

Being Jewish in Scotland

What's it all about?

We wanted to find out more about the diversity of experience of Jewish people throughout Scotland, urban and rural, and of any or no religious affiliation, in order to understand their concerns, and to help us meet their needs. We also hoped that the project would strengthen networks of Jewish people across Scotland, and so help reduce the isolation that some experience, especially in rural locations.



How did we do this? We designed a survey form that we sent to all the Jewish people on our mailing list, sent information about the project to every public library in Scotland, and advertised the project widely in the press and online. Our *Being Jewish in Scotland* project worker, Fiona Frank, organised a variety of Jewish-themed events including a Klezmer dance in Dunoon, a lecture on Jewish immigration in Dundee, a celebration of Jewish writing in Inverness, a concert and talk about art in Dumfriesshire. And at each event we met Jewish people who had not previously been in touch with any other Jewish people or organisations, but who told us how delighted they were to have that opportunity now.

Special Issue

No limits! In every place where we held focus groups, new connections were made, new links were forged, and new opportunities have arisen. There is no limit to what can be achieved when people come together. This special *Being Jewish in Scotland* edition of *Four Corners* is not the end – it's only a beginning. For the next three years, SCoJeC will be building on the results of *Being Jewish in Scotland*, and we want your feedback to help us do so.

For more information see www.scojec.org/jewishinScotland.html or contact us at scojec@scojec.org, or by post or phone (full contact details on the back page).

Communities are Assets

When people think of "community safety" they often think of being protected from harm by the police. That's vital but there is more to it. Promoting the strengths and assets of communities can mean people are better connected and feel safer. Focusing on this more positive idea of community safety was the basis for our partnership with SCoJeC. When we sat down with SCoJeC to discuss the project, we knew that this ambitious initiative would only be realised, and have lasting impact, if the whole range of Scotland's strong, but dispersed, Jewish Communities were engaged.

We were optimistic that such a project, backed by £21 750 of Scottish Government funding, could provide vital connections with and between Scottish Jewish communities leading to a greater understanding of the relationships that already existed, as well as encouraging new bonds to form across wider society, organisations and faith backgrounds.

Not only can the views, experiences, and insights gathered help inform the provision of services by organisations and agencies, such as local authorities, the police, the NHS, and – of course – the Scottish Government and SCoJeC themselves, but the process, led by SCoJeC over the previous 8 months, has of itself been valuable. Meetings, focus groups, and 'listening tables' held across Scotland, have sparked debate and encouraged community participation. Actively engaged communities tend to be resilient and cohesive ones, where diversity is viewed as an asset on which to build inclusivity and understanding.

Being Jewish in Scotland has not only prompted reflection on what it means to be Jewish in 21st-century Scotland. It has also highlighted common understanding and shared patterns of experience that will be recognised by, and have relevance to, wider Scottish society.

LORNA ASCROFT, DEPUTY HEAD, SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT

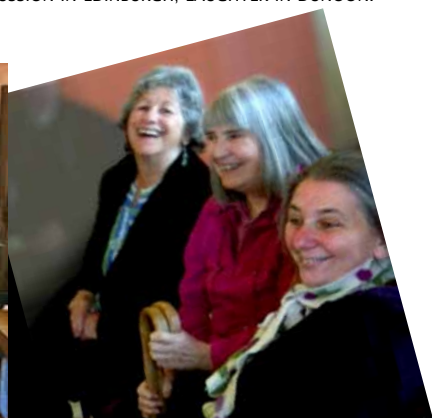
BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT: THE *BEING JEWISH IN SCOTLAND* EVENT IN DUNOON, THE FIRST JEWISH EVENT THERE FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS; MUSIC AND DISCUSSION IN EDINBURGH; LAUGHTER IN DUNOON.



JULY 2012 · SPECIAL EDITION

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
www.scojec.org

THE UMBRELLA REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISATION OF ALL THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN SCOTLAND



For more about what we found, visit www.scojec.org/jewishinScotland.html

Connections

We received survey forms from throughout Scotland, and travelled the length and breadth of the country to meet Jewish people at events and focus groups.

