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An Evaluation of the **Mitzvah Day Programme**



Final Report

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Prepared for: Mitzvah Day UK Charitable Trust



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Table of Contents

1.	Executive Summary	4
2.	Introduction	6
	2.1. Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University	6
	2.2. Introduction to Mitzvah Day	6
3.	Methodology	7
4.	Findings	10
	4.1 Understanding Mitzvah Day's Impact: A Theory of Change	10
	4.2 What participants gain from the civic participation which Mitzvah Day enables	14
	4.3 How Mitzvah Day has helped participants feel more part of their local, national or faith community	19
	4.4 How Mitzvah Day brings people together, particularly those who are less likely to meet	21
	4.5 What Mitzvah Day has achieved over the last 10 years and how it can build on this to move forwards	23
5.	Coordinator Responses	24
6.	Conclusion and Recommendations	25



1. Executive Summary

Mitzvah Day UK Charitable Trust is a Jewish-led charity guided by a vision of Jews and non-Jews coming together to build more cohesive neighbourhoods and to strengthen civil society. The aim of the Mitzvah Day programme, led and delivered by the Charitable Trust, is the breaking down of barriers between people who are different through Jewish-led social action. The programme does this by inspiring, facilitating and coordinating social action across the UK and around the world and enabling a better and more supported role for Jews in social action generally.

In March 2017, a team from Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) was commissioned by Mitzvah Day UK Charitable Trust to evaluate the charity's work, including its 2016 programme. This report presents the team's evaluative findings based on criteria agreed by Mitzvah Day UK Charitable Trust and the team from CTPSR. The approach taken has been based on a significant investment of time in learning about Mitzvah Day from those closest to the programme and has resulted in a strong understanding of how the programme operates, its distinctiveness and where and how its successes and impact can be measured.

Against the aims and ambitions of the programme, this evaluation finds that Mitzvah Day is a hugely successful and well organised programme which is meeting its aims, reflecting its vision in its operations and, importantly, has a clear, evidenced and positive impact across Jewish and wider communities in local areas.

The Mitzvah Day programme has shown itself to be an established leader in the field of social action and social interaction work. Though Jewish-led, it places a strong emphasis on multi-faith and interfaith social action whilst also recognising the importance of more secular community and voluntary bodies. The high profile and strong brand enable Mitzvah Day to take on this leadership role; with clear, evidenced benefits for smaller organisations and charities from working and associating with the brand.

Key to the ethos of Mitzvah Day is that it does not seek to dictate the best course of social action to be undertaken in local areas. In contrast to previous critiques of the

programme, this work finds that Mitzvah Day has a clear footprint across the UK and in other countries and, further, allows and encourages a rare (for this sector) amount of autonomy at a local, grassroots level, allowing local groups and organisations to set their own course. Mitzvah Day's central role is in providing the expertise, focus, resources and profile to make locally-led social action happen.

Importantly too, this research has demonstrated to a strong degree of statistical reliability¹ that, aligning with the aims of the programme, coordinators in local areas feel it is an important, enjoyable and positive experience for them to be involved in and has allowed them to meet new people who are different from them. The key findings here are summarised as such:

- 95% of Jewish coordinator respondents to the questionnaire felt that it was important to them, as a Jewish person, that Mitzvah Day promotes stronger communities and social action.
- 97% of coordinators involved in Mitzvah Day 2016 enjoyed the experience.
- 94% of coordinators felt that Mitzvah Day has made a positive impact to a charity or local community.
- 84% of coordinators felt that Mitzvah Day was successful in contributing to the vision of being a day of Jews and non-Jews coming together to make a difference to local neighbourhoods and to strengthen their communities.
- 74% of coordinators felt that Mitzvah Day successfully promotes interfaith work.
- 76% of coordinators felt that being involved in Mitzvah Day meant that they came into contact with someone whom they otherwise would not have and 98% viewed this as a positive experience. These were people from different faith groups (35 respondents out of 66), people from different age groups (33/66), people from the same faith group (28/66), people from different social or economic backgrounds (27/66) and people of a different ethnicity (23/66).

In commissioning this work and in all interactions with the research team, those involved with Mitzvah Day have shown a positive and open attitude towards both the evaluation process and the critiques which came with it – strong indicators of a programme which is not complacent in its achievements and which is open to learning and change. Within this context the following recommendations are made, with a focus on improving internal processes of an already highly successful programme:

1. The Theory of Change model developed in this evaluation should be used to inform future targets and measures of achievement for the programme and be reviewed and updated regularly.
2. There are no measures in place at the moment to capture longer term behavioural or attitudinal changes in individuals, organisations or communities. It is a definite positive for the programme that previous participants have reported positive feelings and outcomes as a result of their participation, but these should, where possible, be evidenced.
3. Mitzvah Day collects annual case studies focusing on some of the individual communities they work with, however these groups could be assessed over a period of multiple years.

This would supplement the understanding of longer term behavioural and attitudinal changes in the individuals, organisations or communities that interact with Mitzvah Day. This data would be easier to collect at grassroots level, to explore where the project has brought about notable stories of positive change. Mitzvah Day's annual Awards Ceremony, or another possible competition or incentive-based promotion may encourage communal responses for data gathering. Inclusion here of organisations for which involvement in Mitzvah Day has been a catalyst for positive change would be beneficial.

4. A smaller, quantitative piece of work should be undertaken to gain the views and opinions of Mitzvah Day participants and volunteers of non-Jewish backgrounds. Though this piece of work did not exclude these groups, they were not adequately represented. If the same, or similar questions, were asked of non-Jewish volunteers and participants, this would allow for a comparison with Jewish respondents. In particular too, as with recommendation 3, capturing real stories where involvement in Mitzvah Day has benefitted an external organisation via upskilling or positive association should be considered.
5. Consideration should be given as to how Mitzvah Day fits into other social action and social interaction programmes across the country. This is likely to be of particular importance following the unveiling of the UK Government's new Integration Strategy in 2018. Aligning the organisation's vocabulary and communication is likely to help the programme to stay relevant to national policy aims. A proactive response to the publication of the new Integration Strategy would also further cement Mitzvah Day's place at the vanguard of the UK social action and interaction sector.
6. Mitzvah Day Charitable Trust should give some consideration to the potential positive reputational and practical implications of branding themselves more openly as a charity.

1. 10.9% margin of error at 95% confidence level

2. Introduction

In March 2017, a team from Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) was commissioned by Mitzvah Day UK Charitable Trust (CT) to evaluate the charity's work, including its 2016 programme. This report presents the team's evaluative findings based on the criteria agreed by Mitzvah Day UK CT and the team from CTPSR.

2.1. Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University

The [Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations](#) (CTPSR) is a multidisciplinary, applied research centre based at Coventry University. Our focus is on research and action which grows the capacity of all actors to work towards peaceful and resilient societies. Building on Coventry's history in peace, reconciliation and social cohesion, we bring together expertise from across the world and every aspect of the social sciences and humanities to strengthen our understanding of the greatest challenges and opportunities arising from an ever-changing and connected world. We provide evidence and support on issues as diverse as local multi-faith action in the UK, to national peacebuilding initiatives across Africa, aiming to support the work of local practitioners, governments, global organisations such as the UN and everyone in-between.

CTPSR has a strong belief in the importance and power of fair, nuanced and rigorous evaluation research. Our approach is grounded in a commitment to understanding not only the difference made through community-based action but also the processes, barriers and challenges experienced along the way: we believe it is vital to understand both what the impact is and how it is achieved. Wherever viable, our research is undertaken collaboratively with projects and participants. Our evaluation approaches are always tailored to the needs of busy projects, working alongside delivery and ensuring wherever possible that everyone is able to benefit from their participation in some way.

