

Dr Keith Kahn-Harris
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THE LIMMUD IMPACT STUDY

Exploring volunteers'
Jewish journeys

Commissioned by:



Supported by:



Research conducted in collaboration with:



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About Limmud

Limmud is a pioneer of cross-communal inter-generational Jewish learning, organised and run almost entirely by volunteers. The first Limmud Conference was held in the UK in 1980 with 75 participants; our UK Conference (now known as Limmud Festival) now attracts over 2,500 people. The model has inspired the creation of Limmud groups across the world, to create their own Limmud communities unified by a common set of values. We estimate that over 40,000 people participate in Limmud annually. Since 2006, Limmud has supported, developed and connected these volunteer-led communities. It does this by providing them with learning opportunities, training, mentoring, micro grants and support for the sharing of ideas and best practices.

About the author

Dr Keith Kahn-Harris is a sociologist and writer based in London. He is a senior lecturer at Leo Baeck College and runs the European Jewish Research Archive at the Institute of Jewish Policy Research. The author of two books on the UK Jewish community, he has conducted social research for a number of UK Jewish organisations. Dr Kahn-Harris has been attending and presenting sessions at UK Limmud events since 1996 and has contributed to the programming team on multiple occasions. He has also authored a number of articles and essays on the Limmud experience.

Dr Kahn-Harris's work on the Limmud Impact Study was commissioned and overseen by the Limmud board, supported by Eli Ovits, Limmud chief executive, Suzy Marguilies, Limmud international co-ordinator, and the rest of the office team.

Acknowledgements

Limmud would like to thank all of the volunteers who contributed to this research, answered the survey, circulated it to others and participated in the focus groups. The time they spent on this research is yet another sign of the extraordinary commitment that Limmud draws on.

Dr Ezra Kopelowitz acted as an advisor to this project and his willingness to allow Limmud to use his survey platform is much appreciated. Dr Kopelowitz's research assistant, Kristine LeDuc, managed the complex technical aspects of constructing the questionnaire and produced statistics in an exemplary and rigorous manner.

Karen Radkowsky contributed some useful final additions to the data analysis and feedback on the findings.

Foreword

For most of the twentieth century, adult Jewish learning was a low priority on a Jewish communal agenda that was focused on rescue and resettlement of immigrants and refugees, supporting Israel, solidarity with Soviet Jewry and other “civic” expressions of Jewish belonging. Starting in the 1980’s, attitudes have changed with a resulting growth and diversification of adult learning opportunities outside of the Orthodox world.

However, Jewish adult Jewish learning opportunities are still limited and normally organized by educators working for religious, communal or professional associations for their members. The learning occurs in small homogeneous groups of adults who participate in formal classes. As with other forms of education, outside of the Orthodox religious movements adult education is mostly limited to the classroom and focused on intellectual enrichment without a focus on the broader life-involvement of the individual in Jewish community.

As this report shows, the worldwide proliferation of Limmud breaks the mould. Limmud provides both a pathway for its volunteers to experience and embrace Jewish community. The result is the personal enrichment for the Limmud volunteers and participants; and, an increased focus on Jewish learning and knowledge in the broader Jewish community lead by Limmud volunteers and supporters. The Limmud phenomenon serves as a light that illuminates the potential of Jewish learning for Jewish engagement at its finest.

Dr Ezra Kopelowitz

CEO Research Success Technologies and
Fellow at the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education

Executive summary

- The Limmud Impact Study looks at how successful Limmud has been in taking people 'one step further on their Jewish journeys', what these journeys consist of and their wider impact on Jewish communities.
- The study focuses on Limmud volunteers and draws on a survey of ten Limmud volunteer communities in eight countries, together with focus groups conducted with Limmud volunteers from around the world.
- The findings provide clear evidence that Limmud advances the majority of its volunteers on their Jewish journeys, and for a significant proportion it takes them 'further' towards greater interest in and commitment to Jewish life.
- Limmud's principle impact on its volunteers lies in making new friends and contacts, encountering different kinds of Jews and enhancing a sense of connection to the Jewish people.
- For many Limmud volunteers, their experience has increased their Jewish knowledge, their leadership skills and their involvement in the wider Jewish community. Involvement in Limmud therefore enhances both the *desire* to take further steps on their Jewish journeys, and the *tools* for doing so.
- Limmud impacts equally on Jews regardless of denomination and religious practice.
- The younger the volunteers and the less committed they are when they begin their Limmud journeys, the further Limmud takes them.
- Those with more senior levels of involvement in Limmud report higher levels of impact on their Jewish journeys than other volunteers, as do those who had received a subsidy or training from Limmud.
- One might therefore add to Limmud's mission statement as follows: 'Wherever you find yourself, Limmud will take you one step further on your Jewish journey. *The further there is to go, the further Limmud will take you. The further you go on your Limmud journey, the further you go on your Jewish journey.*'
- Limmud volunteers often have difficult experiences and risk burnout and exhaustion. While volunteers generally view the gains as worth the cost, Limmud needs to pay attention to this issue and provide further support.
- In order to enhance its impact, Limmud volunteer communities need to pay particular attention to recruitment. While ensuring that each group is infused with a steady stream of younger individuals is important, it is likely that those groups that are inter-generationally diverse provide the best prospect for balancing long-term sustainability with maximising impact.

Introduction

Limmud's mission statement promises:

'Wherever you find yourself, Limmud will take you one step further on your Jewish journey.'

This is a bold statement of intent: That not only can Limmud work with Jews 'wherever' they are, involvement in Limmud will actually take you somewhere else Jewishly – and take you 'forward' in the process.

Anecdotally, anyone with a serious involvement in Limmud can point to cases where Limmud has 'delivered'. However, as Limmud has grown into a complex global organisation, active in 42 countries, one that attracts and makes use of significant external funding, it is important that it scrutinises its work and examines how far it is successful in meeting its goals.

So how successful is Limmud in taking people one step further on their Jewish journeys? And, if so, what does this consist of? More broadly, how might Limmud take not just Jewish individuals, but also Jewish communities one step further? And how could Limmud do this better?

In short, what *impact* do volunteers attribute to their participation in Limmud? And how might Limmud further enhance that impact?

The following study will start to answer these questions. Volunteers are at the heart of the Limmud experience. It is volunteers who make Limmud happen, who set strategy, who determine the vision, who teach and who deal with the multitude of tasks out of which Limmud events are built. Even those Limmuds that have paid staff usually draw on a large cohort of volunteers. Further, these volunteers report experiencing *community*, the site of an ongoing Jewish experience that is for them no less significant than the events themselves.

As the following report will show, volunteers report significant impact on their lives as a result of participating in Limmud. By looking at the dimensions of the impact reported by the volunteers, and at areas where impact is stronger or weaker, the report is designed to assist Limmud in its future development and to help it understand its role in the wider Jewish world. As an organisation for which learning is a central value, to research Limmud on behalf of Limmud is not just a technical exercise – it is part of what it means to 'do' Limmud.

Methodology¹

With an estimated 4000 volunteers spread over 89 Limmud communities in 42 countries, understanding Limmud's impact on its volunteers requires a global perspective. In order to capture this diversity, this study draws on three sources of data:

- An online survey sent to volunteers of selected Limmuds worldwide.
- Two focus groups, conducted at Limmud Festival in the UK, in December 2017, including volunteers from multiple Limmuds.
- Informal discussions and participant observation conducted at Limmud Connect Global Volunteer Forum in Israel in May 2018.

In obtaining all three data sources, the focus was on how volunteers report impact from Limmud participation on their lives and, more generally, on the Jewish communities of which they are a part.

THE SURVEY

Ten Limmud volunteer communities in eight countries were invited to participate in the survey:

- Arizona
- Atlanta and Southeast
- Bay Area
- Buenos Aires
- Bulgaria
- Galil
- Germany (including regional day Limmud volunteers)
- Hungary
- South Africa (including Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and national executive volunteers)
- UK (including regional Day Limmud volunteers)

Collectively, these Limmuds represent the diversity of contexts within which Limmud takes place and the variety of ways in which Limmuds can be organised². We can be cautiously optimistic that, while the findings from this sample of Limmuds does not definitively pertain to all Limmuds everywhere, the survey has at least encompassed a large part of the diversity of the worldwide Limmud community.

¹ Detailed methodological reflections are available on request.

² We had initially hoped that Limmud FSU would take part in the survey, as it represents an important model for how Limmud events are run. However, Limmud FSU was, coincidentally, undertaking its own research at the same time as this project. We hope to compare findings once their study is completed.

In all cases the researcher worked in close collaboration with the Limmud chair or executive so that emails were sent to all current (and, where possible, former) volunteers, inviting them to complete the survey. In addition, a small number of people who had volunteered for Limmud on an international level and were not part of the sampled Limmuds were also contacted. In most cases, reminder emails were sent to boost response. The survey was translated into Spanish, German, Bulgarian, Hebrew and Hungarian.

