



Kehilla Residential Programme: Preparing the gardens for spring planting.



JServe brings teens together for an afternoon

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What do you get when you bring 500 Jewish teenagers together for an afternoon? You get sandwiches made for the homeless, craft kits assembled for kids in hospital, friendly visitors for seniors and much, much more.

Now entering its seventh year in Toronto, BBYO's J-Serve is an international initiative bringing teenagers together for five hours of volunteer work. Around the world, about 10,000 teens participate in a global day of service, all on the same day.

This year, J-Serve offered students in grades 6 to 12 about a dozen projects to choose from, said Kevin Goodman, executive director of BBYO Ontario.

"We look for a diverse mix of opportunities so there's something of interest to every teen. The teens always like the activities that are hands-on."

BBYO works with a wide variety of youth groups to find engaging projects. The

newest non-profit group added this year was Crafting for a Cure, which distributes craft kits to children in hospitals across Canada.

Students also planted trees and did some gardening at a youth shelter, played basketball or did crafts with disabled young adults or learned about how to volunteer for a federal election campaign.

At the end of the day, the participating youth groups and non-profit agencies put on a volunteer fair so students could learn more about each group and continue volunteering if they were interested.

Jamie Modlin, 16, came to J-Serve for the first time and made meals that Ve'ahavta will distribute to the homeless from its mobile outreach van.

"We learned how people become homeless and how this program helps them get back on their feet," she said.

Modlin, who sits on the board of her local BBYO chapter, said she had never heard of Ve'ahavta before, but was interested in volunteering with the group again.



TOP: Ve'ahavta: Preparing meals to be distributed by the Mobile Jewish Response to the Homeless (MJRH) van to clients living on the streets of downtown Toronto. BOTTOM: Crafting for a Cure: Assembling craft kits for children in hospitals across Canada and around the world.

"It's really good to know you're part of a bigger community that's making a change in the world," she said.

J-Serve has been a "catalyst for collaboration," says Goodman, bringing the city's diverse youth groups to work together on other projects.

A number of youth groups, including BBYO have jointly hosted special showings of the *Hunger Games* movies and collected canned goods for food banks.

"J-Serve opened the doors for us to work together for a common purpose, often tikun olam," Goodman said.

The initiative, which is funded by UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, attracts a wide variety of youth. The majority of participants are not affiliated with a youth group. About one-third of the students attend Jewish day school, Goodman said.

J-Serve is also sponsored by the Anne and Max Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto and the south campus serves as the home base for the day's events.

Next year, J-Serve will take place on April 17. For more information, visit www.jserve.ca ■

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