2.2. Introduction to Mitzvah Day

Mitzvah Day is the largest multi-faith day of social action in the UK, led and coordinated by the Mitzvah Day UK CT. Each year since 2005, Mitzvah Day has brought people from different faiths and backgrounds together to take part in social action by engaging in a diverse range of projects from food bank collections and volunteering projects at homeless shelters to running arts activities for disabled people and organising blood donor sessions. These projects are organised, supported and/or delivered by a network of Mitzvah Day partners, including faith institutions, schools, businesses, interfaith groups and charities working on many different themes. Mitzvah Day projects centre around one day in November each year but can happen all year round.

Underpinned by Jewish values, the overarching vision of Mitzvah Day is to increase the amount of social action around the UK and across the world, with Jews and non-Jews 'coming together to build more cohesive neighbourhoods and strengthen civil society' (Mitzvah Day, 2017). The Mitzvah Day UK CT organisation is a Jewish-led organisation, founded by Laura Marks OBE in 2005, based in London but working in the UK and, increasingly, overseas.

For clarity in this report, Mitzvah Day refers to the day of Jewish led social action which is being evaluated. The organisation which runs Mitzvah Day, Mitzvah Day UK CT, is not. The distinction between the two, where appropriate is made by referring to the full title of the organisation.

3. Methodology

The evaluation of Mitzvah Day is based on the following set of evaluative objectives which were agreed upon and commissioned prior to the CTPSR team's involvement. These are:

To gain insight into issues such as:

- What participants feel Mitzvah Day has achieved so far;
- What they as individuals gain from the civic participation which Mitzvah Day enables;
- How Mitzvah Day has helped them feel more part of their local, national or faith community;
- How Mitzvah Day brings people together, particularly those who traditionally do not meet;
- Ways to build on ten years of activity moving forward.

To do this the evaluation team aimed to:

- Measure how involvement in Mitzvah Day has affected Jewish people's perceptions of themselves and their communities, and to what extent it contributes to a sense of shared vision for communities;
- Assess how effectively Mitzvah Day promotes the interfaith agenda, which develops resilience in the face of negative or extremist propaganda;
- Improve our understanding of how to reach isolated Jewish groups;
- Consider ways to increase Mitzvah Day participation;
- Consider how and in what ways Mitzvah Day contributes to Jewish identity;
- Consider ways to sustain the Mitzvah Day legacy – the sense of community belonging which comes through involvement on the day itself – throughout the rest of the year;
- Learn how to bring more, diverse groups together within communities and;

- Gauge the extent to which participants are being given opportunities through Mitzvah Day to develop trust and promote solidarity within the local (or national) community, particularly in areas which may face division on the basis of faith.

The team conducted the data collection between April-September 2017 with the following approach to fieldwork:

An **Online questionnaire** for Mitzvah Day stakeholders was sent out to the Mitzvah Day mailing list. By 22nd September 180 people had responded to the questionnaire. As we do not know the number of people who received and read the questionnaire, we are not able to calculate an accurate response rate (percentage of the total population) for all stakeholders. Based on the CTPSR team's previous evaluation experience, however, 180 responses is a large number of responses for an evaluation of this scale and is very likely to have generated a useful and reliable dataset.

We do, however, know that in 2016 there were 357 UK based Mitzvah Day coordinators and that the online questionnaire was sent to all of these. There were 66 respondents and thus a response rate of 18.5%. This gives a more statistically significant set of responses than the whole dataset and so is analysed separately in Section 5.

Mitzvah Day was highly proactive in encouraging the different stakeholders to complete the questionnaire, matching the open and positive attitude shown towards evaluation and learning from Mitzvah Day throughout the process. After the initial launch, one reminder email was sent to the participants. The decision was made after this to not push for any further responses, avoiding any potentially coercive affect and skewing of data. It is, however, also accepted that there may be some self-selection bias in the responses – those institutions which had either negative or neutral experiences of the programme may have been less likely to respond. Whilst common and arguably unavoidable in many evaluation methodologies, these minor limitations should be seen as caveats to the findings of this report. It is acknowledged that the sample used here was a convenience sample. This is a common practice in social psychological research (Howitt and Cramer 2008: 55) and evaluation generally. Analysis of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, for example, reveals that 80% of studies published used convenience samples (West et al 1992).

Figure 1 below shows the capacity to which respondents to the questionnaire had previously been involved with Mitzvah Day. The data shows that the majority of respondents were involved in some way in coordinating a Mitzvah Day event. This is very likely to come from an over-representation of Mitzvah Day coordinators within the sample and therefore an under-representation of volunteers and more casual participants. This would suggest that respondents have a greater knowledge of the programme than is typical of all participants.

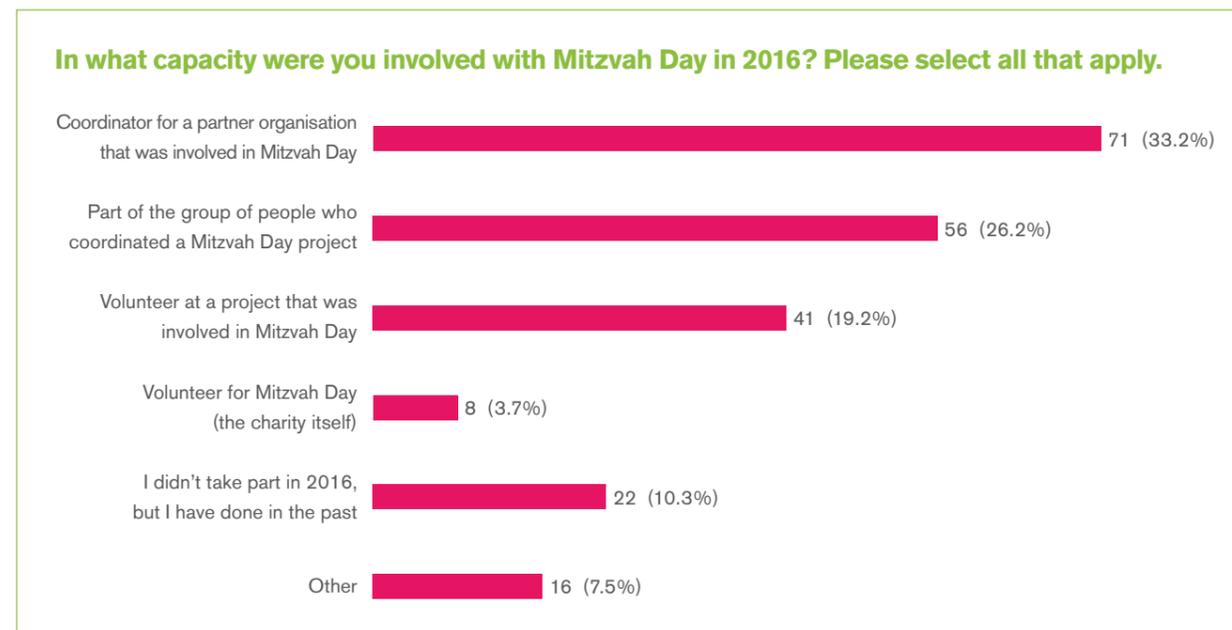


Figure 1

The majority of respondents to the questionnaire were from Jewish backgrounds (89%). Based on anecdotal evidence and the Jewish-led nature of the organisation, we believe this to be fairly typical of those involved with Mitzvah Day. The other religious backgrounds significantly represented were Christian (5%) and Muslim (3%).

These figures, however, only include those who responded to the questionnaire and who were directly involved with Mitzvah Day. Many more individuals of different faith groups will, knowingly or unknowingly, have been involved in or beneficiaries of Mitzvah Day events. To focus solely on these figures is to downplay the total reach of the programme.

As shown in Figure 2 below, there is a significant diversity within the Jewish cohort of respondents.

