

# USCJ REPORT ON INVESTIGATION OF SEXUAL ABUSE & MISCONDUCT IN USY (1951 - PRESENT)

## Synopsis:

*United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and United Synagogue Youth (“USCJ/USY”)” engaged Independent Investigator Sarah Worley, Esq., of Sarah E. Worley Conflict Resolution, P.C. (“WCR”), for a year and a half to conduct a thorough outside investigation of adult on teen abuse/sexual misconduct during USY’s 70-year history, across all of the USY regions and programs which have served over 100,000 teen participants to date. Ms. Worley has reviewed this USCJ Report on the Investigation and agrees that it is a fair and accurate description of her work.*

*During the course of Ms. Worley’s many months of work, and the extensive outreach efforts to hear from anyone with information, 22 self-identified victim/ survivors of adult on teen abuse or misconduct came forward<sup>1</sup> while another 18 were identified from documents as having previously reported misconduct to USCJ, but did not participate in this investigation. The reports included inappropriate sexual contact, grooming, and/or boundary-crossing behavior. Ms. Worley found that all of the victim/survivors she interviewed were credible, but the scope of her investigation did not include corroborating the allegations.*

*Many of the victim/survivors reported misconduct that occurred outside of USY programs or at venues not within USY control. Of the reported misconduct at official USY programs, most occurred between the years 1987 and 2019 in the Metro New York (“METNY”) region, and at METNY Encampment, and involved two alleged perpetrators. Other reported misconduct from decades ago occurred primarily in the Far West region, with most involving a few isolated perpetrators outside of USY event venues or official USY programs. Over the decades, most of the reported misconduct was perpetrated by the same 5 individuals.*

*In her examination of all regions and time periods, Ms. Worley did not find evidence of systemic or widespread abuse beyond the individual incidents reported. She also noted that in recent years, reports of sexual misconduct or boundary crossing behaviors to USCJ/USY were addressed promptly and appropriately.*

*Ms. Worley noted that all individuals accused of sexual misconduct from any time period, who were USCJ/USY employees, have separated from USCJ/USY, with most having separated decades ago and have been barred from participating in any USCJ/USY youth events or activities. Those accused individuals who were not employed by USCJ/USY have similarly been barred from USCJ/USY youth events or activities.*

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<sup>1</sup> An additional 4 self-identified victim/survivors alleged misconduct not within the scope of this investigation because they brought allegations regarding teen-teen conduct, or involved persons not associated with USCJ/USY.

*A number of witnesses reported a highly sexualized culture within USY programs that Ms. Worley concluded was not healthy for teen programs.*

*Ms. Worley reported that the informal governing relationship between USCJ and member congregations challenges the uniform implementation of policies and training for staff and volunteers not employed by or under the control of USY. Ms. Worley reported that while member congregations are expected to adhere to certain standards promulgated by USCJ, adults who “staff” USY programs are not necessarily employed by or even known to USY; they may be volunteer or synagogue employees and are generally the responsibility of the local youth division, which usually is synagogue-based.*

*Additionally, she noted that since the inception of this investigation, USCJ hired a Director of Child and Youth Protection whose responsibilities include working with member synagogues to implement a system that creates verifiable supervision for those adults who work with USY teen participants in any capacity, and to work with member congregations so that they comply with USCJ’s expectations and policies with respect to Teen Engagement.*

*Ms. Worley evaluated USY’s current child safety policies, procedures and training and determined they were appropriate. She offered a number of recommendations for how USCJ/USY could ensure enhanced and uniform implementation of safety protocols and training, advance a healthier culture for teens, and improve record-keeping.*

*Ms. Worley reported that throughout the investigative process, USCJ expressed profound concern for the well-being of the victims/survivors. She noted that the substantial resources that USCJ committed to this investigation should help reassure those victims/survivors and witnesses that came forward that they have been heard and their stories considered with earnest attention.*

## **I. MS. WORLEY’S RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Continue to articulate from the top that no one within USCJ or USY is above reproach, that child safety is preeminent, and that the Director of Child and Youth Protection has broad authority.
- Continue to reinforce policies already in place for safety in group events, such as “Two Deep” for chaperone purposes. In the event that a USY staff member or volunteer violates the policy, USCJ should enforce a clear consequence.
- Continue to mandate that every staff member of USCJ and USY complete Mandatory Reporter Training, as well as training in Youth Protection.