THE MAP SHOWS THE LOCATIONS OF FOCUS GROUPS AND OTHER EVENTS, AND THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE OF RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY:

28 NUMBER OF FOCUS GROUPS AND EVENTS (TOTAL 28)

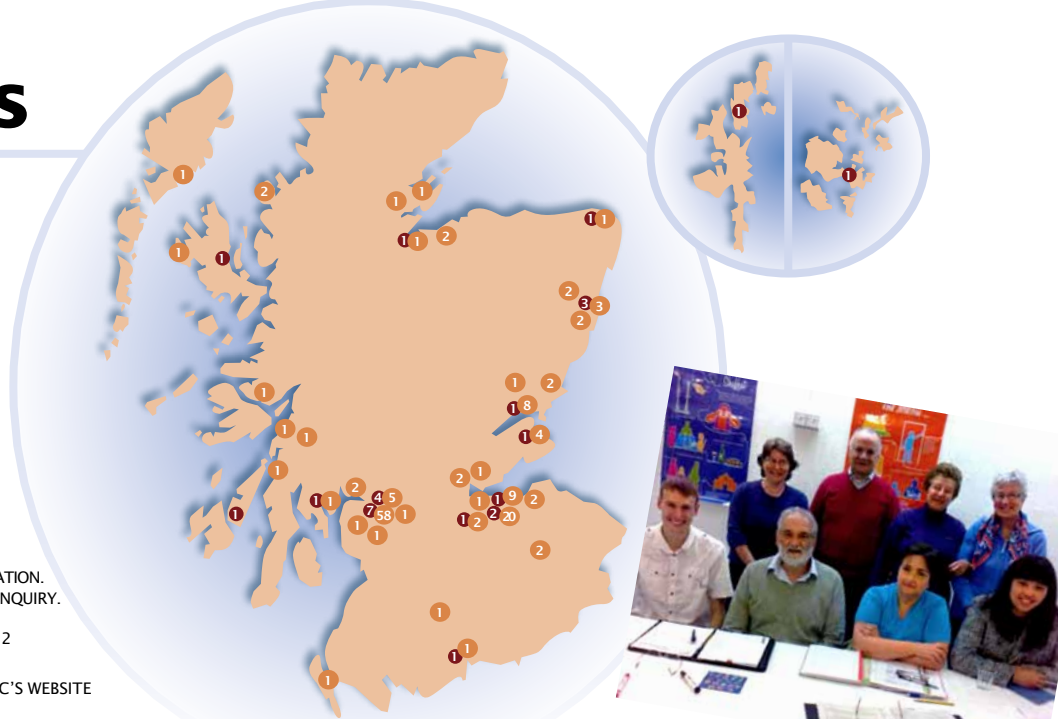
153 NUMBER OF SURVEY RESPONSES & INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS (TOTAL 153)

THIS INCLUDES PLACE OF LAST RESIDENCE FOR 13 RESPONDENTS NO LONGER LIVING IN SCOTLAND. THERE WERE ALSO 6 RESPONDENTS WHO DID NOT DISCLOSE A LOCATION. IN TOTAL, MORE THAN 300 PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN THE INQUIRY.

RIGHT: THE DUNDEE HEBREW LANGUAGE CLASS, JUNE 2012

BOTTOM LEFT: A SCHOOL VISIT TO DUNDEE SYNAGOGUE

CENTRE: THE *JEWISH WAY OF LIFE* RESOURCE ON SCOJEC'S WEBSITE



One Israeli woman who picked up a *Being Jewish in Scotland* leaflet from her local library, had been living in East Central Scotland for many years, and thought she was the only Jewish person in the area. She was delighted that we were able to put her in touch with the Dundee Jewish community less than half an hour away from her home. After attending an event and a focus group discussion at the synagogue, she is now offering Hebrew language lessons to a small group of local people.

In the main, respondents and focus group participants felt very positive about living in Scotland, and people had a lot of good things to say about life here. People reported a general interest in and respect for Jews and Judaism, especially among older Scots who respected the Jews as the "people of the book", and who shared the Jewish respect of the Sabbath.