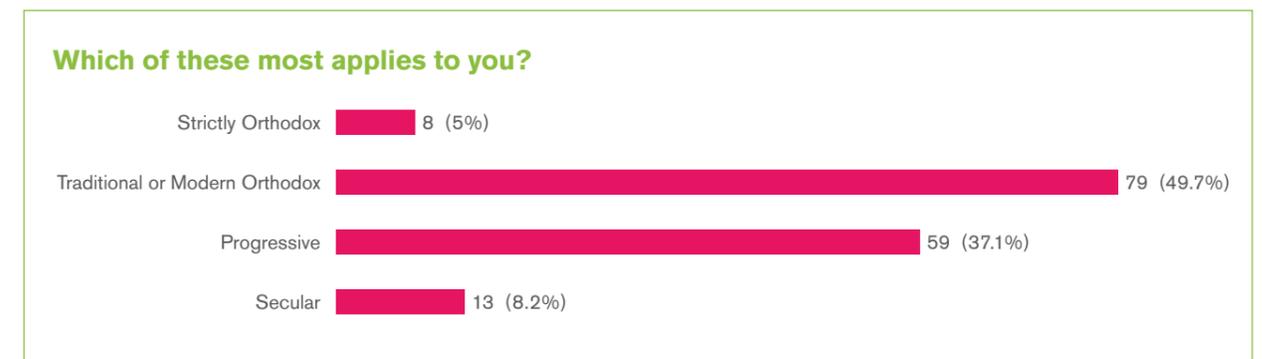


Figure 2

This data demonstrates that the programme has a clear attraction for and reach across all sectors of the Jewish population and communities.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 Mitzvah Day stakeholders. These included interviews with people from a range of backgrounds who had been involved with Mitzvah Day in the past, including faith institutions, schools, charities and businesses. The interviewees had been involved with Mitzvah Day for between 1 to 10 years in a variety of different roles from volunteering to organising Mitzvah Day projects themselves. Therefore the interviewees formed a varied group of people with different views and experiences of Mitzvah Day.

The interviews were conducted via telephone to accommodate the busy schedules of participants and in order to make participation in the evaluation as convenient and easy as possible. Reminder emails were sent to the participants to encourage them to participate in the telephone interviews.

A possible limitation here, as introduced with the questionnaires above, is that most interview participants were self-selecting. Whilst the high response rate to the questionnaire ensures relatively good coverage of the whole programme, this is not the case with the interview sample.

It is obviously not desirable to try to coerce unwilling or completely disengaged stakeholders into taking part in the data collection and so, if those voices exist, it is important to note that they are not represented in the findings of this report.

This project and its methodology has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Leader at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations and the Centre's Ethics Approval Process. Informed consent, either verbally or in writing, was provided ahead of all interviews undertaken. All interview participants received a Participant Information Sheet which outlined the aims and objectives of the project including the contact details of the research team.

A **Theory of Change session** was conducted with 16 Mitzvah Day board members, employees and stakeholders. The session followed a standard Theory of Change structure, starting with the definition of programme aims, followed by a detailed description of activities and, subsequently, of intermediate outcomes. The discussion was captured using post-it notes in order to enable the team to participate actively in the process. The diagram was then cleaned up by a member of the evaluation team and presented back to Mitzvah Day to ensure it provided a satisfactory representation of the programme. The final diagram adopted as the basis for the evaluation is presented in Figure 3.

4. Findings

The sections below set out the main analysis and findings from the data collected through the approach above.

4.1 Understanding Mitzvah Day's Impact: A Theory of Change

As introduced above, the evaluation team began the research process by facilitating a Theory of Change session with 16 Mitzvah Day UK CT board, staff members and stakeholders. Theory of Change is a method of logically describing the desired impact of an organisation. It uses assumptions to show how the everyday *activities* of an organisation create a set of intermediate *outcomes*. These outcomes collectively show how the organisation contributes to an overarching, intangible *aim* or long-term social goal.

In this evaluation, Theory of Change allowed an evaluation framework to be developed from within the organisation, rather than using an externally imposed set of measures. Mitzvah Day UK CT is a unique organisation with ambitions specific to its founders and team – imposing a set of measures from outside the organisation is unlikely to be the most effective method of capturing and understanding the organisation's impact. The process allowed those closest to Mitzvah Day to shape the evaluation, identifying the change they are trying to create and the assumptions that underpin their logic. It was also an effective way for the evaluators to develop an understanding of the ambitions, passion, ways of working and relationships of Mitzvah Day in a way that was relaxed and fun. Also distinctive is that Mitzvah Day UK CT is an organisation which, primarily, runs one major programme, a programme with which it shares a name. This led to some questioning and attempts to differentiate between the aims of Mitzvah Day UK CT and Mitzvah Day. This was not something which had been internally interrogated previously. The Theory of Change focussed on the Mitzvah Day programme.

Similarly, it was not apparent that Mitzvah Day UK CT had clearly positioned itself as a charity. Whilst highly successful in its role as a leader and enabler of charitable works in civil society, the approach to marketing and promotion does not establish clearly that the Mitzvah Day UK CT is a distinctive organisation and charity. There was no mention of Mitzvah Day as a charity on the Mitzvah Day website or promotional material. It was noted by the facilitators that participants also did not refer to Mitzvah Day as a receiver, but almost solely as a giver or as a helper.

The product of this session is shown in Figure 3. The discussion below addresses each of the three areas of the diagram below in turn, beginning with the aim of Mitzvah Day.

