



The Jewish Agency for Israel

The Department for Jewish Zionist Education

ניחל הקלחמה •

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ל"כנמה תכשל

Office of the Director General

Guaranteeing the Jewish Future of FSU Jewry

**Application for Funding for Jewish Educational Activities
in the Former Soviet Union from the Swiss Bank Claims**
(Holocaust Victims Assets Litigation, No. CV-96-4849 (ERK)(MDG))

Executive Summary

The vast majority of the some 900,000 Jews who remain in the Former Soviet Union (some estimates put the figure at around 1.5 million), the remnant of a vibrant Jewish civilization almost extinguished physically by the Nazis and culturally by 70 years of Soviet rule, suffer from a lack of basic knowledge of their Jewish culture and heritage. On the whole, they are unaware of the vibrant Jewish life that thrived in the area before the Holocaust, and are thus less equipped to forge their own Jewish identity and respond to growing external threats, such as anti-Semitism. In fact, by depriving entire communities of Jews in the FSU of their Jewish identity, the Nazis actually succeeded in achieving their objective of destroying a vital part of the Jewish People's heritage. Restoring their Jewish knowledge and consciousness provides a serious channel for compensating these victims of Nazi brutality for their decades of religious oppression and denial of the right to self-expression.

With years of experience in providing pluralistic, comprehensive Jewish and Israel-oriented educational services on a global basis, the Jewish Agency is uniquely positioned to implement a range of new and innovative programs that will allow the Jews living in the former Soviet Union (FSU) to pursue their quest for knowledge.

A bold and revolutionary multi-year approach is required to create involved and committed Jews to guarantee the sustainable future of Jewish life in the FSU. The programs that we present here for funding at an annual cost of \$10,317,240 for each of five years will provide a solid basis in Jewish life and identity for nearly 12,000 FSU Jews each year. Each of these programs has been designed in a modular fashion, to allow for increased or decreased numbers of participants, as funds allow. All the administrative costs of the programs will be covered by the Jewish Agency, so that any funding the Court provides to these projects will go directly to educational activities on Jewish life and the Holocaust – to a population that urgently needs this educational intervention.

- 1. Family Literacy Initiative in Moscow, Kiev, and St. Petersburg** – to give Russian-speaking young Jewish families in the major population centers of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev a yearlong educational experience which will not only teach

them the core values and practices of Judaism, but also allow them to experience the richness of their culture through hands-on educational activities.

2. **Comprehensive Program for Youth in Jewish History and Culture** – the establishment of a four-year comprehensive program in Jewish history and culture, reaching 4,750 youngsters in the FSU each year, beginning in the fall of 2004. The first three years of the program will be implemented during high school (grades eight, nine, and ten), followed by a year-long Israel-based experience in Jewish culture and identity for post-high school students.
3. **Jewish Identity and Hebrew Language Programs in FSU Peripheral Communities** – basic Jewish literacy courses for the approximately 50 percent of FSU Jewry living outside the major Jewish population centers, and for whom access to Jewish culture and life is even more restricted.

Background

The vast majority of the some 900,000 Jews who remain in the countries of the FSU today (see table below), the remnant of a vibrant Jewish civilization almost extinguished physically by the Nazis and culturally by 70 years of Soviet rule, suffer from a lack of basic knowledge of their Jewish culture and heritage. The Jews of the FSU were victimized doubly by the Nazis: some 1.5 million lost their lives, millions more suffered physical injury and deprivation during the war; an even larger number – and their descendants – were completely separated from their heritage when they lost their Jewish identity as a result of the Holocaust.

Jewish population of the FSU in 2003 (Jewish Agency figures)

	524,000
	46,000
	30,000
	204,000
	11,000
	7,900
	100
	16,000
	1,300
	400
	8,000
	300
	15,000
LATVIA	18,000
LITHUANIA	8,000
ESTONIA	4,000

On the whole, the FSU Jewish population of today are unaware of the vibrant Jewish life that thrived in the area before the Holocaust, and are thus less equipped to forge their own Jewish identity and respond to growing external threats, such as anti-Semitism. Although it is estimated that there are still tens of thousands of Holocaust survivors in the FSU today, their stories and personal histories are unknown to the younger generation of FSU Jewish youth. These survivors are a critical resource in educating about modern Jewish history and a rich source of Jewish knowledge and memory. They can play a central role in giving FSU Jewish youth the building blocks of basic Jewish literacy and identification.

