

# GTA teens serve in J-Serve for a day of volunteering

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Correspondent

TORONTO – What do you call it when nearly 500 Jewish teens in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) from 20 different youth groups and a variety of religious affiliations come together to do some good for the community?

The answer is J-Serve, also known as the Global Day of Jewish Youth Service, which took place on April 22.

J-Serve was launched in 2005, and has now spread to 40 cities around the world. This was the third year in which teens from the GTA participated in the international initiative, thanks to the support of the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto and the BBYO Panim Institute. About 10,000 teens participated across the globe.

J-Serve Toronto, coordinated by BBYO's Lake Ontario Region, was designed to encourage community building as well as to foster connections across different religious and social groups. The event also served to open teens' eyes about the opportunities to help people all over the city.

Registrants were asked to choose one of 16 volunteer opportunities across the city.

Their choices for service included tree planting and cleanup at Earl Bales Park, organizing props in Teatron Toronto Jewish Theatre's off-site warehouse, helping young adults with physical or cognitive challenges train for an Olympic day at DANI, and assembling school supply kits as well as making sandwiches at Ve'ahavta.

The day started when participants checked in at Tanenbaum CHAT's Wallenberg campus. They attended a short kickoff show to energize them for the day's volunteering. The teen volunteers were then transported to their chosen service sites. At the close of the day, the participants returned to CHAT for a closing event. Representatives from volunteer organizations set up tables to introduce the teens to other service opportunities.

J-Serve attracted both first timers and veterans of the event. JOLT member and first time J-Serve volunteer Jacob Weinberg, 16, chose to plant trees at Earl Bales Park because he prefers being outside and "wanted something hands on." BBYO member Anastasia Shekhurdina, 15, also volunteering with J-Serve for the first time, signed up to organize Teatron's prop ware-



J-Serve volunteer Samara Bell organizes props at Teatron's warehouse.

house because she loves getting to look behind the scenes and it gives her a chance to meet new people.

Another unexpected advantage of J-Serve is publicity for the organizations.

Samara Bell, 14, a CASY member who has volunteered for two years at J-Serve, signed up to clean up the Teatron's off-site warehouse after her friend told her about the theatre company's shows. She is now interested in going to see a Teatron production.

Kevin Goodman, executive director of BBYO's Lake Ontario Region, was pleased about how the day turned out.

"It was a fantastic example of community building and it was inspiring to see so many organizations and Jewish affiliations come together for an impactful and meaningful day," he said, adding that he

was also excited that this year brought more partner organizations on board.

New service sites included Frontier College, a literacy program; New Circles Community Services, a clothing bank; and the Kehilla Residential Program, the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto's official housing agency.

J-Serve's ultimate success: engaging teens in volunteering and encouraging them to continue to serve their communities.

Bell, for one, is already looking forward to volunteering at J-Serve again next year.



J-Serve volunteers Jacob Weinberg (left) and Matthew Isakow plant a tree at Earl Bales Park. PHOTOS: RACHEL LEVY SARFIN

In memory of my father **Oscar Ezra Fish**, the late owner of College-Bathurst St Cigar Store and his son **Tibi Yisrael Fisch** who died at age 60 in Brockville Ontario. 'Forever in my heart'

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## Volunteer finds peace, kindness at the Glassman Senior Centre

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Correspondent

TORONTO – It's not just seniors who are drawn to the Max and Giani Glassman Senior Outreach Centre at B'nai Brith headquarters.

Monica Lubsey is a regular volunteer whose devotion has made her an integral presence at the centre. What makes her involvement especially unique – is that she isn't Jewish.

Three years ago Lubsey was grieving for her daughter who had recently passed away. She wanted a meaningful volunteer experience and felt that she wasn't getting it from the city-run seniors' program where she was helping out. She began looking for new opportunities when she noticed an advertisement in the *Jewish Tribune*.

She initially volunteered three days a week; setting up and serving lunch, helping with special programs and interacting with the seniors. After a month she decided to volunteer an additional day, bringing her to the centre four days a week.

"I don't know what it is," she said. "I've volunteered before. But coming here, there's this calmness here, this friendliness, this peace, this kindness."

Lubsey's feelings about the Centre and its seniors are far from a one way street. "The seniors love Monica," said Amy Leifer, program coordinator for the centre. "She treats everyone with so much love and respect. When I see the relationships she has with the seniors I'd think they've been lifelong friends."

Leifer said that Lubsey has become an



Monica Lubsey: super volunteer

"If she ever has to miss a day, 10 seniors will immediately start asking for Monica. When they walk in, the first person they ask for is Monica."

Lubsey has been asked why she volunteers in a Jewish program, if she's not Jewish.

"I'm surprised myself that I fit in so quickly," Lubsey said. "But I relate to the seniors as more than just a volunteer. We're all part of a community here."

Lubsey has learned a tremendous amount about Judaism and its holidays. A large portion of the program's participants are Holocaust survivors and many of them have shared their personal stories with Monica.

"I think I've been surrounded by Jewish people since I landed in Toronto in 1961 from Barbados," said Lubsey, who has worked at Scotiabank as well as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

"We lived in the West End, and my sister and I rented a duplex from a Polish Jewish couple. We did most of our intermingling and shopping in the Jewish community."

For the young Leifer, Lubsey is a friend, mentor and mother-like figure.

"When I first started working here, Monica taught me everything I needed to know," Leifer said.

The love affair between the Glassman centre and Monica Lubsey continues and is going strong.

"Without this program you would have a lot of seniors sitting home," she said. "This program means a lot to the seniors and it also means a lot to me. It gets me out, too, and it gets me to learn and educate myself



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