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**Today I'm an Adult . . . Okay, Really, A Teen**

**7 COLORADO JEWISH INSTITUTIONS USE NEW B'NAI MITZVAH PROGRAM  
TO ADD CONTEMPORARY MEANING TO ANCIENT COMING OF AGE RITUAL**

**Jenkintown, PA–(November 15, 2018)**—Seven Colorado Jewish organizations—six synagogues and Judaism Your Way—are among the 30+ institutions nationally which are expanding their b'nai mitzvah preparation to address the social and interpersonal elements of this coming-of-age ritual. Through a [new curriculum developed by Moving Traditions](#), these organizations are drawing on Jewish wisdom and text to explore elements of the b'nai mitzvah—such as being the center of attention, party culture, and social media— providing contemporary relevance to this age-old custom.

Five Denver and Boulder synagogues, one in Aspen, and one open tent outreach organization, spanning the Reform, Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal movements, are implementing this program this year. Several Conservative synagogues have expressed interest for next year. The curriculum is implemented by clergy and Jewish educators over the course of two years, during 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade, through a series of pre-teen modules and family education sessions.

“We’re adding a new dimension to the b'nai mitzvah experience to make it possible for clergy and educators to help parents and pre-teens apply Jewish wisdom to the joys and challenges that arise around the preparation and celebration,” says [Deborah Meyer](#), Moving Traditions’ founder and CEO.

“Jewish educators often dismiss the party as frivolous and focus only on the religious aspects. We are saying that, in fact, the party matters—and Jewish values can help add meaning and understanding to the social aspects of the b'nai mitzvah. Pre-teens today are confronted with tremendous academic and social pressures at an earlier age and a faster pace, magnified by the prism of social media. Parents want and need support to guide their children through the turbulent and inspiring transition from pre-teen to teen. Jewish values and community can offer powerful guidance on this journey.”

Moving Traditions, a pioneer in Jewish teen engagement and education known for its immersive teen groups, piloted its b'nai mitzvah program in 18 synagogues over the past two years. The program grew out of insights gleaned over decades working with and listening to participants in the organization's teen groups, [Rosh Hodesh](#) (for girls) and [Shevet](#) (for boys), and is based on research on healthy pre-teen social-emotional development.

“It was clear that what made teens feel grown up was the preparation for the party, such as being allowed to choose grown-up clothing,” explains Daniel Brenner, Moving Traditions' director of education and programs. “It was also clear that this was where the stress and conflict were occurring between child and parent as they were trying—often for the first time—to make adult decisions together. We realized the party could serve as a core educational topic to help with the transition to becoming and parenting a teen.”

The curriculum was developed by educators and rabbis and draws upon diverse Jewish text, including the Torah, Talmud, Yiddish folk tales and contemporary rabbinic commentary. Through games, activities and discussion, topics such as “Fitting In & Standing Out” and “Deepening Friendships & Creating Community” are explored.

“Our partner organizations are looking for ways to enrich the experience they offer their preteens and families, and this is very appealing because it addresses the whole teenager,” explains Moving Traditions Colorado Director Jennifer Kraft. “The family sessions foster empathy between parents and children and create dialogue in families that might not naturally happen.”

The program prepares families for the pressures of the teen years by laying a critical foundation for thoughtful decision-making and healthy communication. A survey of pilot participants found that parents who completed the family sessions felt they better understood the realities of their children's lives.

### **About Moving Traditions**

Founded in 2005, Moving Traditions emboldens teens to flourish by fostering self-discovery, challenging sexism, and inspiring a commitment to Jewish life and learning. As a result of the organization's immersive teen groups, led by trained adult mentors, 21,000 teens have grown to be confident, compassionate and are forging deep connections to Jewish life. The Moving Traditions b'nai mitzvah program, launched in 2018, is its first to include parents and to work together with youth of all genders. In 2018, Moving Traditions also renewed and renamed its teen groups, Rosh Hodesh and Shevet, and introduced [Tzelem](#), the first national online and ongoing group to connect and engage Jewish transgender and gender fluid teens with the guidance of a trained adult mentor.

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