The online survey was live during February and March 2018 and 504 responses were received in total. The response rate varied between the sample Limmuds and ranged from 17% to 50%. The total response rate is estimated to be 23%.

The questionnaire contained sections asking the volunteers to describe the impact of their Limmud participation (discussed in the next sub-section). It also collected data on the nature of respondents' Limmud involvements, their Jewish background, their education, as well as demographic information. While most questions were fixed-choice, there were also a number of self-complete sections where respondents could discuss their Limmud experiences however they chose.

DEFINING AND MEASURING IMPACT

'Limmud impact' as a concept encompasses the wide range of ways in which individuals perceive the consequences of involvement in Limmud for themselves personally and, more broadly, the wider Jewish community. This might include both tangible outcomes (for example, taking a course of Jewish study) and intangible ones (for example, feeling more enthusiastic about one's Jewishness).

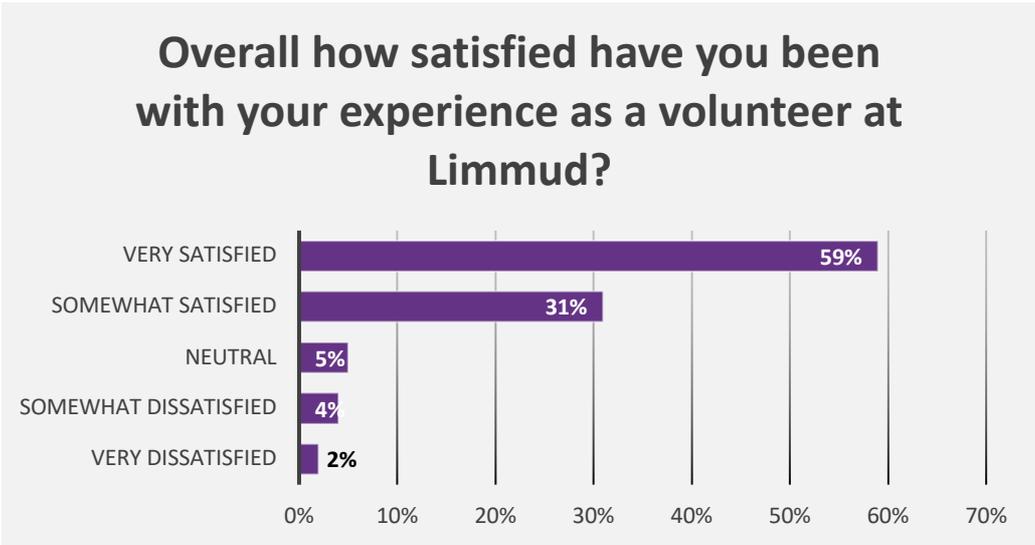
The Limmud Impact Study draws on Limmud volunteers' *accounts* of the impact Limmud has had on them and their communities. The focus groups, the qualitative responses on the questionnaire and the data gathered during the Limmud Global Volunteer Forum yielded rich contextual data that embeds those accounts in individual stories. The quantitative survey data yielded more concrete measures. Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with a series of statements on possible forms of impact that Limmud might have had on them. In addition, respondents were asked to answer questions on their Jewish interest, commitment and identity now and as they were at the start of their Limmud journey. These questions made it possible to examine the volunteers' perceptions of change over time.

In the following sections, the quantitative data is treated as the 'core' of the findings and the qualitative data is used to provide examples of the processes and journeys that are identified statistically.

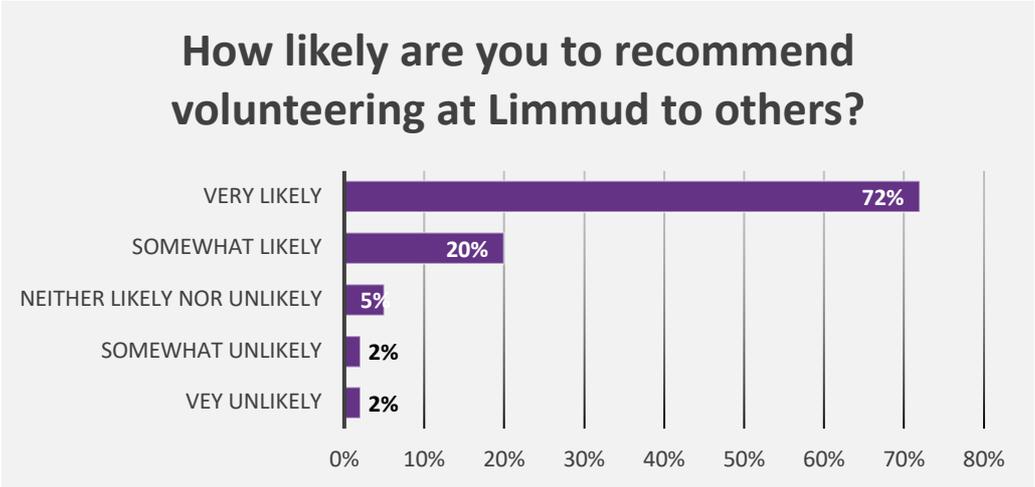
Dimensions of Impact

OVERALL IMPACT

Limmud draws on an enormous degree of goodwill and love for the organisation on the part of its volunteers. The vast majority of respondents to the questionnaire were not only very satisfied with their Limmud volunteer experience (90%), they would recommend it to others (92%).



N=258



N=260

Responses to the open-ended survey questions were often effusive in their praise for Limmud and their commitment to it:

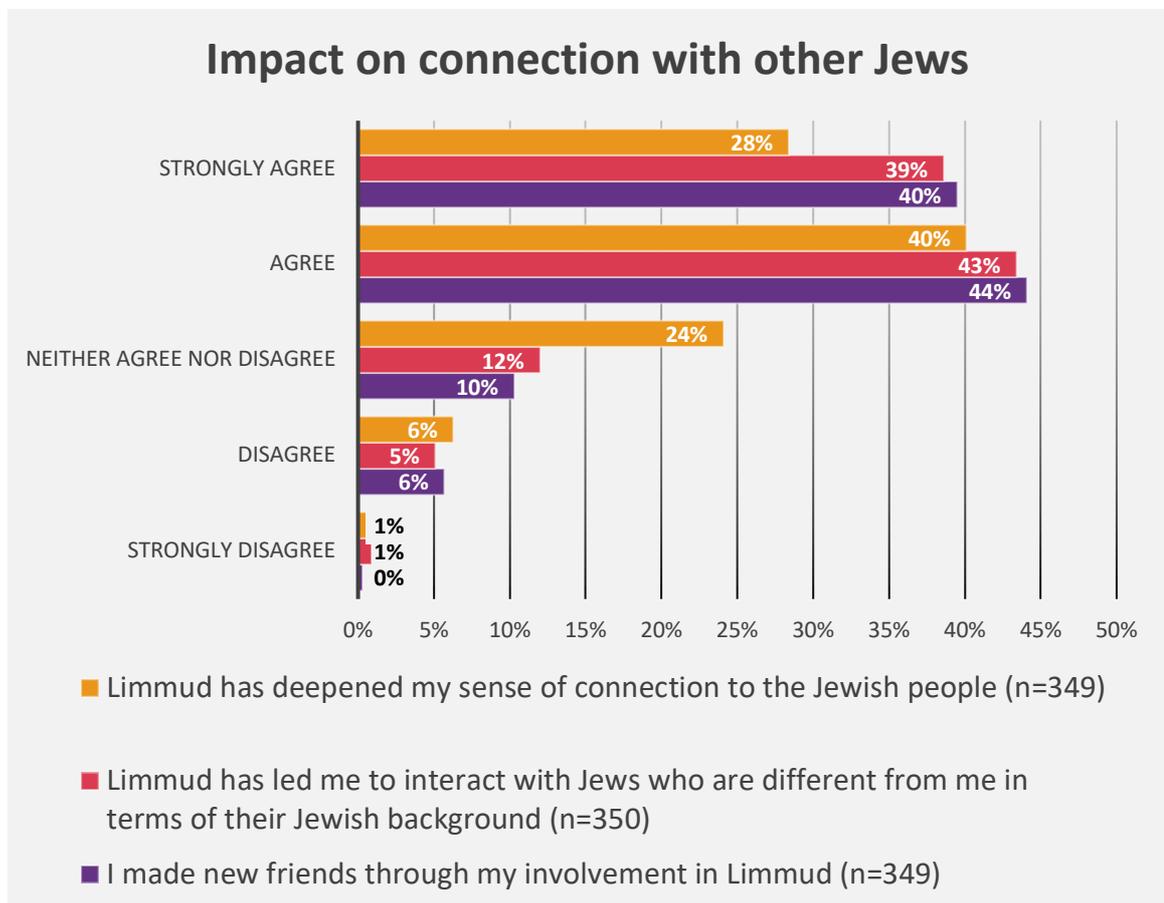
'An Unparalleled Jewish experience, it's unbelievable.'

