



Gimme TEN

A Jewish Agency initiative comes to South Africa | BY CHANDREA SEREBRO



EXCITING NEWS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS THAT LOCAL Jewry can be proud of us is the recently launched Project TEN initiative in Durban, which is making strides in bettering the local communities that it touches. “Project TEN is a Jewish Peace Corps Global Tikkun Olam, a Jewish Agency initiative that takes global responsibility for underprivileged populations throughout Israel and the world, bringing over 500 young Jewish adults each year, both Israelis and their Diaspora peers, to volunteer together with local organisations and staff on sustainable projects in developing regions,” says Aviad Sela, Director of Israel Centre SA.

The programme is aimed at young Jewish adults in their 20s and early 30s, and offers an unparalleled opportunity for these young adults to work together to bring about significant change and bond with Jewish peers from around the world. Participants come from Israel, the USA, and a variety of other countries including France, Argentina, the UK, Mexico, and more, “all sharing a commitment to volunteer service and social justice”. Best described as “highly motivated and idealistic”, says Aviad, the newly established SA arm of the project is currently working

with a number of local NGOs in Durban in the field of Education. “The Jewish Agency partnership with the SAZE, the KwaZulu Natal Jewish community, and with donations by the Victor Daitz Foundation, enables the centre to cultivate sustainable development projects among vulnerable populations and, by doing so, enhance the local community as well as the developing world around us.” And, says Micaela Browde, Director of Project TEN SA, while Project TEN SA is still “very new”, they are “strong” and are committed to becoming “even stronger over time”.

“We will soon expand our projects so that we will focus not only on education, but also on health and food security.” Currently, a group of nine young post-army Israelis from all over Israel are in Durban, working on projects that range from establishing a youth movement in Amaoti Township to partnering with established NGOs. Some examples of the NGOs that the Project TEN volunteers are working with are: I Care, an NGO that works with street children; The Durban Child and Youth Care Centre, a home to many orphaned children which also runs external drug rehabilitation programmes; Tumaini, a new and heavily under-resourced community

centre that works with refugees; and working in the kitchens of the Dennis Hurley Centre, which works from Durban’s CBD with various groups – refugees, homeless people, and unemployed residents.

The group spends its days planning, preparing, and volunteering, and also taking part in Jewish Service Learning sessions four times a week - focusing on Jewish Values, International Development, Local Culture, and Personal development. They spend every second Shabbat together, where they use the time to relax together and run interesting activities for the group. Every other weekend they are free, and have the chance to explore KZN and even beyond.

“Our long-term objectives in the field of education include working on developing leadership/academic success, increased access to information, and employment opportunities for the local communities. The overall aim of Project TEN centres globally is to “create sustainable change that will improve the resilience of the local communities with which we are working”, Micaela explains, and to bring young Jews together. To this end, the volunteers join the local Jewish population in community



events and add new ideas and a young, vibrant energy.

“The volunteers learn, grow, and experience things they would never otherwise experience. They meet other young Jews and learn from them; they meet people from all walks of life and connect with them. Volunteers leave the programme having given to communities in need, as well as having connected to their Judaism and made friends for life.”

To find out more, visit: www.tenprogram.org/Durban,-South-Africa or email: ten.project.dbn@gmail.com

WHAT THE VOLUNTEERS SAY... NETA HAKIM

While most of her contemporaries set off traveling after the army, Neta Hakim, 21, from Jerusalem, wanted to experience a programme whereby she could give back by volunteering in her year of discovery. She had heard about Project TEN, and chose South Africa because it seemed to her that it was the most diverse of the options and an excit-

ing choice. “The mix of the western culture and the third world presented an opportunity like none other for me to experience the inequalities of the world and, through Project TEN, do what I can to change it.” Neta is inspired by the work she is currently doing in Durban – working with a drug rehabilitation group, and building a youth movement in one of the refugee communities. “Much of what we do is to focus on the small things, which, for the kids on the project, can inspire them, and make them feel a part of something bigger, something nicer than their real lives – something important and worth aspiring to.” Through this work, Neta hopes it will make her more compassionate to the world, and open her up to experience emotions she would otherwise not know. “On a personal level, I know that the experience has already made me feel different, and allowed me to develop myself.”

MAOR KOLTOCHNIK

Two years after his army service, Maor Koltochnik started working with Project

TEN in Israel to discover new ways to make a change and a difference in the world. Planning to become a doctor when he returns home to study, Maor’s innate need to help his fellows comes from “the value of giving”, having been brought up in a family of do-gooders as well as with a connection to Jewish values. “I am fortunate that I can do something to give back to people who don’t have what I do in the world.” “Impressed” with what the South African arm of Project TEN is doing, Maor’s volunteer work in the township of Amaoti, near Durban, inspires him because he recognises “the way the kids crave the things that Project TEN is trying to give them” through establishing a youth movement “which will benefit their lives – giving them an opportunity to engage on this level which they have never had before”. He also sees how the street children who frequent I Care – an organisation which gives them a place to clean up, eat, socialise, and rehabilitate – are gaining “life lessons and valuable life skills” through the projects as well. **IL**

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