Training should be frequently offered and should include topics such as recognizing the signs of predatory and grooming behavior, how to respond to it, and how to support youth participants.

- Institute more detailed guidance regarding those activities that are contrary to the mission, vision, and values of USCJ/USY.
- Enhance the social media policy to include defined boundaries on which topics are appropriate for adult staff and volunteers to communicate about with youth over social media.
- Create a centralized, complete database that documents, among other things, a record of every USY teen participant and every adult present at every USY function, be they staff or volunteers.
- Ensure uniformity in areas that feature selection and assignment, such as housing at events, transportation, and selection for trips. Disseminate clear guidelines for those areas in which participants are selected by adults for any given opportunity.
- Work with USCJ member congregations to communicate clear expectations with respect to policy guidance and mandate that USY-affiliated congregational members take USY training.
  - Insist on a strong commitment from USCJ member congregations to:
    - 1) undergo the same mandatory reporter training and youth protection training implemented by the USCJ Director of Child and Youth Protection;
    - 2) ensure that all adults who staff USY events at the local level, including synagogue employees and volunteers, complete the training;
    - 3) ensure that all adults who staff USY events at the local level, including synagogue employees and volunteers, adhere to the policies promulgated by USCJ/USY as administered by the USCJ Director of Child and Youth Protection.

- In the event that a member congregation does not meet these child safety requirements, USCJ/USY should determine a consequence that communicates the gravity of the delinquency.
- Convene a task force with other Conservative movement organizations to examine the hyper-sexualized culture of Jewish youth programs. The task force would consider and develop consistent strategies and messaging, across the movements, for best promoting Jewish continuity while remaining vigilant in protecting the safety of Jewish teens.
- Consistent with USCJ's mission and values, introduce a healthy relationship curriculum into its programming. These topics are consistent with present-day focus on wellness and should create an environment in which teens and their parents can work together to communicate more openly about expectations, anxieties, and hopes around their shared commitment to the Jewish experience.
- Introduce consent training and programs about healthy relationships for teens; promote Jewish continuity in a less sexualized environment; create a safe space for those who wish to speak out, so they do not feel stigmatized, shamed, or afraid; and develop a culture of openness for teens, parents, and adults who staff events to talk about teen safety and reporting in accordance with contemporary expectations.
- Undertake a separate investigation to examine teen-on-teen misconduct in order to better understand its origins and assist the organization in creating systems to prevent abuses.
- Implement a restorative justice program to serve as a resource for those interactions between teens that may be strained but not rise to the level of misconduct.

## **II. BACKGROUND ON THE INVESTIGATION**

In August 2021, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (“USCJ”) commissioned an independent investigation to examine allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct by United Synagogue Youth (“USY”)-affiliated adults toward teen participants made by a number of claimants. USY is the youth program of USCJ founded in 1951 to develop friendships, leadership skills, a sense of belonging to the Jewish People, a deep engagement with and love for Israel, and a commitment to inspired Jewish living through meaningful and fun experiences based on the ideology of Conservative Judaism. USY programs, including “Epic Israel,” “USY on Wheels,” Kadima for pre-teens, and other regional full-year and summer programs have been developed over the years. Marking its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021, USY continues to operate in the United States and Canada and supports 350 chapters. Over 100,000 Jewish teens are estimated to have participated in USY programs to date.

This investigation examined claims involving adult on teen sexual misconduct and the response of USCJ/USY staff to allegations that may have been brought to their attention during any time period in USY’s 70-year history, in any program, and in any geographic location. Epstein Becker & Green, P.C., (“EBG”), independent outside legal counsel to USCJ, retained an outside investigator, Sarah Worley, Esq. of Worley Conflict Resolution, (“WCR”) on August 23, 2021, to learn facts that would assist EBG in rendering legal advice. To gain an understanding of these claims, Ms. Worley gathered information about current and former USCJ/USY employees, volunteer staff, and others associated with USCJ/USY. Ultimately, Ms. Worley interviewed over 100 witnesses which included victims/survivors, bystanders, current and some former USCJ staff and volunteers, and reviewed thousands of documents.