'I believe in Limmud.'

'It's fun and meaningful'

PEOPLE AND DIVERSITY

Limmud clearly has impact in stimulating love for the organisation and in drawing on volunteers' passion and idealism. With regard to more specific areas of impact, the statements showing the highest levels of agreement concerned *people and relationships*. Limmud enables its volunteers to make new friends (84%), to meet Jews who are different from themselves (82%), and deepens a sense of connection to the Jewish people (68%):



The diversity of Limmud is an important factor here. The pleasures of meeting *different* kinds of Jew were often attested to in the open-ended questions and the focus groups:

'It has put me in closer touch with the younger generation and made connections and friendships that still generate personal and professional Jewish activities and enrich Jewish life.'

'You get out of your comfort zone because, you know, you are always with the same people in your synagogue and you rarely meet with other people from traditions you don't like maybe. At Limmud, you get to go to a session where they are there, and you discuss, and you hear other people's views. It's kind of expanding.'

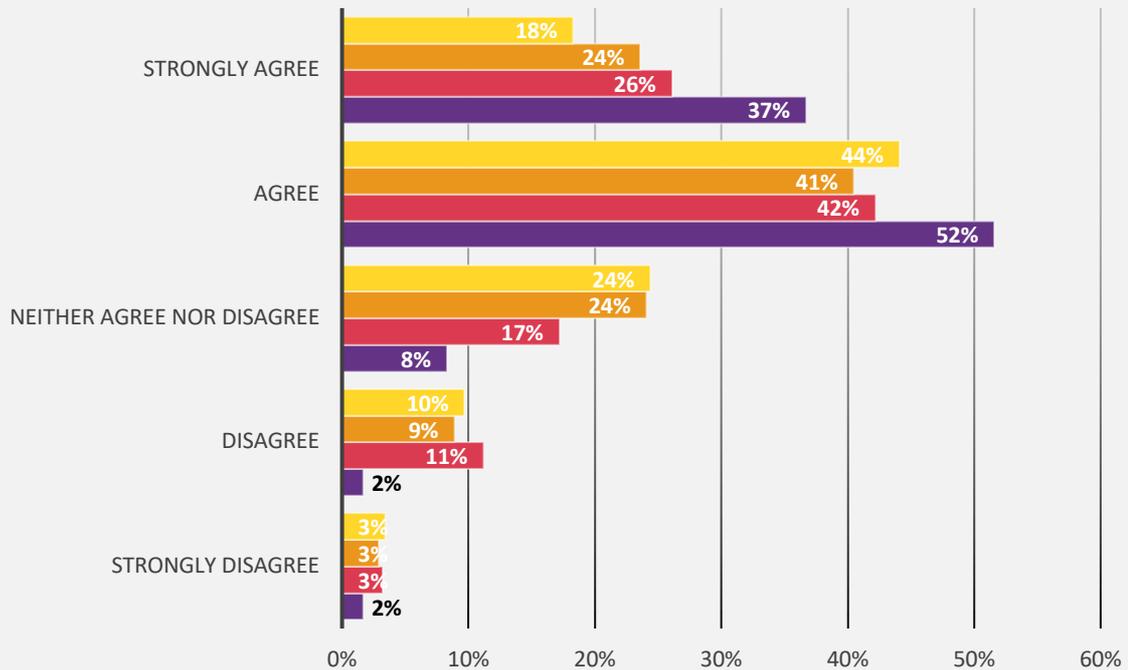
'[The Limmud community is like] nice, really great relatives that you visit. You help them. They help you. They love each other.'

'When I first moved to [city], after a couple of years I joined a synagogue there and the whole community is about 400 people so it's very small, and the synagogue has about 130 members. We hardly have a minyan. It was always the same people. So for me to be part of Limmud meant meeting a lot more people.'

LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Limmud's impact on volunteers' connections with other Jews, is closely connected to its impact on learning and knowledge. The majority of respondents agreed that Limmud increased their Jewish knowledge (89%), exposed them to a wider variety of Jewish traditions (68%), led them to a greater engagement with Jewish learning (65%) and made them more curious about Jewish life and Judaism (62%):

Impact on learning and knowledge



■ Limmud has made me more curious about Jewish life and Judaism (n=349)

■ Limmud has led me to engage more in Jewish learning (n=348)

■ Limmud has exposed me to a breadth of Jewish tradition that I would not otherwise have encountered (n=348)

■ Involvement in Limmud has increased my Jewish knowledge (n=349)

Many respondents and focus group participants explained how Limmud led them to be more engaged in Jewish learning, both in practical outcomes and a more general sense of being challenged:

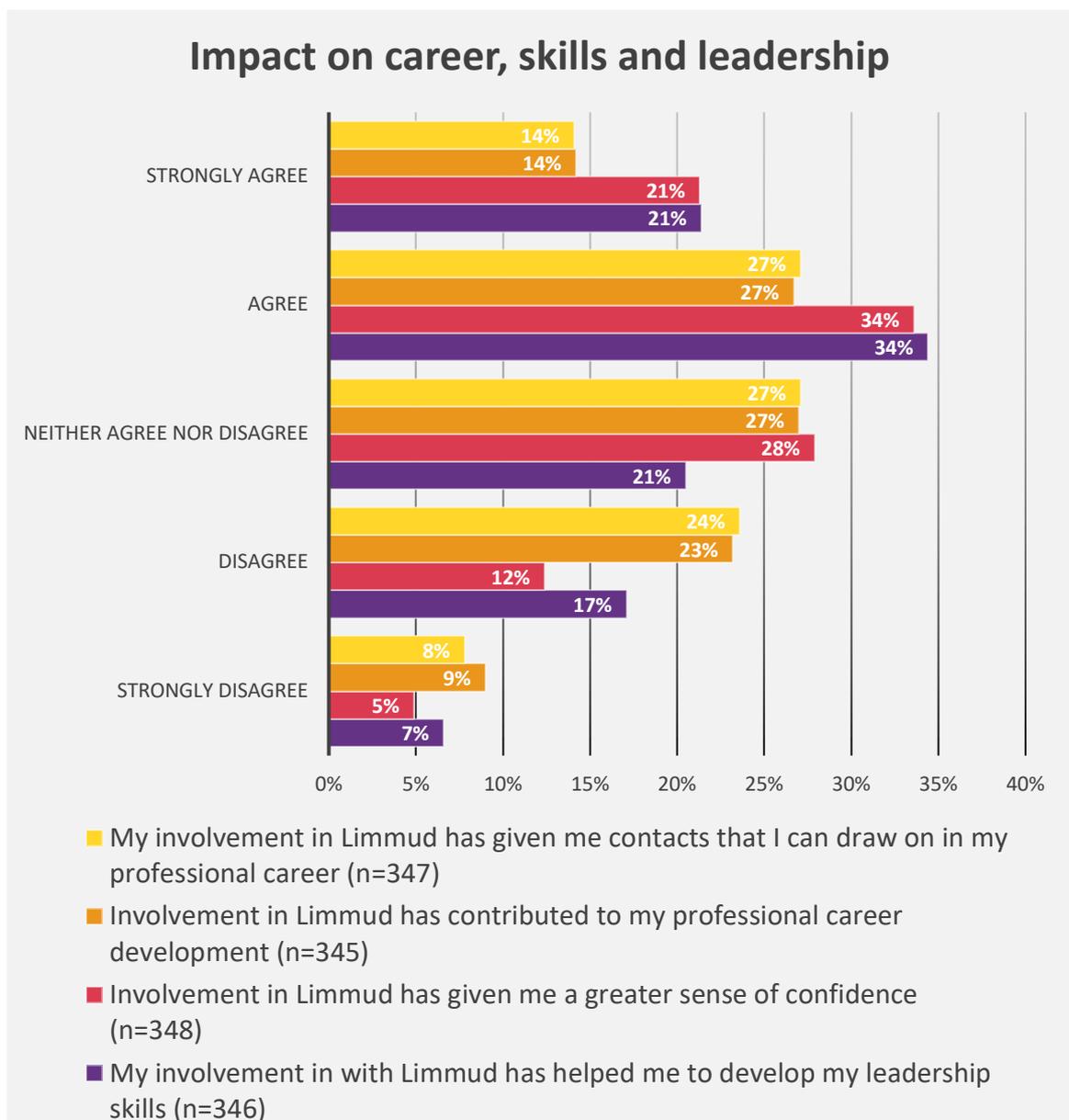
'I decided to do an online MA which was advertised through Limmud.'