Resurgence of Jewish Life

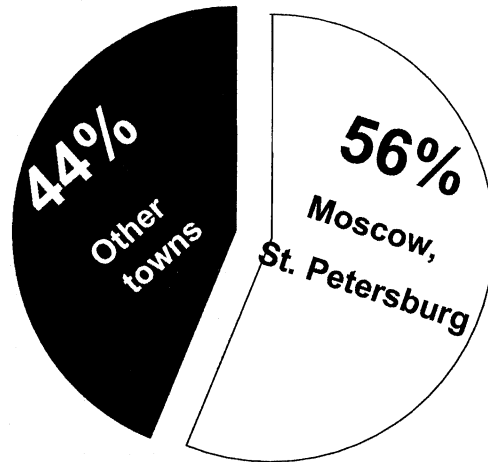
Seventy years of repression, of prohibitions against most outward manifestations of Jewish or Zionist identity nearly succeeded in destroying one of the biggest Jewish communities in the world. Yet the flame of hope kept burning, and since 1989, hundreds of thousands of Jews in the FSU have rediscovered their heritage. Their demand for knowledge has been extraordinary – and the Jewish Agency has expended enormous financial and human resources to meet these demands. From the time that the Jewish communities in the FSU drew their first breath of revival and renewal, the Jewish Agency has stepped into the breach to provide a range of educational and cultural programs.

During the first decade after the collapse of the Communist regime, these efforts focused primarily on providing basic Hebrew language instruction and a preliminary introduction to Jewish tradition and culture to the thousands who yearned to immigrate to Israel (*aliyah*). The Jewish Agency took upon itself exclusive responsibility for preparing Jews in the FSU to integrate into Israeli society; the key to this effort was a network of Hebrew-language courses (*ulpanim*) and youth and student activities that quickly sprang up across the FSU. The ulpanim provided prospective immigrants to Israel (*olim*) with the Hebrew language fluency and knowledge that would facilitate their acculturation into a new society. The youth activities were designed to train a cadre of highly-motivated and enthusiastic young adults to impart Jewish and Israel-oriented education to their peers and to children and adolescents. Youth were seen as the catalyst to rejuvenation and indeed, young informal educators and counselors stimulated Jewish learning and activity in many communities throughout the FSU. Even today, these two major areas serve as the backbone for many other activities organized and carried out by the Education Department.

Meeting Evolving Needs

However, in the intervening years, in response to the change in demographic realities in the FSU, the Jewish Agency has refined and adjusted its educational paradigm. The Jewish population has become concentrated in three major centers: Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev (see table below for breakdown in Russia; the situation is similar in other countries of the FSU). Local Jewish institutions and leadership have begun to create new Jewish affiliations, organizations, and expression, particularly in the field of Jewish higher education. Small groups of Jews are in the process of rediscovering and reclaiming the Jewish heritage denied them for so long.

Concentration of the Jewish population of Russia in the major cities



Many of the Jews from the FSU with the strongest Jewish communal affiliation and sense of connection to Israel have already moved to Israel or other countries. As a result, most of those who have remained feel less attached to their local Jewish community. Most are unaffiliated and intermarriage rates remain extremely high. This means that their children often have little or no exposure to Jewish knowledge or tradition, Hebrew language, or Israeli and Jewish culture, and are therefore at great risk, within another generation, of assimilating completely into the dominant culture, and being lost to the Jewish world forever.

As a result, the Jewish Agency has already begun to shift its educational focus to offer FSU Jews more long-term educational opportunities. Central to this is an awareness of the Jewish world destroyed by the Holocaust, knowledge of Nazi atrocities, and an appreciation of the spectrum of contemporary Jewish life and culture. Bold and multi-year educational initiatives are needed to overcome the cumulative effects of decades of repression and ignorance. There is urgency to this work, particularly in forging personal connections between youth and Holocaust survivors in the FSU. Such connections can help increase the awareness of young people both of the Holocaust and of the expressions of Jewish culture and life that preceded it. They are of critical importance in stimulating Jewish youth to embrace their Jewish identity and halt their assimilation into the broader culture, as well as educate them about the terrible consequences of prejudice, hatred and anti-Semitism. They are no less important in helping Holocaust survivors overcome their psychological scars and realize, through seeing this period in history taught to the younger generations, that their suffering was not in vain. The decades of silence in the FSU about this chapter in history makes these activities all the more urgent and their results all the more meaningful.

The proposed projects will remedy the current situation by introducing young Jews in the FSU to their own heritage and to the history of their people. Yet the implementation of projects of this breadth and depth, even with the Jewish Agency's substantial budgetary

investment in the administrative overhead and other operational expenses, will require substantial financial support from outside sources.

