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## Show your love of Israel at the Heritage Festival

The Israeli Pavilion at the Heritage Festival needed a new committee chair in 2010. Christina Reboh was sitting at a Jewish Federation of Edmonton board meeting when she heard this news.

She noticed that no one else was stepping forward to volunteer and decided she would offer to do it without knowing what was involved. She only had been to the festival once.

Christina threw herself into the project, recruited a committee who put their creative minds to work, and started designing and building a pavilion from scratch.

"We had a vision of creating a tour through Israel from ancient modern times, and the tunnels in Jerusalem, which I've never been, inspired us," says Christina.

They spent hours transforming Styrofoam into stone walls by blowtorching and painting them. The volunteers devised a way to create a real waterfall for the pavilion. All the work had to be moved and installed in the pavilion once the festival kicked off. The revamped pavilion was very well received.

Over the years, Christina and the committee learned they had to create a more durable set that would be easily set up. "The first year was quite labour intensive,

not just for creating the pavilion but for recruiting volunteers to man the pavilion," she says.

One volunteer who was essential for Christina for many years was Amir Taller z"l. "His passion for and knowledge of Israel shined as he gave tours through the culture tent. He would have 15-20 people following him as he went through each section of the tent, summarizing and highlighting key points and answering

**"This is their trip to Israel because not everyone will go and we don't want to rely on media to show them what the heart of Israel is,"**

**- Christina Reboh**

questions. It was incredible and powerful to watch. He came back every year as our tour guide and became an important voice and member of the committee. His perspective and ideas helped develop several areas of the tent, most notably, a feature on the

Bahai community in Israel. It was Amir who helped us expand and more thoroughly represent the diverse and beautiful peoples of Israel," says Christina.

One of the most popular features of the pavilion was a replica of the Western Wall where people could write notes and place them inside the wall's crevasses. The committee changes the pavilion each year to bring an additional element for visitors such as a Jewish history in Canada or a wedding dress.

"We want to recreate the experience of what it is like

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# FROM THE DESK OF

## STACEY LEAVITT- WRIGHT CEO



This issue of Hakol is delivered to you through the eyes of the volunteers who lead many programs and events that connect Jewish Edmonton. Through their views, you will hear about what has inspired them to join us in ensuring a Jewish home in Edmonton, and what they expect we can experience in the coming months. These are the people who are creating the legacy for future generations to look back and learn about what Jewish Edmonton was all about.

Our vision of “a thriving, caring, engaged, and connected Jewish community” has been clear in recent weeks with your support of the Ukraine Emergency Fund, attendance at the Yom Hashoah commemoration, the Yom Hazikaron ceremony, Yom Ha’atzmaut program, and the Edmonton Jewish Film Festival.

After three years of cancelled and virtual events, we returned to an in-person Yom Ha’atzmaut program. The atmosphere was lively, and, in its most warmhearted term, a real “balagan”. “Balagan”—meaning “a chaotic mess” is a word I have heard used in exasperation (the lineup at the airport desk was so unorganized, a real balagan) or in its more affectionate and teasing form (Oy! We made plans to meet at a coffee shop, but she

showed up to the wrong one. What a balagan!).

Seeing a room full of individuals from across the community, meeting new people and old friends, all to support the celebration of the 74<sup>th</sup> birthday of the State of Israel, was an honour to behold. While it also felt a little chaotic, to quote one attendee, “this feels like home”.

We hope you feel the same measure of pride that we have in these events, how they have brought a broad section of the community together and further supported Israel when she needs us the most. You can further support Israel when you come to the Israel Pavillion at Heritage Festival to say hello and shop at our shuk, or volunteer in our tent.

As Dr. Einat Wilf concludes in her recent *Tablet Magazine* article, *The BDS Pound of Flesh*, “It’s hard to bully a proud people; it’s impossible to bully a people who know they have nothing to be ashamed of, and who don’t need or seek anyone else’s approval in the first place. The only response to anti-Zionism, in other words, is Zionism.”

