

18 Teens Doing Outstanding Things in our Community

**18
UNDER
18**
POWERED BY THE SAN DIEGO
JEWISH TEEN
INITIATIVE

Over the past six years, the San Diego Jewish Teen Initiative (the Initiative) has stood by the belief that exposing teens to a diversity of Jewish experiences and opportunities will help them more deeply connect with their Jewish community, culture, and identity. The Initiative's work has been generously funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation, Jewish Federation of San Diego, and Lawrence Family JCC. However, we could not have accomplished all that we have without them or the thought partnership of the Initiative's Task Force members.

On behalf of myself and my predecessors, Rebecka Handler-Feinsilber and Darren Schwartz, I'd like to thank Heather Wolfson, Larry Katz, Susan Chortek-Weisman, Caryn Viterbi, and Jerri-Ann Jacobs Kayla Globerson, and Guy Sela for their continuous support and dedication to the work of the Initiative. Our ability to make this impact on San Diego's Jewish teens would not have been possible without them.

“The outstanding talents of these 18 teens are living proof that there are dedicated leaders in the San Diego Jewish community that are quite literally changing the game of what Jewish teen engagement looks like.”

- Guy Sela & Kayla Globerson, Project Managers, SDJTI

The Initiative has always worked with educators, teens, and their parents to explore and implement ways to help our community's teens navigate Jewish experiences. With our day-to-day still not looking like it once did, we continue to find ourselves in a new world of possibilities for Jewish teens.

In 2019, thinking about how to present the multitude of ways to be involved Jewishly in our community, the concept of 18 Under 18 emerged. 18 Under 18 is a community-wide awareness campaign that recognizes 18 teens doing outstanding things in our community, with the hope that it inspires other teens and pre-teens to find a deeper connection to Jewish life that is authentic to who they are. The COVID-19 pandemic made me think that this year's 18 Under 18 recipients should showcase the teens in our community that are not only enthusiastically dedicated leaders or volunteer-oriented, but that have shown the community their resilience in a time where no one would have faulted them had they just hid under the covers till this was all over.

It's been a true honor getting to know more about these 18 resilient teens in our community, and I applaud the Jewish professionals that have guided and supported them throughout their journeys: Mazal Tov and Lech Leha to this year's 18 Under 18 recipients.

Allie Donahoo
Executive Director, San Diego Jewish Teen Initiative

Allie Donahoo has worked in Jewish non-profit for 10+ years and has proudly served the San Diego Jewish community since moving here in 2017. Allie is excited to be joining the Lawrence Family JCC professional staff as their Director of Strategic Outreach and Partnerships beginning July 1, 2021.
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This year, the Initiative allocated \$360 to each 18 Under 18 recipient to donate to a 501-c3 of their choosing. Below you will find their chosen charity and learn more about their leadership and resilience.



The San Diego Jewish Teen Initiative
is generously supported by:





Olive Benito

**Friendship Circle
Class of 2022**

Chosen Charity
*Doctors
Without Borders*

This past year has brought countless challenges to everyone, but Olive was determined to stay connected to the people in her life in meaningful ways. Whether scheduling virtual or socially distanced hangouts with friends, volunteering with Friendship Circle's online programs, or staying engaged with her teachers and classmates during online courses, Olive is dedicated to creating an inviting environment for everyone. For Olive, it was witnessing the Jewish community band together in the aftermath of the devastating Poway Chabad shooting that connected her to her Jewish roots and made her realize that to be Jewish is to be resilient. In addition to being more active in Jewish communal events, Olive is also a member of two Clubs at her high school, Student Wellness Education & Resources (SWEAR) and Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). After high school, Olive hopes to pursue a career in Sociology.



Jaeden Clark

**Temple
Adat Shalom**

Class of 2025
Chosen Charity
*Bridge to the
Future Foundation*

Jaeden is one of those rare personalities that makes others realize he is the anchor to everyone around them. Coming from an interfaith and interfacial family that is rooted in strong Jewish values, Jaeden knows what it means to treat the world around him with love and respect. For Jaeden's Bar Mitzvah project, he wanted to share his passion for soccer by collecting once-loved soccer cleats from the community and refurbishing them to donate to families struggling financially. Jaeden is a dedicated member of BBYO's Gal Chadash and attends Mosad Shalom Religious School at Temple Adat Shalom.