But some told us that people they meet have not encountered Jewish people before, and sometimes the level of ignorance about Judaism came as a surprise. Many Scots, for example, can hardly believe that Jews don't observe Christmas!

"I love living in Scotland - I wouldn't want to live in any other part of the UK - this is to do with quality of life generally and access to remote and beautiful wilderness!" (F, 50s, Glasgow.)

"In Scotland we are not restricted, we can be as Jewish or as non-observant as we wish." (F, over 75, Glasgow.)

"I find on the whole Scottish people are respectful and friendly towards all things Jewish, and very interested in Jewish holidays and so on." (M, 30s, Glasgow.)

"I find people are very interested and very respectful of my Jewishness, much more so than in London." (F, 50s, North-East.)

"For many of my friends, I am the only Jewish person they know. That comes with some pressures, but it means that they can discuss Jewish issues with me if they want to. If folks know someone Jewish well, they cease to be 'other'." (M, 30s, Glasgow.)

"Outside the main Jewish areas, people haven't met Jews and have skewed ideas of what Jews are. I feel I wear it as a badge: you have a duty to show that you're like everyone else and that you don't have horns." (F, 40s, Glasgow.)

"In the past ... people went to church, children to Sunday school, and there was respect for Jews as the people of the book." (F, over 75, Glasgow.)

"I have to explain to my lads' school teachers what being Jewish means - for example, Jewish new year, Yom Kippur holidays." (F, 50s, North-East.)

"The only thing that annoys me is being asked by non-Jewish people, Christians, whether I'm celebrating Christmas. What is this? They can't grasp that some people don't celebrate it. They find it completely unbelievable. They just don't grasp it. What, are you not getting presents?!" (F, 40s, Edinburgh.)

Happily, there is a lot of demand across Scotland for Jewish people to give talks about Judaism in schools, and to youth and adult groups.

"I go to schools, interfaith, I do this constantly." (M, 40s, Glasgow, religious leader.)

"People are curious to find out about Judaism, so I speak to women's groups, go into schools." (F, under 21, formerly Glasgow.)

"In my younger days I spoke regularly to church groups, school pupils and youth groups." (F, 60s, Glasgow.)

Many people enjoy doing this type of talk and come up with great ideas to make the sessions engaging, but others would like some additional support. People should not feel obligated to talk about Judaism - and should definitely not find themselves in the situation that one Edinburgh woman described:

"When it was the turn to find out what Jews did around Christmas, they asked my son who was seven. He was a complete non-expert on the subject, and he felt very set apart." (F, 60s, Edinburgh.)

Some of you may find *The Jewish Way of Life* educational resource on SCOJEC's website useful for schoolchildren, and we are investigating sources of funding to provide more support for people asked to speak about Judaism in schools. If you give talks about Judaism, we'd be glad to know what resources and backup you would find useful - please do let us know!



Ways of Being Jewish

“Every Jew has a story to tell, and every story is different.”

WE NEVER IDENTIFY INDIVIDUALS WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION. EVERYONE WHOSE NAME OR PHOTO APPEARS HERE HAS GIVEN CONSENT.



● Art and Judaism

Randy Klinger from New York, the director of Moray Art Centre, has lived at the Findhorn Foundation for 20 years. “When I designed and built our art centre, I thought, ‘Why can’t the gallery space double as a shul?’ I had studied in a shul in Midwood, Brooklyn, it was in the small basement of someone’s home - about 100 of us crammed into a dark, but very joyous place. As we started building the centre, we had about ten Jews in the community, with regular Torah study classes, and the celebration of all the festivals (though finding kosher chicken around these parts WOULD be a miracle!). I suppose that our creaky old Sukkah in the garden is the only one around for 100 miles around! Now we are down to four Jews, but our offer and our doors are still open - to experience beauty through art and HaShem.”

● Housebound

David Gallant: “Being Jewish in rural Scotland means being unable to practice communal Judaism.