Ms. Worley’s task was to do an exhaustive search for information, weigh the strength and credibility of information from all sources, and provide attorney-client privileged information to EBG to assist in the rendering of legal advice to USCJ. To avoid confusion with this current USCJ Report on the Investigation of Sexual Abuse and Misconduct in USY 1951-Present (“USCJ Report on the Investigation” or “Report”), Ms. Worley’s information provided to EBG is referred to as the “investigatory information.”

As described more fully below, Ms. Worley did not corroborate or make final determinations or findings on any of individual allegations brought forward but has brought to USCJ the narratives as they were presented to her, in the context of the available documentation and the recollections of involved personnel, together with her recommendations. While further investigation of various events and individuals is being undertaken, USCJ is sharing with its community and stakeholders this USCJ Report on the Investigation, which does not contain investigatory information that is either legally privileged, confidential to protect victim/survivors' and witness' explicitly requested privacy, or is currently subject to pending litigation. Ms. Worley has reviewed this USCJ Report on the Investigation and agrees that it is a fair and accurate description of her work.

### **III. THE INVESTIGATOR AND THIS USCJ REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION**

Ms. Worley is an attorney licensed to practice in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the President of Sarah E. Worley Conflict Resolution, P.C. ("WCR"). Both WCR and Ms. Worley are completely independent of USCJ, and neither WCR nor Ms. Worley have had or currently have any personal or business relationship with USCJ, or any of its principals, except in relation to the preparation of this Report and in the conduct of ancillary independent investigations. Ms. Worley is not affiliated in any way with the Jewish community.

This investigation consisted of Ms. Worley conducting interviews of numerous witnesses and reviewing thousands of documents maintained by USCJ and collected from other sources, including EBG, USCJ managers and others, to aid in the investigative process. Her investigatory information includes accounts and attendant circumstances reported to her; some observations about the credibility of the interviewees; and, after considering all available information, Ms. Worley's conclusions and recommendations.

At all times Ms. Worley was committed to conducting a thorough, fair, and impartial investigation. She reported to Melissa Jampol, Esq., a member of EBG, which serves as outside counsel to USCJ. Information and documentation was provided by (among others) USCJ CEO Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, CFO Balchan Gajadhar,

former Senior Director of Teen Engagement Rabbi Josh Rabin, and Julie Marder, current Interim Senior Director of Teen Engagement. At all times, Ms. Worley enjoyed full and unfettered latitude to review any documents requested, and to interview any witness who might have information relevant to this investigation. USCJ/USY cooperated fully with the investigation.

As indicated above, Ms. Worley determined that it was not the purpose of the investigation to substantiate individual claims. In her interviews with each self-identifying victim/survivor, she explained that her task was not to prove or disprove the individual allegations made. She did not look for corroboration but has shared with USCJ and its attorneys the victims/survivors' stories as they were presented to her. Ms. Worley's decision to not seek corroboration was deliberate. In some cases, the perpetrator already had admitted to some of the conduct, to the point that it was not necessary to corroborate independently each claim made, especially where the claims were so similar to the conduct the perpetrator had already acknowledged. In the remainder of cases reported, victim/survivors shared accounts of misconduct that took place in the past – sometimes decades ago – when, to their knowledge, no witness was present. In the absence of eyewitness corroboration, word-on-word analysis is challenging. This investigation sought to hear and understand the victim/survivor accounts as they were shared.

The withholding of names and identifying information in this USCJ Report on the Investigation allows important information communicated by the victims/survivors to be shared with USCJ and its legal counsel while protecting their identities and privacy. It also gives consideration to the fact that some of those accused of wrongdoing by victims/survivors and witnesses may never have been confronted with these allegations and have had no opportunity to respond to them. In this USCJ Report on the Investigation, we have not disclosed the identities or other identifying information of witnesses and victim/survivors, many of whom came forward under the explicit condition of anonymity to protect their privacy.<sup>2</sup>

Names of any alleged or actual perpetrators of sexual misconduct have been shared with USCJ leadership and its legal counsel.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted in this regard that New York law expressly provides for the protection of all persons - - but especially those who are not parties to litigation - - from “unreasonable annoyance, expense, embarrassment, disadvantage, or other prejudice”.

Importantly, no one who has been accused of sexual misconduct is currently affiliated with USCJ/USY in any way, and all have been barred from participating in or attending any USY activities, with most of these individuals having separated from USCJ/USY decades or years ago.