Jordan Bially Levy

**Congregation
B'Nai Tikvah**

Class of 2023

Chosen Charity
*The Humane
Society*

Jordan is the epitome of a growing Jewish leader. She is a dedicated volunteer at Congregation B'nai Tikvah, helping mold the Jewish youth of today to become the Jewish leaders of tomorrow. Jordan is in her first year as an SDJTI Peer Leadership Fellow, where she connects her peers and local teens to various Jewish community offerings that align with their passions. When she isn't volunteering at B'nai Tikvah or connecting local Jewish teens to Jewish opportunities, Jordan performs with her high school's concert band as First Chair for the clarinet. Combining her dedication to academics with her love of Judaism, Jordan plans to attend JNF-USA's Alexander Muss High School in Israel for the Fall 2021 semester.



Shai Davis

**Congregation
Beth Am**

Class of 2024

Chosen Charity
*Camp Ramah
in C.A.*

Whether acting as Beth Am's USY Membership Vice President, performing on stage, playing lacrosse, or engaging the public with her mental health podcast, Shai is always on the go. With a passion for all things Jewish, Shai enjoys being a madricha (counselor) for Beth Am's Jewish Learning Center, participating as a Ramah Fellow, and attending Camp Ramah. Like many peers who thrive on social interaction, Shai struggled with the emotional toll the pandemic was taking on her life. So she started a teen mental health podcast, Lemon-Aid (find it on Spotify), to provide an outlet for herself and her peers to speak out on issues that she and her friends knew existed but that no one was speaking openly about. By creating this podcast, Shai has given a platform and space for teens to share their stories while also gaining confidence in herself to speak publicly and vulnerably about these important and often misunderstood topics.



Kate Chasin

**Congregation
Beth Israel**

Class of 2022

Chosen Charity
*Jewish
Family Service*

Kate is a mental health & wellness activist. At school, she is vice-chair of the Student Wellness Education & Resources (SWEAR) club, a program that advocates for improving student mental health and wellness practices, and president of the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate program. Kate is the only representative under the age of 18 on San Diego County's Human Relations Commission, an advisory board for the San Diego County Board of Supervisors that promotes justice and equality for all San Diego citizens. Dedicated to her Jewish identity and community, Kate volunteers as a madricha (counselor) and plays cello with her congregation's band at Shabbat services. Kate's resilience to overcome personal anxieties during these difficult times has made her an exemplary activist by instilling and advocating for meaningful and long-lasting wellness practices among her peers and the greater San Diego Jewish and secular communities.



Liora Krantz

**Congregation
Beth Israel**

Class of 2022

Chosen Charity
Pawsitive Teams

As the President of Congregation Beth Israel's (CBI) NFTY Chapter, Liora has learned to be an empathetic listener to her fellow board members and spent time building an inclusive environment. Liora spends her free time volunteering with Pawsitive Teams Service and Therapy Dogs, Make-a-Wish Foundation, and McCormick Coaching Co. She's found a renewed sense of belonging within the Jewish community, especially since becoming a Racial Justice Fellow for the Religion Action Center. In March 2020, coinciding with the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Liora's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Throughout her mom's battle, which she has now won, Liora managed to excel in her leadership roles, carry a rigorous course schedule, and be with her family when they all needed each other most. Liora is resilient in more ways than one and is looking forward to strengthening her Jewish engagement and identity.



Maytal Lefkowitz

Jewish Federation

Class of 2023

Chosen Charity
*San Diego
Food Bank*

Maytal is one of those bright lights that a person is immediately drawn to. She has unshakeable and optimistic energy and an awareness to know when to step up and when to step back. Maytal is the Parliamentarian on Beth Am's USY chapter board, an SDJTI Peer Leadership Fellow, and volunteers at Jewish Family Service and the San Diego Food Bank. Maytal is the 10th grade Secretary of her high school's ASB and is an actress in Scripps Ranch High School's theater program, Falcon Playhouse.



Zoe Levin

Jewish Federation

Class of 2023

Chosen Charity
Heifer Intl.

Zoe is an outstanding young Jewish leader. Over the past year, as a Peer Leadership Fellow, Zoe has managed and led a network of 15 peers to become more engaged in our local Jewish teen community. Her ability to grow teen engagement allowed her to promote and participate in One2One, a program comprised of Israeli and San Diego teens that creates cultural learning opportunities. Zoe is a member of the Jewish Community Foundation's teen program, serves as the Social Action Tikkun Olam VP for Congregation Beth El's USY chapter, and sits as Parliamentarian on Far West USY's Regional Board. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoe has helped her peers connect and reinforce their relationships with Judaism on both a cultural and social justice level. Zoe looks forward to reuniting with her friends in person so that together they can continue learning to better themselves and the world around them.



