

## Kavod House

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“God gave you your whole life. The least you can do is give him one minute of your time,” said a black-clad, peyos-sporting preadolescent perched in a Chabad Lubavitch Mitzvah Mobile. He was scolding a passerby for an inadequate response to the question—“You Jewish?”—that many New Yorkers face at certain times of the year—usually from Chabadniks, and often ones who are leaning out of Winnebagos plastered with pinups of Rebbe Schneerson. Yes, Chabad—the ubiquitous Orthodox group that maintains Jewish houses around the globe—has enjoyed a monopoly on the Jewish outreach game for years, providing programming to Jews everywhere, and in some places serving as the only Jewish presence around.

But Chabad had better watch its back. A group of recent graduates are cooking up a plan for a new kind of Jewish outreach house—and this one is grassroots, youth-run, and progressive. “The idea of Kavod,” explains Margie Klein, a recent Yale graduate and one of the project’s five founders, “is to create Jewish communal houses that would welcome a diverse group of Jewish twenty-somethings for Shabbat dinners and other types of programming.” The group’s preliminary plans for the houses include such events as “radical Jewish thought potlucks,” fundraising parties for progressive Jewish causes, and late-night singing and prayer on Shabbat. Most importantly, the group will devote significant efforts to reaching out to other progressive and unaffiliated Jews by attending political, social justice, and cultural events and encouraging new acquaintances to join them at Kavod. “Originally Kavod was called Radical Chabad,” says Klein. “We liked Chabad because it welcomes people for programming and more Jewish involvement. But their political message was not as fulfilling—we want to use their model of outreach to fit our values.”

Kavod’s founding members took their inspiration from experiences with Fruity Jews in the Woods, which Klein explains is a “pluralistic, artsy, social justice-oriented gathering which meets in the northeast once or twice a year.” Klein loved the independence, lack of institutionalization, progressive politics, and Jewish spirit, as did Joseph Gindi, Frances Kreimer, Benj Kamm, and Zach Teutsch, and they began looking for a way to recreate Fruity Jews’ activities and attitude in “the real world” and year-round.

The project speaks to the organized Jewish community’s concerns about high levels of unaffiliated younger Jews. But Kavod will be different from the array of programming seeking to engage this demographic, because it is not only conceived for young Jews, but by them as well. It seeks to tap into existing communities of progressive, unorthodox Jews who currently have few networks and no home base. “We do not fall along traditional denominational lines, and are attracted to pluralistic models that bring together Jews of different backgrounds,” explains its mission statement. “We want to take ownership of our own Jewish life.” The Kavod houses are still in their early development stages: “It’s not a 501c(3),” explains Gindi, “it’s an idea with legs.” The Kavodniks hope to launch a test house in Washington, DC next year, and once that house is functioning, the group will fine-tune its mission and methods and seek broader financial support. After that, “I think we would like to see growth to other cities,” says Gindi, but most importantly, Kavod will retain its member-defined mission and its openness to all who seek it out. *New Voices* commends the Kavod founders, but strongly urges the group to consider a bulk purchase of Mitzvah Mobiles, which we believe to be the true key to successful Jewish outreach.