'I moved to London as a direct result of Limmud. I was sent to my first Limmud in 1998 [by my US-based organisation] and it was the first Jewish conference where I learned! (All others I'd attended were [in a work capacity] so I never went to workshops for myself). After 5 years, I realized I wanted more, another MA perhaps. And all the people I studied with at Limmud were teachers at [name of institution]. So in 2003, I moved to London to get my degree in Jewish Education. I finished and stayed 8 years. And I haven't missed a Limmud since.'

'I was always involved one way or another with the youth movement. I was in a huge Jewish school. After that there was a gap, before Limmud I didn't have to engage anymore. At least in something interesting that wasn't stupid or lame or something. I wanted something more you know? Something intellectual. Something really challenging.'

CAREER, SKILLS AND LEADERSHIP

Limmud does not simply engender a deepened connection to Jewish people and Jewish learning: for many of its volunteers it gives them the practical tools to take that connection further. While the proportion of respondents who reported that Limmud impacted on their career, their sense of confidence and their leadership skills is lower than with the forms of impact mentioned previously, they are still high:



Involvement in a Limmud volunteer community allows individuals to grow and to develop new skills. It enables volunteers to gradually develop their leadership potential over time, through taking on progressively greater levels of responsibility. Further, those who agreed strongly that 'My involvement with Limmud has helped me to develop my leadership skills' were also more likely to feel that Limmud has provided them with confidence, professional development skills, and career contacts.

As the respondents explained:

'I have lost some fear of speaking publicly, thus can share important influences on my life, in a Jewish sense, with others'

'I certainly got more involved, but more confident also about getting involved. You get a certain set of skills and you grow into a role and into doing things and you get recognition and then suddenly you appear on people's radar. You simply trust yourself to do things more. It becomes more natural simply to step up and organize small things and suddenly you slip into leadership.'

Impact on the wider Jewish community

While Limmud certainly impacts on individual volunteers' lives, respondents valued it for its impact not just on their own lives, but that of the wider community. One of the most striking aspects of the focus groups in particular is that, when asked about the impact of Limmud on themselves, many respondents answered in terms of the impact on the communities of which they are a part.

'I have to say that when I think about the change in my involvement in the Jewish community I have to first and foremost recognize that the Jewish community has been profoundly changed by Limmud. So the Jewish community in [country] is so rife with divisions and established organizations are very resistant to change. Whenever there is something new appearing either they would like it not to appear, so they try to nip it in the bud or they try to suck it in and make it theirs. And the other thing is this crazy thing about the missing masses. There are supposed to be tens of thousands of Jews but where are these people? You know we always see the same five hundred or thousand, but where are the 95 percent? And with Limmud, all of these traits that are the defining features of my community have been profoundly changed. So I was always very involved, but even those who are not, they now live in a different community where people do different things together which I never experienced when I was young.'

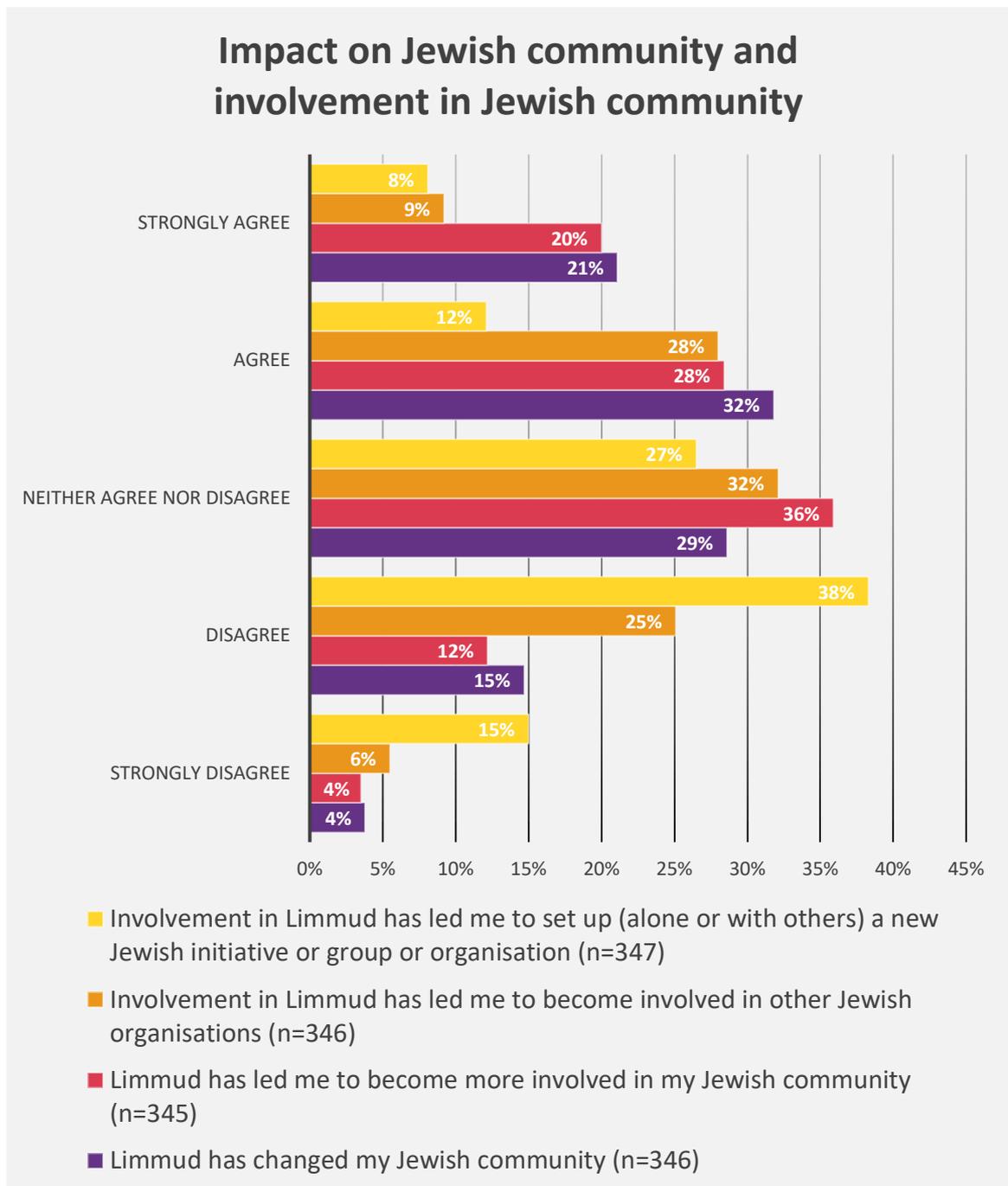
'When I found Limmud it was, it was like my place; otherwise I think that maybe I would be going to the holidays and eating lots of food and doing that Jewish stuff but I wouldn't be doing like really something important for the community otherwise.'

In the open-ended questions on the survey, many respondents also mentioned the chance to impact on the Jewish community as one of the reasons why they loved Limmud:

'Unlike other organizations, when you volunteer with Limmud you really have a chance to have an impact on others and on the community, to try new things and to lead. At Limmud, leadership is not about connections or money it's about rolling up your sleeves and getting the work done.'

'It's an opportunity to work with passionate, committed people. It's an opportunity to create the community we want to be part of. It remains one of the most important things happening out there.'

The survey demonstrated that this willingness and desire to have an impact on the wider Jewish community is widely shared. A majority agreed or strongly agreed that Limmud had changed their Jewish community (53%); more than a third reported that Limmud had led them to become more involved in their communities; one-fifth set up new Jewish initiatives or organisations:



Limmud provides practical skills that can be leveraged in further work in the Jewish community. For example, further analysis showed that those who agreed strongly that 'Limmud has led me to become more involved in my Jewish community', were also more likely to feel that Limmud has provided given them a greater sense of confidence.