#### **IV. INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS**

Ms. Worley's goal was to gather the most robust compilation of information available regarding sexual abuse and misconduct that may have been committed by USY-connected adults against teen participants; to listen with earnest intent to understand; and to learn the facts and not make assumptions. Throughout the investigative process, she communicated as necessary with USCJ's outside counsel Melissa Jampol regarding witness interviews, the investigative process, relevant documents, and the timeline with respect to the status of the investigation and the investigatory report. On occasion, she also communicated with Edward Rudofsky, Esq. USCJ's general counsel, to obtain clarifying information.

To ensure access to as much information as possible, and to encourage anyone with information to come forward, USCJ/USY publicly announced this investigation in August 2021 through numerous media statements, on its website, and through direct written and oral communications with the USY community, parents, alumni, synagogues, and rabbis. A new dedicated hotline ("the Worley Hotline") was established in September 2021 as part of the public announcement of the launching of the investigation, so that witnesses and victim/survivors could contact Ms. Worley's firm directly. In addition, witnesses were also identified from records concerning a previous USCJ hotline established in November 2017. Ms. Worley reviewed those prior complaints and reached out to those who called into that hotline in 2021 prior to her engagement.

As the investigation progressed, USCJ/USY repeatedly shared many reminders of this investigation through various channels and shared Ms. Worley's contact information in USCJ/USY's regular written and oral communications to stakeholders. In addition, Ms. Worley personally and repeatedly urged those who did come forward to share her contact information with their networks and to encourage anyone with information to contact her. USCJ continues to urge anyone



with information to come forward by contacting Sarah Worley at: **617-419-1900**; ***sarah@worleyconflictresolution.com***.

**A. Investigation Scope**

The scope of the investigator’s engagement was to conduct an independent investigation concerning allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct by USCJ/USY-affiliated adults toward teen participants made by claimants during any time period in USY’s history, in any geographic location, in any teen-related programming and on any subject matter. Reports of teen-on-teen misconduct were not part of the scope of this investigation, but any of those accounts Ms. Worley received were documented and shared with USCJ and its legal team. The issues presented for adult on teen abuse are different than-teen on teen abuse and require a dedicated focus in the future.

This investigation did not include review of other Jewish institutions or other Conservative Judaism institutions not directly under the authority or control of USCJ/USY. Although many people perceive that the Rabbinical Assembly, Cantors Assembly, Jewish Theological Seminary, Camp Ramah, individual synagogues and other community camps and schools are part of a unitary “Conservative Movement,” in fact each of these institutions are independent of each other and of USCJ/USY, and have their own governing and legal structures which were not within the scope of the USCJ/USY investigation.

At the outset of the investigation, USCJ was already aware of a number of claims against alleged USY-affiliated adult perpetrators involving sexual misconduct/abuse, boundary-crossing, and/or grooming from media accounts and prior complaints, including reports made to the USCJ hotline set up in 2017. Ms. Worley reviewed those prior accounts to the extent possible, as well as USCJ’s response to any reports that had been brought to its attention.

During the course of the investigation, additional witnesses came forward with reports against 2 alleged perpetrators who had never been identified previously to USCJ. In each instance, Ms. Worley promptly alerted USCJ to this new information. The most recent disclosure by a witness occurred in September 2022.

In addition to the look-back at historical allegations and USCJ/USY's responses, Ms. Worley also reviewed USY's past youth safety policies, procedures and training, to the extent they were available, as well as the revised youth safety policies, procedures and training currently in place.

Finally, witnesses shared important information regarding cultural issues that they believe encouraged a hyper-sexualized environment at USY in general, and at METNY Encampment, in particular. These matters will be discussed further below.

## **B. Information Gathering**

Information for Ms. Worley's investigation came primarily from two sources: documents and witnesses including victim/survivors.

### **Documents:**

The primary source of documents was USCJ, EBG (which has marshaled documents in the course of representing USCJ in litigation), and witnesses. Ms. Worley reviewed all available documents, some of which are protected by the attorney-client privilege and/or attorney work product doctrine, and some of which were prepared in anticipation of litigation.