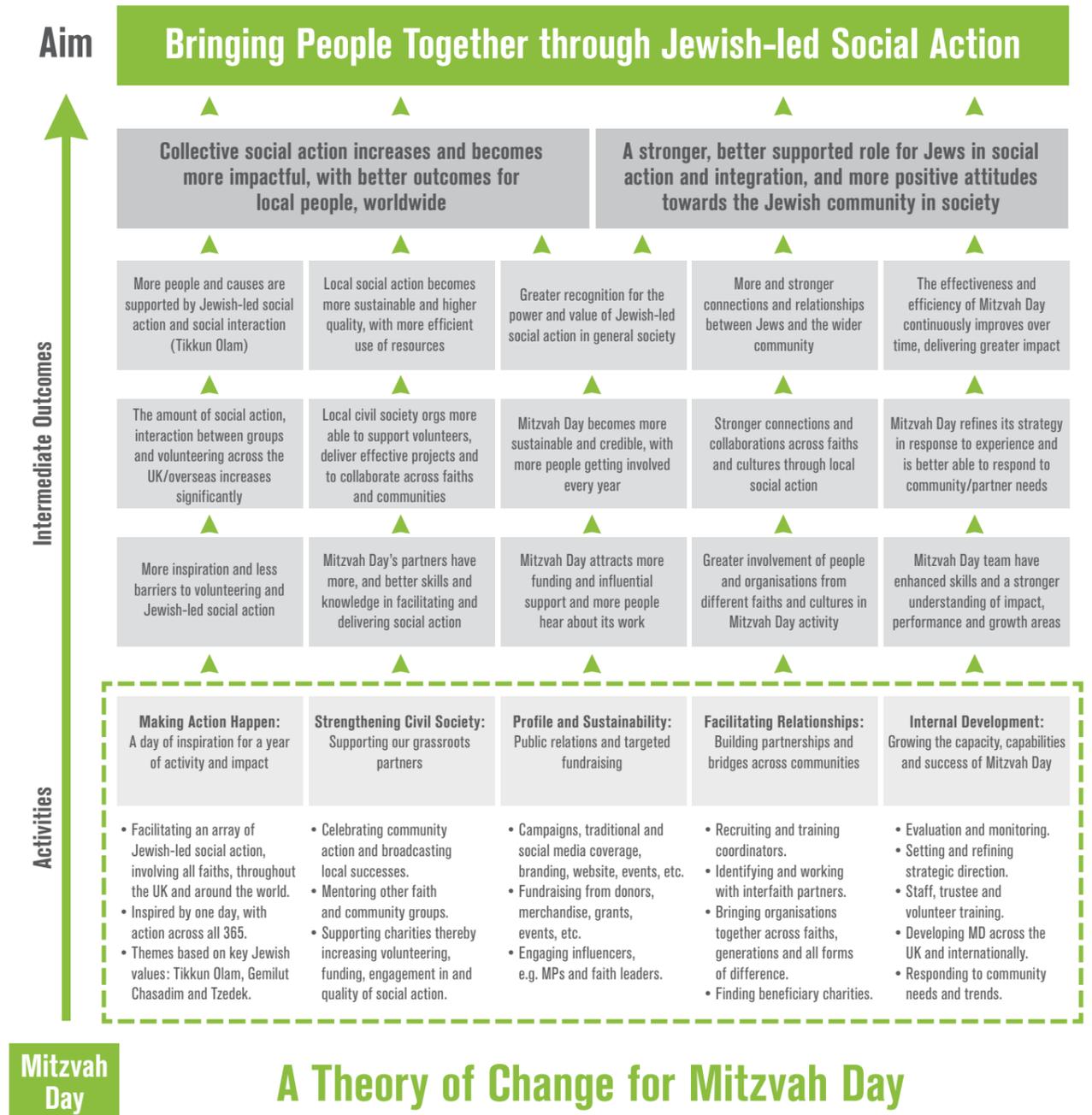


Figure 3

The overarching aim of Mitzvah Day

A discussion of the overarching aim revealed the complexity of the organisation's ambitions and the nuance required to establish both the distinctiveness of Mitzvah Day and what the organisation has in common with the ambitions of its partners. Many different ways of describing Mitzvah Day's aim were posited but underpinning them all were a set of common factors and concepts on which there was consensus. These are discussed briefly below.

The final overarching aim was set as:

Bringing people together through Jewish-led social action

The Importance of Local

Mitzvah Day is a national and increasingly international organisation, with a central base and organisational structure; at the heart of its aim, however, is *local* action and change. Central to Mitzvah Day's mission is its desire to facilitate and inspire locally-led action that can be entirely different in each city, town and street across the UK and around the world. The locally-led element was felt to be important, particularly in contrast to other organisations trying to achieve similar change but using a common model of delivery across areas or, for example, through nationally-dictated programmes. By working with local partners, building relationships at a local level and providing inspiration and tools for individuals and groups to use, the organisation is aiming to catalyse change from within communities – a bottom-up approach with national/international and faith-based inspiration. Significant here too was the level of support and organisational credibility that Mitzvah Day lends to partners. Smaller organisations are provided an opportunity to learn from working with an international charity acting in many respects as a peer to them. This peer-based role seemed largely unrecognised within the internal team. Close association with the Mitzvah Day brand also gave other organisations and charities a vicarious credibility. This upskilling activity and positive association gives Mitzvah Day a local impact far beyond that of the activities of the day itself.

Change without Prescription

In a similar vein, the ambition to *improve* local communities represents a common recognition across the Mitzvah Day team that across the world, people and areas are in vital need of support, investment and development, and in innumerable ways. Importantly, however, it is not

desirable for Mitzvah Day to define, identify or classify this improvement. Mitzvah Day provides the inspiration, support and tools to create a diversity of changes, from increasing the number of blood donations and renovating buildings to help for destitute refugees and more support for children's hospices. Central to the aim, however, is a view that positive local change can be created through Mitzvah Day without the need for the organisation to ever prescribe or predetermine what the change should be.

Jewish-led Social Action

There was much discussion over the inclusion of the words 'Jewish-led' in the aim. Mitzvah Day is a Jewish-led organisation: its work is founded on values and concepts from Judaism, including its name taken from 'mitzvot', the term for commandments in Jewish law often interpreted as good deeds or acts of kindness. It was seen as of central importance, however, for the aim to capture the ambition of Mitzvah Day to reach out beyond Jewish communities. Following this, it was felt that 'Jewish-led' social action accurately captured the ambition of Mitzvah Day to take inspiration from Judaism but proactively work to inspire and celebrate the social action of people from all faiths and cultures and, further still, to facilitate interaction between and within groups.

Finally, the overarching aim shows that Mitzvah Day has much in common with the ambitions of other organisations seeking to increase social action and bring people from different backgrounds together – an important starting point for establishing partnerships with other groups and agencies. The aim, however, also places great emphasis on the distinctiveness of Mitzvah Day: a belief in local action, a foundation in Judaism and a diversity of impacts that can be different in every context. That Mitzvah Day is distinctively Jewish-led was one of the areas of clearest agreement in the Theory of Change session. What seemed less commonly-understood were the reasons it is important that Mitzvah Day is Jewish-led.

Activities

A key benefit of a Theory of Change approach is the opportunity to temporarily think outside of organisational structures, project plans and delivery schedules and view the activities of an organisation solely through the lens of the change they create. The process identified a large range and volume of activities within Mitzvah Day which have been grouped into five key areas of operation, with some natural overlap between groups.

Making Action Happen – this is the largest group of activities across the organisation and the group that is most visible and strongly associated with the Mitzvah Day brand. Activities relate to the array of Jewish-led social action that takes place in local areas, across a multitude of different themes. It was stressed throughout that the ambition of Mitzvah Day is for these activities to occur throughout the year rather than being solely focused on one day. Strengthening this aspect of the work was identified as an area for development by the Mitzvah Day board during this process.

Strengthening Civil Society – the Mitzvah Day team provides a range of formal and informal support to local grassroots partners as part of its work. Mitzvah Day is able to use its national reach and significant profile to promote the work of others and publically celebrate local community action, aiming to raise awareness of Jewish-led social action. Less explicitly, however, the team also provides a range of support through mentoring, advice and guidance for grassroots partners, helping them to become more effective at, for example, attracting and retaining volunteers, fundraising and delivering sustainable social action. The Theory of Change demonstrates that this group of activities is vital to Mitzvah Day's success: strengthening the quality of social action is as important as the desired increase in volume. Despite their centrality, however, these activities seem somewhat underrepresented in the profile and perception of Mitzvah Day, as discussed within the session.

Facilitating Relationships – essential to the success of Mitzvah Day is its partnership working with other organisations and groups. Through recruiting a network of local coordinators, working with interfaith partners and finding beneficiary charities, it is able to not only catalyse local action but ensure the inclusion of people from different faiths and cultures. Whilst Jewish-led, Mitzvah Day works to bring people together from other faiths, generations and other forms of difference, with the ambition of fostering relationships between people who would not normally meet.

Internal Development and Profile and Sustainability – these two groups of activities represent largely internally-serving functions essential to the operation of Mitzvah Day. By fundraising, marketing, advertising, merchandising and working with influencers, Mitzvah Day is able to raise awareness of both its own brand and the Jewish-led social action that it facilitates, ultimately attracting more financial and other support for both. In parallel, Mitzvah Day also places significant emphasis on continuous internal development – a commitment to regularly refining the

strategic direction, learning from experience, developing the strengths of its staff and more effectively responding to the needs of communities. The importance of both sustainability and growth was a core point of discussion throughout the Theory of Change session.

Outcomes

The Theory of Change shows how, through investing in the five groups of activities above, Mitzvah Day aims to achieve a range of intermediate impacts, shown in the diagram as 15 tangible outcomes. These lead to two overarching, more abstract outcomes which reflect the core elements of Mitzvah Day's aim: the desire to have a positive impact on the lives of people through social action and the ambition to foster positive attitudes towards Jews in society.

On the former, the logic demonstrated by the Theory of Change shows that by reducing barriers to people engaging in social action, e.g. volunteering, and providing inspiration and encouragement, Mitzvah Day is able to increase the volume of social action and allow more causes, areas and people to benefit from support. Alongside this increase in volume, as introduced above, is support for partners to increase the effectiveness, sustainability and power of charitable and voluntary work. The assumption here is that the work of charities and community groups will be enhanced by the range of support offered by the Mitzvah Day team, leading to improved skills for staff, stronger awareness of opportunities for funding, more efficient use of resources and ultimately higher quality social action. It was made clear throughout the session that not all partners need or desire this type of support but that, in Mitzvah Day's experience, there are many groups, particularly those recently formed, who value the mentoring, networking, strategic and fundraising expertise available from the Mitzvah Day team.

