Programmatic Impact

The programmatic impact on Moishe House has been significant. As a global organization with programming on six continents, we have watched the spread of this virus from the first cases (beginning in January for our communities in China) and have a unique opportunity and challenge given our breadth.

Due to the obvious health risks and shelter-in-place policies, in mid-March we officially paused all in-person programming around the globe. This not only includes the more than 120 Moishe Houses around the world, but also our Moishe House Without Walls (MHWOW) alumni programming, Moishe Pods and immersive Jewish learning retreats and experiences. In a typical month, our houses and MHWOW hosts collectively lead more than 1,000 programs, so missing even one month of programming makes a real organizational impact.

We have ensured our residents that we will continue to pay our portion of the rent subsidy. When this crisis subsides, we want to be ready. We believe young adults will be demanding what we offer in ways we have not yet experienced, and we want to ensure that our communities are equipped to provide it. In the meantime, the majority of houses immediately pivoted to continue hosting opportunities for their communities to connect online. Our creative community builders are planning virtual programs from Passover Seders to meditation meet-ups, trivia nights, Torah on Tap discussions and more. We already have more than 220 virtual programs planned for April.

An immediate challenge we are facing is that in many cities, residents are beginning to hear about their jobs being eliminated. Separately, other newly selected residents who had planned to move into existing Moishe Houses cannot because of social distancing protocol. These two things create a real exposure area for us because of how the Moishe House model is designed. Many of them will not be able to pay rent, or will need to move home, which puts their roommates in a bind. These are people who dedicate their time to creating Jewish programming in their homes and take on more expensive leases to do so. In the cases where residents have to move home, we are working to cover their portion of the rent, and are estimating this will cost us an additional $15K-$20K of unbudgeted expenses each month.

We have had to cancel all immersive experiences through May and are making decisions about future programs on an ongoing basis. While obviously not the same experience, many of these convenings are being held online, and are actually able to accommodate even more participants as a result.

Status of Fiscal Year 2020 Budget (January - December 2020)

Moishe House’s board and executive leadership team are using multiple programmatic and financial models related to the disruption of programming during social distancing and shelter-in-place requirements. Through these models, it is clear that Moishe House will begin to run a significant deficit beginning in August. Our hope is that by that time we will be able to resume programming, travel and fundraising but if it becomes clear that this is not a reality, we will need to take the appropriate measures to ensure our financial health for the long term.

As indicated above, the biggest and most immediate financial challenge is how to do right by our community builders by continuing to pay our portion of the rent subsidies and, where appropriate, support them with unexpected additional rent costs. We are also working with every Moishe House to reduce rents through their landlord where possible. The other immediate challenge at this time is the fact that we cannot conduct our proactive fundraising efforts given the climate and the fact that we cannot travel, etc.

Moishe House has applied to participate in the SBA payroll protection program loans made available through the CARES Act. If funded, this loan will help Moishe House weather the storm and maintain its full current staff team throughout this financial crisis.
Continued Community Building

Our primary focus is ensuring that Moishe House community builders have the access, support and resources to continue building meaningful spaces for Jewish life and connecting with their communities and other Jewish young adults around the world. To this end, we are:

- Empowering our Program Team to create new spaces for engagement online, and educate our community builders on how to lead virtual programming effectively;
- Hosting Jewish learning opportunities led by our Regional Jewish Educators;
- Moving some of our retreat content online, including our Let It Go! Passover Retreat becoming a Webinar, which was held over Zoom on March 29;
- Providing residents with a paid Zoom account as needed;
- Continuing to pay rent subsidies at previously-agreed-upon levels;
- Continuing monthly conference calls between our Resident Support team and residents;
- Giving residents access to programmatic funds as needed to pay for educators and other resources; and
- Continuing to learn as we go, staying nimble, and responding to community builder needs as they arise.

We are blown away by both the perseverance of these leaders and the creativity they have taken to approach the challenge. We are working quickly to try to both support them and help lead the way and inspire them around Passover and beyond.

In addition to Havdalah services, cooking classes and mental health conversations, we are also seeing the community builders rally their networks around blood drives, food deliveries to the elderly and more. It has also been really special to connect to and learn from Moishe House leaders all over the globe, including in China and Italy. Our community is leaning on each other during this very challenging time, and we are seeing that play out in so many different ways. From virtual Shabbat candle lightings, to residents supporting each other and sharing creative virtual programming ideas via their various Moishe House social media groups, to learning from the reflections of our community builders in Shanghai who are now back in their community, we know we are better for the connections we have with each other which will certainly continue in the days ahead. Moishe Houses around the globe have already hosted or planned hundreds of virtual programs, all from their own desire to continue connecting with their communities.

Some specific examples of virtual programs include:

- Moishe House Chicago - Uptown: Judaism and Food Series, Session 4
- Moishe House Northern Virginia: Virtual Concert
- Moishe House NYC - Williamsburg: Virtual Architecture Tour of Domino Park
- Moishe House Montreal: Glow in the Dark Virtual Havdalah
- Moishe House Barcelona: Challah Workshop
- Moishe House Tel Aviv - RSJ (Russian-Speaking Jews): Online Lecture about Emotional Health

Staying Connected During This Time

Moishe House's website is the best place to find out more about upcoming webinars for the community, challenges and opportunities we are facing, and programmatic changes. The COVID-19 portion of our website can be found at www.moishehouse.org/thelivingroom.

Moishe House's webinars, Global Voices, introduce Moishe House residents and staff around the world, including residents in Brazil, China, France, Israel, Italy, Spain and the United States, all of whom have experienced the current crisis and responded with outstanding, engaging, virtual peer-led programming. Global Voices is held every Tuesday in April at 11am Eastern; registration information and recordings of past webinars can be found at www.moishehouse.org/thelivingroom.