

My mom sent me the link to this job posting in early May. "Might be interesting," she said. I scoffed. Admittedly, I was a bit thrown off by my mom's sudden bid at getting me to work for the Jewish Federation of Edmonton.

Though I have stayed an active cultural Jew, celebrating all the big holidays as I jumped from Nanaimo to Victoria, there are days where I mourn a former life spent engrossed in multiple Jewish programs across the Edmonton Jewish community. From Camp BB Riback to B'nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO) to NCSY Canada, I highly prioritized my Jewish community involvement at one point. But that was a past era. It has become increasingly difficult for me to stay connected with any Jewish community as life develops and takes on alternative forms of busy.

I ache for community and acceptance in Judaism, and it has never been easy to find that. Multiple forces compounded with each other to create a tornado of confusion, apathy, and frustration, picking up debris of memories with the Jewish community and leaving me stranded in its wake. I grew resentful. And yet, here I was, confronted with an opportunity to make amends with the forces of nature that left me distraught. Would I dare apply for a position to be at the centre of something I had forgotten how to appreciate? How do I connect others to a community I disconnected from?

Camp BB, I assume for most young people in the Jewish community, is their first confrontation with Jewish nationhood. This was true for me. Before camp, what I knew of Judaism was waking up early on a precious Saturday morning, only to spend a couple of hours itching in uncomfortable clothing as I waited for services to end so I could indulge in some cold tuna salad. It was not particularly striking to me.

But camp was different. Camp taught me that Judaism is fun, diverse, and exciting in ways that were previously unimaginable. I went from mumbling prayers in a stuffy room to shouting hymns surrounded by friends, from yawning during services to being an active participant, and from feeling disengaged from my religion to enjoying every single aspect of it, itchy clothes, and all. Camp exposed me to a community of people that I will hold on to forever, whether my interactions with them were big or small. While working at the Federation, I came to this realization again. The importance of building a community is cementing a foundation of people who you know you can reach out to for anything because there is a mutual understanding that our strength as a people relies on the wellbeing of everyone.

There is something uniquely daunting about working in the hub of All-Things-Jewish. My actions as a Federation employee are far-reaching and, suddenly, I can affect the community in ways that I never have before. To be truthful, I was ignorant of the Federation's innerworkings, both as an office and in its daily operations. First, it took me aback at how only a small body of people was the glue holding together the Edmonton Jewish community. But there is so much fire in this modest office space, ignited by a powerful commitment to keep Jewish people united in their faith and community. The work by the Federation is the product of five dynamic women who are devoted to their craft. Woven between the oak doors of every office, from Tammy



to Jenn to Diedre to Susan to Stacey, is an energy of spirited desire to ensure Edmonton's Jewish community thrives. I have never seen such a small yet dedicated group of people who work tirelessly at connecting people with their Judaism and with their fellow Jews.

So, here I stand, having completed eight weeks of working in the hurricane's eye and feeling an odd mixture of pride, sadness, and hope. It is cliché to exclaim as I shut the door behind me, "my work here is done!" but I felt that I have achieved what I set out to accomplish. I wanted to do for others what they did not do for me. I wished to touch the Jewish community in a way that aligned with my values and reflected the growth of the community. Those feelings of acceptance that I longed for have finally settled into a content sense of peace.

This community is vast and complicated. But we need each other. My mom says that life is about adventures and relationships, and that sums up how I feel about my time here in the Federation and how I view the community. The relationships we establish with each other are axiomatically essential in preserving the strength of Jewish communities all over the world. The Federation works tirelessly every day to ensure that there is a sound foundation for which we can build those relationships on and continue to nurture them for as long as needed. Through programming, education, and communication, the Jewish community can remain unshakable in its stance. And the rest are all just adventures.

Shabbat Shalom,

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