

# Meet the 2018 WRJ Wilkenfeld International Leadership Seminar Participants



*Natalia Acuña*

**Bet Shalom Progressive Jewish Community  
Barcelona, Spain**

Natalia “Nati” is an active member of Bet Shalom Progressive Jewish Community where she is responsible for much of their marketing and communication. She has a passion for connecting Judaism and Yoga and has started a “JaiYoga” program that is being implemented in her community. Her synagogue recently established a sisterhood. Nati came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project plan for a Rosh Chodesh group aimed to connect women to body, soul, and community through Jewish education and female empowerment.



***Iryna Belskaia***

**Congregação Israelita Paulista  
Minsk, Belarus**

Iryna is a Jewish educator of the Reform community in Belarus including 13 communities around the country that have programs for people of all ages. Iryna came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a plan for a project called “Famous Faces from Jewish Places.” The project is aimed to strengthen Jewish identity and promote Jewish knowledge among middle-aged Jews of Belarus by learning about outstanding Jewish individuals born in Belarus and their contributions to the world. She hopes to strengthen the connection between national pride and Jewish identity.



***Kelita Cohen***

**Associação Cultural Israelita de Brasília  
Brasília, Brazil**

Kelita is an active volunteer in her community at ACIB. She leads a study group, produces the Middle East Newsletter, organizes *tikkun olam* events, and is also acting treasurer. In addition to her local involvement, Kelita is on the communications committee of the World Union of Progressive Judaism – Latin America. She came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project plan for revitalizing community Shabbat. Her project emerged from a demand from part of the community committed to liberal values, gender equality, and diversity, which are not currently being practiced at ACIB. She is looking to gather song leaders, Torah readers, and a minyan with likeminded values to create a regular egalitarian practice.



***Laurie Cosmo***  
**Beth Hillel Roma**  
**Rome, Italy**

Laurie has been involved with Progressive Judaism in Rome since she moved there from Cambridge, Massachusetts in 2006. She is a founding member and board member of Beth Hillel Roma, the first ever Progressive Jewish congregation in Rome. Her primary responsibility is tikkun olam and she has a special interest in discussing the particular challenges facing Jewish Progressive women. She came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project plan for creating a tikkun olam program at her synagogue as a way of engaging and educating members who are new to Judaism or new to Progressive Judaism.



***Karen Goldberg***  
**Temple Isaiah**  
**Walnut Creek, CA, USA**

Karen is a WRJ North American Board Member and a member of Women of Isaiah, her synagogue's sisterhood. She serves her local community in many different capacities including membership and engagement, outreach to seniors, social action and social justice. She believes in the power of connections and came to the Wilkenfeld seminar with a project proposal to share personal stories of Reform Jewish women in North America, Israel, and around the world. She believes that "stories can give us new insights, provide us with inspiration, and ultimately, move us to action."



***Kristina Grublite***  
**Le-Dor va-Dor**  
**Moscow, Russia**

Kristina “Kira” has been involved in the Jewish community her entire life. She was a student leader at Hillel and worked as a madricha at Jewish summer camps. She has worked as a para-rabbinic leader in Crimea, where her family is from, and also worked as a coordinator in the Netzer Movement. She is currently a student at the New Institute for Modern Jewish Studies and is on the path to become a rabbi. She came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with the goal of helping women overcome domestic issues and barriers to religious participation through a variety of thoughtful programs ranging from Bat Mitzvah classes, cooking courses, Torah study, and therapy groups.



***Elena Izmailova***  
**Shirat ha Yam**  
**Odessa, Ukraine**

Elena grew up in the Shirat ha Yam community. She served as a madricha and a volunteer in many capacities. She was also involved with the Netzer Movement and is encouraged to share her love for Judaism with other young people in her community. Elena came to the Wilkenfeld seminar with a project proposal to help participants understand the different denominations of Judaism in Odessa, to appreciate their differences, and to strengthen their own Jewish identity.



*Sarah Jackson*  
**Harlow Jewish Community**  
**Harlow, United Kingdom**

Sarah has been very involved in her Jewish community for the past few years. Her career is as an English teacher in Jewish day schools. She is passionate about strengthening her community and is looking to take on more leadership role within her synagogue. Sarah came to the Wilkenfeld seminar with a project proposal to engage young people post bar/bat mitzvah. She is addressing an issue that is common among many Jewish communities – retaining the interest of younger members.



