50%), singles (25%), and couples (25%).

While there is a certain stigma that the Association provides solutions to 'poor people,' there is a waiting list for facilities near the community center. The Association is viewed as an important community service and a reflection of its values.

In addition to the Association, there is a privately run, community-affiliated home for the elderly. The home is in the process of developing a rehabilitation program.

Jewish Education – Schools

The community has always placed a high priority on Jewish education and has recently fulfilled a long-time dream of establishing a Jewish high school.

The school system provides services to over 350 children and youth. It serves as an important means for providing community members with a basic Jewish identity and education and is the central mechanism for generating the community's social network. For a growing number of families, the school is their only point of connection to the Jewish community.

The Jewish studies program can be considered a 'diluted edition of British Modern Orthodoxy,' and is based on a curriculum developed by the London Jewish education department. The program puts an emphasis on Hebrew, prayer, and Jewish studies. It has been updated to make it more relevant and 'hip' while providing skills for the children.

A high number of Jewish children study at the primary school.

The new high school presently has 80 students, and will hopefully grow to fill the void that existed until now. The school has a resilience program, and the Jewish studies component includes an emphasis on Jewish ethics.

The school is open to all Jewish children, children of mixed marriages (identified Jews), and a small percentage of children of other religions.

While the school receives very positive feedback from most parents, there is some discussion of the need to strengthen elements of Jewish identity, and to increase the connection of the school to other community organizations (especially synagogues).

In addition to the school campus, there is a small Menorah school which provides Haredi education.

Many of the synagogues, the Zone youth center, and other local organizations hold additional Jewish lessons for children, youth, and adults.

The Question of Jewish Identity - Synagogues and Other Social Organizations

As stated by many, “a Jewish community without a vibrant synagogue system is not a Jewish community.” The synagogues (together with the school) are considered the cornerstone of the Leeds Jewish community.

The community has eight synagogues including Orthodox, Reform, and Chabad.

Most of the synagogues are suffering from a dwindling number of members, with an especially strong decline in those who regularly attend services. There is deep apprehension by many that this may be a real threat to the sustainability of the community.

Thus, the ongoing challenge is how to make the “synagogue experience” more relevant for more members. There is a growing understanding that the synagogues will need to be proactive, and there is indeed an ongoing effort to provide a wide range of new synagogue-based platforms and activities.

In parallel, there is an increase in the number of organizations and programs that are devoted to providing a stronger emphasis on the cultural, historical, and “peoplehood” elements of Jewish identity.

There is a discussion in the community regarding what are, and what should be, the components of Jewish identity today. This is a critical issue for many, with wide implications for community strategic planning. While there is agreement on the need for activities that strengthen the sense of Jewish identity and increase the attraction and meaning of the community for members, there are differing opinions regarding how this can be achieved.

While some point to the need to strengthen the observant sector (the Kollel and the eruv project) as a compass for the entire community, others point to the need to continue to develop and strengthen programs which put an emphasis on cultural, social, ethical, and peoplehood aspects of Jewish identity.

The need to bridge and combine these two approaches is a community challenge.

5. Recommendations

Summary of Leeds Community Profile

During the community resilience mapping process, JDC had the privilege of meeting community leaders and members, and of visiting some of the community's institutions (Appendix 1). JDC found a small but vibrant community dedicated to providing its members with a full and rich Jewish life. JDC met devoted community leaders and members who cherish their community and are committed to its future. JDC was inspired by their hospitality, openness, and willingness to critically assess their community's strengths and weaknesses.

Community resilience is a multi-faceted concept. No one single capacity enables a community to cope with a crisis. Instead, community resilience is an inter-connected network of core capacities, which are all relevant and can be advanced with the right intervention.

Building resilience is a continuous process, in which the community – step by step – strengthens its resilience capacities.

JDC believes that the community resilience profile is a tool that can assist communities to map and identify core resilience strengths and weaknesses. JDC hopes that the profile will assist communities in holding a significant dialogue in the field of community resilience and that it will offer a solid base for building a long-term intervention plan.

Looking at the Leeds Jewish community through the prism of community resilience, it is easy to identify many clear areas of strength. These include a strong sense of community and a unified and inclusive membership with many, strong social networks. This is a community that is committed to providing for the needs of its members, with an emphasis on those with special needs; a community that provides children and adults with numerous platforms to strengthen their identity; a community with strong ties to its local government and its neighboring local communities; and a community that is served by a dedicated lay and professional leadership.