USCJ and EBG, provided every document Ms. Worley requested and was forthcoming with all available information. However, in certain areas over the decades Ms. Worley discovered that record-keeping was not optimal or uniform, and in some cases, documents were no longer available.<sup>3</sup>

### **Witnesses:**

Ms. Worley interviewed over 100 witnesses, including 22 self-identified victim/survivors of adult-on-teen abuse, as well as individuals who reported information about others, USCJ staff, former USCJ staff, USCJ Board members,

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<sup>3</sup> It should be understood that documents concerning past events were discarded in the normal course of moving from one location to another before the Child Victim Act was passed and statutes of limitations revived. Accordingly, at the time of various office relocations, there was no reason to believe that events that had occurred many years in the past would be the subject of current inquiry and records relating to them preserved.

METNY Board members, congregational rabbis, and alleged perpetrators. Some victim/survivors reported misconduct that occurred at more than one venue.

Ms. Worley did not attempt to interview victim/survivors who are represented by counsel, or who are party to litigation with USCJ or USY, although one such party was offered through legal counsel the opportunity to speak with Ms. Worley, but declined.

Some victim/survivors provided Ms. Worley valuable insight about obstacles to information gathering. They identified factors that, in some cases, discouraged them from reporting sexual misconduct to USCJ/USY and/or to child protection or law enforcement agencies when the misconduct occurred and, in other cases, kept them from sharing the information with anyone at all until now. Those factors included: fear of ostracism by family; religious identity and guilt; fear of retaliation; interfamily and community connections; and shame.

Ms. Worley reported that some victim/survivors could not or would not provide certain details with respect to their accounts. Some victim/survivors could not or would not provide dates for key events in their accounts. In some instances, victim/survivors and witnesses said they could not recall pertinent dates with accuracy. In other instances, some victim/survivors declined to provide pertinent dates out of concern that such detail subsequently could be used to identify them.

Ms. Worley also interviewed bystanders who came forward with information they either witnessed personally or heard about from others. In some instances, bystanders requested anonymity. Several witnesses said they suspected that friends of theirs had been victimized but they would not share those names. In those cases, Ms. Worley asked the witness to encourage their friend to contact her, but none of those friends ultimately made contact with her.

Ms. Worley's interviews with current USCJ staff members provided important context in describing operating procedures and sharing institutional history, as well as producing documents to support the investigation. She was able to interview some former staff and volunteers who agreed to be interviewed.

#### Interview process:

For every witness interview, Ms. Worley followed the following protocol:

- She introduced herself as an attorney;
- She explained that she had been hired by USCJ’s legal counsel to conduct an outside investigation regarding allegations brought to USCJ’s attention;
- She explained that she did not and could not represent the witness and that she could not offer legal advice to the witness;
- She explained that neither she nor any member of her family had any connection to USCJ or USY, that she is not a member of the community and, when asked, she explained that she is not of the Jewish faith;
- She asked each witness if she had their permission to take written notes of their conversation; and
- She explained that as part of the investigative process, she would be sharing her findings with USCJ through its legal counsel.

To schedule witness interviews, Ms. Worley provided each potential witness with an on-line calendar from which they could select a date and time to meet for an interview, either by Zoom® or telephone.<sup>4</sup>

Several victim/survivors of alleged sexual misconduct said they would participate in the investigation only if their identities could be protected against disclosure. Ms. Worley consulted with USCJ’s legal counsel about those communications. She stated that she weighed the balance of the victim/ survivor’s desire for anonymity against the need for USCJ and EBG to document disclosure of sexual misconduct by victim/survivors.

In those instances where victim/survivors requested that their identities be masked, Ms. Worley told them the following: that she respected the request; that she would assign them a masked identity for the purpose of her notetaking; that in the event a request/demand was made to share their identity, she would contact them to discuss this and would seek their permission to share their identity; that if they did not give her permission to share their identity, she would not do so; that she may be subjected to a court order to reveal their identity; and that, in the face of a court order, she

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<sup>4</sup> Consistent with the guidance established by the Center for Disease Control (“CDC”) and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (where Ms. Worley’s office is located) with respect to COVID-19 precautions during the course of the investigation, all interviews were conducted by Zoom® or telephone.

would contact them again and if they declined to be identified, she would not reveal their identity to anyone, regardless of the risk to her. Based on her conversations with victim/survivors, and her experience in the field for the last 20 years, Ms. Worley noted that the request from victim/survivors for their identities to be masked was not unusual because she noted the common element of victim/survivor profiles is a deep sense of shame, embarrassment, guilt, and mistrust.

