

J-Serve brings out hundreds of teen volunteers

Students lend a hand to make city a better place to live

Taylor Isen
Special to The CJN

More than 500 Jewish students from grades 6 to 12 recently spent an afternoon doing volunteer work in Toronto, including planting trees and picking up litter, as part of the fourth annual J-Serve Toronto.

J-Serve is the Jewish service component of Youth Service America's annual Global Youth Service. J-Serve Toronto is hosted by BBYO in partnership with youth movements, synagogues and social service agencies from across the city. It is funded by the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto and the BBYO Panim Institute.



Left, Edan Kelner, above, Ben Marshall and Carly Lerner were all part of J-Serve.

[Taylor Isen photos]

Volunteer options included litter cleanup at G. Ross Lord Park; a casino-themed day interacting with clients from DANI Toronto, a program for young adults with physical and/or cognitive challenges; joining seniors at the Bernard Betel Centre for an afternoon of activities, and tree planting at Downsview and Earl Bales parks. There were also workshops with organizations such as Pencils for Kids, Free the Children and Hillel of Greater Toronto.

Although it was a warm day, with the temperature

The students gathered at the gymnasium of the Anne and Max Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto, Wallenberg campus, on the morning of April 28, to select a volunteer activity from more than a dozen J-Serve project options.

The HDrummers, an interactive percussion troupe performing Latin, African and Middle Eastern rhythms, entertained, to get the crowd pumped and ready to work.

climbing to above 16 C, the tree-planting volunteers persevered at Earl Bales Park. More than 30 participants planted around 150 trees on a new trail. The process included digging holes, putting the tree in the ground and mulching. The teens, working in groups of two, finished the job in just three hours. The work paid off, when people saw the end results – three new patches of land covered with baby trees native to the land.

Carly Lerner, a Grade 11 student at Westmount Collegiate Institute, said she chose the tree planting and mulching activity because she did the same sort of work while she was in Israel. "Although it's fun, it's a little challenging, too," she said.

Lerner said she takes part in J-Serve as it helps her "know more about my culture" and "helps me learn more as I explore the world."



Grade 9 student Ben Marshall said it was his first year contributing to J-Serve. "J-Serve is helping me learn about my roots, fulfilling tzedakah, just and charitable giving," he said.

J-Serve staff member Edan Kelner, 24, said that as a former member of BBYO, he believes that Jewish teens from different organizations getting together to do something good helps them be more aware of what's out there for them. He added that the best thing about being a supervisor is seeing everyone's smiles, that they're having a good time and, most importantly, that they're realizing they're contributing to making a difference in the world.

The day opened a lot of the participants' eyes as to how they can help make the world a better place.

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