The second overarching outcome relates to social cohesion and relations between groups in society. As Mitzvah Day is Jewish-led, the emphasis is placed on attitudes towards Jews but implicit within the work of Mitzvah Day is a general desire to improve social relations generally. The logic within this pathway is that through 1) encouraging and facilitating positive contact and collaboration between Jews and people from other faiths and cultures and 2) raising the profile of Jewish-led social action, Mitzvah Day is able to strengthen connections and relationships between Jews and the wider community. The logic underpinning this desired change is discussed and tested throughout this evaluation report.

4.2 What participants gain from the civic participation which Mitzvah Day enables

Building a strong sense of civic participation and responsibility is core to the aims of Mitzvah Day as both a programme of activity and an organisation. This was passionately expressed in the Theory of Change session and came up repeatedly in interviews and conversations with the Mitzvah Day team throughout the evaluation period. Neither Mitzvah Day nor any other participants sought to offer a concise definition of what civic participation in this sense is seen to be. Rather it is more implicitly understood and communicated across the organisation – a commonly valued concept within the organisation’s culture that doesn’t necessarily need specific definition. As a point of reference for this evaluation, however, the American Psychological Society (2016) offers a definition of civic participation as “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern”. Based on data collected and the evaluation team’s experience of Mitzvah Days work, this appears to be a suitable starting definition for the evaluation.

In contrast, the vision of Mitzvah Day is explicitly communicated and, from data collection, commonly understood: Mitzvah Day is a day of Jews and non-Jews coming together to make a difference to local neighbourhoods and to strengthen their communities. The link with the American Psychological Society definition of civic participation is clear: collective actions, addressing issues of public concern.

The understanding of this vision amongst participants was tested in the online questionnaire – 83% felt that it broadly fits with their views of what Mitzvah Day is about (Figure 4). This is positive. Those respondents who did not agree or who were unsure broadly feel into 3 categories:

- those who felt that the programme had significantly more focus on social action than interfaith;
- those who felt that only Jews took part in the programme and;
- those who see taking part as a part of their Jewish life (linking to concepts of Tikkun Olam and Tzedakah).

The vision of Mitzvah Day is of Jews and non-Jews coming together to make a difference to local neighbourhoods and to strengthen local communities. Does this broadly fit with your views on what Mitzvah Day is about?



Figure 4

Participants were also asked how successful they feel Mitzvah Day is in contributing to the vision of being a day of Jews and non-Jews coming together to make a difference to local neighbourhoods and to strengthen their communities. The responses here, as expected, overlap closely with the responses to whether or not the vision fits with the participant’s view of what Mitzvah Day is about. This underlines the credibility and reliability of these findings.

Do you feel that Mitzvah Day is successful in contributing to this vision?



Figure 5

Respondents from Jewish backgrounds were asked an additional question (Figure 6), stemming from conversations with the Mitzvah Day team and the importance placed on the role of Jewish concepts, faith and identity in Mitzvah Day. The question aimed to ask people to reflect on Mitzvah Day in relation to their Jewish identity.

Figure 6 reports that 97% of respondents feel that it is important for them, as Jewish people, that Mitzvah Day promotes stronger communities and encourages social action showing the clear link between Jewish identity and the work and image of Mitzvah Day. Given the centrality of the Jewish faith to the programme, this should be seen as a powerful and positive indication of proximity between people’s identity as Jews and their perception of Mitzvah Day – a resonance between people’s personal faith and the work of the organisation.

Is it important for you as a Jewish person, that Mitzvah Day promotes stronger communities and encourages social action?



Figure 6

No interviewees or respondents gave their reasoning behind not believing that, as a Jewish person, it is important to them that Mitzvah Day promotes stronger communities and encourages social action. Most of those who responded positively gave further reasoning and, through this, we identified three broad camps, set out below with selected quotes to illustrate the sentiments of each group.

1. Those who feel that community involvement and social action is an important part of Jewish identity (again, the link to Tikkun Olam and Tzedakah):

“It’s quite nice to take Jewish values and export them”

“We are demonstrating to the Jewish community that we can give back to the community...we are not an isolated group”

“As a Jew, I try to do as much as social activism and volunteering as I can, and to give back”

2. Those who feel that the day acts an important focal point for bringing the Jewish community (or communities) together:

“It’s a very positive way to bring the Jewish community together”

“Jewish community needs Mitzvah Day...particularly in smaller communities...it’s very important that it has strong Jewish identity”

“It does really well in connecting to different parts of the Jewish community”

3. Those who feel that engaging in activities and events which promote stronger communities and social action reflects well on the Jewish population and positively influences the opinion of other groups:

“It has a positive impact in terms of what it says about the Jewish community and giving back”

“It gets us to talk about Jews in different ways”

Away from the specific vision of Mitzvah Day, people of all faiths generally felt confident in articulating the broader aims of Mitzvah Day. The quotes below demonstrate how ably interviewees and questionnaire respondents were able to articulate their own interpretations of the aims of the programme. As shown in the quotes below, many of these are synonyms or alternative expressions of Mitzvah Day’s stated vision or the definition offered of civic participation.

“To do things for others. To be involved, to broaden your experiences, being involved with all faith communities”

“Bringing people together...being part of community... bringing different types of people together, Jews and non-Jews”

“To provide some good deeds for the local community”

“To make a positive social impact”

“To encourage community spirit”

“To get people involved in social action and to get diverse groups of people involved in social action as well”

“To do social justice, to do difference”

“To bring local people together, to build stronger communities by doing social action together”

These articulations of the aims of Mitzvah Day across the data collected point to a highly positive finding for the organisation: there is a common, relevant and positive understanding of what Mitzvah Day is and seeks to achieve for the vast majority of its stakeholders. This reflects extremely positively on the way the organisation has communicated its aims and work and hints at the ability of the organisation to unite a diversity of people behind its aims and vision.

Moving on to another area of positive findings, the evaluation shows that nearly all respondents (95%) who took part in Mitzvah Day enjoyed their experience (Figure 7). The importance of a positive, enjoyable experience for Mitzvah Day participants was highlighted by the organisation as critical to the success of the programme:

“It makes people feel good...for people to go home feeling good, that they have done something good” (Mitzvah Day team member)

Did you enjoy your involvement in Mitzvah Day?



Figure 7

This ties in closely with findings with intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954, Pettigrew and Tropp 2007) which show that individuals experience greater reductions in prejudice and more positive attitudes towards other groups when they have had a positive – as opposed to neutral or negative – interaction or experience with that group. Negative experiences similarly lead to increased levels of prejudice and increased negative attitudes towards other groups. Therefore, this high level of enjoyment with participation in the programme is both important in terms of outcomes for participants and their likely attitudes to people from other groups, and represents a significant achievement for the Mitzvah Day programme.

The sole respondent who did not enjoy their experience felt this way because they had requested information about the programme and were sent a full pack to run their own event. This is something which they had no intention of doing and so they subsequently felt guilty for the costs involved to the organisation.

The evaluation data shows clearly that a benefit of involvement for individuals in the Mitzvah Day programme is the feeling that participants have made a positive impact to a charity or local community (Figure 8). 92% of participants felt that they had achieved this whilst only 1% were sure that they had not. This is a strong indicator of success which relates excellently to Mitzvah Day’s desire for individuals to feel and value the contribution they have made through their involvement. As one internal stakeholder stated:

“If people know that they are doing good for themselves and others, they’ll come back and do it again. They’ll go away feeling better about themselves”

Does Mitzvah Day make you feel like you have made a positive impact to a charity or local community?



Figure 8

Building on these findings, Figure 9 shows that those who believed that Mitzvah Day had made a positive impact upon a charity or local community felt that this positive impact had occurred in a range of ways.