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# Maccabi delegation heads to San Diego



Marit Abrams

Marit Abrams is growing her leadership skills as she takes on the volunteer role of the Alberta delegation head for the JCC Maccabi Games for the first time this year. She is organizing the trip to San Diego, California for eight teens from Calgary and Edmonton, who will compete in hockey and basketball.

The games are celebrating their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and held from July 31 to August 5. It's an opportunity for teens to play in 13 different sports from delegations around the world. The mission of the JCC Maccabi Games is that it is a Jewish event for Jewish teenagers intending to foster long-lasting memories and identification with organized Jewish community groups and with Israel. JCC Maccabi Games aim to foster a strong Jewish identity among all its participants.

Marit was preparing to be the delegation head for the 2020 games when the pandemic struck and halted

Maccabi until this year. The previous delegation head asked her to take on the role. "I'm really excited that this is the first time I get to see this through," she says. She wanted to volunteer for Maccabi not only for the leadership experiences, but she loves working with youth. "Being a part of the community is just an extra special and I can relate to them because I was a Jewish teen," says Marit.

The gathering is smaller this time because they restricted numbers for participants' safety. Plus, they will not hold ArtsFest this year. Maccabi will still hold opening ceremonies and have opportunities for delegates to tour the host city. Host families will house the teens. "The goal is to keep it as true to the Maccabi experience while making sure that everyone is safe as possible. It's important to get back into the swing of things such as meeting other teens and networking," she says.

Without the work that Marit does as a volunteer, the program would be very expensive for participants. In addition, an anonymous donor has generously supported this year's Alberta delegation.

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*...continued from Page 1*

in Israel for Edmontonians because many people won't visit Israel. This is their exposure. This is their trip to Israel because not everyone will go and we don't want to rely on media to show them what the heart of Israel is," says Christina.

The pandemic prevented many from seeing the pavilion in the last two years. As a result, there aren't many changes to the displays for this year's event in order to give people a chance to see it. There still are many volunteer hours planning and executing the event each year. Volunteers dedicate an average of over 2,200

hours annually.

Christina is always looking for new volunteers to help with different aspects of the pavilion. It's up to individuals how much time they want to commit. They could help with designing the displays, take a shift during the festival, or set up and tear down the pavilion. "It is imperative that new perspectives and ideas are involved in the pavilion because I've only been to Israel once and the rest is all research based. Someone who is native to Israel can share a different perspective. It's important to show how Israel is continuing to grow and develop as a country. We need the new ideas to present that," she says.



The Jewish Federation  
OF EDMONTON

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# Film festival shares Jewish culture with audiences



Sam Koplowicz

One joy of volunteering for the Edmonton Jewish Film Festival is watching an array of movies.

With the festival wrapped up for 2022, Sam Koplowicz, festival committee chair, and Neil Grahn, committee member, each share their experiences. Sam has volunteered for the festival for 13 years while Neil joined

the committee in the last year. They are two members of the hard-working committee.

## Why did you want to volunteer for the Edmonton Jewish Film Festival?

*Sam:* I answered the call to join the film festival selection committee. I was a filmmaker, and it was just a natural involvement for me. I'm a lifelong lover of film and through the festival, I get the access to all these films.

*Neil:* The film committee sounded fun. I watched 25 Jewish movies in three weeks. My background is as an actor. I've done films and dramatic work.

## Why do you think it's important to have a Jewish film festival?

*Sam:* It gives us access to films in a place like Edmonton that people would not normally have any access to. Our audience would never see here the vast majority of the films that we show.

*Neil:* The Jewish culture is truly one of the great cultures of the world. It's beautiful to share our experiences with ourselves and others. Having a Jewish film festival is a real treat for Edmonton, and whoever else wants to watch it online.

A lot of these movies you can't get on general programming. The committee has done a fantastic job to offer films that just aren't available in the mainstream.