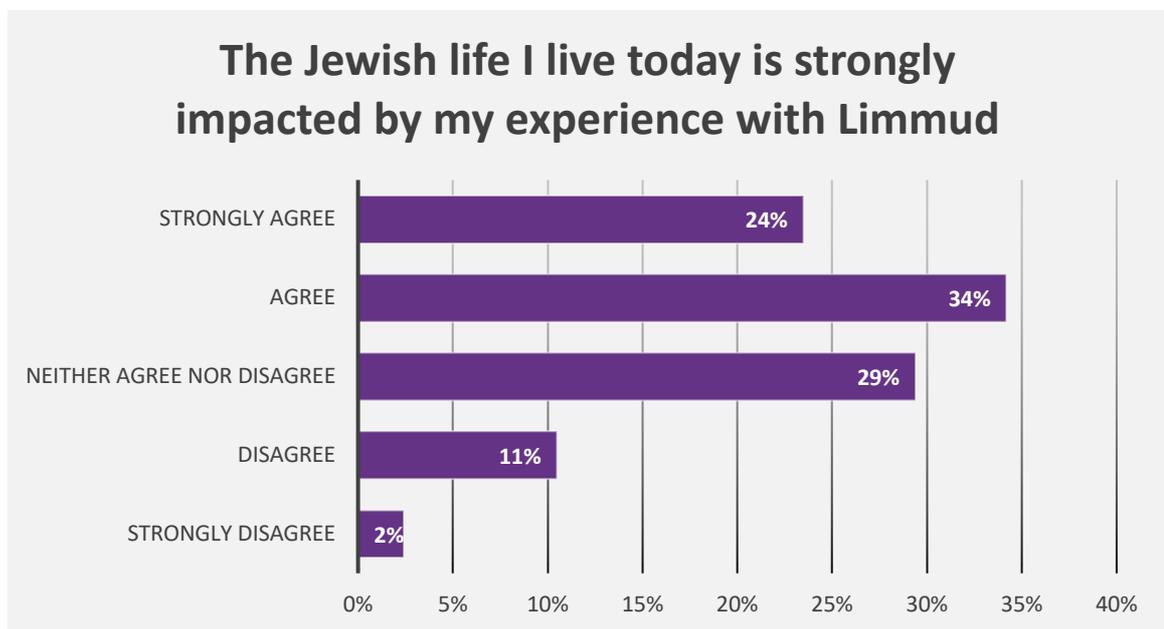
That 20% agreed that Limmud has led them to set up a new initiative or organisation, by themselves or with others, is very significant. It only takes a few such initiatives to have a substantial impact on Jewish communities. Discussions during and after the Limmud Global Volunteer Forum revealed a wide range of projects that Limmudniks have been instrumental in founding, drawing on their inspiration and practical skills gained at Limmud. Some examples include:

- Educational initiatives that take Jewish learning one step further, such as the Lehrer Haus in Copenhagen and Malmö, currently being developed by volunteers from Limmud Oresund and the New York traditional egalitarian Yeshivat Hadar, which was inspired in part by Limmud.
- Cultural events that build on organisational capacities gained at Limmud, such as the Cape Town Jewish Literary Festival, Gefiltefest (UK) and the Atlanta Jewish Music Festival.
- New religious communities, minyanim and synagogue services that emerged out of Limmud, including a partnership minyan in Johannesburg, post-denominational minyanim in Berlin and London and a *tefillah* band in Manchester.
- More broadly, Limmudniks have gone on to senior positions in Jewish community organisations, often bringing a taste for innovation with them. The Jewish cultural centre JW3 in London is one example.
- Limmud has also inspired similar initiatives outside the Jewish community, such as the Muslim New Horizons project in the UK, which was founded by a Muslim leader who had visited Limmud on many occasions, and Lsaran, an event for the Armenian Diaspora whose founder was inspired by Limmud FSU.

Differences in impact: who goes furthest on their Jewish journeys?

MEASURING IMPACT OVER TIME

A majority (58%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Jewish lives were strongly impacted by their experience of Limmud.



N=371

Of the 29% who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, it is worth remembering that this figure may include those who may have been impacted by Limmud in areas of their lives other than simply Jewish.

One of the other key impact-related questions on the survey concerned 'levels' of Jewish interest and commitment. Respondents were asked to choose the level that corresponded most closely to how they were when they first attended Limmud and how they are now:

Not interested - I was not interested in Judaism or Jewish life

Curious - I wanted to learn more

Exploring - I was actively exploring my relationship to Judaism or Jewish life

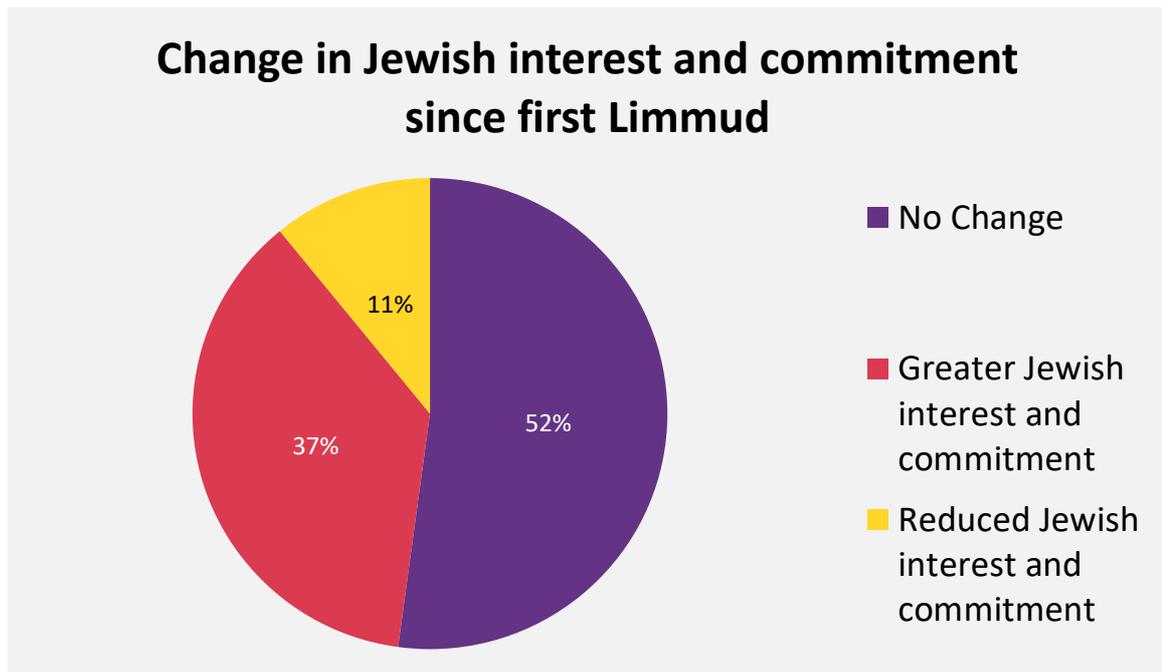
Tentatively committed - I was likely to have continued to be involved with Judaism or Jewish life in the future, but I was not 100% sure

Committed personally - I would have continued to be involved in the future on a personal basis

Committed and working to involve others – I was committed personally and wanted to engage others, in order that they would become more strongly connected to Judaism or Jewish life.

Committed and working to advancing Judaism/Jewish life – I worked in a leadership capacity to adapt Jewish culture and civilisation to our society.

By comparing the answers for ‘now’ and ‘at the time of first attending Limmud’, it was possible to calculate the proportion who reported that they level of interest and commitment had changed over time, and in which direction:



N=387

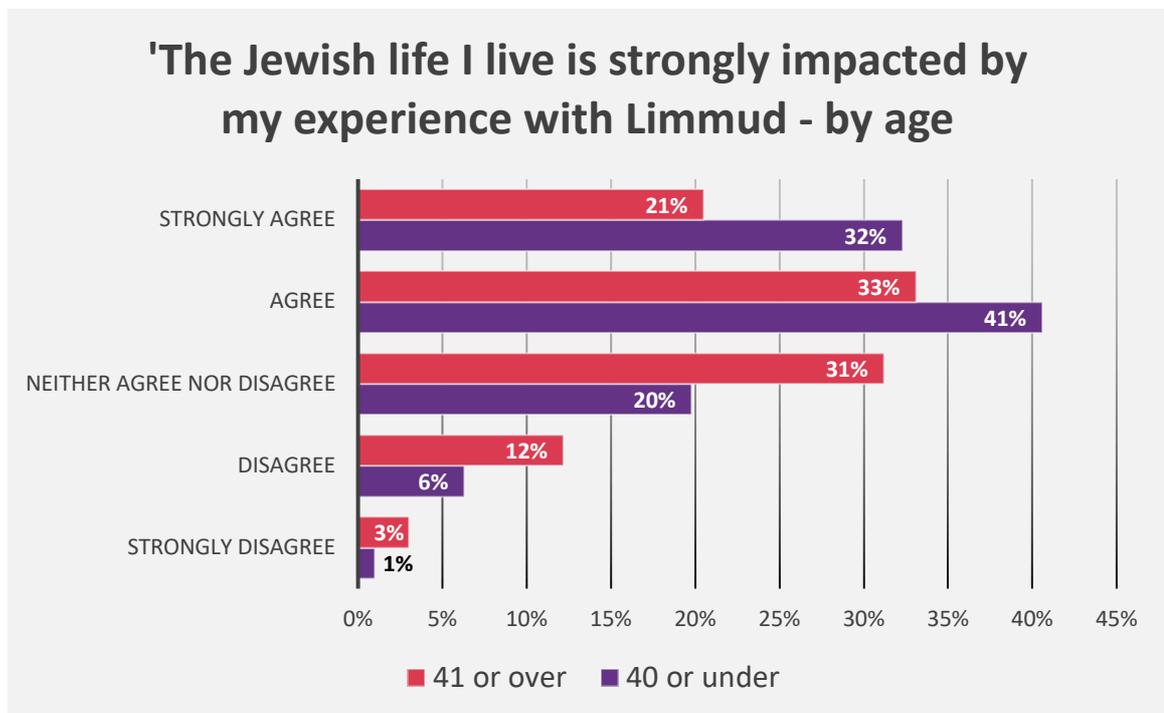
This chart, which suggests that a minority, albeit a high one (37%) had moved towards a greater degree of Jewish interest and commitment since their first Limmud, may seem surprising, given the large majorities for many individual impact statements. We should remember though that, for the 52% whose interest and commitment has not changed, Limmud may well be an important factor in *sustaining* interest and commitment. Limmud may well play an important role simply in maintaining Jewish engagement. The same is true with the previous chart, which may demonstrate how Limmud sustains Jewish lives as well as changing them.

