

Welcome to Federation Focus, the quarterly supplement about your Jewish Federation, its partner agencies and their impact on Jewish life.

Federation Focus keeps you informed and connected with important issues in our community, ensuring that everyone knows where to find a helping hand and where to extend one.

March of the Living is Journey of a Lifetime

When a group of local teens boards a plane to Poland and later Israel this April, they will be going on a journey which will take them much farther than Eastern Europe or the Middle East. They will go back in time to what was once a thriving, vital Jewish community in Warsaw, then retrace the destruction of that community, culminating in the three kilometre walk from Auschwitz to the gas chambers of Birkenau. That walk, already so weighted with meaning and emotion, takes place on *Yom HaShoah*—Holocaust Remembrance Day. The next day, the teens fly to Israel

to celebrate Jewish triumph on *Yom Ha'atzmaut*—Israel Independence Day. March of the Living (MOL), now in its 22nd year, immerses Jewish youth in two of the most profound events in our collective history—the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. The journey of 13 local teens will be immeasurably enriched by

Emanuel has also worked closely with Jewish Federation to generate funds from local community members to subsidize the trip. In addition to these funds, Federation provides scholarships to participants, funded by a grant from the Jewish Community Foundation. Federation's Israel and Overseas Affairs department provides support

of our people—first at the camps, then in Israel. For Whiteside, the trip showed her a theretofore unseen side of her identity: “It’s not just going to shul; there’s so much history and tradition. [MOL] showed me that it’s such a beautiful religion.” More surprising is that survivors like Alex Buckman are able to move past their



CHELSEY WHITESIDE, 2008 MOL PARTICIPANT

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the presence of Alex Buckman, a child survivor now living in Vancouver. He is the first survivor from Vancouver to accompany teens on the trip, calling it the “march of a lifetime” for him. He says he does not want to “preach” to the MOL teens, but rather to “teach by example and hopefully that will resonate with them.”

MOL participants spend months preparing intellectually and emotionally—to the extent that one can for this unparalleled experience. Chaperone David Emanuel has been meeting weekly with the teens, who come from across the Lower Mainland. Each Wednesday evening, Emanuel and the local teens gather—with Buckman—to learn about the history of the Holocaust, its aftermath and the creation of the State of Israel.

and resources for the group to use in their weekly meetings before and after the March.

The reasons for participating in MOL are as varied as the teens themselves. Chelsey Whiteside, 17, went on the trip two years ago. She says that before going on the March, she did not have a lot of Jewish friends and was not very involved in the community, adding that she “wanted a strong reason to be involved.” Whiteside found that reason with MOL. A Montreal-based survivor spoke to her group at Auschwitz, actually sitting on his own former bunk as he told the teens his story.

As dark and wrenching an experience as Auschwitz and Birkenau is, it is ultimately triumphant as Jewish teens from around the world affirm their identity and culture, honour the dead and celebrate the ongoing life

irremediable loss: “I’m really hoping against all hope, that people will learn to get along with each other—which is why I am so excited that students are going on this trip... I’m hoping [they] will make the change because the adults were unable to.”

For more information about March of the Living or to enquire about scholarships for the program, please contact Shelley Goldberg at Jewish Federation’s Israel and Overseas Affairs department at sgoldberg@jewishvancouver.com or 604.257.5100.

Federation Partners Deliver Aid & Opportunity

A central part of ensuring a strong local Jewish community locally is building strong ties with Israel, and taking responsibility for helping those in need, wherever they may be. As part of its mandate to build a vibrant and enduring Jewish community, Jewish Federation provides funds to meet urgent, ongoing humanitarian needs of Jews worldwide, and directs more funds annually to Israel than does any other local organization. A portion of funds raised during the Annual Campaign is directed to these programs, and Federation also works with individual community members to support additional projects that meet their personal philanthropic goals.

Two particular agencies are Jewish Federation’s major partners for global Jewish support. The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) and The Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) manage funds, develop programs and deliver aid in Israel – and, in the case of the JDC, worldwide.

Founded in 1929, JAFI was instrumental in building the Jewish state, and its core belief remains that “a strong Jewish future requires a strong Israel at its heart.” To that end, its priorities include securing the success of new immigrants, creating opportunity for Israel’s high-risk populations, including those in Vancouver’s partner region of the Upper Galilee Panhandle, and

strengthening Jewish identity worldwide.