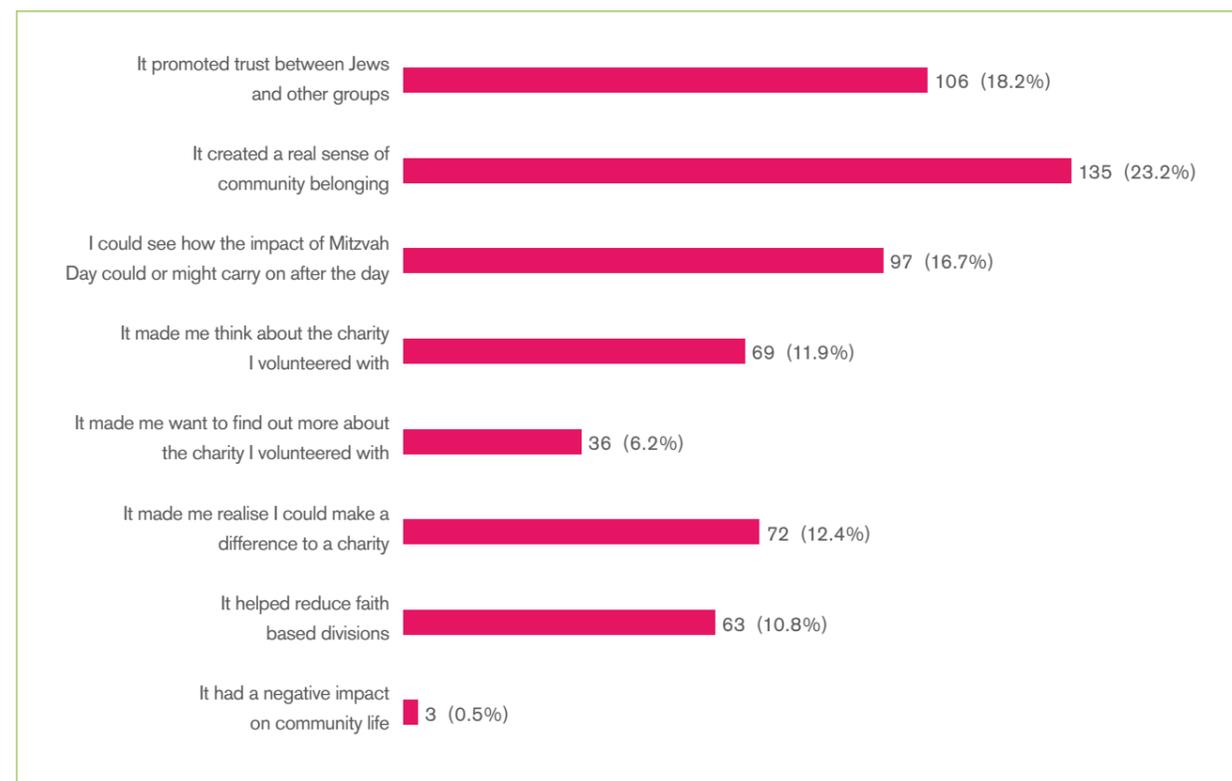


Figure 9

It was felt that a ‘sense of belonging’ was created or enhanced, perceived levels of trust between Jews and other groups were increased and perceptions of faith-based divisions were reduced. The outcomes shown here are highly positive signs of the programme creating change; collectively they are a powerful demonstration of the contribution Mitzvah Day makes to social relations between faith groups at a local level.

Further, the idea that 97 respondents saw how the impact of Mitzvah Day could continue to be felt after the day is a real positive for local communities and charities Mitzvah Day supports. This is strongly suggestive that the work done by Mitzvah Day is desired, positive and sustainable. When linked with the reported increases in interest around volunteering and the work of local charities, it is also strongly suggests that the programme acts as a ‘catalyst that leads to more’ (internal stakeholder) involvement and action beyond the day itself.

4.3 How Mitzvah Day has helped participants feel more part of their local, national or faith community

The importance placed on Mitzvah Day being a Jewish-led day of social action and of the work that it does in bringing different elements of the Jewish communities together is one of the major strengths of the programme. As discussed in Section 3.2, participants clearly feel that bringing together Jewish communities is an important ambition but also value the programme’s ability to bring people together from different faith groups. This dual offering on such a large scale is, in the UK at least, unique to Mitzvah Day. Interviewees raised concerns over what could take the place in Mitzvah Day in fulfilling these dual roles if the organisation ceased to operate, concluding that there is no programme that could come close because of the level of investment, reach, networks and awareness created across the UK and beyond since the organisation’s inception.

In short, without the work of Mitzvah Day, it is highly likely that the Jewish communities living in the UK would be more isolated in a range of ways, both from other Jewish people and from people of other faiths. Social action and social interaction in areas in which Mitzvah Day operates would also likely be lower, though it is accepted that there are a range of other agencies working towards these aims.

Engagement in this evaluation has been lower with members of non-Jewish faith groups than would be ideal. In part this is because the methodology focussed on engaging with individuals who had led Mitzvah Day projects. However, respondents from all faith backgrounds were very clear that they believe that Mitzvah Day successfully promotes the interfaith agenda (Figure 10).

Examples of direct and indirect interfaith and multi-faith work were forthcoming throughout the research with these too numerous to concisely list. One interviewee, for example, gave the following estimate and insight:

“There were 83 examples of interfaith work from last year – we had a chief rabbi cooking with local imam together in a foodbank and interfaith cooking for the homeless. We cook together and then donate the food to local homeless shelter”

In response to the question posed in Figure 10, 15% of respondents to this question were unsure as to whether or not Mitzvah Day successfully promotes the interfaith agenda. Some respondents here were genuinely unsure of the impact of the programme in this regard; however the majority of respondents who were not sure simply were not aware of the “interfaith agenda”.



Figure 10

Respondents were also asked whether or not they feel that strong interfaith links and work can create an environment in which there is less prejudice and hatred. 92% responded that they believe this to be the case with only 1% believing otherwise. This figure, given that respondents are drawn from volunteers and organisers of a faith sector event, is not surprising. It does emphasise, however, that Mitzvah Day is engaging and working with individuals who share their values.

Mitzvah Day is also seeing success in helping to make people feel more a part of their local or faith community: 60% of respondents agree that this is the case (Figure 11). This figure is lower than may have been expected but, given the numbers of people involved and the relatively small intervention that Mitzvah Day makes, this is still illustrative of a positive impact: how great an increase in community belonging can be expected from involvement in a one day event would need to be explored through more in depth data collection. It is worthy of note that other interventions between different groups, such as intergroup contact or intercultural dialogue, typically take place over longer timeframes than most of the projects taking place under the Mitzvah Day brand. It may also be the case that respondents already feel that they are fully a part of their local or faith community, in which case their involvement in the programme is not likely to illicit a strong shift in perception.

Several respondents cited the strong branding of the programme as a reason why they felt that their participation increased their sense of belonging. The physical act of seeing other people in the same branded t-shirts as them and of working alongside them under the same banner really did seem to add to the outcome.

“Seeing other green tshirts around London makes you feel that you’re all in it together.”

Some interviewees were critical of the focus that Mitzvah Day placed on working in big cities, and particularly London. In response to this, however, it is recognised by this evaluation that the programme arguably does require a critical mass of Jewish populations in an area for it to run successfully. Also, it was felt by some interviewees that Mitzvah Day could have the most impact working in big cities because of the established and visible levels of diversity prevalent in them.

“Ignorance of the other is so apparent in big cities – When you live in a big city, faith groups tend to live near each other and in a “cocoon” so to break into those groups is essential for a cohesive society”

The programme's ability to offer scope for these visible but often-segregated groups to come together in these urban areas is, from the data presented here, a critically important element of its offer.

