Limmud FSU is a stealth force in the world of informal Jewish education for the young Russian-speaking Jewish community. Today, we experience their passion and burgeoning interest in their Jewish heritage, reflecting their drive and desire to understand what it is to be Jewish. Entering its eighth year, volunteerism and participation in Limmud FSU events has grown exponentially.

As we travel on behalf of Limmud FSU, from Moscow and Ukraine to Belarus, Israel, Moldova, St. Petersburg, Canada and the United States, we continue to be inspired by the intellectual and spiritual hunger of the participants, who were eager to understand: “What is being Jewish about?” It is the uniqueness of the Limmud model that provides young Russian-speaking Jewry an unfettered, safe environment to learn about their Jewish roots and history and, most importantly, about their place in the Jewish community.

The amazing growth of Limmud FSU – from a few hundred in 2006 to roughly 25,000 participants in 2013 – showcases the yearning for Jewish knowledge throughout the transglobal Russian-speaking Jewish world. As Limmud FSU forges ahead, the outstanding enthusiasm and genuine passion on the ground from Russian-speaking volunteers, participants, and presenters have encouraged Limmud FSU to do more, to engage more Russian-speaking Jewry, and to support local communities in their efforts to “own” their programming. Indeed, each Limmud FSU conference is an expression of local interests, local culture, and local strengths.

The following pages highlight 2013 Limmud FSU conferences and also offer a glance at plans for 2014. However, none of this would be possible without the collaboration, partnership, and generosity of global Jewish organizations and our generous donors. And, we want to thank the volunteers in every community who work so hard to make each Limmud FSU conference and festival an outstanding success.

In a few short years, dynamism and visionary leadership at every level have transformed the lives of thousands of young Russian-speaking Jewish adults who are becoming knowledgeable and reconnected with their heritage and culture. We hope you will enjoy reading about Limmud FSU, truly an important and unique ‘growing’ Jewish learning organization.
Looking Ahead - Expanding Jewish Learning in 2014

For almost eight years, we have been striving to help young Russian-speaking Jewish adults in the former Soviet Union, in Israel, and in New York reconnect with their Jewish heritage and roots. In a sense, we are helping to repair our Jewish world, improve their connection with the global Jewish community, and encourage their involvement within their own communities. This poses a challenge for Russian-speaking Jewish families who experienced the lack of Jewish values, Jewish traditions, and identity for over 70 years under communism.

Limmud FSU began with the notion that we could adapt the 25-year-old Limmud model of informal Jewish learning to fit the specific needs of young Russian-speaking adults who lacked any knowledge of volunteerism and philanthropy, and who had scant understanding of Judaism or Jewish culture. Through perseverance and gentle guidance, Limmud FSU has taken off, now holding annual gatherings in eight countries for Russian-speaking Jewry. Yes, from a modest start with 50 volunteers in Moscow, this spark of an idea has succeeded.

Many individual donors and our global Jewish partner organizations, seeing both the potential and witness today’s success, continue to provide generous funding and positive encouragement, for which we are extremely thankful. Even more exciting, is that the Russian-speaking community itself wants more - the Russian-speaking community itself wants more – the Russian-speaking Jews from across Canada, Limmud FSU is delighted that the Honorable Irwin Cotler, a Member of Parliament for Mount Royal, will be the honorary chairman.

For this premiere conference, for an estimated 500 Russian-speaking Jews from across Canada, Limmud FSU’s dynamic, energetic, and exciting global Jewish learning happenings.

