

The Impact of Volunteerism

By Michael Kent, G.J. Cooper Scholarship Recipient, 2012 /2013

This past June, I received the G. J. Cooper Scholarship Award for leadership and academic excellence from the Ottawa Jewish Community Foundation in recognition of my academic achievements, leadership endeavours and community mindedness.

This award has proven extremely valuable in allowing me to pursue my goals. Commitment to academic excellence, community and leadership are among the chief requirements for the Cooper scholarship. These are three subjects that I value for a variety of reasons.

My education has provided many opportunities for personal growth. Through studying the social sciences, I have become adept at understanding the people and world around me, knowledge that is truly important for personal development. Next is community, which is a vital resource. Humans are social animals and our membership in a community is necessary for not only our personal fulfillment, but our survival. Throughout my life there has always been community around me for support and I want to ensure that future generations of Ottawa Jews will continue to benefit from all our community has to offer.

Finally, leadership is something that I have always been drawn toward. I think my approach to leadership is best captured by Hillel, one of the greatest Jewish sages of all times. In Pirkei Avot 2:6, he teaches that “in a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.” Hillel is not speaking about a deserted location; rather he is speaking about a community of people. Hillel is describing that the essence of communal leadership is stepping up and

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Hillel, Pirkei Avot 2:5

actively serving the community, not being complacent to its needs or leaving the responsibility to others. I have often joked that much of my volunteer involvement is due to an inability to say no, but truthfully when a valuable project, or initiative comes my way, I say yes because I want to see its fulfillment, recognizing the necessity of these projects in nourishing our community.



My own list of volunteer activities actually surprised me as I didn't realize how very involved I had become. Some of the organizations I've volunteered with include: NCSY Ottawa, Hillel Ottawa, Beth Shalom, the University of Ottawa, and the Ottawa Modern Jewish School. These were all positive experiences and rarely did they feel like work; rather my participation in the community has given me great enjoyment.

Since receiving the Cooper scholarship, this sense of appreciation and accomplishment has continued. The award has alleviated much financial pressure and as a result I've had more time to dedicate to other causes. While these focuses included finishing my Masters in Religious Studies, the major impact of the scholarship is that I can volunteer more. I have greatly increased my involvement with NCSY and Torah High. I have also begun volunteering for BBYO, a youth group for Ottawa Jewish teens operated out of the Soloway Jewish Community Centre. Without the Cooper award I wouldn't have been able to do this. I thank the Foundation for the scholarship, and also encourage its continued support of young Jews.

For more information on the G.J. Cooper Scholarship Award, visit www.ojcf.ca/programs-events/george.aspx



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