4.4 How Mitzvah Day brings people together, particularly those who are less likely to meet

The core aims and vision of Mitzvah Day revolve around people coming together to improve their local communities. This evaluation demonstrates that this is clearly something which happens in a wide variety of ways. All interviewees were able to give examples of the programme bringing different groups together – examples of interfaith groups, multifaith groups and people of no faith, to do good work in their local areas. Importantly too, 74% of all respondents to the online questionnaire believe that being involved in Mitzvah Day has brought them into contact with someone who they otherwise would not normally meet (Figure 12).

Mitzvah Day's approach here is well supported by academic theory. Bringing individuals into contact with people whom they would not normally meet or interact with is central to ideas around promoting positive intergroup contact and building trust between individuals. Low levels of self-efficacy are a common cause for 'pre-contact' (before an event, for example) anxiety amongst participants (Turner, Crisp and Lambert 2007) which

links closely with social embarrassment. Individuals who are unfamiliar with a situation that they find themselves in enjoy the contact less (or avoid it entirely) as they fear making a faux pas. Mitzvah Day, in bringing people together around a common aim and under a common brand, begins to break down these barriers and fears and, in doing so, mitigates some of the strongest predictors of negative or lack of contact. By familiarising an individual with different groups through Mitzvah Day's activities, the fear of social embarrassment is lessened and levels of self-efficacy are more likely to be increased.

These positive interactions between individuals can have wider societal benefits too as individuals tend to associate stereotypes with outgroups (or other groups) based on their interactions with members of that group. Therefore, providing that the individual is identified as belonging to an outgroup, the contact is more likely to lead to lower levels of prejudice towards that whole outgroup (Paolini et al., 2004). It is clear to see how this Intergroup Contact Model (Hewstone and Brown, 1986) fits in with the Mitzvah Day ambitions of increasing positive perceptions of Jewish communities.

Did being involved in Mitzvah Day help you to feel more a part of your local or faith community?

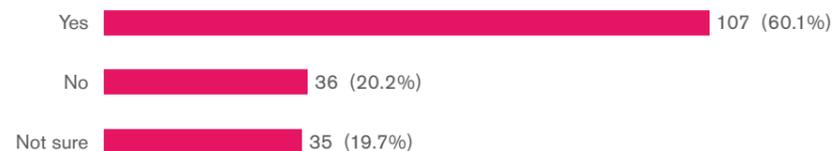


Figure 11

Did being involved in Mitzvah Day bring you into contact with someone or some people who you otherwise would not normally meet?



Figure 12

Whilst it is an achievement for the programme that so many people who otherwise would not interact are brought together, it is perhaps an even greater achievement that 98% of those who did meet someone whom they usually would not find this to be a positive experience. Positive experiences with an outgroup have been shown to lead to greater levels of prejudice reduction, lower levels of negative stereotyping and an increased proclivity for engaging in contact in the future (Birtel and Crisp 2012).

Figure 13 below shows the depth and breadth of the diversity of different people which those involved in Mitzvah Day have made contact and spent time with. Again, these are individuals with whom they would not normally come into contact. 93 respondents had come into contact with someone from a different faith group to them, 83 with

someone of a different age group, 81 with someone from a different social or economic background and 64 with someone from a different ethnic group to them. This clearly indicates Mitzvah Day's impressive success towards its aims in bringing different people together. It is hard to imagine a broader sweep of general society than those main categories with which Mitzvah Day is enabling and stimulating contact.

In addition though, 68 respondents, all of whom were Jewish, were brought into contact with someone of the same faith group as them whom they would not normally meet. This brings a true element of successful intra-faith work to the programme to complement its interfaith and multifaith success and fits well with the aims and ambitions of Mitzvah Day.

Did being involved in Mitzvah Day bring you into contact with someone or some people who you otherwise would not normally meet? Please let us know what type of different people or group was this?

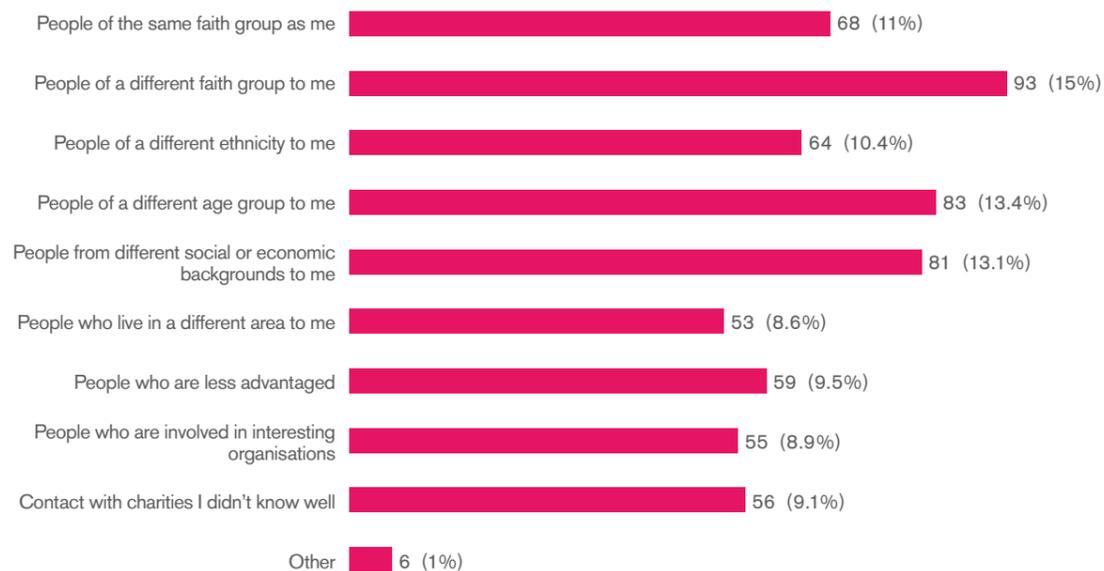


Figure 13

4.5 What Mitzvah Day has achieved over the last 10 years and how it can build on this to move forwards

It is recognised by this evaluation that Mitzvah Day has grown hugely over the last 10 years and that it can credibly claim to be the largest day of Jewish social action in the UK. This is testament to the leadership of the organisation and the direction that this has led the programme in. Throughout the data collection, it became clear to the evaluation team that those leading Mitzvah Day are an ambitious and forward-thinking group with a clear ambition to continue to grow Mitzvah Day in the coming years.

The wider achievements of Mitzvah Day have been documented throughout this evaluation and are reflective of the aims and ambitions of the programme. These include increasing social action and interaction, bringing people who are different together and raising the profile of Jewish communities and the good work that they do. The impacts of this work are felt at organisational, individual and societal levels;

“It has had a very positive impact on our organisation”

“Things grow out of it...now we do a year round project on interfaith....it's a project that came directly out of Mitzvah Day”

“Our relationships with Muslim communities have grown. Based on the things we have done, we have met local Muslims through Mitzvah Day activities. And that therefore strengthens the relationship with Jews and Muslims”

“On a practical level the work and different projects we are involved as a community, have clearly benefitted [the community]”

“It has opened our eyes to working with different faith groups”

The brand that Mitzvah Day has built over the last ten years appears central to its success. As discussed in Section 3.3 many participants in the programme feel that the strong branding and clear identity of Mitzvah Day adds to the sense of community and belonging provided by partaking in the day of action.

“It is a really powerful brand. Almost if you see that colour green anywhere in the community, you know what it is”

“It's an incredible brand”

“People know about Mitzvah Day. People of other faiths know about Mitzvah Day”

91% of respondents to the online questionnaire would like to be involved in Mitzvah Day again and nearly all interviewees were planning to be involved in Mitzvah Day 2017. This lends well to the sustainability of the programme. In part too this will be due to the levels of enjoyment and satisfaction that participants have taken from being involved in the programme. It is essential that Mitzvah Day does not lose sight of this. There is no suggestion that this will not be the case but the non-prescriptive approach to events being run under the Mitzvah Day banner has enabled communities and individuals to come together to do work in their communities and areas which they enjoy and value. This is not likely to be as successful with more top-down approaches to programme management.