I moved to Scotland 35 years ago, and have lived at four different addresses, but have never once been to a synagogue here, because the nearest has always been well over 100 miles away. I have almost forgotten what it’s like to attend a Jewish service. I have once been to a service in the last 35 years, but that was on a visit to Jerusalem.

The biggest problem is travel. My local buses are subsidised by the Council, and it is their policy to subsidise buses to run Mondays to Saturdays, but they will not pay subsidies for buses to run on Sundays. Since I prefer not to travel on Shabbat, it means I am virtually housebound from Friday afternoons until Monday mornings.”

● I never realised how Jewish I am

Chrissie Nyssen, Further Education lecturer: “One of the things that my mum used to say was, ‘you’ve got a good Scots tongue in your heid, you’ll get a piece at any door’. So I do count myself incredibly lucky to be Scottish and Jewish. I wouldn’t change either if I had to be born again.”

Yvonne Millman, lecturer: “I never realised how Jewish I am till I came to Aberdeen. Sometimes you have to step outside your culture to see how much the culture is part of your personality and behaviour.”

Sarah Bronzite, teacher: “On the down side, it’s difficult to get kosher food here in Aberdeen. But on the up side, everyone’s very accepted. That’s a really important point. Because there’s not a huge Jewish community, and there’s only one synagogue, people aren’t self-important like they are in bigger communities. It’s fantastic, nobody asks questions in the way that bigger Jewish communities do, everyone is welcomed”



DEBBY TAYLOR AND HER SON DAVID, WHO LIVE IN ABERDEENSHIRE, ON A VISIT TO HER PARENTS ALBERT AND RENEE JACOB, WHO WERE ONCE THE MAINSTAY OF THE DUNDEE COMMUNITY AND NOW LIVE IN BEERSHEVA.

● Being Positive

Debby Taylor: “It’s been great - I’ve met lots of Jewish people I didn’t know existed. I can be negative at times, but Scotland’s a darn good place to be a Jew”.

● A Warm Welcome

Jonathan Horowitz, a horse racing and sports commentator and writer, spent a year at the University of Edinburgh as part of a study abroad programme: “I take a lot of pride in being Jewish, and Jewish values and teachings come through in how I interact with other people. The strength of Judaism in Scotland is the Jewish people. They are warm and outgoing, especially to visitors and to young people like myself. In particular, the rabbi and the Jewish student society played a major role in making me feel welcome. They were tremendous ambassadors for Scotland overall, and not just the Jewish people in Scotland.”



● Thoughtful Attitudes

Valerie House, who has retired to the Highlands with her husband Frank, told us: “I find being Jewish here a pleasant experience - we have met with positive and thoughtful attitudes from local people. I contacted Highland Council about burial in the local cemetery, and two days later a young man called back, having looked into Jewish burial requirements so he could comply with them - and I had to reassure him that he wouldn’t have to find a minyan, nor would we insist on being buried on a Sunday. We now have permission to be buried with white bricks around our graves to demarcate the ‘Jewish section’. And local GPs have been very helpful, wanting to know what they should do if one of us dies, and what my requirements would be if my husband was ill or died.”

Antisemitism in Scotland?

Although many people told us that there was very little or no antisemitism in Scotland, or that they had not experienced any, some of them then went on to tell us about their experiences of antisemitic incidents or about general unease.

Several people told us about their children hearing antisemitic remarks at school from other pupils. Some people had experienced threats of violence or disturbing incidents – but we also heard some heartening experiences of how people can change and how ‘fear of the unknown’ can be challenged.

“I have never ever encountered any antisemitism – my children’s schools are fantastic about taking High Holy days off. There is a lot of tolerance, and non-Jewish people are genuinely interested in what we do.”