In recognition of the concern most victim/survivors expressed about maintaining their anonymity, victim/survivors who participated in this investigation and requested anonymity were referred to only by coded numbers. None of those victim/survivor names were disclosed to USCJ at any time. Even victim/survivors that may have been previously publicly identified were assigned a coded number by Ms. Worley and referred to them by that number in the investigation. Ms. Worley personally conducted every witness interview in this investigation.

Ms. Worley reported that throughout the investigative process, USCJ expressed profound concern for the well-being of the victim/survivors who had chosen to participate in this investigation. She noted that the time, effort, and very substantial resources that USCJ has committed to this investigation should help reassure those victim/survivors that they have been heard and that their stories have been considered with earnest attention.

## **V. INFORMATION GATHERED BY MS. WORLEY**

During this investigation, 22<sup>5</sup> self-described victim/survivors of adult-on-teen sexual misconduct came forward to share their stories. The sexual misconduct reported involved sexual misconduct of USY teen participants by adult USY staff; or by adult volunteers or other adults somehow connected to USY programs, but not employed by USY. In addition, grooming and/or boundary-crossing behavior toward USY teen participants that did not include sexual touching by adult USY staff and/or volunteers or other adults not employed by USY, but affiliated in some way.

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<sup>5</sup> An additional 4 self-identified victims/survivors alleged misconduct not within the scope of this investigation because they brought allegations regarding teen-teen conduct, or involved persons not associated with USCJ/USY.

A review of documents maintained by USCJ revealed another 18 individuals who previously reported misconduct to USCJ, but did not participate in this investigation. With respect to those 18 individuals, some reported sexual misconduct, while others brought forward concerns regarding grooming behavior and boundary-crossing issues by adults, some of whom were employed by USCJ/USY, and some who were not but affiliated with USCJ/USY in some way.

Of the 22 individuals who identified themselves as victims/survivors of adult-on-teen misconduct and came forward to be interviewed, although Ms. Worley did not corroborate the events they alleged, she found all of them to be credible.

Some witnesses shared with Ms. Worley their belief that USCJ had not been responsive over the years to those who made reports of alleged misconduct. Some believed these complaints “fell on deaf ears”. Some said that if USCJ took action against an alleged perpetrator, outcomes were not shared with the community in a satisfactory manner. But Ms. Worley found that USCJ was responsive to allegations brought to USCJ’s attention, particularly during the tenure of Senior Director of Human Resources Vivian Lewis (“Lewis”), who conducted a number of investigations and responded to reports alleging misconduct that were made to her. Ms. Worley also noted that it is common for those seeking an explanation to speculate about outcomes or even assume incorrectly that there was no appropriate response, especially when an institution is limited in what information it can share about employee discipline.

#### **A. Allegations of Misconduct**

With respect to allegations of misconduct against teens perpetrated by adult USY staff or volunteers or others associated in some way with USY programming, the accounts<sup>6</sup> spanned from 1967 – 2022 and broke down across the decades as follows<sup>7</sup>:

**1960s:** 2 reports of sexual misconduct: 1 incident of a teen participant fondled by a former USY Youth Commissioner in a car; and 1 teen assaulted

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<sup>6</sup> As described elsewhere in the Report, there were a variety of ways USCJ previously and Ms. Worley in this investigation gathered this information.

<sup>7</sup> 6 victim/survivors did not reveal the time period of reported misconduct and therefore are not included in this tally by decade, but their reports are accounted for in this Report.

repeatedly by his parent, who purportedly was a USY staff member, at home and various non-USY venues.

**1970s:** No reported allegations of misconduct against adult USY staff.

**1980s:** 5 teens reported sexual assaults by adult staff members which occurred in each instance at the perpetrators' homes; and 1 incident of adult camp staff threatening to 'blackmail' a teen participant with graphic photograph while at encampment.

**1990s:** 4 incidents of sexual assault of teen participants by same adult staff member during USY on Wheels trip; 1 incident of unspecified sexual touching of teen participant by a synagogue youth director at synagogue; 1 report of adult staff disseminating pornography to teen participant; 2 reports of an adult staff encouraging teen participants to engage in group masturbation at a USY event; and 2 accounts of adult staff disseminating pornography by computer and engaging in molestation.