The community resilience profile also points to several areas of concern. In discussions with the community leadership, JDC recommends specific areas where resilience capacities could be strengthened. Among the most prominent issues are:

- ▲ Community vision and strategic planning
- ▲ Community coordination
- ▲ Emergency management
- ▲ Young adults
- ▲ Community narrative and branding
- ▲ Professional training for lay and professional leaders (present and future)
- ▲ Building a community profile and database

Additional issues include the capacity to respond to psycho-social needs, the opportunity to leverage the community institutions as a tool for outreach, and leadership succession planning.

Proposed Next Steps

- ▶ Presentation of the resilience profile to a locally arranged steering committee (consisting of community lays leaders, professionals, and community members) to identify and discuss key issues arising from the report
- ▶ Decision by community steering committee regarding key issues, priorities, timetable, and action points, including those to be advanced with the support of JDC and those the community, decides to lead independently
- ▶ Ongoing review

JDC is here to help Leeds take meaningful steps toward building a more resilient community for the benefit of its members in routine and crisis or emergency situations.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1: Sources of Community Resilience Profile

Interview Subjects	
Name	Role in the Community
Claire Bartfield	Community member and young parent
Lee Bloomfield	CEO of the Leeds Jewish Housing Association
Liz Bradbury	CEO of the Leeds Jewish Welfare Board. Also, runs community center - MAZCC
Alby Chait	Professional - Chazzan / Minister - UHC Synagogue (Orthodox)
Dan Cohen	Lay leader - LJFS
Stan Cundle	Vice Chair of the Zone and Chair of Makor
Robert Dewar	Lay Leader - President - UHC Synagogue (Orthodox)
Aviva Engle	Brodetsky primary school – head of Jewish studies
Steven Frieze	Chair Kashrut board
Susie Gordon	Executive Director, Leeds Jewish Community
David Israel	Lay leader, Chair of Sinai Synagogue (Reform), UJIA lay leader, and lead coordinator of the lay leadership course
Susy Jagger	CEO of Brodetsky Primary School and LJFS
Helen Lewis	Lay leader, Board LJWB
David Levene	JLC Representative, based within the LJR
Hilton Lorie	Lay leader, chair interfaith network, Kashrut: Gourmet Foods
Eli Magzimof	Professional and Student Chaplain
Melissa Miltz	New arrival to Leeds from New York
Ros Peters	Lay Leader, President - BHH Synagogue (Orthodox)
Laurence Saffer	Lay leader, President (Director) – LJRC
Raina Sheaf	CEO of the Zone Youth Centre
Jonathan Straight	Part owner of the Moortown Deli, Street Lane Café / Bakery, Trustee for the Leeds Jewish Welfare Board
Malcolm Taylor	Lay leader, President Etz Chaim synagogue (Orthodox)
Alex Webster	CST, Community safety, resilience

Appendix 2: Published materials on the Jewish Community in Leeds

Materials Published by the Community

- ▲ Leeds strategic planning group (2005)- Report and recommendations
- ▲ S. Gordon (2015) The Leeds strategic group – Report and recommendations summary
- ▲ LJWB (2015) 2014-2105 Annual review
- ▲ Leeds Jewish representative council (2016) - Yearbook 2016
- ▲ A wide range of community and organizational websites and Facebook pages

Materials from Other Sources

- ▲ Jpr (2003) - The Jews of Leeds: Portrait of a community
- ▲ I. Kudinko (2007) - Negotiating Jewishness: Identity and citizenship in Leeds Jewish community
- ▲ Jpr (2011) - Key trends in the British Jewish community
- ▲ Jpr (2013) - 2011 Census results -Initial insights into Jewish neighborhoods
- ▲ Various media articles

About JDC

Since 1914, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) has given global expression to the principle that all Jews are responsible for one another. Working today in over 70 countries, JDC acts on behalf of North America's Jewish communities and others worldwide to rescue Jews in danger, provide relief to those in distress, revitalize overseas Jewish communities, and help Israel overcome the social challenges of its most vulnerable citizens. JDC also provides non-sectarian emergency relief worldwide.

JDC's reach is global, yet it is uniquely equipped to make a deep impact locally. In practice, this means working to create Jewish communities that are independently capable of recognizing and responding to their own needs; advancing a vibrant Israel that can respond to the challenges of its most vulnerable populations; and creating ever deeper and stronger connections between Jewish communities worldwide.

JDC partners with local organizations in creating and implementing all JDC projects. These local partnerships enable JDC to most effectively address the unique needs of the communities where we work and to build the capacity of local institutions, professionals, and volunteers so they become equipped with the skills needed to serve their own communities.

More information can be found at www.jdc.org

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