

The Impacts of Well Circle Participation  
*Exploratory Outcomes Research for At The Well*

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AT THE  
WELL

“This is one of the only spaces where I get to connect with my Jewish heritage. I'm proud of that. When people ask, *Do you go to temple?* I say *Not really, but I'm a part of this Jewish women's group.*”

WELL CIRCLE PARTICIPANT



# Well Circles: Background

At The Well (ATW) enhances the well-being of modern women through ancient Jewish practices. **Specifically, ATW promotes emotional, spiritual, and physical wellness by demystifying and revitalizing Rosh Chodesh, an ancient Jewish celebration marking each new moon.** Using a variety of educational resources and engagement opportunities, ATW supports the creation and ongoing facilitation of **Well Circles**, independently-run groups of 6-12 people who meet to mark the moon's cycles by reflecting and connecting in a Jewish context. By providing content related to the themes of the Hebrew months and offering a replicable structure for monthly, small-group gatherings, **ATW aims to empower participants to draw on the transformative potential of this Jewish ritual.**

Designed to be self-scaling and self-sustaining, **Well Circles** are facilitated by participants based on a shared leadership model where everyone takes turns hosting and facilitating. ATW provides substantive content for monthly gatherings via Moon Manuals, digital guides with themes, activities, and rituals related to each Hebrew month. Moon Manuals support the creation of sacred space through a wide variety of modalities including writing exercises, storytelling, singing, intention-setting, and movement. **Since ATW started five years ago, more than 2,500 individuals have accessed content and more than 1,000 have participated in no fewer than 200 Well Circles worldwide.**



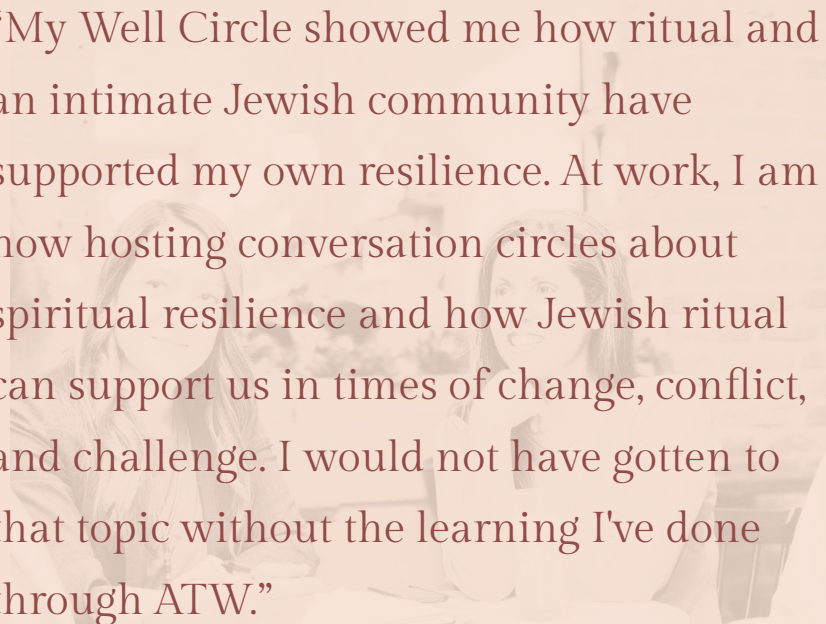
“In my Circle, I feel seen, heard and held by the women. It feels like one of the most life-giving things that I have built into my life. After each Circle, I feel a deep sense of fullness. I get a sense of wellbeing, which is such an intangible thing.”

WELL CIRCLE PARTICIPANT

# Methods

Qualitative methods were used to explore participants' perspectives about how participating in Well Circles has affected their Jewish identities, practices, and sense of community and influenced their approaches to wellness and self-care. Data was also gathered to understand what additional support, resources, and programming is needed to enhance participants' ATW experience and amplify outcomes.