Current Activities: Focus on Youth

Today, the Jewish Agency's educational work in the FSU focuses on several primary target populations, in particular young families, youth, and university-age students. Several key projects include:

- *The Jewish Identity Project*: This program along with Hebrew language ulpanim comprises the single largest Jewish adult education program in the world. The Jewish Identity Project brings basic Jewish cultural literacy to over 30,000 people each year in cities in the FSU with significant Jewish populations. The modular program provides a 120-hour course of basic Jewish knowledge, followed by more intensive one-day and weeklong seminars on specific topics such as Jewish holidays, the calendar, and Shabbat. A supplementary weekend seminar, which is partially supported by the Conference on Material Claims against Germany, focuses on the Holocaust. A recently-inaugurated component of the project, "From Holocaust to Revival," prepares teachers in Jewish schools to conduct educational projects on the Holocaust within their classrooms and institutions.
- *Summer camps for youth*: The Jewish Agency's network of 40 summer camps give 15,000 children, adolescents, and university-age students the opportunity to delve into issues involving Jewish identity, a sense of belonging to the global Jewish family, and the centrality of Israel in world Jewish life in an environment that is both intellectually stimulating and fun. Teams of local and Israeli counselors provide the campers with real-life role models of Jewish and Zionist values. In keeping with its educational paradigm shift, which calls for providing as many children as possible with a rich and ongoing life-transforming educational experience, the Education Department is making a concerted effort to offer longer camp sessions and to bring children back for consecutive summers, in essence, allowing them to spend their Jewish childhood in the framework of Jewish Agency summer camps. The educational content of the summer camps is reinforced when up to 5,000 children each year attend Jewish Agency winter camps.
- *Heftziba*: The Heftziba network of formal Jewish-Zionist educational institutions, established by the Israeli Ministry of Education in 1990 to strengthen the Jewish identity of the local community and enhance its connection to the Jewish People and the State of Israel, currently comprises 43 pre-school, elementary and secondary schools, as well as 180 Sunday (supplementary) Schools, with a total enrollment of some 21,000 children. As of September 2003, the Jewish Agency Education Department assumed the day-to-day implementation of this crucial educational project. This involvement in Heftziba is allowing the Education Department to integrate formal and informal educational activities, reach new populations, and stress Israel's centrality in world Jewish life.
- *Youth clubs*: The Jewish Agency has established youth and student clubs in cities across the FSU as a means of encouraging young children and teenagers to maintain their involvement in Jewish communal life. Youth and student emissaries run the

clubs, which offer a range of ongoing activities, the ultimate goal of which is to encourage Jewish self-identity among participants, and to give them as much information and knowledge possible about Judaism, other Jewish communities, and Israel. By providing youngsters with a Jewish environment, introducing them to Jewish peers, and infusing them with the spirit of Israel, the youth clubs are an ideal vehicle for strengthening the Jewish commitment of those who choose to remain in the FSU while promoting the ideal of aliyah as well. The most active and enthusiastic youth club members have traditionally gone on to participate in Jewish Agency training programs for youth leaders, such as the *Lechet* school for informal education, and other leadership seminars.

In keeping with its ultimate mission of intensifying the unique and multi-dimensional significance of Israel in connecting the next generation to its heritage, people, and homeland, the Education Department integrates Israel education into every aspect of its activities in the FSU. Moreover, the Department is constantly seeking new opportunities to bring youth and students from the FSU to Israel for a first-hand encounter with their historic homeland. These opportunities range from participation on birthright Israel (with the Jewish Agency funding the portion normally covered by the student's local community), to youth leadership camps and professional development workshops for formal and informal educators.

Rationale: Jewish Education as the Key to Survival

Over the past fifteen years, the entire spectrum of Jewish communal institutions, philanthropic organizations and individuals, and professional and lay leaders around the globe have lent crucial support to the full range of Jewish Agency educational efforts in the FSU. Holocaust-related funding sources have invested very significant resources in Jewish Agency-sponsored education programs in the FSU. The Claims Conference has helped fund activities including Holocaust education centers in the major population centers, youth leadership development, Holocaust-oriented educational trips within Eastern Europe, youth leadership camps in Israel, publication of Holocaust-related texts, teacher training and more. Most recently, the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims (ICHEIC) has approved a pilot program to be launched in the major population centers that will massively expand and deepen the Jewish summer camping program for youth and students in the FSU, including a serious Holocaust-education component.

Their backing is an affirmation of the nearly universal belief that Jewish education is the key to ensuring that Jews remain Jewish. Nonetheless, in terms of obtaining substantial and ongoing financial and moral support, educational endeavors are often shunted aside for seemingly more pressing physical and social needs. Yet those who remain ignorant of their heritage will ultimately be lost to the Jewish People forever.