(F, 40s, North-East)

“I remember deciding which of my friends I could talk freely and openly with. Some were interested and accepting, but I generally kept pretty quiet about my Jewishness to non-Jews.” (M, 50s)

“Last year I was staying in halls. We weren’t allowed candles, but for Chanukah I had cut pictures of flames out and put them on a paper chanukiah on the outside of my door. When I came back to Uni after the holidays, I found that the stems [of the chanukiah] had been taken down and torn up and replaced in the shape of a swastika.” (Student, F, 20s)

“Tensions with my children’s schools because I was not content for them to engage in Christian worship – the reaction combined incomprehension and annoyance at the inconvenience. “We all worship the same god really”. No, we don’t; that’s part of the point.” (M, 50s, North-East)

“My daughter was told at Easter time that she killed Jesus. I sat in an Easter ceremony and one of the children read, ‘The Jews wanted Jesus dead’. She was upset.” (F, 40s, rural)

“Today my grandson was accosted by three skinheads who shouted ‘Jew’ at him – which he regarded as a compliment!”

(M, 70s, North-East)

“My brother and sister were in the living room where they heard shouting ... they looked out of the window and saw a teenager in a blue hoody. He did the Hitler salute and then ran off.”

(M, under 21, Glasgow)

“I personally experienced a Scotsman who originated from Italy say in the heat of an argument, “The Germans should have burned her.”

(F, 60s, North-East)

“We should continue to be open about being Jewish and engaging with people including those who express hostility especially confusing Zionism and Judaism.”

(F, 50s, Glasgow)

Rabbi Ruben from Giffnock shul in Glasgow, told us: “I was at the supermarket a few months ago late at night, and was loading the car up. A guy dressed in full Muslim gear, coming from prayer, with the full robe, started approaching me. He came up to me – and it turned out he wanted to apologise to me! About a year earlier, there had been a group of Asian kids at the supermarket who started harassing me, and shouting abuse. He was one of those guys, but he’s now grown up, he’s more mature, he’s going to mosque, he’s married, he’s learning about his religion, and he said he wanted to apologise. It was a good moment. And I have to say my initial reaction was fear. It says something good about Scotland, about the local mosque’s view of the situation in the Middle East, that his views were transformed because of going to the mosque.”

“We ought not to pretend that we’re worse than we are – but we ought not to pretend that we’re better than we are either.”

ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM MSP, MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LEGAL AFFAIRS,
TACKLING SECTARIANISM TOGETHER,
EDINBURGH, MAY 2012

Talking about Israel in Scotland

Almost all of our respondents talked about having experienced discomfort with the level of anti-Zionist activity in Scotland. Some told us that people frequently conflate Judaism with Israel, failing to differentiate between local Jewish people and the actions of the State of Israel.

“People equate Judaism with Israel and Zionism too much, it is very tiresome. People assume. How they can mix up your religion with a nationality? I don’t get it at all.” (M, 40s, Edinburgh)

“I was at a party, and I took my hat off. I had a kippah on. The flatmate of a friend was there, saw the kippah, and said, ‘so you like killing Palestinian children?’ He tried later to make it a joke.” (M, 20s)

“If people experience it, then we need to think how to fix it” ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM, AS ABOVE

Some responses indicated that anti-Zionism sometimes became, or purported to legitimise, antisemitism.

“There is growing intolerance regarding Israel in Scotland, which I do believe is in danger of becoming antisemitism – that is my experience.” (F, 60s, rural)

“I sometimes feel afraid of stating openly my background and beliefs. In the streets, I would be extra cautious to do so. I am more afraid at the university campus.” (F, 40s, North-East)

“I used to be proud to wear a kippah all the time, but when I lived in Edinburgh, I was harassed several times by pro-Palestinians in Edinburgh city centre. ... Now, I do not feel safe to publicly wear a kippah.” (M, 30s, North-East)

“You do get into political discussions with people, you do find yourself having to defend the state of Israel a lot more, you are always a bit wary about saying you’re Israeli.” (F, 40s, Edinburgh)

“In a recent stay in the Scottish Highlands when I was asked where my accent was from, when I answered, I saw the look of disgust on the man’s face – a man who a second before that had chatted to me kindly about various subjects. ... Now, I sometimes say I’m Turkish or Italian rather than Israeli.” (F, 40s.)