Representing the flagship of Limmud FSU’s initiative for young Russian-speaking Jewry, has evolved into a lively locally driven volunteer organization with individual events in eight locations.
Converging on the capital’s Kiryat Moriah’s 4
Princeton Looks - Limmud FSU
Cahn, Limmud FSU co-founder, observed, standing Organizing Committee, Sandra anniversary of the emigration of the Jews
The central theme of the 2013 Limmud March 2013.
The Princeton Limmud FSU Conference in 750 Russian-speaking Jews took part in the emigration of the Jews
750 Russian-speaking Jews took part in the emigration of the Jews
The conference featured lectures and activites connected to the historic ties between Odessa and Tel Aviv and on the life of Bialik - one of the 20th century’s most famous Hebrew-language poets, who was born in what is now Ukraine, 140 years ago. Kicking off the conference, the Bialik’s House museum opened an exhibition on Israel’s national poet, in Odessa, where he was born and published his first poem, entitled “Poet’s Path.”
Oskíl Akselrod, Limmud FSU’s Ukraine chairman, was very pleased with the exceptional programming and said, “Limmud FSU is the most important and the biggest gathering of the Jewish community of Ukraine, exceeding all expectations.”
After attending a lecture, Katya Osmekhovsky, a recent college graduate from Moldova, said, “Limmud FSU empowers you by connecting interesting Jewish people from different countries who have different points of view.” She added that she didn’t know she was Jewish until the age of 11, and since then has utilized Limmud FSU as a means to learn about Jewish history and develop a greater connection with Israel.
Quoted in the Jerusalem Post.

FSU in Vitebsk - Exploring The Cultural Capital of Belarus
Over 500 Jews from across Belarus, most of them aged 20-40 years, gathered in Vitebsk, Belarus from May 31-June 2, 2013, for the first Limmud FSU Belarus.
Galina Levina, chair of Limmud FSU Belarus Organizing Committee explained, “We have brought together a big family of our friends from different countries to touch and to feel Jewish culture and life – not as an exercise in nostalgia, but as the proud modern Jewish community of Belarus.”
All the Limmud FSU events are organized by a generous and dedicated local committee, headed by Galina, a middle-aged woman who has devoted the last few years of her life to Limmud FSU. She explained that “everybody is doing it,” and that there is a “real hunger” for Jewish learning across Belarus.

Extolling Odessa’s Huge Impact on the State of Israel and Israeli Culture
In October, Limmud FSU Odessa brought 550 Russian-speaking Jews from Ukraine together to celebrate the seventh Conference in Ukraine and the birthday of Israel’s national poet Haim Nachman Bialik.
Participants enjoyed the atmosphere of Jewish unity under the special Odessa sky.

St. Petersburg - The Spirit of Volunteerism and Pluralism
In October, Limmud FSU came to St. Petersburg, attracting approximately 400 people.
Limmud FSU in St. Petersburg differs from other Limmud conferences in its really intimate nature. Dima Zicer, an educator and one of the prime movers of Limmud FSU stated, “Three years ago, when we first thought about Limmud here, we understood that it was wrong that other cities had a Limmud of their own, but St. Petersburg, a cradle of Jewish culture, did not.
We found people who were enthusiastic, and it was those people who created a unique style, making Limmud FSU in St. Petersburg different from the others with their own style and local cultural heritage.”

Jerusalem’s Art Limmud FSU Festival
Converging on the capital’s Kryat Moriah’s campus, over 840 Russian-speaking Israelis attended the annual three-day Jerusalem Art Limmud FSU Festival. The opening ceremonies featured the Peres/Begin Exhibition and were attended by President Shimon Peres and Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat. Hundreds of young Israelis from the former Soviet Union attended 80 lectures ranging from art history, science, philosophy and bible studies, and dance, too.
After attending a lecture, Katya Osmekhovsky, a recent college graduate from Moldova, said, “Limmud FSU empowers you by connecting interesting Jewish people from different countries who have different points of view.” She added that she didn’t know she was Jewish until the age of 11, and since then has utilized Limmud FSU as a means to learn about Jewish history and develop a greater connection with Israel.
Quoted in the Jerusalem Post.

Prisoners of the Soviet Union, and the helpful volunteer organizers.”
Limmud FSU Sponsors and Funders

So many people - our partners, our sponsors, our donors, and our friends - have generously contributed to the accomplishments and global success of Limmud FSU over the past seven years. We thank you.

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Marcia P. Neely, Communications Advisor and Newsletter Editor
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Limmud FSU’s Community Online

Each Limmud FSU community has developed a local web site, featuring local programming, news, and activities.

