Mitzvah Day
2015 Report
It’s hard to think of a time when we didn’t see the Mitzvah Day green t-shirts come out in force every November, and yet it’s easy to forget that Mitzvah Day is only eight years old. Our challenge is to ensure that Jewish led Mitzvah Day continues to evolve and make an impact on as many volunteers and charities as possible.

So much work goes into making sure Mitzvah Day happens. This year we have focused on making sure we deliver the most efficient Mitzvah Day ever.

Our new website and database will make it easier than ever to register as a partner, and to find and participate in a Mitzvah Day project.

Mitzvah Day is expanding and becoming an even greater force for good. We ran 550 Mitzvah Days in 21 countries in 2015 and we’ve seen growth in our essential interfaith work, and our project which engages young adults. Our Mitzvah Day Together programme supports disabled people to participate in volunteering, and we have continued to work with non-Jewish schools and offices.

This report gives you the opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved in 2015, and for us to showcase how we plan to grow in 2016 and beyond.

We look forward to seeing you on 27th November 2016.
But not just rabbis and imams and not just kitchens. On Mitzvah Day, volunteers from across seven faith communities and none came together to work on meaningful social action projects.

But ‘meaningful’ isn’t just about the end result of the project. Mitzvah Day is there to give our 40,000 volunteers an individually meaningful experience as well. The spark that happens when people join forces, and do good deeds while chatting and sharing anecdotes and recipes: that’s what our work is about.

Immediately after the terrorist atrocities in Paris, being able to introduce a French Jew living in London to a British Muslim and send them to entertain residents of a retirement home together: that’s what our work is about. Or helping a Jewish sixth former to bring a food collection project to their whole non-Jewish school: that’s what our work is about.

We embody the current political imperative for integration, engaging people in local community and bringing people who are different, together. Volunteering on a Mitzvah Day project highlights what everybody has in common.

Everybody’s humanity. Everybody’s striving for community. Everybody’s caring. Everybody’s ability to contribute.

Every time a Muslim and a Jew peel potatoes side by side, it builds bridges, challenges stereotypes and makes our streets safer.

Interfaith integration is not just for rabbis and imams and religious leaders. It’s all the more important at a grassroots level.

We are driving this agenda, bottom up. Do join us.
Mitzvah Day 365
Making a difference all year round

Mitzvah Day in November is the peak of our calendar and it serves to enthuse our volunteers from one year to the next. Many of our partners run projects on a regular basis, continuing to build on the relationships kindled by Mitzvah Day.

But we also organise a year-round programme of events, some tied to the Jewish calendar, some to other faiths.

Tu Bishvat is a time for tikkun olam: repairing the world. Volunteers from Ealing to Kiev ‘put on their wellies’ and tended to the environment. Purim and Pesach focused on tzedek: alleviating hardship. A Purim tradition is ‘mishloach manot’, giving gifts to people in need; and Pesach is about helping strangers.

This year, Mitzvah Day organised refugee projects on these themes.

In the interfaith world, Sadaqa Day is our fledgling counterpart in the Muslim community, on which we delivered 10 Jewish-Muslim projects across the country. And a Christian interfaith initiative, Society Sunday, is coming up on 12 June. We’ll run projects then too.

Overall, 2015-16 has shown every day really is a Mitzvah Day.

Because we were strangers.
A focus on refugees

A significant focus of Mitzvah Day’s work this year has been supporting refugees. As a humanitarian crisis, which so strongly echoes the Jewish experience, we have done all we can to mobilise volunteers from across communities and faiths to do their bit.

On Mitzvah Day itself, dozens of projects were refugee-centered: from collections of toiletries to cooking for asylum seekers. Work has continued year round, with several collectathons on Sadaqa Day.

Our Pesach campaign followed suit: Don’t pass over helping a stranger this Passover.

And we are currently planning a nappy drive to support a new Christian led day, Society Sunday, for asylum seekers and refugees who need them most.

All these projects are run hand in hand with our charity partners who really understand the issues, and how to make our contribution meaningful.

Case study: FEAST!
Moishe House London’s FEAST!

FEAST! runs fortnightly throughout the year, and started as a collaboration between young adults from Moishe House and a local homeless shelter in Kilburn, Conway House.

Using surplus food donated by the local Sainsbury’s, Moishe House community members work with Conway House residents to cook something creative, then all eat together. It is a wonderful re-introduction to social environments for vulnerable adults.