● Association of Jewish Refugees

In February Fiona attended a meeting of the Glasgow AJR where she heard harrowing stories of wartime Austria, communist Hungary, and hard times in Germany, and of children having to find their own way with new families. But we also heard about the kindness of strangers. As a 14 year old boy, George Taylor had arrived in Glasgow alone on the Kindertransport. There was no-one at Central Station to meet him, he didn't speak a word of English, and he had no money, but a Jewish taxi driver approached him, spoke to him in Yiddish and took him – at no charge – to meet his mother, who had already managed to escape to Scotland.

Dorith Sim, who also came on the Kindertransport, stayed with a non-Jewish family. "Within a week the granny had me going to Sunday school: when you're seven and a half you do what you're told to do." She wasn't able to make links with other survivors until she was an adult, but when she got together with AJR members, she felt an immediate bond: "I just felt they were family".

These two members had known each other for years, but recounting their stories at this meeting, they discovered that they had come to Britain on the same date and must have travelled together. Several members talked about the 'safe haven' they found in Scotland, and, as Agnes Isaacs, the Scotland and Newcastle coordinator of the AJR, who herself arrived in Glasgow as a teenager from Hungary in the 1960s, said, "it was good to come to a country where you could be openly Jewish."

● Klezmer in Kirkgunzeon

In early March Fiona went to Kirkgunzeon in Dumfriesshire with her band Kasha-Malasha. As Ashley wrote in Four Corners 34, 'something rather special' happened – a group of ten Jewish people and friends living in the area got together, listened to Klezmer music, ate kosher food, and talked about their experiences of being Jewish in an isolated part of Scotland.

● Dancing in Dunoon

The first Jewish event in Dunoon for almost 20 years took place in April when we organised a Celebration of Jewish Music with Glasgow-based Klezmer band, Kasha-Malasha. We had been in touch with five or six local Jewish people prior to the event, and weren't expecting a big audience, but when the doors of opened, more than thirty people turned up! The event began with a "getting to know you" session and buffet, after which Bob Leiser on double bass, Mirek Pukacz on fiddle, Richard Norris on clarinet, and Fiona on concertina and melodeon, accompanied Marzanna Antoniak, who sang songs in Russian, Polish, and Yiddish. Fiona led the audience in some traditional Klezmer dancing and a good time was had by all. After the music and dancing, people shared their experiences of being Jewish in Scotland – and many of them are looking forward to meeting up again.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: KASHA-MALASHA IN KIRKGUNZEON; LUNCH IN DUNDEE BEFORE THE HISTORY TALKS; ARTIST GORDON COCKBURN SHOWING ONE OF HIS AUSCHWITZ PAINTINGS IN KIRKGUNZEON; INVERNESS WRITERS PANEL; ENJOYING A CHAT AFTER THE EVENT IN INVERNESS; EVA SZIRMAI, DORITH SIM AND FIONA FRANK WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE AJR; A TALK BY FIONA FRANK AT THE ROYAL GLASGOW INSTITUTE; KLEZMER IN DUNOON; JEWISH PEOPLE IN INVERNESS GREETING A GROUP OF RABBIS WHO WERE CYCLING FROM LANDS END TO JOHN O' GROATS.

● History of Jewish Immigration

35 people came to Dundee synagogue in March to hear talks by two academics from the University of Dundee Department of History. Dr Billy Kenefick spoke about the Jews and the Irish in modern Scotland. Kirk Hansen then talked about his research into Jewish identity and attitudes toward militarism in Scotland. This was followed by a kosher buffet and animated discussion on the early findings of the *Being Jewish in Scotland* project.