*Joanne Loewy Irons*  
**Temple Beth Israel**  
**St. Kilda, Victoria, Australia**

Joanne is an active member of her Jewish community. She is on the board of Temple Beth Israel and is currently serving as secretary. She has coordinated TBI's Mitzvah Day and is on this year's committee for the national Mitzvah Day Australia. She sees herself as both a grass-roots volunteer and a community leader. Joanne came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project proposal to encourage children ages 3-11 who attend non-Jewish day schools to share a part of their Judaism with their fellow students. Her project will encourage Jewish students to share the values of tikkun olam by doing good deeds within their school community.



***Iryna Malushchenko***  
**Hatikvah Jewish Reform Congregation**  
**Irpin, Ukraine**

Iryna lives in the small town of Irpin next to Kiev. She is on her synagogue board and enjoys connecting with other members during Shabbat and holidays. Iryna came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project proposal to connect to children, teenagers, and adults at her congregation through theatrical performance. Not only is she looking for this program to engage and educate, she also hopes it will be a good psychological and therapeutic tool for the Hatikvah members and other congregations of Ukraine at a time when Ukraine is in a state of war and its citizens are in traumatic stress.



***Tamar Messer***  
**Associação Religiosa Israelita**  
**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

Tamar Messer is the Vice President of the Associação Religiosa Israelita and has been actively involved in the Jewish community since she was a madricha and ran her congregation's youth movement. Tamar came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project proposal to increase the level of engagement of families after their children's bar or bat mitzvah. She is looking to do this by not only engaging the teenagers but also engaging their families.



***Miriam Olchansky***  
**Fundación Rabinica Reformista**  
**Buenos Aires, Argentina**

Miriam works for the Reform Jewish community in Argentina. She has been involved in Jewish organizations all her life as both a volunteer and a professional. She came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project proposal to create a curriculum to educate community members at all levels from introductory to Jewish educators to those on the path to the rabbinate.



***Ellen Petracco***  
**Temple B'nai Israel**  
**Clearwater, FL, USA**

Ellen is a WRJ North American Board Member serving as Southeast District president and a member of Women of Temple B'nai Israel, her congregation's sisterhood. She connects strongly to World Progressive Jewry and finds we can learn so much by sharing our experiences with each other. Ellen came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project proposal to aimed get to know the communities that the WRJ YES Fund serves in North America and around the world by sharing their stories.



***Rachel Razi***  
**Or Hadash**  
**Haifa, Israel**

Rachel and her family have been members of Or Hadash since her bat mitzvah in 1963. While it was her son's bar mitzvah that helped her become an active member again, she became very involved and currently serves on their board. Rachel came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project proposal to strengthen the personal connections between the core active members of her community. She is looking to build a system to care for those in hard times and celebrate those in happy times. She would also like to engage her community in social activities to keep them involved beyond the synagogue walls.



*Diana Sochen*  
**Temple Israel**  
**Cape Town, South Africa**

Diana has been an active member of Temple Israel since 1985 after migrating from the Orthodox community in order to fully share her spiritual life with her husband, two daughters, and son. She has been involved in all aspects of synagogue life and is currently serving on the board. She is also a very active volunteer for other causes in her community and worldwide. Diana came to the Wilkenfeld seminar with a project proposal to form a Chai Mitzvah Jewish education group using monthly Chai Mitzvah material packets. She hopes to engage younger members and members who are Jews by choice.



*Sônia Veprinsky Mehl*  
**Associação Religiosa Israelita**  
**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

Sonia teaches bar and bat mitzvah students in her community and also teaches Jewish literature and Tanach. She identifies as a very engaged feminist and is passionate about finding ways to connect her feminism and Judaism. Sonia came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with a project proposal to engage the very common age gap in synagogue life between age 13 and 30. During the seminar she was so moved by the power of strong women that she wanted to add a women's component to her project as well.





*Alice Wilcock*

**East London and Essex Liberal Synagogue  
London, United Kingdom**

Alice has been an active member of her synagogue for nearly ten years, playing various roles including singing in the choir, organizing communal seders, and teaching Hebrew to bar and bat mitzvah students. She has also completed a lay service leader training and is involved in their rites and practices committee that looks after the liturgical and service planning. Recently her community went through a merger with another synagogue in East London. Alice came to the Wilkenfeld Seminar with the goal of creating a cohesive planning committee for her new community so they can be sustainable and reflect the needs of all involved.