The Upper Galilee Panhandle in the northern reaches of Israel, is geographically, economically and politically removed from the country’s centre. Already challenged by lack of jobs, infrastructure and opportunity, the area bore the brunt of the 2006 Lebanon War, taking 40% of the missile hits launched against Israel.

With support from Federation, JAFI’s programs are making inroads in the north and providing residents with the opportunity to create a better life for themselves and their children. The partnership’s two primary objectives in the region,

according to Partnership 2000 chair Ted Zacks, are to “help improve the quality of life for the residents... and to build sustained, personal relationships between those residents and Jews in our respective communities.”

Several long-term investments from Federation’s Israel Emergency Campaign, launched during the 2006 Lebanon War, are now bearing fruit. Tel Hai Academic College, which serves 4,000 students, opened its new campus – including Canada House – in late 2008. It is currently building a new Science Education Centre which will support high school level science and technology education. Tel Hai is the

area’s largest employer, and its research capabilities and skilled workforce benefit the region’s high-tech industries, enabling graduates to stay in the north.

The JDC is Jewish Federation’s partner in the fields of rescue and relief, assisting communities in more than 60 countries. They work together to deliver life-saving support and restore basic dignity to more than 168,000 destitute elderly Jews in the former Soviet Union. These seniors lack the most basic infrastructure, and Federation’s partnership with JDC may be their only source of home care, medication and even food.

The Jewish Federation

and JDC partnership also provides financial support for non-sectarian emergency response and humanitarian relief projects, such as those in Haiti following its devastating earthquake. Funds raised locally are helping JDC provide medical care, food and clean water to Haitians reeling from the quake. (*Editor’s note: To learn more visit jewishvancouver.com/haiti.)*

Together with JAFI and JDC, Jewish Federation and its donors are living in the spirit of *tikkun olam*, the moral responsibility to repair the world and alleviate suffering.

For more information, please contact Shelley Goldberg at Jewish Federation at 604.257.5100.

Birthright Trips Strengthen Jewish Connection

You may have heard this saying: “You are only as Jewish as your grandchildren.” It neatly sums up the Jewish sense of responsibility to pass on our history and identity from generation to generation. This powerful need for continuity is at the heart of the Taglit-Birthright Israel program. Birthright sends Jewish young adults from around the world to Israel every year for ten days of adventure, education and immersion in Jewish culture, history and identity. From the storied ruins of Masada to the natural splendor of the Golan Heights, from the Old City of Jerusalem to the bright lights of Tel Aviv, Birthright is not only an introduction to Israel—for many of our young people, it is an introduction to their own Judaism. And it’s free.

Initiated by philanthropist Charles Bronfman, the \$90 million-plus program is now supported in large part by

Jewish Federations across North America, including the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver. Jewish Federation funds one third of each Birthright trip, and locally Birthright has received over \$300,000 from the Federation Annual Campaign since the program’s inception. That’s helped over 1,000 local teens and young adults join approximately 225,000 peers from 50 different countries on Birthright. The overwhelming majority describe the trip as a life-changing experience.

Natalie Strul says that Birthright helped her focus on what’s important. “Before I left for my trip... I believe I lost sight of what was important to me, and what I was working towards. My trip to Israel allowed me to reestablish and recognize the values and goals that I want in my life and my future. The diverse trip itinerary allowed us to explore

and discover our Judaism outside of the usual Jewish structures and institutions.”

Strul’s experience appears typical of participants: close to three-quarters of Birthright alumni feel “much closer” to Israel and even those who participated ten years ago overwhelmingly feel it changed their lives. Over half of now-married alumni married someone Jewish – and of those who did not, nearly all are raising or plan to raise their children as Jews*.

As well as interacting and connecting with Israeli youth, including IDF members who accompany the tour, participants build relationships with peers from their own communities and those across Canada. When they return home, follow-up programs such as the very active BC Birthright Alumni Community, help them keep in touch with new friends and

their own—often newfound—sense of Jewish identity.

Strul says it is an investment that will pay dividends for years to come: “...We collectively discovered what it means for each of us to be Jewish. Our group was left with an incredible attachment to the country, and a timeless, unbreakable solidarity with Israel.”

As any applicant can tell you, the waiting lists for Birthright trips are long. Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver is now working in partnership with the Birthright Israel Foundation to increase funding to enable more young adults from the Lower Mainland to have the Birthright experience.

For more information on Birthright, contact Shelley Goldberg at Jewish Federation’s Israel and Overseas Affairs department 604.257.5100 or sgoldberg@jewishvancouver.com.



Photo by Lindsay Goodman

* Source: Maurice & Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2009