Exploratory interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of **30 ATW participants**, meaning a select group of respondents was identified based on variables such as type and extent of engagement, and geographic location. To provide contextualizing information and inform the design of the research instruments, program related documents were collected and analyzed. Additionally, interviews were conducted with seven ATW stakeholders, including staff members, consultants, and board members. The findings included in the report emerged from across interviews and with attention to outlying responses.

A group of people, including women, are seated around a table in what appears to be a meeting or discussion. The image is faded and serves as a background for the quote.

“My Well Circle showed me how ritual and an intimate Jewish community have supported my own resilience. At work, I am now hosting conversation circles about spiritual resilience and how Jewish ritual can support us in times of change, conflict, and challenge. I would not have gotten to that topic without the learning I've done through ATW.”

WELL CIRCLE PARTICIPANT

“Rosh Chodesh adds huge value in my life and is very big part of my self-care. In this space I can be with other people who know me, who aren't judging me, who are there to support me and who love me (and I them). It's a space where I can be real, show up for myself, and show up for others.”

WELL CIRCLE PARTICIPANT



# Well Circle Participants

1. Research participants are current and former Well Circle members who have participated anywhere from several months to several years.
2. For some, the opportunity to participate in Well Circles motivated them to re-engage Jewishly for the first time since they were children. For others, the Well Circle experience is part of their ongoing process of Jewish exploration and reclamation.
3. Well Circles are some respondents' primary Jewish community.
4. Interview participants live in 14 states. Three others live in Tel Aviv (2) and Paris (1).
5. Almost every interview participant identifies as a woman. One identifies as a non-binary person.
6. They are single, married to Jewish people and non-Jewish people, and divorced. A few identify as Queer. Some are mothers.
7. They are born Jewish and Jews by Choice.
8. They work as: educators, therapists, non-profit professionals and marketing and design consultants. A few are Jewish professionals.
9. Some have taken on leadership roles as Well Circle Coaches and facilitators for ATW programs.

“When I was younger, I identified as culturally Jewish. I was a once-a-year Jew. Now I’m much more aware of the cycle of the year and I’ve gotten much more spiritual. It really changed my mindset to see Jewish rituals and learning as a tool I can use to deepen my relationship with myself and with others. I got married and it was important to me to have a rabbi officiate. Five years ago, the rabbi would have been about following tradition for my parents.”

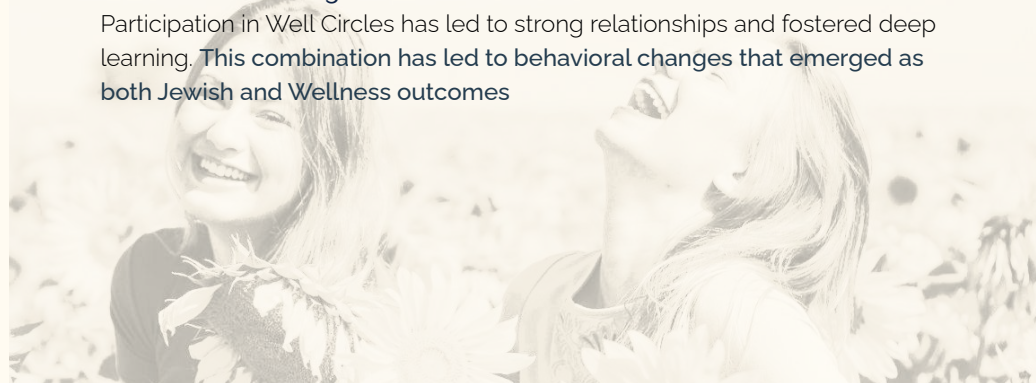
WELL CIRCLE PARTICIPANT

# Outcomes

Respondents described **16 different outcomes** they experienced as a result of their participation in Well Circles. Each outcome contributes to a nuanced picture of how participating affected respondents' lives. Each illustrates a combination of changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. **Together, the outcomes showcase Well Circles as a highly effective form of peer-led experiential education.**

The research shows that ATW is providing content and structure that **empower participants to integrate Jewish community and practice into their lives.** By taking part in Well Circles over time, participants cultivated the confidence and a network of support **that enabled them to effect transformative change as individuals and as micro-communities.**

Participation in Well Circles has led to strong relationships and fostered deep learning. This combination has led to behavioral changes that emerged as both Jewish and Wellness outcomes



“Along with a lot of women in my Circle, I’m feeling more connected to my menstrual cycle and the things that are uniquely physical about being a woman.”