As Prof. Jack Wertheimer, provost of the Jewish Theology Seminary in New York noted in a discussion of Jewish day school education in North America, Jewish education “is a necessary foundation for Jewish living.”¹ According to Prof. Hanan Alexander, head of the Center for Jewish Education at Haifa University, “Statistical abstractions about assimilation and Jewish

¹ From *Charity Wire*, American Jewish Committee, article 00651, “American Jewish Committee Leading Debate on Jewish Education Priorities,” November 17, 2000.

illiteracy veil the simpler reality that large sectors of the Jewish population now lead lives essentially empty of Jewish content – even in Israel. In many families, parents know almost nothing about Jewish culture, history, religion or ways of thinking and behaving. They have nothing substantive to pass on to their children.”²

If these conclusions are valid for the United States and Israel, two of the major world centers of Jewish life, how much more does it apply to the countries of the former Soviet Union, the third major center, where many parents were themselves raised in homes devoid of any familiarity with Jewish heritage or tradition? How can these parents possibly have the tools needed to instill in their own children any appreciation of that legacy? As each successive generation lives its life steeped in the values and practices of the surrounding culture, it becomes more and more likely that the love of Jewish learning; observances of Jewish holidays or life cycle events such as circumcision (*brit milah*), *bar mitzvah*, and a religious wedding service (*chuppah*); the feeling of belonging to a global Jewish family; any sense of connection to the Land of Israel, will be lost forever to their descendants. The fate of the Jewish communities of the FSU depends not only on meeting physical needs – which are, of course, not insignificant – but on meeting spiritual needs and ensuring that the essence of Jewishness endures.

The provision of basic Jewish education, encompassing all sectors of the population through a system of appropriate educational frameworks, is the most effective means of allowing FSU Jewry to choose to be Jewish. Evaluative research prepared by the Jewish Agency reveals two pieces of interrelated data that emphasize the importance of Jewish education in the FSU. The subjects of the survey were 14,250 people who, as of December 2001, were participating in the first stage of the Jewish Identity project, an introductory course on Jewish people and culture that is integrated into the Jewish Agency’s network of Hebrew language ulpanim. First is the fact that Jewish Agency activities are truly the entry point to significant Jewish and Israel-related education, either formal or informal, for large numbers of Jews in the FSU; 38% of the respondents had not attended any event, sponsored by the Jewish Agency or any other organization, in the two years preceding their involvement in the ulpan and the Jewish Identity Project.

Second is the fact that participation in one framework often leads people to increase their involvement in other communal events. Thus, 48% of the ulpan students interviewed had attended at least two other types of Jewish Agency activities (be it Jewish holiday celebrations, lectures, seminars on Jewish or Israel-related topics, informational evenings on life in Israel or options for immigration, youth clubs, or summer and winter camps) during the previous two years, and these experiences had prompted them to seek out opportunities for deeper Jewish and Hebrew language study.³

Despite all the efforts and the many miraculous success stories, it is the considered opinion of the field staff of the Jewish Agency and other organizations active in the FSU that the

² Hanan Alexander, "The Right Tools Can Fix Identity Crisis," *The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*, October 17, 2003.

³ Prof. Eli Leshem, "Survey of Project 'Jewish Identity,' Stage One, in the FSU," conducted on behalf of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Department for Jewish-Zionist Education, FSU Division, August 2002.

majority of Jews there remain totally unaffiliated and unaware that educational and cultural channels even exist. In fact, these professionals have estimated that up to 90 percent of the Jewish population remains disengaged from Jewish communal life. Hence, the Jewish Agency, seeking to exploit its many years of experience and its widespread educational network in the FSU, is now proposing to institute a new in-depth initiative that will make a quantitative leap in engaging FSU youth, students and young families in a program of basic Jewish literacy.

The Jewish Agency is the single organization that brings to bear the breadth and depth of human and material resources necessary to answer the evolving educational needs of the FSU Jewish community. These resources encompass 1,800 specialists who are sent abroad to conduct professional development sessions for local educators and workshops for different groups of students; sophisticated, state-of-the-art distance learning systems that reach audiences around the world; a training center in Israel that brings thousands of teachers every year for in-service seminars; and curricular experts who design informative and creative educational programs on every aspect of Jewish and Israel Studies. With years of experience in providing pluralistic, comprehensive Jewish and Israel-oriented educational services on a global basis, the Jewish Agency is uniquely positioned to implement a range of new and innovative programs that will allow the Jews living in the FSU to pursue their quest for knowledge. Administrative costs related to the supervisory work of senior staff within the Education Department in general and its FSU division in particular will be absorbed by the Jewish Agency; the funds being requested here will be applied towards the direct costs of implementing the proposed projects.

Proposed Programs

1. Family Literacy Initiative in Moscow, Kiev, and St. Petersburg

The Jewish Agency is proposing to create a Family Literacy Initiative to give Russian-speaking young Jewish families in the major population centers of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev a yearlong educational experience which will not only teach them the core values and practices of Judaism but also allow them to experience the richness of their culture through hands-on educational activities. This outreach effort will target young families at precisely the moment that they are making fundamental decisions regarding their identity as a family unit and the part that Jewish culture and heritage will have in forming that identity. By giving these families access to the collective memory of the Jewish people in general, and the memory of FSU Jewry in particular, the Jewish Agency will play an instrumental role in helping them to appreciate their Jewish past, create a Jewish present, and ensure a Jewish future.