**This year the committee offered a hybrid festival—two**



Neil Grahn

**of the online films were also offered in-person. How is the experience different from watching a film online compared to in a theatre?**

*Sam:* Part of the attraction of in-person is the social aspect of it. You have this shared experience with a group of people. You're in the dark and feeling this audience. The audience provides the best

part of a theatrical experience.

However, there are benefits to having films online. Our audience has expanded. We've reached three times the numbers that we ever had before and so we have a much wider reach.

## What is challenging about your role?

*Sam:* We have a very good middle of the road festival that shows the current and best films available. We aim for a mix of documentaries, some historical, and not too much focus on the Holocaust.

We still get criticisms that there's too much Holocaust content. Personally, I think that it's an important area that needs to be covered.

*Neil:* What was challenging was to pick and narrow down all the films to a selection for the film festival. There's just the sheer breadth of movies.

## What was your favourite film from this year's festival and why?

*Sam:* The one that really sticks in my mind as significant was our opening night film called *Neighbours*. I thought it was a very well-made film. It's a close examination of a very poor community through the eyes of this one Kurdish family whose neighbours are Jewish. They are all living in this little village that's on the border between the Kurdish lands and Syria.

*Neil:* *Persian Lessons* was such an interesting story. The way it was told was just incredibly well done. It was unique.

# Volunteering provides a connection to Israel



Meirav Or

Meirav Or maintains her connection to Israel by volunteering for the Jewish Federation of Edmonton events. She moved to this city from Israel 20 years ago and first became involved with Talmud Torah, Naa'mat, and the Aviv dancers. She started coming forward for the Federation after passing these stages of life and found the

organization aligned with her values.

"I've always tried to help, even when I was with other organizations. What we do here at the Federation, it's for everybody," says Meirav. "For me, it helps to preserve the sense of community."

Meirav was the chair for the recent Yom Hazikaron service at Congregation Beth Shalom. They held this service in-person and live streamed. It's a day of remembrance for Israel's fallen soldiers and victims of terror. "It's an opportunity for people to get together and

remember the soldiers and the victims," she says.

She also led a committee to organize the Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration at Beth Israel to mark Israel's 74th birthday. Families filled the room at the synagogue. They enjoyed song and dance performances from Aviv, Talmud Torah students, and a local band. There was also face painting, a photo booth, playing Kahoot, and socializing. The last time the Jewish community gathered in-person for this festivity was before the pandemic.

She's grateful for the support of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton and many volunteers for making these events possible.

In Israel, both days are of great significance. Meirav adds it's important to celebrate these holidays in Edmonton by the Jewish community as well. "We are all affected by what's going on in Israel and by commemorating these days, it can make us a stronger community. For me, it's feeling connected to my heritage, my culture, and my people."



Aviv dancers, left, perform during the Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration while attendees, right, show off their Israeli pride.

# Foundation seeks volunteer board members



*Stephanie Hendin*

Stephanie Hendin has a lengthy history of volunteering in the Edmonton Jewish community. Her parents modelled volunteer values.

She followed in their footsteps by becoming involved in the Talmud Torah Society board, Hadassah WIZO and the Jewish Federation of Edmonton, where she served

in many capacities, including Federation president.

Now as board chair of the Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation (EJCCF), Stephanie hopes more people will follow suit and join the Foundation's board. "A community needs volunteers to grow, to thrive, and to mentor," she says.

The EJCCF helps people support Jewish causes that are important to them. It provides resources to make the community's vision a reality, working in partnership with its donors, and striving to ensure the long-term financial security of the Jewish community. Stephanie is searching for new board members to help the EJCCF

in donor recruitment and to ensure continuity and future leadership.

