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Summer camp inspires educator

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Special to The CJN

Aleeza Lubin has an impressive resumé. With degrees in history and education and a master's from Columbia University in New York, the Toronto native has taught everything from high school math to history.

Now one of three new B'nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO) directors, Lubin, 33, has worked with young people for most of her career, with a focus on keeping teens involved in the Jewish community. But it isn't only her stint teaching at the Anne and Max Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto (TanenbaumCHAT) or her experiences in New York that fuelled Lubin's career.

It's the time she spent at summer camp, as a camper and as an employee. Growing up in Toronto, Lubin spent 14 summers at Camp Ramah in Muskoka – eight as a camper and six as an employee. It was those last six years that shaped the rest of her life.

"I always worked with the teenagers. Most of the time, I worked with the older kids, the Counsellors-in-Training (CITs). It always felt like, wow, this is such a momentous point in their lives. To reach that final year as a camper, where you have added responsibility... is a big thing," she said.

"You feel as though you're shaping a part of their lives. I saw it as a challenge, which I love. I took it very seriously."

After getting an honours BA from York University, Lubin was drawn to teaching and mentoring positions. She started working at an educational non-profit north of Toronto before deciding to go through teacher's college at the University of Toronto.

Rather than sticking to his-

tory, the current BBYO director decided to try something different.

"In order to become a high school teacher in Ontario, you need to have two teachable subjects. I chose history and math, an unusual combination," she said.

"I was possibly the only person in the entire year who had combined history and math... I love trigonometry. I love algebra. I know. I'm such a dork."

After graduation, Lubin went back to her high school, TanenbaumCHAT, to teach. She saw that the school was expanding and was excited to be part of its growth. But most importantly, she was excited about working with teenagers again.

"[I thought], 'I can have an impact on these kids' lives. A lot of people graduated [high school] and said, 'I'm going to be a lawyer, an accountant, and I'm sitting there... going, 'If you want to be a dancer, do that,'" she said.

"Most importantly, though, I wanted to be able to help them develop as young Jews... It's definitely about showing them the connections [Judaism has] to their lives and making it accessible."

While Lubin enjoyed teaching in the classroom, her favourite moments were usually after school.

"What I was thriving on were the moments outside of the classroom where I was coaching, advising on assemblies, working with students one on one. I was seeing an impact. I wanted that all the time," she said.

In 2007, Lubin left TanenbaumCHAT and moved to New York, where she got a master's degree in American studies.

"I'd taught for four years. I decided it was time to go back to school," she said.

Lubin, who described New



Aleeza Lubin

York as a "little bit faster and louder than Toronto," earned her master's degree in two years. During that time, Lubin realized that although she wanted to work with young people, she didn't want to go back to the classroom.

"I didn't want to be limited to a classroom," she said.

Lubin found a national non-profit Jewish organization based in New York, Bend the Arc (formerly Jewish Funds for Justice), which runs "service-learning" programs for youth and college students.

The group partners with campus Hillels and synagogues and places students in communities across the country so they can volunteer and give back.

While Lubin enjoyed her job with the Bend the Arc, she missed working with teenagers.

"I liked the age group in terms of where they are in their developments. Teenagers are at this point where they're such a sponge. They're taking in so much. They're trying to figure out the world," she said.

"There's something about a

teen... [By college], they've already asked so many of those questions. They feel like they already have the answers."

While at Bend the Arc, Lubin learned about a job opening at BBYO, a pluralistic Jewish organization that works to keep teens involved and engaged in their Jewish communities.

Thanks to a \$1.9-million grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation of San Francisco, the group was hiring three directors of Jewish enrichment.

After months of interviews and meetings, Lubin won a position earlier this year.

"It'd been a very long and winding process, and it was sort of this relief of 'wow. I'd been so looking forward to this, and now it's actually happening,'" she said.

Getting the job meant moving to Chicago, where Lubin now lives.

"It was an amazing feeling, but also incredibly bittersweet. My five years in New York were amazing... but ultimately, this job felt worth it," she said, adding that her focus for BBYO is on the midwestern region, which includes Winnipeg.

Lubin has high hopes for her position at BBYO, especially since the group, a Jewish non-profit, is growing and evolving.

"Which, in today's world, for Jewish non-profits, is hard to come by," she said.

"It's thrilling for me to be a part of that, because they're growing and doing such innovative things with young Jews. I'm excited to continue to learn about this amazing movement of young people that is so passionate and strives to get involved in ways that actually are seen, felt and heard."



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