**2000s:** 5 reports of same adult staff member encouraging teen participants to engage in group masturbation at USY encampment, while others were made in 2021); 2 reports of adult staff member encouraging teen participants to engage in group masturbation; 1 incident of same adult staff member groping teen participant at USY events; 1 report of sexual assault of teen participant by a rabbi not employed by USY, at the rabbi's home; and 1 report of an adult staff member groping female USY teen in a private car.

**2010s:** 2 reports involving same adult staff member (one allegation of groping and one allegation of sharing pornography at USY event); 1 report of adult staff member attempting to fondle a teen participant at a USY event; 1 report of an adult staff member displaying sex toys and disseminating graphic video to teen

participant at a USY event; 1 report of a cantor, not employed by USY, posting images of young boys on social media and rubbing shoulders of a teen participant.

**2020s:** 1 report of adult staff grooming teen participant through text messages.

## **B. Complaints regarding oversexualized culture within USY**

Ms. Worley reported that many victim/survivors and others who reached out to her complained of an overly sexualized culture within USY.

It appears that this was most prominent at METNY Encampment between the years 1987 and 2019. Of those who came forward, most complaints were directed specifically at 2 former members of METNY staff whom they believe promoted an over-sexualized culture, participated in it, or looked away and did not take steps to address it. Some of those accounts are included in the decade-by-decade allegations summary above.

Witnesses reported various inappropriate games played at METNY Encampment over the years by teens. Witnesses reported that these games were conducted with the knowledge and sometimes approval of some staff and volunteers, and included various “games” involving masturbation.

Victim/survivors described the impact those activities had upon them, including embarrassment and feelings of shame that lasted into adulthood. One witness said his exposure to these activities created pressure to become sexually active before he was ready to do so. Some witnesses described that female teens felt pressured to engage in sexual activity by the same teen males that had been encouraged by a staff member to engage in group masturbation.

At other regional programs over the decades, including International Convention, as well as at METNY Encampment, teens participated in the “Point System,” an unofficial activity that allocates a certain number of “points” for teens “hooking up” with different categories of other teens. Multiple victim/survivors and others reported their concern with the Point System and offered it as an example of the hypersexualized culture that they believe pervades USY and its programs.



Ms. Worley noted that the Point System is not unique to USY. It has been researched and documented in other organizations and attributed to the significant element of encouragement that youth participants pair up to find romantic partners among other Jewish youth. See, Wolkenfeld, *“Investigation: How Jewish Youth Groups are Breeding a Toxic Culture for Teens”* New Voices Magazine, July 2021.

Ms. Worley reported that many victim/survivors experienced discomfort at some point in their USY tenure when the sexualized culture became overwhelming. Some explained that sexualized “traditions” had been developed and passed down over generations, and in some instances, victim/survivors said they felt torn between their reluctance to participate in these traditions and their sense that, as teens in the Conservative movement, their participation was expected.

Ms. Worley observed an ongoing tension between USCJ/USY’s mission to help Jewish teens to develop deep and meaningful friendships with other Jewish teens, including appropriately encouraging in-faith relationships as a means to ensure Jewish continuity on the one hand, and the need for clear rules, education and enforcement mechanisms to best protect the safety of teen participants on the other.

### **C. Relationship of USCJ/USY to local affiliated congregations**

USCJ is a nonprofit corporation with affiliated congregations, whose youth participate in USY programs. Ms. Worley reported that the highest proportion of adult on teen misconduct occurred at the local level.

Ms. Worley reported that adults who staff USY-affiliated events offered through local affiliated synagogues are often not USY employees. They may be volunteers or paid synagogue employees. While USCJ affiliated congregations are expected to adhere to certain standards promulgated by USCJ, if an individual is “staffing” a local USY event, they are not necessarily employed by or even known to USY; generally, they are the responsibility of the local youth division, which may be synagogue-based.

Ms. Worley reported that many complaints involved misconduct that did not occur at USY-controlled venues. Ms. Worley reported that those incidents involved an adult who preyed upon a USY teen participant apart from a USY event venue: some victims/survivors reported misconduct that took place in private homes, during rides

in private cars, or on synagogue property. However, in each instance, the adult met the teen through involvement in USY.