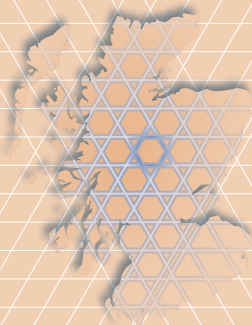
● First Jewish Event in Inverness for 50 years

In April SCoJeC took three award-winning Jewish writers to Inverness in a celebration of Scottish Jewish writing. Rodge Glass, Annemarie Allan, and J. David Simons read from their recent books, and reflected on the relationship between their Jewish identities and their writing. A recording of this is on www.scojec.org/bjis_inverness.html

The event, at Inverness public library, attracted a diverse group of people; some Jewish, and others with Jewish family background, or an interest in the Jewish community. After the readings and discussion, many of the audience were inspired to tell their own stories. When one local man told us that he had converted to Judaism, another participant commented that "It's not the easiest thing to be Jewish – why would anyone want to take that burden on?" He replied that he didn't feel it as a burden; the more he found out about Judaism, the more he felt it was "instinctively right" for him. "Maybe," said his questioner, a Jewish woman who had moved to the Highlands as an adult, "you feel the same way about being Jewish as I feel about being a Highlander."

So what have we learned from

Being Jewish in Scotland



- ▼ There is a hunger for Jewish contact, especially among people who live significant distances from any settled Jewish community.
- ▼ Many Jewish people who are not affiliated to any synagogue or communal institution are still very interested in Jewish identity and Jewish concerns, and keen to take part in a 'Jewish conversation'.
- ▼ Some organisations in the wider community are very willing to support local Jewish events.
- ▼ Many people told us they are concerned about the future of Jewish life in Scotland. They see the Jewish population shrinking and are worried that they or their children won't be able to find a Jewish partner here.
- ▼ There is concern about future political support for shechitah and circumcision, and some also worry about the impact of double summer time – if Scotland were to change to European time, religious observances that depend on sunrise and sunset would become very difficult.

Where next for *Being Jewish in Scotland*?

Which of these areas should we prioritise?

- ▲ More support for people talking about Judaism in schools and to other groups
- ▲ Jewish cultural-social events all round Scotland
- ▲ Web based Jewish educational programmes with a Scottish context.
- ▲ Email and online discussion groups
- ▲ A 'welcome pack' for Jewish newcomers to Scotland
- ▲ Meet-ups between Scottish Jewish communities
- ▲ Leadership training for local leaders
- ▲ A network of Jewish people around Scotland offering hospitality to visitors
- ▲ More support for elderly Jewish people outwith Glasgow
- ▲ A buddy scheme for Jewish students
- ▲ A national Jewish trail around Scotland
- ▲ A travelling exhibition of Jewish life
- ▲ More support for bar and bat mitzvah children outwith the central belt
- ▲ Better information about the Middle East – more facts and figures, and training in engaging with others with different opinions.

Let us know what you think!

SCOJeC is working with the Scottish Government to discuss the issues raised, with the NHS, local authorities, education authorities, employers, faith groups, and others. These include the availability of kosher food in hospitals and schools, education to improve understanding of Judaism, and more effective policies in schools, universities, and workplaces for dealing with name calling and racist incidents.

We will continue to run events throughout Scotland, and are very keen to involve 'local ambassadors'. We are working with the Limmud Scotland committee to ensure that people across Scotland are able to attend the sixth Scottish Limmud festival of Jewish learning on 25th November in Glasgow, by helping to cover the cost of advance train tickets for the event. We are exploring setting up regional and thematic e-mail groups to facilitate communications between the various Jewish communities and people living outwith any settled community, and we're helping to facilitate regular discussion groups about Jewish issues. In Glasgow, we have helped to build links between Garnethill Synagogue and students at the city centre universities, enabling the students to benefit from the synagogue's facilities.

To get involved in any of these activities, or to respond to any of the questions or issues raised in this special edition of *Four Corners*, get in touch with us via the *Being Jewish in Scotland* page on our website: www.scojec.org/jewishinScotland.html, or contact Fiona Frank: fiona@scojec.org or 07779 206 522



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TOP LEFT: FIONA WITH IDA SCHUSTER BERKELEY AT A *BEING JEWISH IN SCOTLAND* EVENT AT THE ROYAL GLASGOW INSTITUTE KELLY GALLERY IN APRIL; CENTRE: INTERVIEWING ESTHER HERMAN AT DUNDEE SYNAGOGUE IN MARCH; BOTTOM: FOCUS GROUP IN ROSEHEARTY AT THE BAY HOTEL.