Stephanie says interested EJCCF board representatives should be familiar with the Edmonton Jewish community and understand how to work with donors who have the potential to give large gifts. There is a difference in donating to the Federation and to the EJCCF. "Federation is the day-to-day operations of the community, but the Foundation represents the future. The funds that we raise, the gifts we receive—these endowments are what will sustain our community in the future. The gifts that we receive today will generate proceeds that maintain the community's financial security," she adds.

The Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) works with the EJCCF to prepare contracts with donors, administer the funds and manage the investments. The ECF expertise and professional staff help the volunteers in their efforts to secure donors.

If you are interested in becoming a board member or contributing to the EJCCF, contact Stephanie at [ejccfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:ejccfoundation@gmail.com).

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# Connecting Shalom Baby families is a perfect fit



Anika Zepp

Shalom Baby attracted Anika Zepp as a project because she realized how important it is for parents to have a system of support.

Anika had her son, Levi, in 2021 and discovered that parenthood is a huge journey. “Over my years of community work and volunteerism, I have

seen that positive impact and peer support fosters a thriving community. Regardless of how prepared you are, there are many times that having a network of support makes things feel more manageable, and I saw an opportunity to help curate that with Shalom Baby. Plus, I’m a social extrovert and planner, so the role was a natural fit,” says Anika.

As the parent connector for Shalom Baby, she plans the events and tracks the outreach of families with babies. Her role is supported by volunteers from the group and Jenn Malganick at the Jewish Federation of Edmonton. Many of the volunteers have started walks or reached out to new parents and this helps Anika with her work.

Since they focus Shalom Baby on connecting parents with new babies, members change as they head back to work and their babies become toddlers. Awareness about the group has helped get the word out and membership has grown.

What pleases Anika is seeing how the connection

between families continues as the babies grow. “We’ve seen some evolution in what we talk about and how we meet. I’m glad to see much continued relationships.”

Anika didn’t grow up in the Edmonton Jewish community. When she married her husband, who is an active community member, she became interested in supporting him and believes in the value of a strongly connected community for a thriving Jewish culture in Edmonton today and in the future.

“Now that I am a parent, I see our involvement through a new lens of helping to build the community that he will grow up in and eventually contribute to. L’dor v’dor comes to mind more now than ever to create a community that can continue to flourish from each generation to the next,” she says.

She’s involved as a volunteer with Edmonton’s NextGen. The organization engages young Edmontonians in shaping the city. Anika has organized events such as Pecha Kucha Night for NextGen since 2014. She invests herself as a volunteer because she sees the value of being generous in giving back with what she offers.

“For me at this point in my life, I have the time, energy, and—I think—valuable knowledge to give. To act as though it is selfless would be untrue, as I have always found that as a volunteer I am rewarded by the outcomes of the work, the friendships, and the further opportunities to take part in my community,” says Anika.

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[magalj@edjfed.org](mailto:magalj@edjfed.org)  
for more information.



# Hillel provides a community for students



*Danielle Shaposhnikov*

Danielle Shaposhnikov understands what it's like having a safety net of a Jewish student community. Going to high school in Edmonton and now as a student at the University of Alberta, she feels she bridges two worlds—one that is Jewish and the other that is not.

As an Israeli, Danielle has faced antisemitism, accusations about the treatment of Palestinians, and unsolicited hate texts on her phone from people she doesn't know. She's found solace by connecting to her peers—first with many local Jewish youth groups and now with Hillel.

Danielle first started volunteering with Hillel during her last year of high school by reaching out to other Jewish teens who were about to graduate and move onto post-secondary. She needed to let them know that a support system was there.

"Many people who are involved with BBYO and are going to MacEwan and University of Alberta are already sad about leaving BBYO behind because it was such a major part of their lives," she says. "In high school, being a Jew is one issue, but on university campuses we face a lot of antisemitism. Being Jewish is one of the best things, but it comes with its challenges. Reassuring students, especially high school students, they are about to be catapulted into this whole other universe. Having a safety net of a community is a real comfort to this transition."