Ms. Worley reported that, at present, USCJ/USY lacks the authority and control to uniformly ensure that the non-USY employees or volunteer adults are trained and supervised adequately. Even when appropriate child safety policies and training are in place, those may not be uniformly implemented or enforced at the local level because USCJ does not have day-to-day control over its member organizations. Ms. Worley stated that some victims/survivors reported grooming, boundary-crossing and/or sexual abuse by adults who were employees of affiliated synagogues (and therefore not directly accountable to USCJ/USY) but who were engaged in USY activities. Some witnesses said it was sometimes unclear to whom incidents that occurred at the local level should be reported and who had authority over the perpetrators. In addition, some witnesses reported that sometimes local rabbis or synagogue leaders did not have clear understanding of USY's child safety policies or how to respond to these reports.

In 2022, USCJ hired a Director of Child and Youth Protection whose responsibility includes working with USCJ affiliated synagogues to implement a system that creates verifiable supervision for those adults who work with USY teen participants in any capacity, and to work with affiliated congregations so that they comply with USCJ's expectations and policies with respect to Teen Engagement.

USCJ is also currently working with the Ramah Camping system, the Rabbinical Assembly, the Cantors Assembly, the Jewish Educators Assembly and the North American Association of Synagogue Executives, to develop enhanced sexual assault and molestation training and a system to independently investigate and report misconduct and related employment actions throughout the Movement.

#### **D. Review of USY's child safety policies, procedures and training**

Ms. Worley looked at information shared by victim/survivors, witnesses, and in documents to the extent possible, and reported that policies she reviewed were appropriate. In the past and in some locations, she noted some differences from what today's policies now more robustly include. And, she pointed out in her

recommendations below certain topics that can be further clarified to enhance youth safety.

Ms. Worley acknowledged that her fact gathering and recommendations were reflective of what was available to review. While extensive documentary evidence was invaluable, she noted in some instances it was difficult to determine who took what training and when. The lack of certain documentation caused Ms. Worley to rely in some cases upon the memories of individual witnesses.

Ms. Worley also reported that in the past there was some inconsistent training and disparities in the manner in which training has been administered to USCJ/USY staff and volunteers. Ms. Worley reported that historically training for staff and volunteers on summer programs was more thorough and consistent than for non-summer programs. Some staff and volunteers reported that in the past they had less knowledge of how to prevent, spot, and or report misconduct than in recent years.

Under the leadership of CEO Jacob Blumenthal, USCJ undertook a top-to-bottom review of its child safety policies in 2021. Ms. Worley confirmed:

- USCJ engaged the Center for Hope of Baltimore, MD in September 2021 to review and revise USY's child safety policies and training materials, some of which had been prepared previously by Drew Fidler, LCSW-C from the BBYO Center for Adolescent Health and Wellness in 2020. Those new materials went into effect in 2021/2022 and include "USCJ/USY Mandated Reporter Training: How, What, and Why?" Current Child Safety policies are attached here as Exhibit A.
- In 2022, USCJ hired Mauria Atzil, a licensed master social worker and IDF veteran, as Director of Child and Youth Protection, effective in January 2023, a newly created position. Ms. Atzil has extensive experience overseeing program compliance and personnel training. Her responsibilities include continuous review and implementation of USY's Child Safety Program. Job description attached here as Exhibit B.

Ms. Worley acknowledged that in establishing the position of Director of Child and Youth Protection, USCJ has created a solid infrastructure to support programs designed to create a healthy and safe environment.

## **VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

USCJ/USY is deeply grateful to all of the victim/survivors and witnesses that courageously came forward to share their stories, some for the first time ever. It is very difficult for individuals to share painful experiences, and USCJ/USY regrets that any teen felt harmed or uncomfortable during their teen years participating in USY. The information shared is invaluable to leadership as it continues the ongoing work to ensure the safest and most enriching opportunities for Jewish teens going forward.

USCJ/USY also expresses its sincere gratitude to its outside investigator, Sarah Worley, Esq., for her steadfast work over many months to thoroughly engage with victim/ survivors and witnesses, for earning their trust so they felt safe to share their stories, for following up on all leads large and small, and for immersing herself in the relevant documents. USCJ/USY greatly values Ms. Worley's impartial observations and recommendations that will guide USY to its best future.