David Lutz

**Congregation
Beth Israel**

Class of 2022

Chosen Charity
*JFS Safe Parking
Program*

As Congregation Beth Israel's (CBI) NFTY Chapter Social Action Vice President, David has proven time and again that he can face new challenges head-on, create a safe space in our community, and prioritize social justice in an ever-changing world. Whether bringing care packages to CBI members struggling with familial loss or volunteering with Build a Miracle to provide safe housing for San Diego's most vulnerable populations, David truly puts his words into action to help build a better world. In addition to being an active CBI member, David has attended Camp Mountain Chai for the past seven years and hopes to be a counselor there soon. David enjoys spending time outdoors, where he can be found skiing, surfing, or playing soccer with friends and family.



Elijah Mandel

**Congregation
Ner Tamid**

Class of 2024

Chosen Charity
*Anti-Defamation
League*

Elijah is the definition of what it means to be a leader "on and off the field." A die-hard soccer fan, Elijah is a team player, whether playing his heart out on the soccer pitch, working as a Torah School Madrich (counselor) or in his role of Vice President on Ner Tamid's USY Chapter Board. Elijah takes all of his commitments seriously with a positive attitude and maturity beyond his years. Though the pandemic side-lined his plans to play in the San Diego hosted JCC Maccabi Games & Artsfest, Elijah took this in stride. He stayed committed to his participation in SDJTI's Global Partnership Program. This program was a cohort of 40 teens from San Diego, USA, Shaar Ha'Negev, Israel, Sofia, Bulgaria, and St. Petersburg, Russia, all athletes and artists who intended to be here in person for the JCC Maccabi Game & Artsfest Espeirecne in the Summer of 2020. Proud of his Jewish heritage, Elijah looks forward to leading and creating meaningful change in the local community and beyond.



Lauren Mathios

Temple Solel

Class of 2023

Chosen Charity
*Jacobs &
Cushman
Food Bank*

Whether she is spending her summers at a Jewish camp or leading Temple Solel's Climate Solvers Teen Kibbutzim Program, Lauren takes great pride in educating her peers about environmental and climate issues. Lauren's passion for access to literacy led her to create Books to Go, for which she received a Girl Scout Gold Award. Struggling with the emotional strain of the pandemic, Lauren felt compelled to help the community in tangible ways. With a newfound interest in filmmaking, Lauren created a PSA about the importance of mask-wearing and social distancing. Lauren's PSA went on to win the San Diego Union Tribune's Stop the Spread contest, amplifying her message through social media, radio, and television. Lauren's kind heart and soul to better the world around her are rooted in strong Jewish principles, which she enthusiastically credits to her involvement in Temple Solel's Teen Journey program.



Anna Maya

Stand With Us

Class of 2022

Chosen Charity
*Ken Jewish
Community*

From creating her high school's first Israel Club to writing articles and speaking to elected officials on Ethnic Studies, Anna's leadership and passion for Israel and Jewish advocacy in the community are unmatched. Anna is dedicated to her roles as a Stand With Us intern, Ken Jewish Community madricha (counselor), and SDJTI Peer Leadership Fellow. She is a role model for younger students to look up to and a student that the world should look out for as she continuously pushes the bar of service to her community. Even in the face of antisemitism or bigotry, Anna continues the fight against hate. There is no doubt that Anna has and will continue to grow into one of this community's most influential leaders.



Ya'ara Oren

Ohr Shalom Synagogue

Class of 2022

Chosen Charity
Make-a-wish Foundation

As a Teen Aide, Ya'ara has dedicated her time this past year assisting and supporting Ohr Shalom's young learners during their weekly virtual Religious School lessons. As a fluent Hebrew speaker herself and someone that is well versed in Jewish liturgy, Ya'ara also assists her Ohr Shalom peers in learning Hebrew. With the pandemic putting a stop to all in-person gatherings, Ya'ara stepped up in helping Ohr Shalom's USY Chapter create unique and out-of-the-box virtual gathering ideas to keep USY members in touch with their Jewish identity. Ya'ara has attended Camp Ramah in California for nine summers and Camp Alonim for two. Her hobbies are musical theater and all things Far West USY.