As part of her role, she ran online programs for high school students that included cooking and holiday celebrations. Now that Danielle is in university, she took on the role of vice-president for Hillel Edmonton and is concentrating on delivering programs to her peers.

This year the board focused on teaching how to combat antisemitism and informing about Zionism. They are instructing through bonding such as Jews and Brews and conversations during hockey nights.

"Every event is unique. Some experiences are more educational, and some are more connecting and let loose. One thing all our events have in common is there is always a Jewish aspect to it," says Danielle.

She volunteered for Hillel because she is grateful for all the opportunities that the Edmonton Jewish community has given her over the years. "This community has given me so much that I wished to do the same for others. I want to help other students feel like they belong, especially in a place where they may not feel that. The U of A campus has 40,000 students, and it is easy to feel lost and unwelcome. Therefore, it is vital to be proud of one's Jewish heritage, but staying safe is as important," says Danielle.

She's looking forward to Hillel having more of a presence on campus once COVID-19 restrictions permit this. In the meantime, the board is planning one last event at Camp BB Riback before students break for summer.

All post-secondary students are welcome to join Hillel Edmonton. For more information, contact [hilleledmonton@edjfed.org](mailto:hilleledmonton@edjfed.org).



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# Holocaust education pays tribute to those lost



Colin Muscat

Colin Muscat is proud of how the Jewish Federation of Edmonton's Holocaust Education Committee has continued with its mandate during the pandemic. The Yom HaShoah virtual production in 2021 is especially a highlight for him.

"I think we made something very special basically from scratch. It was a pleasure to see it all come together. I am glad of how we have been able to deliver quality programming and events to a virtual platform," says Colin, the committee chair.

His volunteer role with the Federation has him leading the committee meetings and planning events with staff. He also is the secretary for the organization's executive board. Colin wanted to volunteer for the Holocaust Education Committee because it was very active throughout the year.

"I feel that Holocaust education is a very important duty to both the Jewish community and the public at large. As time passes, fewer people are aware of the

significance of the Holocaust in history," he says. "Most recently, we are seeing this in the misappropriation of Holocaust imagery and symbols by those involved in the anti-vaccine mandate movement. It is our obligation to educate the public about this unprecedented event in history. It is also our responsibility to pay tribute to the survivors in our community and remember those lives that were lost."

Although it's been a challenge to adapt programming to ensure public safety, the committee has been bringing in speakers with the support of the Edmonton and Calgary Public Libraries, the staff at the Edmonton office, and Marnie Bondar and Dahllia Libin, the co-chairs of the Calgary Holocaust Education Department. "I am extremely lucky to be supported by such dedicated people," says Colin.

The committee organized an in-person Yom HaShoah ceremony this year at the Legislature grounds. There will be a second virtual Holocaust Symposium of this year for Alberta high school students in May.

There are upcoming virtual programs with the Edmonton and Calgary Public Libraries, in collaboration with both Edmonton and Calgary Jewish Federations as well.

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# Upcoming art exhibit honours survivors



Davina Eisenstat

Davina Eisenstat is passionate about diversity and inclusion (D&I). When she heard that the Jewish Federation of Edmonton was bringing in a special art exhibit in honour of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, she wanted to be involved.

Canadian artist Carol Wylie created a project, *They didn't know they were seeds*, and painted 18 portraits of Holocaust and residential school survivors. Wylie's goal of this exhibit is to create a silent dialogue between these survivors. The Federation is partnering with Edmonton Public Library to bring in this art exhibit that will be on display at the Stanley A. Milner Library through the month of October.

Davina is excited about the possibilities that this exhibit can bring to both communities in Edmonton. "It's one way in which we can bridge those connections within the community and get people out and into doing more interactive activities. It's also how you can take a moment for your own personal reflection," she says.

Much like how Wylie's paintings bridge the connection, volunteering brought the connection for Davina. When she moved to Edmonton from Winnipeg in 2012, she joined the Israeli folk dance group, Aviv. "That was my sense of belonging. It's being able to give back in the community for fun events. It promotes multiculturalism and sharing the best parts of our Jewishness," she says.