Furthermore, this project builds upon the fact that, in the FSU, young people are the driving force for the renewal of Jewish life; they often provide their families with the content and passion which their families cannot provide them. It is not merely the intuitive sense among Jewish Agency summer camp counselors, Sunday School teachers, or informal educators who run youth and students clubs that children inspire other members of their families to learn more, to practice more, to be more Jewish. This sense is born out by the stories of real families whose lives were changed dramatically by Jewish Agency educational projects:

- The Levak family sent their daughter to a Jewish Agency summer camp; when the child returned, she persuaded her parents to enroll her in a Jewish school. But she came home every day with questions that her parents simply couldn't answer. Not wanting to disappoint the girl, both parents began to learn more about Judaism themselves. Eventually, Mrs. Levak was hired to teach in a Jewish school and Mr. Levak, a student at the local Jewish Agency Zionist study center (*midrasha*), was circumcised at the age of 40.
- The Jewish Agency's bar and bat mitzvah projects, conducted in several cities in the FSU, bring together young children and other members of their family for a yearlong course on Jewish history, holiday rituals, ethics, and classic Jewish texts; the program culminates with a festive celebration of the children's bar and bat mitzvah. In Moscow, an old woman who had participated in this project along with her grandson brought a set of phylacteries (*tefillin*) to the bar mitzvah ceremony. With tears in her eyes, she explained that the tefillin were the only memento she had of her grandfather, but she had never before known exactly what they were. Now, with the full knowledge of what they represent and how they can connect the past with the future, she was ready to pass them onto her grandson.

The Family Literacy Initiative will be based in part on the successful model of the Child and Parent Education Center (CPEC), run by the Jewish Agency in Moscow. As it is currently structured, the CPEC serves a core group of 60 children who participate in weekly classes in Hebrew, Jewish tradition, Hebrew songs, and Jewish history in the FSU including the pre-Holocaust, Holocaust, and post-Holocaust periods; at the same time, their parents attend

lectures and seminars on similar subjects. Children of the appropriate ages participate in a bar and bat mitzvah project, which increases their knowledge of Judaism and their familiarity with this meaningful life cycle event. The yearlong classes culminate in a festive celebration shared by the entire community. The CPEC community shares celebrations of Jewish festivals, as well as Israeli national holidays and days of commemoration (Israel Independence Day, Holocaust Memorial Day, etc.).

There are many joint activities for parents and children within the CPEC framework – trips to places of Jewish historic interest within their own community and to Holocaust-related sites and memorials; family Sabbath (*Shabbat*) seminars where games and workshops bring alive the joy of Shabbat and teach all family members the many beautiful Shabbat rituals; and cultural activities including visits to the Jewish theatre. Many have signed up to participate in the CPEC choir that specializes in Jewish and Israeli music and the Center's performing theatrical group.

Camping is an integral element of the CPEC program. Parents and children attend a special Jewish Agency family summer camp (which is funded through a different Education Department budget), where all lessons, activities, and even the evening recreational events center on the theme of the Jewish holidays. Winter and spring camps, held during the school vacations, provide additional opportunities for educational and social growth.

The importance of the camping experience for these children and their parents cannot be overstated. In the most recent CPEC winter camp, held in January 2004, the parents and children enjoyed a warm atmosphere of Jewish learning and camaraderie despite the frigid temperatures outdoors. One of the fathers who attended the camp brings his daughter to CPEC every Sunday; the train journey from his town to Moscow takes two and a half hours each way, but he and his daughter never miss a session. The father told the winter camp coordinator that CPEC has “changed their lives,” and that “everything he was prevented from learning as a child, everything he felt toward Judaism can now be expressed with greater joy because my daughter is living as a Jew.”

Over the years, CPEC – which was created primarily as an educational vehicle for young children – has become an integral part of the Moscow Jewish community, serving to fill a void that no other program touches and reaching out to a population that would otherwise not be involved in the Jewish community. Lecturers, teachers, Jewish artists and musicians, reaching across all the various streams and ideologies, have participated in and enriched CPEC activities.

Now, the success of the CPEC model will be expanded exponentially to include many more participants and to encompass three different cities; each center will serve up to 800 children and parents. Moreover, the project will also integrate central elements of Jewish Family Education (JFE), an innovative educational approach pioneered largely by Dr. Ron Wolfson from the Los Angeles-based University of Judaism Whizin Institute for Jewish Family Life. Many of the basic ideas of JFE have already been incorporated into family seminars operated by the Agency as part of its Jewish Identity Project; 10,000 families have enjoyed and benefited from these seminars in the past two years alone.

