

It is hard to put into words how much my community means to me. I've grown up in a supportive, caring neighbourhood that is filled with people who have taught me and shaped me into the person that I am today. My neighbourhood has helped me grow and put into perspective how special the idea of "community" can be. My interest in helping others and doing good started at a young age. I was raised with the values of selflessness and compassion, and was given the opportunities to put others before myself while making an impact in my community.

Holy Blossom Temple holds a special place in my life. My first memories there are as a preschool student. Although I don't have any vivid memories, they are all extremely fond. What I took away most from being a student at Holy Blossom, was the idea of doing mitzvahs. Whether they be small or large, anything can be meaningful. I've grown up at Holy Blossom Temple and the synagogue has given me a multitude of opportunities to do good in my community, and improve as a person while doing so. Over the years, my family and I have participated in a number of impactful opportunities at Holy Blossom. When I was younger, we made care packages for the less fortunate with other members of the congregation. My family and I have also delivered flowers to the elderly and I have volunteered at the Purim Carnival.

This year, I began working towards my Duke of Edinburgh Award. Holy Blossom recently started offering teens a way to complete the award, and I instantly jumped on board. A key part of the process is to consistently participate in community service. I was aware of Out of the Cold at Holy Blossom, but didn't really know how meaningful it was until I stepped into the Philip Smith Congregational Hall on the first day. I still marvel at how amazing the experience was. For twelve weeks, I was a part of the set up shift. Each Thursday after school, I would walk to the synagogue and complete a number of jobs including moving mattresses, making juice, breaking down boxes, and setting tables. I was a part of a team of men and women of all ages, and got to work with many incredible people. I loved that we all had the same goal in being there, to give the less fortunate whatever we could to make their lives better. At the beginning of the three months I was learning the tasks and routines that needed to be completed. Time passed and by the last few weeks I was running the show. At the end, I was the one delegating tasks and instructing people. I really came full circle.

Even though the jobs that I completed might not have been seen by the people benefitting from Out of the Cold, I know that I made an impact. My time volunteering for Out of the Cold really made me appreciate what I have and how I live. It really put into perspective how lucky I am to live like I do. We take things for granted, but I've learned

through Out of the Cold to find value in everything, even the most simple of items and experiences.

One of the most impactful experiences of my life was in 2017 when I along with other congregants of Holy Blossom Temple made a Ring of Peace around Imdadul Islamic Centre in Toronto. This was following an attack earlier in Quebec City. We all held hands and formed a giant circle of protection around the mosque while the congregants prayed. It was extremely powerful and the unity that our congregation showed was absolutely incredible. What I find really meaningful about the experience is that despite our race, religion, background and status, we are all people. We all live in the same city and we have the same right to religion. We chose to do something good for a group of people going through a tough time. The expression “What goes around comes around” is one that I strongly believe in. This expression was proven to be true as in November of 2018, that same mosque that we helped earlier made a ring of peace around our synagogue after the attack in Pittsburgh.

The common theme with these three memories, is that they all stemmed from Holy Blossom. Our synagogue has given me a platform to make a difference by doing many mitzvot, and I am immensely grateful for each of these experiences. It would be unfair to say that the sole cause of all of my work in the past was HBT.

My extraordinary family challenges me to empathize for others and do everything I can to better myself and my community. Another massive contributor to my social action is the people in my community. Over the years, I've befriended some of the most caring, generous and thoughtful people.

Throughout my childhood, my family has gone through some very tough times. There were times when things were not good, and there was a lot on my parents' plate. Constantly, friends and family members from around the neighborhood and city would bring us meals, drive me and my brother to school and baseball, and most importantly offer their support in any way that they could, big or small. The most important takeaway for me is extremely simple. People are good. There is so much good in our world and I have been lucky enough to have found people who shine with generosity and kindness. Another lesson that I've learned from my community is the importance of being a good friend. The reason that many families have assisted us in the past is because of our generosity to them as well. My parents have taught me to always be of assistance and offer support and love whenever I can.

There is another massive way that my community has continually supported me and my family. I have been hosting an annual community fundraiser that I started 8 years ago. The event is a street fair that brings the entire neighbourhood together. All proceeds from this grassroots event are donated to the Princess Margaret Cancer

Foundation. Nine years ago, my grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and was cared for and treated at Princess Margaret Hospital. They prolonged her life and cared for her extremely well. I decided to start running a street fair in honour of my grandmother, and the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation was the perfect place for the proceeds. It is truly amazing how my entire community comes together to create a spectacular event year after year. Over eight years of hosting the event, we've raised over \$20,000 for the foundation. Families make donations, create games, bring baked goods, and most importantly support the cause each year. The event would not be possible without the kindness of the community and I am so lucky to live in such a special environment.

I have heard about Tikkun Olam through my family members and some of the services at Holy Blossom. It means to 'fix' or 'repair' the world. To me, this means doing everything that I can individually to contribute as much as I can to our society and our community. In some of the Jewish texts I read in preparation for this project, I learned that starting small can lead to bigger changes. Before we can "fix the world", we must focus on ourselves, then our families, then communities, cities, nation, world, universe, cosmos.... Once we improve ourselves, what we do can rub off on others and create a chain of events that will help others join us in repairing the world.

Being a part of my community has greatly impacted my life. I've gained so much from doing mitzvot. It is important to reflect on the past but equally important to look ahead to the future. I will continue to do work in my community and do my best to empower the future generation of leaders to do the same. We all have a choice. We can act, learn and grow together, making our world a better place, or do nothing. I've become a better person from the work that I've done, and I strongly encourage everyone to think about what they can do to fulfill their lives and make their communities and our world the best they can be.