Belarus
www.limmud.by/en

Canada
www.limmudfsucanada.org

Moldova
www.cm.md

Moscow
www.limmud.ru

New York
www.limmudfsu.us.org

St. Petersburg
www.limmud.spb.ru

Ukraine
www.limmud.org.ua

(English version: en.limmud.org.ua)
“This coming out of the Russian-Jewish community and Limmud – it’s almost magical. B’sheret. Destiny.”

“It was a very authentic and genuine weekend.”

These were just some of the comments heard around the room as the planning retreat for the first ever Limmud FSU Canada wrapped up in early January. Ten months still to go until the conference, but the planning committee was already clear on one point – their sense of Russian-Jewish identity and community had undergone a profound transformation.

And that’s in large part because of the very process itself – a weekend retreat where gibbush and emotional connections were high on the agenda. Many of the 25-odd participants had never met before the two-night retreat at a resort just outside Toronto, Canada, but by the second night – at a Soviet artifacts and stories workshop, led by Project Okna out of New York – comments like “It’s frightening how similar we are to each other. The same experiences. The same stories,” were getting emphatic nods from around the room.

It is a hopeful sign of things to come during the conference itself, which is set to take place In Deerhurst, also outside Toronto, from October 24-26, 2014.

As one participant put it in the retreat wrap-up, “Limmud is about the journey – the process – and not just the conference itself.” That journey is off to a fine start already.

- Lea Zeltserman

Introducing New Faces

Yan Birbraer
Limmud FSU Israel Project Manager
In addition to his present responsibilities as overall Limmud FSU Logistics Manager, Yan has been appointed Limmud FSU Israel, Project Manager. Born in Kharkov, Ukraine, Yan immigrated to Israel with his family to Israel in 1993. Trained as a classical clarinetist, he served in the Israel Defense Forces as a “Talented Musician.”

Following his army service, in 2000, Yan began to work as a coordinator of activities in the Department of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). Beginning in 2009, Yan joined us to produce Limmud FSU festivals in Israel, including the one just completed in Kiryat Moriah, Jerusalem. Since in 2011, he has had overall logistic responsibility for presenters and volunteers at Limmud FSU events overseas as well.

Yan replaces Vika Elkin who was Limmud FSU Israel project manager for the past 5 years. We thank Vika for her years of service and extend our best wishes for her continuing success.

Noam Shumakh - Khaimov
Limmud FSU USA Project Manager
Originally from Donetsk, Ukraine, Noam spent several years in Israel working in the informal Jewish education. In Israel, she was a program coordinator for the Israel Experience Birthright and served as a Jewish educator in Ta’ir, developing and leading Jewish education workshops for Israeli high school students.

Noam came to United States in November, 2008 as an emissary for Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). Fluent in Russian, Hebrew, and English, Noam believes Limmud FSU is the great platform for Russian Jewish communities to explore and come together for a multidimensional Jewish learning experience. She said, “I’m very excited to join the team and be part of the organizing process as the Limmud FSU project manager in New York.”

Noam replaces Ilya Bratman who served as the New York area’s project manager for the past two years. We wish Ilya the best of luck in his new position as director of Hillel at Baruch College.

Mila Voihanski
Limmud FSU Canada, Country Director
Originally from Lvov, Ukraine, Mila’s family moved to Toronto, Canada in 1974. Mila earned a Bachelor of Social Work at York University in Toronto and then a Master of Social Work at Wurzweiler School of Social Work in New York. She rose through the ranks at Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS) to become a team supervisor, then executive director of JIAS Toronto, and then CEO of JIAS Canada.

Mila initiated numerous settlement, integration and community development projects for immigrants of all ages. Her expertise and professionalism are widely recognized, and her advice and assistance are sought by community organizations.

The spark of Jewish commitment lit by her family in Lvov has continued to burn brightly and has grown over the years as Mila has dedicated her life to helping immigrants make their dreams come true! Mila explains, “I am very excited about working at Limmud FSU to revitalize and rebuild the link with Jewish culture.”

The same stories,” were getting emphatic nods from around the room.

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