The proportion who agreed that they had changed their Jewish identity and denominational affiliation (orthodox, reform, secular, etc) was lower, with 23% reporting a change since their first Limmud, although 48% reported a change since their youth; 18% agreed or strongly agreed that ‘As a result of Limmud, I am now more engaged in Jewish religious practice.’ While Limmud may change the nature of engagement with Jewish life in profound ways, it does not necessarily change the way one practices Judaism and defines oneself Jewishly. Again though, Limmud may play a vital role in maintaining Jewish practice into the future.

It is also possible, even likely, that individuals who are highly engaged in Jewish life may experience a qualitative change in the nature of their Jewish commitment through volunteering for Limmud. These kinds of changes do not necessarily come through in the answers to the survey questions, but some were attested to in the qualitative data produced in the focus groups and open-ended survey questions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AGE

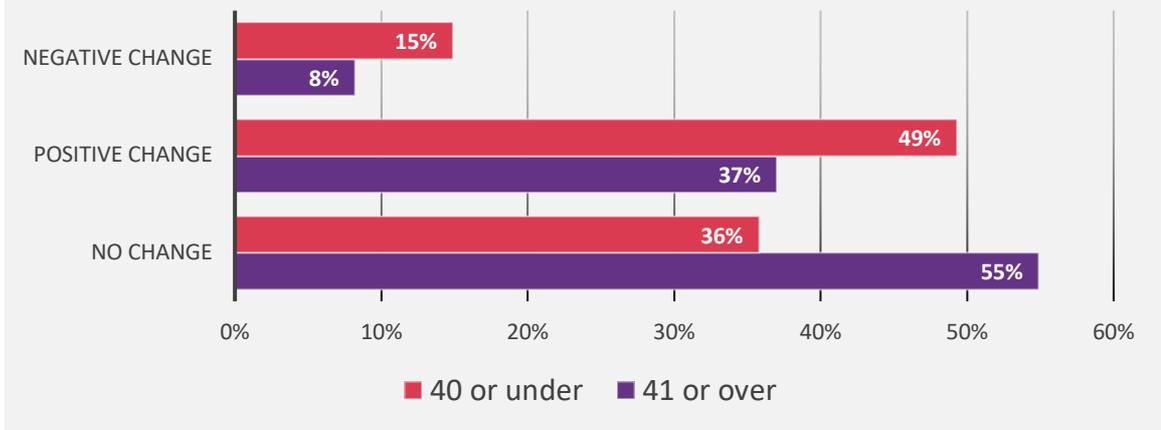
The most important variable in determining levels of impact is *age*. Splitting the sample between those 40 or under and 41 or over, those in the younger group reported consistently higher levels of impact across a range of measures. For example, 73% of those who are 40 or under agreed or strongly agreed that ‘the Jewish life I live is strongly impacted by my experience of Limmud’:



N=359

Those who are 40 or under are also more likely to report a change towards greater Jewish interest and commitment since their first Limmud (49%):

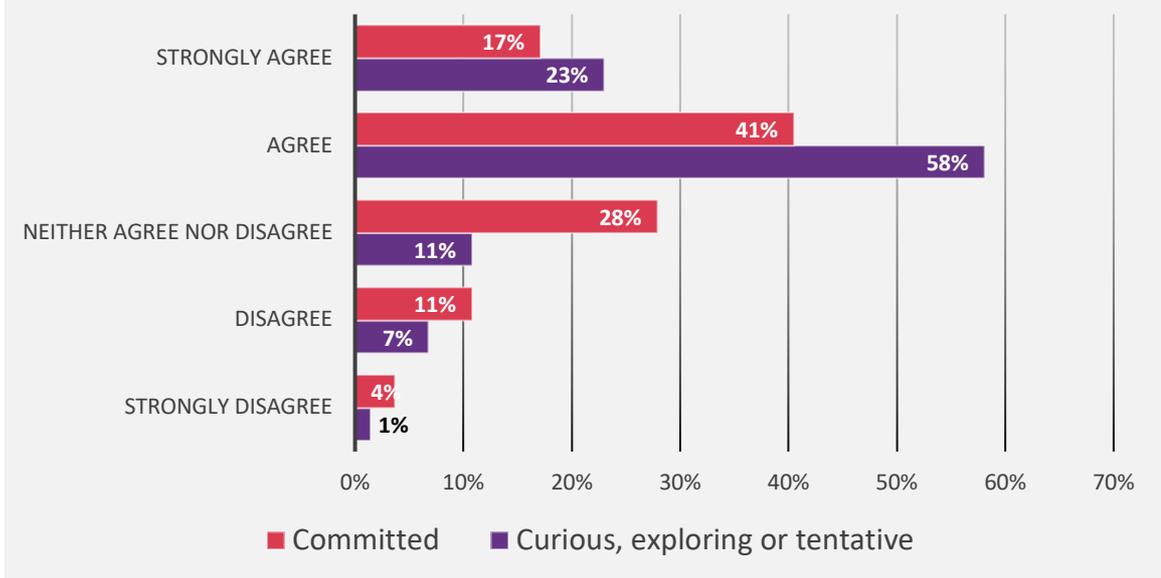
Change in Jewish interest and commitment since first Limmud - by age band



N=251

The data further shows that those who had a lower degree of Jewish interest and commitment at their first Limmud scored higher on some impact measures, for example:

Limmud has made me more curious about Jewish life and Judaism – by degree of Jewish interest and commitment at first Limmud