According to Prof. Hanan Alexander, an expert in the field who has led seminars in Russia on creating JFE curricula, JFE “is an educational approach that aims to change the behavior and culture of whole families, not just of individual students... As a pedagogical method, it is ‘ecological,’ assuming that identity formation is an interactive, intergenerational process involving parents, children, siblings, and community. The key insight of Jewish Family Education is that in order to affect the individual child, we need to impact that ecology.”⁴ These observations support Prof. Jack Wertheimer’s argument that “the Jewish community can ill afford the delusion that it can raise the next generation with only the most minimal knowledge of what it means to be a Jew. Jewish education alone, without parental reinforcement, will have only a limited impact.”⁵

The type of experiential approach exemplified by the Family Literacy Initiative will not only reinforce the educational content, but will strengthen the emotional bond between the youngsters and their parents and encourage families to take their newly-discovered knowledge home – in other words, to begin lighting Shabbat candles, observing holidays, telling stories from the Bible, and singing Hebrew songs together within the family unit. In this way, participants will begin the process of creating the foundation for their own Jewish family life where little currently exists.

Annual Budget for Three Family Literacy Initiative Centers in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev

(each serving 800 children and parents)

ITEM	COMMENT	ANNUAL COST	FIVE-YEAR COST
Project director	1 x 3 x \$12,000	\$ 36,000	\$ 180,000
Teachers	50 x 3 x \$4000	\$ 600,000	\$3,000,000
Jewish holiday celebrations	3 x \$40,000	\$ 120,000	\$ 600,000
Supplies, refreshments, etc.	3 x \$70,000	\$ 210,000	\$1,050,000
Facility rental	3 x \$18,000	\$ 54,000	\$ 270,000
Winter/Spring family camp	3 x 800 participants x \$360 (including 3 Israeli counselors)	\$ 864,000	\$4,320,000
Joint activities for parents and children (including trips and family Shabbat experiences)	3 x 800 participants x \$510	\$1,224,000	\$6,120,000
Bar/Bat mitzvah program	3 x 130 children x \$500	\$ 195,000	\$ 975,000
Professional training	3 x 90 teachers and	\$ 243,000	\$1,215,000

⁴ Alexander.

⁵ *Charity Wire*.

	counselors x \$900		
TOTAL		\$3,546,000	\$17,730,000

2. Comprehensive Program in Jewish History and Culture

Adolescents and young adults in the midst of the critical years of identity formation are most susceptible to influences from the surrounding culture that are likely to induce them to abandon their Jewish affiliation and assimilate into the surrounding society. They require a serious and substantial anchoring experience to allow them to choose a Jewish future. Linking them to their Jewish heritage is one of the best ways to guarantee that they will remain involved with the organized Jewish community and choose a Jewish future.

The Jewish Agency is proposing the establishment of a four-year comprehensive program in Jewish history and culture, reaching 4,750 youngsters in the FSU each year, beginning in the fall of 2004. The first three years of the program will be implemented during high school (grades eight, nine, and ten), followed by a year-long Israel-based experience in Jewish culture and identity for post-high school students. Each module of the project can be readjusted to accommodate different numbers of students.

Most of the participants will be drawn from students enrolled in the formal Jewish education system in the FSU, Heftziba, which is now managed by the Jewish Agency. The remaining participants will be recruited from among the most active and motivated members of other Jewish Agency programs, primarily its youth clubs. Some candidates will be those youngsters who are involved in other local Jewish organizations, for example the Adain Lo network of schools and youth groups in St. Petersburg, with whom the Jewish Agency is in close working contact.

The cumulative Jewish history and Holocaust study program being proposed here will be structured as follows:

- Eighth grade: a study program focusing on the history of FSU Jewry from “the Jewish life that was” in the 1800s until the 1920s and 1930s, when most expressions of Jewish life were prohibited; the Holocaust; and the post-Holocaust period, including the impact of Zionism, the Soviet Jewry movement and the Prisoners of Zion, *glasnost*, and the massive immigration to Israel of Jews from the FSU. The students will spend five days touring places of Jewish historical interest in their respective countries.
- Ninth grade: a five-day study-travel program to Poland, focusing on the rich history of the Jewish community in this country from medieval times to the present. Students will travel to the Warsaw ghetto and the site of Mila 18; to memorials; to concentration and extermination camps including Treblinka, Maidanek, and Auschwitz; to Jewish cemeteries; to Lublin and Krakow; and to the Lupichova forest, among other sites. The dual aims of the pilgrimage are to imbue the youngsters with an intimate understanding of their people’s history and to create a new generation who has witnessed the atrocities of the Holocaust.
- Tenth grade: a short-term trip to Israel, modeled on the Jewish Agency’s *Meitar* Seminar in Israel. This seminar, inaugurated in August 2003 and partially funded by the Claims Conference, brought students from the FSU to Israel for a two-week seminar that focused on the theme “From Holocaust to Revival.” The intensive study program, developed by the Education Department in collaboration with Yad Vashem

and Beit Lochamei Hageaot, linked the destruction of East European Jewry with the rebirth of the Jewish people in the State of Israel. The Meitar seminar was originally developed for youth counselors who are enrolled in Lechet, the Jewish Agency's school for young informal educators in the FSU.