Davina is still involved with dance, but she wanted to take on more volunteer roles in the Jewish community. She joined the Federation board with a an intention of reaching out to the younger population. "I see that there's a sizeable gap within our community, especially among the young adults. I'm hoping maybe there's a way to bridge them in, and especially with something

new and exciting."

Being a member of the planning committee, which is organizing the exhibit, ties together all the passions that Davina has—connecting with the Jewish community, art, and D&I. She has acknowledged she hasn't had the same struggles as many others have had. She's never experienced direct discrimination as a Jew. However, Davina wants to raise awareness about the struggles that others have faced and believes the Wiley exhibit is the perfect event to do this.

She was 12-years-old when she initially learned about residential schools and discovered about the Holocaust around eight-years-old. Davina understands how there

*"For me, if the exhibit provides a space to talk to one person and shift their perspective, that's making a difference."*

- Davina Eisenstat

is a huge knowledge gap for both traumatic topics. "It's really important we're able to educate others on our histories and not in a way to compare the histories of the Jewish people and Indigenous people. But perhaps we can bridge those

gaps in knowledge and actually further understand each other's cultures," adds Davina.

She says by standing in front of Wylie's paintings, it can be a moment of connection and an opportunity to build empathy and compassion. "It may help build solidarity. I can't imagine what it would be like being a survivor having to still live in a world survive through all that and be in a life where we haven't fully accepted each other or embrace our differences."

When Davina has children, she wants them to experience a society where they don't have to worry about prejudice or consider hiding who they are. She is advocating for a world where everyone can live their true selves. "For me, if the exhibit provides a space to talk to one person and shift their perspective, that's making a difference. It might be the first time someone meets a Jewish person and connects with them," says Davina.

Subscribe to the Federation's weekly e-newsletter to find out updates about the upcoming exhibit.

# Israelis reach out to small communities

Two special Israeli visitors spent a weekend in early May connecting with different groups in the Edmonton Jewish community. Doron Gertzovski, 26, and Netanel (Nati) Benami, 25, were on a small communities mission. During their 10 day tour of Canada, Doron and Nati also visited Calgary and Ottawa. The Small Communities program is a partnership on the Jewish Agency, the federations, and Israel's Ministry of Diaspora.

In Edmonton, they spent time with Talmud Torah students, Hillel Edmonton, teens from B'nai Brith Youth Organization, local Israelis, Temple Beth Ora and Congregation Beth Shalom. Doron and Nati's goal was to bring Israeli culture during this packed schedule.

"For us, it's amazing opportunity to bring Israel, to bring our Judaism, and our Israeli story to the community," says Nati.

"We have an opportunity to educate by sharing our stories and find that the connections and the dots that connect us. The connection is we really live in Israel and they live here but we all have the same feeling that we want to help and represent Israel," says Doron.

Nati is based in Tel Aviv where he is a social media manager at a start up company. Before his military service, Nati accomplished a gap year as a Young Emissary (a program of the

Jewish Agency) and lived in Westport, CT, USA, for a year. During that year, he conducted dozens of events and activities for the local Jewish community. At the end of this year, he volunteered as a counselor at JCA Shalom (Malibu, CA) Jewish summer camp.

Doron is a dance and theatre teacher who works with the Israeli Ministry of Education and is a dancer in a dance group that performs in Israel and abroad. She's based in a small community of moshav Avihayil in Emek-Hefer Valley Regional Council. Currently, Doron is a student at the Kibbutzim Seminary College with a master's degree in visual arts.

They both say that this tour was an opportunity not to educate but to share stories and experiences. Doron and Nati encouraged everyone they met in Edmonton to keep in touch with them so their relationships could continue beyond the mission.



*Doron Gertzovski, left, and Nati Benami visited Edmonton as part of the Small Communities mission program.*



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