I went on a Birthright trip while Israel was bombarding Gaza during Operation Cast Lead in 2008, and I was shocked by the trip leaders’ disregard for Palestinian life. Back home, my Jewish community refused to act in the face of this injustice, so I joined Students for Justice in Palestine and later co-founded a JVP campus chapter.

During Cast Lead, I remember feeling confused, helpless, and like opposing the war was a fringe position. This summer, I was just as devastated and outraged, but I felt clear, focused, and like part of a growing global consensus. Whether we demonstrated against an occupation-profiteering corporation or a Jewish community pro-war rally, we did it as part of JVP and the Palestinian-led BDS movement. There’s no work I’d rather be doing.

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After returning from Israel/Palestine, we knew that we wanted to continue to fight for justice and an end to the occupation in Palestine. We were eager to help start a local chapter because we knew that having JVP on our campus could help shift the conversation on Israel/Palestine and increase campus activism for a just peace.

I’d been wishing there were a chapter in Western Mass. It didn’t occur to me that I could start one myself. Thankfully it occurred to Dori Midnight, who had a suspicion that we’d all be looking for each other after this summer’s heartbreaking siege on Gaza.

After moving here from Tel Aviv, I have met a number of Pittsburghers who said they felt left out of the Jewish community because of its unconditional support for Israel. Israel’s actions over the summer created urgency around this issue, highlighting for our small group of chapter leaders the fact that if we did not build our own community then we would continue to be isolated and irrelevant.

My moment came in August 2014. I had retained a vague and romantic commitment to “liberal Zionism” most of my adult life, but after visiting Israel several times in the 1990s and 2000s I grew increasingly dismayed and angry about the directions in which Israeli society and politics were moving. This summer’s assault on Gaza pushed me to action and I helped create a Rochester JVP chapter.

After University of Michigan’s divestment campaign and sit-in last year, I found myself – along with quite a few other Jewish students – extremely frustrated by our campus’ attitudes and reactions. We felt that JVP was a necessary space for us to express our views, as Jews, against the occupation, pro-divestment, and in solidarity with the Palestinian students.
How did you get involved?

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After graduating from Brandeis, I interned with the organizing team, and then joined the national board. JVP mentorship over the years made a huge difference to my leadership, understanding, and skills. For example, JVP organizers helped us respond when our campus Hillel’s refusal to admit the JVP chapter became a national story.

How does an organizer do?

I think the most important thing is listening: gaining a deep enough understanding of other activists’ vision so that you can support them in bringing those ideas to life. That listening happens everywhere: in meetings, on the phone, over breakfast, late at night. On a typical day, I might edit press releases, lead a training on meeting facilitation, ask members to lead a training on meeting facilitation, ask members to register today at jvp.org/nmm

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We were inspired by Palestinians’ resiliency, in Gaza and around the world. It was time to fill the streets, speak truth to elected officials, interrupt corporate complicity, and stop Jewish leaders from supporting a massacre in our names.

We worked with a dozen other peace and justice organizations to form the #Boston4Gaza coalition, which turned out 2,000 people for an emergency rally. We held the street outside the State House, suspending business as usual, for more than three hours. It was a display of power that almost every media lit up. Politicians could not leave work without seeing a die-in on their front steps. As night fell, local Palestinian activists read the names of people killed in Israel’s attacks, and our community cried and mourned together.

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How did JVP-Boston respond this summer?

We held the Winter Activists Assembly, an all-day event before Valentine’s Day. We worked with a dozen other local Palestinian activists read the names of people killed in Israel’s attacks, and our community cried and mourned together.

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