

Jewish Life at Mandelbaum House in Semester 1, 2021 By Miriam Itzkowitz

Despite Mandelbaum House having a predominantly non-Jewish majority, being the Jewish college on The University of Sydney campus, all residents were able to create and facilitate meaningful Jewish life in an inclusive and relevant manner this semester. During Semester 1, we celebrated Purim, Pesach, and Shavuot, as well as commemorating Yom HaShoah and Yom Ha'Atzma'ut, alongside a weekly observance of Shabbat.

Shabbat is a time each week where many residents come together to welcome in the weekend. It is observed minimalistically, with the recitation of the brachot (prayers). However, an introduced Mandelbaum tradition is everyone putting their hands on the challah (a Mandelbaum favourite) during the hamotzi as a "hands in", to create an environment of inclusivity and enabling everyone to take part in a tradition which may be initially unfamiliar. This inclusive environment has been replicated throughout each celebration and observance at Mandelbaum, in a meaningful way.



Purim was one of the first festivals we celebrated during our Mandelbaum semester. Together, we packaged mishloach manot with hamantaschen and other lollies, and left them in each other's pigeonholes. This was a really great bonding activity as it was quite early in the semester, so we were all still getting to know each other. There was also an opportunity to attend Newtown Shul to celebrate, which included a magic show! The next big festival we had was Pesach, for which we held a seder. We developed a Haggadah from scratch with a transliteration pronunciation guide, as well as having various people sign up for various roles, such as opening the door for Elijah, or being one of the four sons. *Dayenu* was definitely the highlight of the night, with many people continuing to sing it afterwards!



For our final festival of the semester, Shavuot, we really went all out. The "Shavuot Crew" designed a brilliant programme to cover the entirety of Shavuot, commencing with cheesecake making, then onto Mandelbaum "Ted Talks" for Tikkun Leil Shavuot, with topics ranging from *The Music of God* to *What is a Chad?: An Historical & Memetic Analysis* to *The Similarities & Differences between People in Pompeii & the Modern Man through Graffiti* to *The Shadow Hunter Family Tree* followed by Israeli dancing. This enabled any resident who wished to speak, to educate us on something they were passionate or knowledgeable about in an accessible manner. The next night, we had a group study session which was set up in the lounge room so we could all study together, in the spirit of learning for the festival. The next night we organised charity baskets, and throughout the festival, hung posters up with facts about the environment and how to improve it. For the Yamim, we lit a Yahrzeit candle for Yom HaShoah, and for Yom Ha'Atzma'ut, we had an Israeli dinner feast, along with a huge cake to celebrate Israel's birthday!



Thus far, Mandelbaum has been a great facilitator for creating an inclusive Jewish life for all residents this semester – looking forward to the next one!