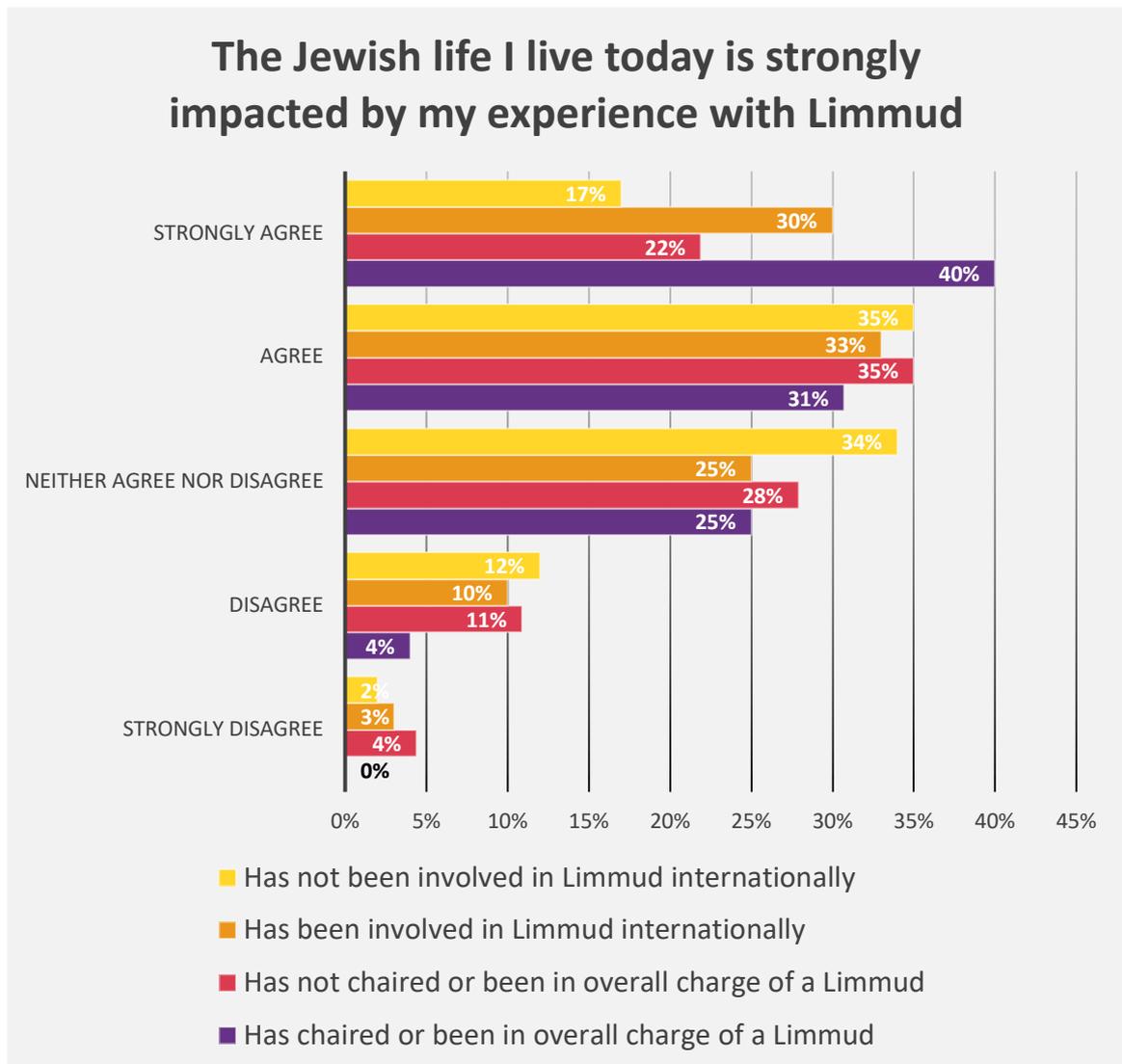
N=343

It is possible that at least some of the reason why those who reported lower levels of interest and commitment at first Limmud appeared to show greater levels of impact, is that this group had a younger age profile than the more committed group. This is unsurprising to a degree as those who are younger will have had less time to develop a higher level of commitment and interest in Jewish life.

Another group with a younger age profile is current or former Jewish communal professionals. They reported higher levels of impact on career development and Jewish communal involvement and lower levels of impact on measures involving learning and knowledge. Here it is difficult to disentangle how far these differences are a function of age or not.

LEVELS OF LIMMUD INVOLVEMENT

One finding that may also be unsurprising is that those who had served as a chair or overall leader of a Limmud group, and those who had been involved in Limmud on an international basis – in other words, some of the most senior and involved Limmudniks – reported higher levels of impact across a range of measures. For example, 40% of those who had chaired a Limmud group strongly agreed that their Jewish lives were strongly impacted by Limmud, compared to 22% of those who had not served as a chair:



We can conclude then, that *the further you go on your Limmud journey, the further you go on your Jewish journey.*

There is also evidence that Limmud's investment in volunteers also 'pays off' in terms of producing higher levels of impact. Those who had received training by Limmud reported consistently higher levels of impact compared to those who had not. In addition, those who had received a subsidy from Limmud to attend a Limmud event at Limmud also reported higher levels of.

We can also conclude, therefore, that, *the more Limmud invests in you, the further you go on your Jewish journey.*

THE UNIMPORTANCE OF GENDER, DENOMINATIONAL IDENTITY, AND OTHER VARIABLES

Perhaps the most interesting findings in the entire survey concerned what the analysis did *not* find. There was no evidence to suggest that impact varied by gender, how often respondents had attended a Limmud event or when they started attending, or by their denominational Jewish identity.

The latter finding is particularly important: as an organisation that values Jewish diversity, it seems that denomination genuinely makes little difference where Limmud takes volunteers. Further, those who had been involved in Limmud internationally or as chairs were no more or less likely to identify with a particular kind of Judaism than those who were not. Finally, while a significant minority had changed their Jewish identity and affiliation since their first Limmud, for those that did change there were few discernible patterns in terms of where they changed to – if Limmud does cause volunteers to change their way of identifying Jewishly, it does not do so by favouring one particular denomination over another.

Variations in impact between Limmuds

The ten case study Limmud communities differed significantly in the levels of impact that their volunteers reported³. However, on closer analysis it became harder to trace this variation down to differences between the Limmuds in and of themselves. Rather, the variation is likely to be explainable, in whole or in part, to the variations in their demographic profiles. In particular, the age profiles of the Limmud volunteer communities were remarkably different from each other: one had a mean age of 27 and, at the other end of the spectrum, another had a mean age of 62. The Limmuds also differed considerably in terms of the spread of their denominational Jewish identities and their levels of Jewish education. These differences are, in some cases at least, attributable to the differences between the Jewish communities of which they are a part.

The Limmud communities fell into two broad types: those that had a tight, relatively homogeneous core of volunteers dominated by those of a particular generation and often a similar educational and Jewish background too; and those that were much more heterogeneous and whose volunteer community was not dominated by one particular type of individual.

Analysis of the data therefore suggests that, paradoxically, while individual Limmuds differ significantly from each other, these differences do not determine differences in impact on individuals and communities. Rather, age and, to a lesser extent, degree of Jewish interest and commitment at first Limmud, are of overwhelming importance regardless of location. In this sense, globally-speaking, Limmud is remarkably homogeneous.

It follows therefore, that if an individual Limmud wishes to maximise the impact it has on individuals, the most important task is to ensure that it has a steady flow of young, and less committed, people into its volunteer community. That does *not* mean, however, that its impact on the wider community is solely determined by how high its proportion of young people is. Nor does it mean that Limmud doesn't have an impact on older or more committed Jews. At the same time, as one of the focus group participants explained, Limmud's ability to impact disproportionately on the young provides a pathway to the greater participation of young people in the wider Jewish community:

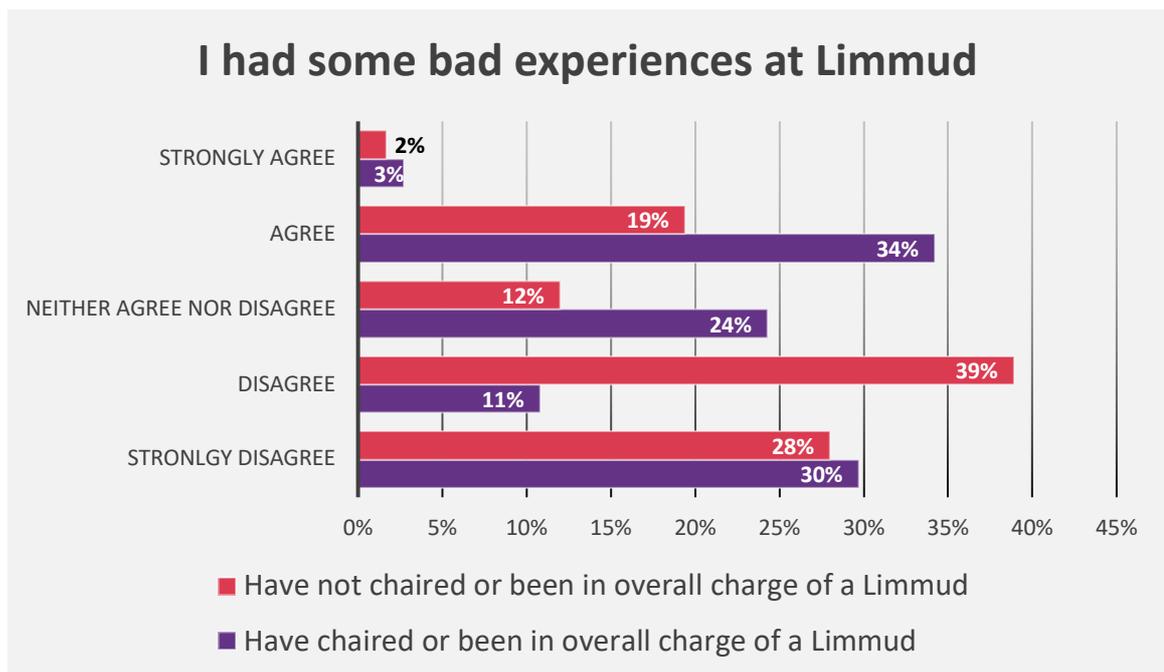
'I see Limmud as a platform for empowering the youth because the synagogues are always managed by seniors. Once they get the power they don't want to leave it. And I feel the youth should be empowered and Limmud is the best platform to get more youth volunteers involved.'

³ NB: specific findings for the case study Limmuds have been shared with the senior members of those groups privately and they will not be referred to in this section.

Negative impact

Earlier we saw that only 6% of respondents were dissatisfied by their Limmud experience and only 4% would not recommend Limmud to others. The survey also asked respondents whether they had had any 'bad experiences' at Limmud and 25% agreed that they had and 1% strongly agreed.

Those who had served as chairs or been in overall charge of a Limmud were more likely to report bad experiences:



It is, to some extent, inevitable that those in senior volunteer positions are more likely to have to deal with problems and difficulties in organising events and volunteer teams.