Each and every trip at every grade level will be supplemented by preparatory and follow-up programming, to provide the students with a basic familiarity of the place they will be visiting and, upon their return, to help them process the lessons learned and apply them to their own lives as members of the global Jewish community. Successful candidates for the Israel trip will complete a supervised research project on some aspect of Jewish history, and will have demonstrated a serious attitude toward, and reasonable proficiency in, their Jewish subjects, including Hebrew, Jewish tradition, and Jewish history.

Moreover, the students will be accompanied by Russian-speaking Israeli counselors on their trips to Eastern Europe and Israel. These counselors will make a significant contribution to the Jewish-Zionist educational process that is designed ultimately to reinforce the Jewish identity of each and every participating student. The counselors will come from the ranks of informal educators who are enrolled in a special program operated by the Education Department, in conjunction with several Holocaust-related organizations, to train Russian-speaking Israelis to lead programs on the Holocaust.

The 150 most outstanding "graduates" of the three-year high school program will then be accepted to the fourth and final phase of the project, a one-year program in Jewish history and culture to be held in Israel. Until the first cadre of high school youth has completed the three-year history program, candidates for the Israel program will be selected from among those students who are participating in existing Jewish history projects in the FSU, such as the *Shorashim* ("Roots") programs in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as Lechet informal education program graduates.

This program will be based on existing and highly successful models of post-high school and long-term programs for Jewish young adults from abroad, including:

- Voluntary programs: in community centers and other institutions, with the Israel Defense Forces, in the educational system, on kibbutzim;
- Academic studies: at universities and colleges (an arrangement between the Israel Ministry of Education and its counterparts in the FSU for the transfer of academic credit have yet to be arranged);
- Enrichment programs in Jewish Studies: at religious seminaries (*yeshivot*) and seminaries representing all religious streams of Judaism;
- Leadership seminars: to prepare youngsters from the FSU to return to their home communities and initiate projects and activities that will widen the circle and engage thousands of their peers in Jewish life;
- Professional internships: to introduce young adults to opportunities for advanced study or employment in Israel.

Furthermore, participants will be offered a wide range of living accommodation – within communities, on university campuses, at boarding schools, or in youth villages – each of which will bring them into contact not only with their Israeli counterparts, but with young Jews from other Diaspora communities. These informal encounters will introduce young adults from the FSU to the richness and diversity of contemporary Jewish life, while providing them with a support group during their year in Israel. A team made up of an academic director and several project coordinators will offer the flexibility required to allow each student to individualize his or her year in Israel.

The Jewish Agency will apply its experience in organizing these types of comprehensive educational programs to the current project. Over the past two years, the Jewish Agency has designed exceptional educational content for programs which have involved 500 youth from the FSU on trips to Poland and 600 on trips to Israel, as well as 3,500 students on the birthright israel program for university-age young people who have not visited Israel previously; in addition, some 50 teachers have participated in a select, yearlong senior educator training course at the Hebrew University's Melton Center, run in collaboration with the Education Department.

Annual Budget for Comprehensive Program in Jewish History and Culture (salaries are only for personnel working directly on this project)

ITEM	COMMENT	ANNUAL COST	FIVE-YEAR COST
8 th -grade program in the FSU for 1,600 students	\$45/day x 5 days x 1,600 students = \$360,000 Travel expenses (depending on point of origin): \$100 x 800 + \$350 x 800 = \$360,000	\$ 720,000	\$ 3,600,000
9 th -grade program in Poland for 1,600 students	\$60/day x 5 days x 1,600 students = \$480,000 Travel expenses (depending on point of origin): \$100 x 800 + \$350 x 800 = \$360,000	\$ 840,000	\$ 4,200,000
10 th -grade program in Israel for 1,400 students	Room & board: \$750 x 1,400 = \$1,050,000 Flights: FSU-Israel-FSU \$600 x 1,400 = \$840,000 Domestic flights: \$350 x 700 = \$245,000	\$2,135,000	\$10,675,000
Post-high school year in Israel for 150 students	Travel, visas, accommodations in transit = \$141,000 Room & board: \$150/month x 10 months x 150 = \$225,000 Staff: Academic director (\$60,000), 5 project coordinators (\$150,000), 2 secretaries (\$30,000) = \$240,000 Academic studies: tutors, Hebrew ulpan, Judaic studies (in Russian), enrichment seminars, educational trips = \$450,000	\$1,156,000	\$5,780,000

	Curriculum development and educational materials = \$100,000		
TOTAL:		\$4,851,000	\$24,255,000

3. Jewish Identity and Hebrew Language Programs in FSU Peripheral Communities

For the approximately 50 percent of FSU Jewry living outside the major Jewish population centers, access to Jewish culture and life is even more restricted. In these areas, the building blocks of Jewish identity must center on basic Jewish literacy courses, including an emphasis on Hebrew language – which even during the Soviet era, when strictly forbidden, provided a locus for Jewish activity.