The funding of Mitzvah Day was not a specific focus of this evaluation but does clearly warrant discussion when looking at the future of Mitzvah Day. This evaluation and other material produced and collated by Mitzvah Day can successfully evidence the outcomes of the programme and these can be linked back, through the Theory of Change model, to the aims and visions of the programme. The final recommendations of this piece suggest ways in which this evidence base can be built upon and enhanced, preparing evidence to support future funding pursuit.

The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) are due to publish their new Integration Strategy in late 2017 or early 2018. This is likely to include a heavy focus on the role of faith communities and so Mitzvah Day should use the new strategy, in tandem with this evaluation and its recommendations, to plan its own strategic development.

5. Coordinator Responses

This section is an addition to the original report and is based on conversations with the Mitzvah Day UK CT team in January 2018. The data from 2016 UK based Coordinators has been analysed separately from the larger, complete dataset as it allows for the calculation of accurate sample sizes and therefore the statistical significance and reliability of the results. This aligns with Mitzvah Day UK CT's wish to have a credible evidence base for its work.

66 of the 183 online questionnaire responses were from UK-based coordinators involved in Mitzvah Day 2016. In total there were 357 coordinators in the UK involved in Mitzvah Day 2016. The online questionnaire was sent to all of these, providing a response rate of 18.5%. This means that the questionnaire has a margin of error of plus or minus 10.9% at a 95% level of confidence. Simply put, this means that if the survey were conducted 100 times, the data would be within 10.9% points above or below the percentage reported in 95 of the 100 surveys. In the physical sciences to be considered statistically significant, there must be less than a 1 in 20 probability that the findings of the quantitative analysis were down to chance whereas in the social sciences a figure of 1 in 10, or 10%, is more acceptable (Bryman and Cramer 1999: 105).

94% of coordinator respondents were Jewish (45% Traditional or Modern Orthodox and 37% Progressive) with 2% Christian and 4% of no religion.

The key findings are that:

- 95% of Jewish coordinator respondents to the questionnaire felt that it was important to them, as a Jewish person, that Mitzvah Day promotes stronger communities and social action.
- 97% of coordinators involved in Mitzvah Day 2016 enjoyed the experience.
- 94% of coordinators felt that Mitzvah Day has made a positive impact to a charity or local community.
- 84% of coordinators felt that Mitzvah Day was successful in contributing to the vision of being a day of Jews and non-Jews coming together to make a difference to local neighbourhoods and to strengthen their communities.

- 74% of coordinators felt that Mitzvah Day successfully promotes interfaith work.
- 76% of coordinators felt that being involved in Mitzvah Day meant that they came into contact with someone whom they otherwise would not have and 98% viewed this as a positive experience. These were people from different faith groups (35/66), people from different age groups (33/66), people from the same faith group (28/66), people from different social or economic backgrounds (27/66) and people of a different ethnicity (23/66).

Overall, the results from the coordinator only sample do not vary greatly from those of the whole cohort. The key difference here is that the sample size is known and so it can be said with a strong, though not absolute, degree of certainty that those involved in Mitzvah Day feel that it is an important, enjoyable and positive experience for them to be involved and to meet new people who are different from them. Even with a potential, but statistically hugely unlikely, negative swing of 10.9% on all outcomes, the outcomes all remain positive. These are the aims of the programme being demonstrably realised.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This evaluation takes as its starting point the organisational vision of Mitzvah Day: to bring Jews and non-Jews together to make a difference to local neighbourhoods and to strengthen their communities. The process of the evaluation has shown that through impactful, collective social action Mitzvah Day is working to enhance the role of Jews in their local communities and positively shift perceptions of Jewish people and the Jewish faith, working towards a commonly understood aim to improve local communities through the celebration and facilitation of Jewish-led social action which brings people together.

Against these ambitions, the evaluation finds that Mitzvah Day is a hugely successful and well organised programme which is meeting its aims, is reflecting its vision in its operations and, importantly, has a clear, evidenced and positive impact across Jewish and wider communities and within local areas. It has been demonstrated to a strong degree of statistical reliability that coordinators in the programme feel that it is an important, enjoyable and positive experience for them to be involved and to meet new people who are different from them.

- Jewish coordinators felt that it was important to them, as a Jewish person, that Mitzvah Day promotes stronger communities and social action.
- 97% of coordinators involved in Mitzvah Day 2016 enjoyed the experience.
- A large majority of the coordinators felt that Mitzvah Day has made a positive impact to a charity or local community.
- Coordinators felt that Mitzvah Day was successful in contributing to the vision of being a day of Jews and non-Jews coming together to make a difference to local neighbourhoods and to strengthen their communities.
- 74% of coordinators felt that Mitzvah Day successfully promotes interfaith work.
- 76% of coordinators felt that being involved in Mitzvah Day meant that they came into contact with someone whom they otherwise would not have and 98% viewed this as a positive experience. These were people from different faith groups, people from different age groups, people from the same faith group, people from different social or economic backgrounds and people of a different ethnicity.

The Mitzvah Day brand is well known and well regarded and appears to carry significant capital both within Jewish communities and other faith groups. Mitzvah Day's significant commitment to local social action and network building has created an impressive and unique breadth and depth of engagement within and across faith groups. Importantly, the positive regard in which Mitzvah Day is held also has, based on the findings of this evaluation, positive implications for the perception of Jewish groups in the UK.

Similarly, Mitzvah Day operates in a unique way by successfully working to increase social action and social interaction – the realm of many other organisations – whilst also raising the profile of Jewish communities and their commitment and contribution to social action. The data from this evaluation reveals tangible value to this for individuals, other organisations and charities and communities.

The positive and open attitude shown by Mitzvah Day towards this evaluation process and the critiques which came with it are strong indicators of a programme which is not complacent in its achievements and which is open to learning and change. With this spirit in mind, we offer the following recommendations. Primarily these aim to increase the evidence base for the impacts of the programme and to spur further strategic development to what is an already successful and important organisation.

1. The Theory of Change model developed in this evaluation should be used to inform future targets and measures of achievement for the programme and be reviewed and updated regularly.
2. There are no measures in place at the moment to capture longer term behavioural or attitudinal changes in individuals, organisations or communities. It is a definite positive for the programme that previous participants have reported positive feelings and outcomes as a result of their participation, but these should, where possible, be evidenced.
3. Mitzvah Day collects annual case studies focusing on some of the individual communities they work with, however these groups could be assessed over a period of multiple years.

This would supplement the understanding of longer term behavioural and attitudinal changes in the individuals, organisations or communities that interact with

Mitzvah Day. This data would be easier to collect at grassroots level, to explore where the project has brought about notable stories of positive change. Mitzvah Day's annual Awards Ceremony, or another possible competition or incentive-based promotion may encourage communal responses for data gathering. Inclusion here of organisations for which involvement in Mitzvah Day has been a catalyst for positive change would be beneficial.

4. A smaller, quantitative piece of work should be undertaken to gain the views and opinions of Mitzvah Day participants and volunteers of non-Jewish backgrounds. Though this piece of work did not exclude these groups, they were not adequately represented. If the same, or similar questions, were asked of non-Jewish volunteers and participants, this would allow for a comparison with Jewish respondents. In particular too, as with recommendation 3, capturing real stories where involvement in Mitzvah Day has benefitted an external organisation via upskilling or positive association should be considered.
5. Consideration should be given as to how Mitzvah Day fits into other social action and social interaction programmes across the country. This is likely to be of particular importance following the unveiling of the UK Government's new Integration Strategy in 2018. Aligning the organisation's vocabulary and communication is likely to help the programme to stay relevant to national policy aims. A proactive response to the publication of the new Integration Strategy would also further cement Mitzvah Day's place at the vanguard of the UK social action and interaction sector.
6. Mitzvah Day UK CT should give some consideration to the potential positive reputational and practical implications of branding themselves more openly as a charity.



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