WELL CIRCLE PARTICIPANT

# Jewish Outcomes

## Finding their *Place*

For some, Well Circles are the first and only Jewish space where they feel comfortable participating. **The Well Circle is some respondents' primary Jewish community.** The do-it-yourself nature of Well Circles is a draw for some participants who are not interested in being involved with more traditional Jewish institutions.



## Taking *Ownership*

Engaging in the monthly ritual empowered respondents to make Judaism their own. Participating increased respondents' sense of comfort with and ownership of Jewish rituals and content.

**Participating helped some understand the value of Jewish practice for the first time.**

The opportunity also helped respondents bring meaning and relevance to other Jewish holidays and traditions. Several mentioned how they now celebrate Hanukkah, Shabbat, Havdalah and Break the Fast with people from their Well Circle.



## Reclaiming *Judaism*

Participants described how their Well Circle experience contributed to their process of **self-discovery** about how to integrate Judaism into their lives. **Well Circles brought new depth to their Jewish experiences.**



## Expanding *Knowledge*

Participating has increased respondents' **Jewish literacy**. Some are deepening their understanding of Jewish history and spirituality first learned in their youth. Others are learning about these Jewish concepts for the very first time—which is helping deepen their interest in and appreciation of Judaism. **Many participants noted that learning about Judaism from a feminist perspective has been inspiring and motivates them to stay involved.** Learning from peers is a significant aspect of the Well Circle experience for respondents.





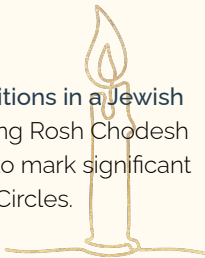
# Jewish Outcomes *cont.*

## Empowering *Participants*

Well Circles offer a structure that makes Jewish community more accessible. Respondents described the feminist nature of the space as an important aspect of their experience. They appreciated the opportunity to explore the intersection of Judaism and gender. **Participating increased respondents' connections with Jewish women across time.**

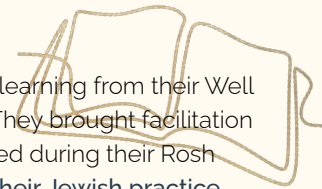
## Creating *Rituals*

Well Circles enable participants to **mark life transitions in a Jewish context**. Their experience of the power of observing Rosh Chodesh motivated some to develop rituals and traditions to mark significant moments in their lives in the context of their Well Circles.



## Applying *Learning*

Several respondents mentioned applying learning from their Well Circles outside of the monthly gathering. They brought facilitation techniques and communication skills honed during their Rosh Chodesh observance into their work life. **Their Jewish practice became professionally relevant.** Respondents mentioned applying their learning in both Jewish and non-Jewish contexts.



## Marking *Time*

Participating in monthly Well Circles influenced how respondents connect with time. The experience fostered a sense of connection to the moon and the Jewish Calendar. **Their awareness about the relationship between their own bodies and the cycles of the moon increased.**



“The Well Circle has provided a real sense of comfort and support. There's been at least one person on every Zoom call who says *I really needed this tonight because of X, Y, Z happening in my life...thank God for this.*”

WELL CIRCLE PARTICIPANT



# Wellness Outcome

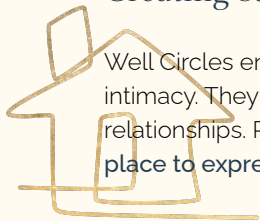
## Engendering *Self-Care*

Respondents described their Well Circle participation as an **important aspect of their self-care**. They encouraged each other to attend to their needs and served as accountability partners over time.