Co-ordinator Hannah Style said, “We would not have been able to facilitate such a wonderful programme were it not for our involvement and success with Mitzvah Day last year, when we ran a one-off bake-athon for the homeless at this same residence. It has now blossomed into something so important for so many people.”

Case study: Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue

Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue organised an entire day of collectathons and talks to show that ‘Refugees are Welcome’.

Working with the Council of Christians and Jews, the synagogue has been acting as a hub for donations for refugees. Most significantly, on Mitzvah Day NPLS launched a new partnership with the Islamic Centre, High Wycombe.

Rabbi Aaron Goldstein, a veteran of Mitzvah Day for the past eight years, drove donations to High Wycombe with both Muslim and Jewish volunteers, cementing this new and exciting relationship between the faith groups.
The growth of Mitzvah Day

How we spend our donors’ money

Projected budget for 2016
£200,000

Mitzvah Day 2015 saw projects taking place in 21 different countries spread across 4 continents.

The British Ambassador to Israel, His Excellency David Quarrey, joined over 50 students from three Commonwealth partner countries, Britain, Australia and South Africa at a historic blood drive at the MDA HQ in Jerusalem.

Until 2015, British nationals were unable to donate blood in Israel due to risks associated with Mad Cow Disease. These British students were therefore the first group to have donated blood in the country for almost 20 years. Students were given a tour of the MDA centre and learnt about volunteering opportunities.

Throughout Germany, communities teamed up for 120 projects, mainly in support of refugees. In Berlin, 60 Jewish and Muslim volunteers spent the day in a shelter for refugees – cooking, entertaining, teaching and playing games. There were also projects focused on senior citizens, people with disabilities, victims of terrorist attacks, the environment and animal welfare.

In 2016 we aim to launch Mitzvah Day Poland and Mitzvah Day Belgium to join Australia and Germany. In difficult times for Jews around the world, Mitzvah Day provides a platform for Jews to demonstrate what we do best: giving back.

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The Worth Charitable Trust
Joy and Stanley Cohen Charitable Trust

Additionally, other families and friends
plus anonymous supporters

Thank you to our supporters
In 2015, Mitzvah Day has continued to engage with political leaders at all levels from across the political spectrum. We were particularly proud to welcome the Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, to an interfaith cooking event, and the newly-elected Mayor of London Sadiq Khan to several projects on Mitzvah Day itself.

Last year a wonderful thing happened to us here at Dashwood House. We received a massive food bank donation arranged by Mitzvah Day. We are a hostel for vulnerable young women near Notting Hill Gate. The donation helped keep many of our clients safe. It may have saved a life. But certainly, just knowing that someone cares can make a difference.”

Jonathan
Dashwood House

“Philanthropy and support for the wider community have always been core Jewish values, as has our commitment to social action. Mitzvah Day is a wonderful expression of these values as well as an expression of our duties as European citizens.”
Dr Moshe Kantor
President of the European Jewish Congress

“I have an enormous amount of pride in the generosity, selflessness and community engagement shown on Mitzvah Day. In this challenged world, we must strengthen links and build bridges for tolerance and harmony.”
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

“I was delighted to recently see, first-hand, some of the important work that Mitzvah Day and Sadaqa Day are doing. It is all too easy for voluntary work to go unsung, but it is exactly initiatives like this that help to build the social fabric of our country.”
Home Secretary
Theresa May

“Mitzvah Day is a unique event in that it not only brings together our own individual Jewish communities to help others, but unites ALL branches of Judaism and ALL religions.”
Rabbi Danny Rich
Senior Rabbi of Liberal Judaism

“Mitzvah Day is an impressive example of how barriers between faith communities can be overcome through good will and social action.”
Mayor of London
Sadiq Khan

“Mitzvah Day is a powerful movement for change, harnessing the enthusiasm of thousands of people who want to give their time to make a difference in their communities.”
Prime Minister David Cameron

“I am proud to have taken part in many Mitzvah Day events. Mitzvah Day is a brilliant initiative which brings people from different backgrounds together with one united goal.”

Stephen Timms Chair of the APPG on Faith and Society

“Mitzvah Day is a model for social action. It reflects the values that liberals hold dear, bringing people together to make a difference to their local communities. It’s about empowerment, responsibility and integration.”
Liberal Democrat leader
Tim Farron

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“As a Muslim, it was an honour and such a pleasure to work side by side with my Jewish brothers and sisters on Mitzvah Day, working towards one goal. New friends were made and thus new bridges created between our very similar worlds and faiths.”
Onjali Rauf Founder and director of the women’s rights charity Making Herstory