

“From learning about philanthropy and discovering my Jewish identity...

THE FEDERATION HAS PROVIDED A **FOUNDATION FOR ME TO GROW INTO A PERSON & A WORLD** I'VE NEVER IMAGINED BEFORE.”

*Josh Stevens has a passion for being deeply involved in his Jewish community and he wants others to join him.*

Josh Stevens clasps his hands above his head, reenacting a pivotal moment in his Jewish identity.

It was 2008 at the Capital Camps, a Jewish camping and retreat center in the Catoctin Mountains. Josh was in attendance at a weekend gathering of Federation leaders and donors with 10 special guests. These guests were participants of NEXT DC's Reverse Mifgash, a Federation program that affords Israeli young adults the Diaspora version of Birthright Israel, which he'd attended a few years earlier—and loved. So he was thrilled to, as he puts it, “return the gift.”

As it turns out, the weekend nurtured him, particularly the moment he was asked to hold the braided candle for Havdalah services, a sensory ceremony punctuated by candlelight and spices to

mark Shabbat's end. Surrounded by multiple generations of Jews, from Israel and the D.C. area, he held aloft the candle, warmed by wax dripping onto his fingers and the melodies of nigunim, spiritual chants.

“I felt for the first time a full participant of my community,” says Josh, who grew up in a Reform household in a growing Orthodox neighborhood of Long Island. “I'll never forget that.”

A 5th grade teacher at Bradley Hills Elementary School, Josh brims with the energy level of someone used to working



## Make it Yours • Josh continued...

“Through The Federation, I’ve met the most amazing people in my life. Each person plays a critical part in my Jewish journey.”



with kids and the commitment of someone driven by a mission. As his Jewish experiences tapped into that sensibility, it took off. And Josh became a leader, crafting innovative programs and bolstering existing ones for his young adult peers.

During a breakout session of the retreat talking about affiliation rates of his peer group, Josh became a bit dismayed. With few twenty-somethings in the room, Josh felt concerned—not by the stats, but by a discussion he found deeply misguided. While the group viewed charts depicting this so-called “lost generation of Jews,” Josh says he saw another picture entirely—spirited engagement among his cohort at the retreat and multiple modes of affiliation for young Jews across the city, many of which don’t require a commitment.

He wanted to mine those opportunities and help shape the community and began by co-chairing the subsequent Reverse Mifgash. Then he went on to co-chair NEXT DC, Federation’s program focused on involving and engaging Birthright alumni upon their return from Israel. This led to a leadership role as

Co-Chair of the first NEXT DC Alumni Leadership Mission to Israel and more responsibility throughout the years which led him to his role of Young Leadership Co-Chair.

Meanwhile, he enrolled in NeXus, the signature educational program for young adults interested in learning more about Federation, which catapulted him into an observing role on the board of Capital Camps. These opportunities brought his experience full circle—and introduced him to his mentor, Robert Burman, one of the camp’s founders. Pretty soon, Josh, a longtime camper at a secular Jewish camp in the Poconos, was spending his summers as a village leader at Capital Camps, ultimately running the coed “village” for 8th and 9th graders.

And these days, with the support of Burman and other mentors, he’s created a social program for men of all ages to come together, network and share their passion and interest for The Federation and our community. This program has drawn the attention of dozens of men, eager for the next opportunity to share cocktails, stories and friendship.

In 2013, Josh was awarded the Jerome J. Dick Young Leadership Award, a prestigious Federation honor whose recipients include a pantheon of the community’s most esteemed leadership.

Why does he do all of this? Simple. “It keeps me fulfilled,” he says, explaining that “there’s always a new program to support, someone else to mentor or someone to mentor you.”

Plus, he’s grown into a person and a world he never before imagined.

“I’ve been able to meet the most amazing people in my life,” and that’s just the beginning,” he says, from learning about philanthropy to discovering his Jewish identity and a passion for Israel, “where else in the world,” he asks, “can you do all this?”



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