Many answers to the open-ended questions on the survey gave more details of what bad experiences consisted of. It appears that involvement in Limmud, particularly in positions of greater responsibility can be exhausting and stressful, even leading to burnout. Sometimes, volunteers do not feel appreciated or supported enough:

'There are times when the balance is wrong - that we expect volunteers to give lots and don't always recognise their contribution or give them something back.'

'I enjoyed volunteering for [name of Limmud] but said never again because I was drained dry after the event on account of the amount of work involved'

and time it took up. Everyone else felt the same and there was only one [of this Limmud].'

Some respondents suggested that the stress and workload varies depending on the role and who is doing it:

'Limmud volunteering is a great deal of work but there is almost no reward (training, formal networking, or thank yous) apart from an ice skating party at the beginning of the year. I would recommend volunteering at Limmud to someone in their early 20's. I am unlikely to recommend it to people who are older, I found it to be frustrating.'

'Being volunteer co-coordinator was highly stressful and I would not recommend to anyone. Being a floating information resource throughout the event was highly fulfilling and I would recommend the role to others.'

It is striking that, however taxing Limmud involvement might sometimes be, only 1% agreed (and no one strongly agreed) that 'bad experiences at Limmud have led me to become distanced from the Jewish community' and a similar 1% agreed that they did not intend to attend a Limmud event ever again. Even when involvement in Limmud is challenging, there is no evidence that this produces a significant 'negative' impact. It may be that, even when Limmud involvement is taxing, volunteers see the more difficult aspects of it as not an essential part of the experience, preferring to focus on the positive essence of Limmud. As one South American focus group participant explained:

'We invented a verb 'Limmudar' ['to Limmud']. It's always a positive term. So the members of the team would never use it when they're overwhelmed. It's oddly moving.'

Long-term impact

As we have seen, age is the most important variable in determining the degree of impact that Limmud volunteers report. Part of the reason for this may simply be that Limmud impacts on one's life experience in proportion to how much of one's life has been devoted to it. It may follow then that, if volunteer involvement in Limmud ceases, impact will gradually diminish as the proportion of one's life experience it constitutes diminishes.

This hypothesis was difficult to test out as, for all but the UK case study Limmud, there were negligible numbers of former volunteers included in the samples other than ones who had only ceased volunteering in the last 3 years (reflecting, in part, the relative youth of many of the other groups). In the UK case, current and former volunteers were compared and those who had last volunteered over 3 years ago did report lower levels of impact to a modest extent (usually 10-20% less).

While of course it is possible that Limmud was less impactful in the past, there is no evidence that that is the case. In fact, the UK former volunteer sample suggests that commitment to Limmud persists even after active volunteering ceases – most continued to attend Limmud events.

In any case, some of the impact that Limmud has is 'irreversible' in that it is not dependant on continuing volunteer involvement. If Limmudniks go on to set up new Jewish organisations, those organisations may continue independently of the enthusiasm and involvement of those who initially set them up. If Limmudniks make new friends at Limmud, these relationships may last a lifetime, even if they may become a smaller proportion of one's total friendship group over time. If Limmudniks learn new things about Judaism at Limmud, these may act as a foundation for further learning even if they constitute a smaller proportion of total knowledge over time.

It is in fact healthy for a Limmud to produce a steady stream of ex-volunteers, provided that they stay positively inclined towards the organisation and continue to be willing to attend events. All volunteer organisations benefit from a regular inflow of new volunteers and, if organisations over-rely on particular individual volunteers for an indefinite period, this can negatively impact on its vitality and sustainability. As one focus group participant explained:

'We don't want to see all familiar faces. We said 'let's talk to people who actually work in other places'. And we didn't know there was a nurse, an architect you know somebody else and it was wonderful. It was great you know bringing in new people. Renewal is good.'

In the next section we will consider further what lessons there are in this research for Limmud and for the people who make Limmud happen.

Recommendations

The research has demonstrated that volunteering for Limmud enables diverse kinds of Jews to take further steps on their Jewish journeys. How can Limmud continue to do this and also deepen and broaden its impact?

- **Deepen exchanges between Limmuds** Given the very different make-up of Limmud volunteer communities worldwide, there can be no one model for maximising impact that works everywhere. At the same time, there is clearly a global Limmud culture. How can Limmud as a global organisation support the efforts of local affiliates around the world in ways that are sensitive to the specificities of the local context? One way might be to deepen 'exchanges' between Limmuds so that volunteers can learn from each other and, where appropriate offer ideas and advice. While Limmud has long brought people to the UK Limmud Festival, and individual Limmuds have long invited speakers and trainers from other countries, exchanges between local groups in different countries are, as yet, under-developed.
- **Promote generational diversity** The research has provided clear evidence that Limmud impacts most strongly on younger people and it is therefore reasonable to conclude that Limmuds that wish to maximise their impact should pay particular attention to recruitment amongst younger Jews, particularly those who are otherwise less committed and interested in Jewish life. Yet this does not mean that a Limmud dominated by young people is necessarily the model to aspire to. Limmuds can and do benefit from a broad range of experience, including the experience that comes with age. Further, a Limmud that is dominated by one age group may age as that cohort ages without attention to continuous outreach. It may be then that, if there is an 'ideal' Limmud volunteer community in terms of age, 'multi-generational' Limmuds may be more sustainable and effective. For that reason, the lesson of this report is not that Limmuds should focus on the young, but that they focus on achieving *generational diversity*.
- **Provide greater financial support and training to volunteers** The survey found that, when Limmud invests in volunteers through providing training and subsidies, higher levels of impact are achieved. Funding more young people to enable them to participate and volunteer will lead to greater impact on them, on Limmud and on the Jewish community.
- **Provide greater support to volunteers in managing workload.** The pressure experienced by some Limmud volunteers can cast a cloud over their Limmud experience, although not in such a way as to negate its positive impact. Both globally and locally, Limmud needs to consider how volunteers can be better supported in what can often be complex and

demanding work. In particular, Limmud needs to consider practical ways to demonstrate appreciation to volunteers and to reduce their isolation. Given the sometimes-unclear levels of responsibility in volunteer roles, Limmud could consider developing clear 'job descriptions'. Future research could usefully explore the workload issue in greater depth.

- **Integrate research and evaluation in every community** One of the best ways to improve the ways in which Limmud volunteer communities work on their own diversity and outreach is to develop a culture of research, in which monitoring of the make-up of each group becomes a standard practice. Many Limmuds do undertake evaluation surveys amongst event participants, but research on volunteer communities is much less established and is worth considering too. Limmud as an international organisation can assist in developing local capacity to do this kind of work. The impact questions used in this study could be used as the basis of multiple studies and, if repeated, could allow comparisons to be made over time and across different Limmud communities.
- **Pursue further research** Additional research could explore how far the findings of this study can be generalised to a) those Limmud volunteer communities not included in the case studies and b) Limmud attendees that do not volunteer for Limmud on a regular basis or at all. While Limmud's values deliberately blur the boundary between volunteer and participant, it is worth testing how far that is actually the case in terms of the impact that Limmud has. It would also be worthwhile to explore/measure/evaluate Limmud's impact as seen from the perspective of the Jewish community beyond Limmud.
- **Pursue partnerships with other Jewish organisations** Outside Limmud, given the evidence that Limmud is impactful, particularly on younger volunteers, other Jewish organisations might want to consider partnering with Limmud to a greater extent. Given the pivotal importance for Jewish continuity of engaging younger people, deepening pathways from Limmud to other forms of Jewish communal involvement will be beneficial for all.

Conclusion

The Limmud Impact Study has not just affirmed one of Limmud's key mission statements, it has added to it too:

Wherever you find yourself, Limmud will take you one step further on your Jewish journey. *The further there is to go, the further Limmud will take you.*

And, in addition:

The further you go on your Limmud journey, the further you will go on your Jewish journey.

The more Limmud invests in you, the further you go on your Jewish journey.

While this research has certainly validated some of Limmud's key claims and aspirations, that does not mean that there is nothing left to be done. Limmud is successful precisely because it is an organisation within which people strive to achieve more, both collectively and individually. It is a space of aspiration and development. For that reason, careful note should be taken of the areas where Limmud's impact is less significant and those aspects of the Limmud experience that are harder for its volunteers.

Limmud was not set up with impact in mind and, even if some Limmud volunteers may be goal-oriented about what they want for themselves and for Limmud, they do not pour this much energy into the organisation with statistical targets and outcomes in mind – and nor should they. If Limmud were to dedicate itself too much to the achievement of clear, centrally-set outcomes, then it is likely that the grassroots creativity it draws on would wither.

The task ahead, therefore, is to find ways of developing Limmud so as to strive to maximise impact, without narrowing the organisation's focus to the achievement of set goals. This research can contribute to this process, but it does not in and of itself validate Limmud. Limmud needs no validation. Its value is intrinsic.