When a Jewish Agency emissary recently came to the town of Vologda and blew the *shofar* (ram’s horn) during the days before the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashana), he was approached by several elderly people, all of whom had tears in their eyes; they had not heard a shofar for over sixty years. One woman even spoke a few words of Hebrew, which she had learned as a child, to the young man. When he saw it was difficult for her and suggested that they converse in Russian, she insisted on speaking her ancestral language.

The Jewish Agency proposes to establish a network of Jewish identity and Hebrew language programs focusing on the Jewish lifecycle, calendar, history, and culture, and tailored specifically to meet the needs of Jews living in peripheral areas. The project will build upon the proven success of the Jewish Agency’s Jewish Identity Project, which was initiated in mid-2000 to provide Jews living in FSU communities with a Jewish and Israel-oriented educational vehicle that would be intellectually stimulating and emotionally satisfying; the ultimate goal of the project is to ensure the Jewish future of these Jews and prevent assimilation by offering every adult Jew in the FSU a program of fundamental Jewish cultural literacy. The proposed project would expand the Jewish Identity Project to much smaller, outlying communities that currently lack any educational resources.

Over the course of the year, up to 120 groups comprised of 30 students each will meet in 60 small outlying communities (two groups per community) to study Hebrew for three hours per week and Jewish history, tradition, and identity for another three hours. The course will be taught by highly-qualified and knowledgeable local teachers and lecturers. This yearlong curriculum will be supplemented by nine monthly study days focusing on the Jewish calendar as well as the traditions and observances connected with each Jewish holiday and festival. These sessions will be facilitated by experts and senior educators; whenever possible visiting Israeli specialists will participate and lead workshops.

The segments of the program related to the Holocaust and its impact on the history of the Jewish community in the FSU will maximize a very special resource – the remnant of Holocaust survivors still living in the FSU, many of whom live in peripheral communities. They will contribute to the program and also be potential participants. For the next generation, these survivors represent a unique repository of Jewish knowledge that, if not maximized now, will soon disappear forever.

A project of this magnitude is of the utmost importance in ensuring the survival of Jewish life in peripheral areas of the FSU. Although the Jewish population has concentrated primarily in the large metropolitan areas, small centers remain in many other towns and cities. Jews in these smaller communities are often financially distressed, without the personal resources to seek out a Jewish connection. Yet they thirst for knowledge. Jewish Agency summer camps held in the periphery are full to capacity – in fact, many campers are turned away each summer. For these children, summer camp is their only exposure to organized Jewish and Israel-oriented education for the entire year. Their parents are in a similar situation – they too, have little or no access to either formal or informal Jewish learning. Unless resources – both financial and human – are directed towards these communities, the spark of love for Judaism and learning will soon be extinguished.

Budget for Jewish Identity and Language Programs (salaries are only for personnel working directly with this program)

ITEM	COMMENT	ANNUAL COST	FIVE-YEAR COST
Basic Jewish Identity and Hebrew language course	\$7/hour x 24 hours/month x 9 months x 120 groups	\$ 181,440	\$ 907,200
One-day seminars held monthly in 60 communities with 60 people in each seminar	Lecturers: 120 x \$560 = \$67,200 Food & rent: \$30 x 3,600 = \$108,000 Transportation: \$5 x 3,600 = \$18,000 SUBTOTAL: \$193,200 \$193,000 x 9 months per year	\$1,738,800	\$8,694,000
TOTAL:		\$1,920,240	\$9,601,200

Conclusion

Together, these programs, at an annual cost of \$10,317,240 will provide a solid basis in Jewish life and identity for nearly 12,000 FSU Jews each year. A bold and revolutionary multi-year approach is required to create involved and committed Jews to guarantee the sustainable future of Jewish life in the FSU. This visionary educational intervention will firmly equip FSU Jewry with the cultural resources to sustain Jewish life on its own. We believe that there can be no more fitting tribute to the memories of those who perished in the Holocaust than guaranteeing the future of this abundantly talented Jewish community, deprived by history of the necessary conditions to sustain and nurture Jewish life and culture.