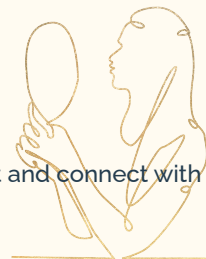
## Creating *Sacred Space*

Well Circles enabled participants to create space for emotional intimacy. They developed and nurtured deep and trusting mutual relationships. Participants described Well Circles as a **safe and sacred place to express vulnerability without judgement or shame**.



## Encouraging *Self-Reflection*

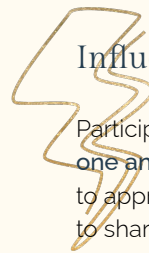
Well Circles helped participants **self-reflect and connect with themselves and others in new ways**.



They were emboldened to bring their full selves to the experience.

## Influencing *Action*

Participants have become **valuable resources and role models for one another**. They influence each other by modeling different ways to approach situations. Circles provide opportunities for participants to share their strengths and talents.



# Wellness Outcome *cont.*

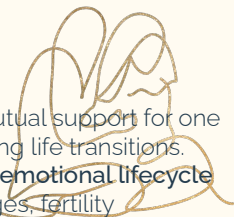


## Increasing *Embodiment*

Respondents gained skills like mindfulness and meditation that enabled them to practice **self-regulation and reflection**. In their Well Circles, respondents are practicing staying in the moment and being in their bodies. Several respondents described their experience in somatic terms.

## Supporting *Each-other*

Well Circles enabled participants to provide mutual support for one another through significant and often challenging life transitions. **They helped one another through a variety of emotional lifecycle phases:** marriages, babies, lactation, miscarriages, fertility challenges, job transitions, accidents, depression and anxiety, divorces and deaths. Respondents valued the opportunity to support others and feel supported.



## Extending *Support*

Participants create communities of **collective care that extend beyond their monthly Circles**. Respondents described how they show up for one another throughout the months and years.



## Fostering *Community*

Participating created a sense of community among respondents. Well Circles help participants feel **grounded in themselves and connected to each other**. Some respondents described how the relationships fostered by their Well Circles helped them acclimate to new places when they moved.



# Concluding Thoughts

When considered individually, each of the 16 outcomes points to a subtle shift in attitudes and behaviors. Taken together, it becomes clear that ATW has **robustly created a highly adaptable model for peer-led community building that draws on Jewish practice, tradition and wisdom to foster personal and collective wellbeing.**

These findings show how **Well Circles enrich participants' social, psychological, and spiritual lives** by creating a learning environment that leads to positive behavioral changes. Throughout the report, respondents described the numerous small and profound life changes they attribute to their participation in Well Circles. **ATW is empowering participants to create communities of collective care that enable them to more actively embrace their identities as Jews.** Relationships fostered through Well Circle participation are intimate and supportive. Respondents are highly engaged in the process of integrating Well Circle content into their reflective and relational processes. Many have incorporated Well Circle style facilitation techniques into their personal and professional lives, and in doing so, are extending the impact of ATW.

This study was designed to uncover positive outcomes that emerge for participants who are most actively engaged and affected by their Well Circle experience. These findings shed light on the optimum experience as a starting point for conceptualizing the continuum of outcomes that the larger population of Well Circle participants is likely to experience. The variety of outcomes illustrated throughout this evaluation, coupled with ATW's growing organizational capacity, points to ATW's strong potential to exponentially increase the depth and breadth of impacts related to Well Circle participation moving forward.

“When I was a newcomer to this city, starting a Well Circle made me feel like less of an outsider in the Jewish community. Without the Well Circle, I wouldn't have made these connections. It has increased my confidence in my ability to build relationships.”

WELL CIRCLE PARTICIPANT

A group of people sitting in a circle on the floor, engaged in a discussion or meeting. The image is semi-transparent and serves as a background for the text.

## Research & Evaluation

At The Well is a data-driven organization. In order to ensure that we are providing the highest-quality offerings that address the needs of our community, we invest significant resources in ongoing research and evaluation. This qualitative study indicates that Well Circles are working. We need additional support to expand our impact and continue to hone our programs.