Kim Peretz

IAC-Eitanim

Class of 2022

Chosen Charity
Interns 4-Good

A natural-born advocate and leader, Kim's passion for BBYO's Gal Chadash, as well as Israel American Council's Eitanim, has kept her engaged in the Jewish community for the past four years. The COVID-19 pandemic didn't pause Kim's desire to engage her classmates in meaningful community service and advocacy projects. During the pandemic, Kim co-founded Rise Up, one of the largest clubs on her high school campus, with an active student-led board. Whether rallying classmates to volunteer in food and clothing drives, attending environmental webinars, or writing letters to teachers, Kim was determined to make a difference on campus. Kim is also a passionate writer and sits on the writing staff of several publications, including "Girl's Life Magazine." Additionally, Kim became a published author in 2019 for "Dani's Diary." Through her projects and passions, Kim hopes to empower others to make the world a better place.



Fania Pupko

Ken Jewish Community

Class of 2021

Chosen Charity
Stand With Us

For the past two years, Fania has been a Ken Community youth leader, both as a Rosh (logistics leader) and Madricha (counselor). Her dedication and commitment to her community are true examples of a role model and leader. Though in-person activities came to a halt this past year, Fania chose this as an opportunity to motivate her peers to continue to engage in Ken Community offerings. Fania also started The Good Neighbor, an organization that asks for once-loved clothes to be donated to emergency and temporary housing shelters across San Diego County. Fania is also the captain of the San Diego Jewish Academy (SDJA) Tennis Team, President of the SDJA Israel Club, and an SDJA Lion Student Ambassador. Following her graduation from SDJA this June, Fania will take a gap year in Israel with Maccabi, where she will experience Kibbutz life, volunteer with Magen David Adom in Tel Aviv, and undergo IDF Basic Training.



Netanel Schwartz

SCY High & San Diego NCSY

Class of 2021

Chosen Charity
Kehillat Shaar HaShamayim

Netanel serves as the Gabbai at his synagogue, Kehillat Shaar HaShamayim, and is Editor-in-Chief of his High School's Torah publication, Lishkat HaDorom. He is the Regional Vice President of West Coast NCSY and an active participant and board member of San Diego's NCSY chapter. Netanel embraces and embodies core Jewish values, is committed to his peers and community and thrives at making everyone feel welcome. On February 19th, 2021, Netanel lost his father (z"l) to COVID-19. Most teens would remove themselves from their day-to-day commitments. Still, Netanel turned his tragedy into a learning experience for his school and youth group peers by hosting an evening of learning and reflection in which Netanel shared meaningful messages he had learned from his father about bettering the world around us. Netanel's resilience in such a trying time is an inspiration to all those around him. Following his graduation from SCY High, Netanel will be attending Yale University.



Ben "Talp" Talpalatsky

Camp Mountain Chai

Class of 2021

Chosen Charity
The Dream Project

There is an unparalleled air of respect associated with those known by a single name. Benjamin "Talp" Talpalatsky fits that bill, continually proving a nuanced understanding of the interconnectivity of kehilla (community), tikkun olam (repairing the world), and dugma ishit (leading by example). The grandson of four Holocaust survivors, Talp represented his faith with pride during the 2019 joint CMC and DREAM Project service-learning trip to the Dominican Republic, the only nation to offer visas to Jews fleeing Europe during WWII. Talp instantly connected with the kids in the remote community of La Libertad, teaching English lessons and giving never-ending piggyback rides. When the pandemic hit, Talp created a website, organized events, and solicited donations, ultimately collecting thousands of dollars for Dominican Pandemic Relief. In addition to his many years as an outstanding member of the Camp Mountain Chai community, Talp is the VP of Membership for the Lawrence Family JCC's Teen Leadership Council and local BBYO chapter.



Hannah Velazquez

Friendship Circle

Class of 2023

Chosen Charity
Friendship Circle SD

Hannah is a leader who embodies passion, professionalism, and dedication. A stand-out culinary volunteer for Friendship Circle, Hannah is adored by every participant who attends her online educational classes. Whether preparing delicious meals for her family or easy-to-follow recipes for the Jewish holidays, Hannah knows how to adapt any program to be inclusive for all. Though the pandemic should have made starting the Eco-Club at her high school nearly impossible, Hannah made it happen by finding COVID-19 safe and friendly ways for her peers to collaborate and volunteer in person. Hannah hopes to continue her passion for the environment by pursuing a career in environmental engineering.