

Greater Toronto Area

# Toronto hosts think tank on social entrepreneurship

By FRANCES KRAFT  
Staff Reporter

Last week, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto hosted a two-day international think tank on Jewish innovation and social entrepreneurship.

About 30 people – social entrepreneurs (people who use a business model to address societal issues), researchers in the field, and funders – took part in the event. Approximately a third were Canadian, and there was one participant each from Sweden and from England.

The subject represents a growing trend and emerging sector in the Jewish world, according to Robin Gofine, the federation's vice-president of strategic planning and engagement.

Gofine has participated in North America-wide discussion about the trend since an initial meeting two years ago organized in New York by United Jewish Communities, the umbrella for North American federations, now known as Jewish Federations of North America.

At that meeting, she said, Toronto's federation was the only one represented. "I think the point at the time was that, organizationally, if we as a federation don't continue to nurture innovation, we're going to lose out on reaching out to young people in particular."

The recent Toronto meeting was co-sponsored by its lead organizer Jumpstart – The Network for Jewish Innovation, which is based in California; the New York-based Lippman Kanfer Institute, a think tank for innovation in Jewish learning that is part of JESNA (Jewish Education Service of North America); Jewish Federations of North America; and Toronto's federation; with support from the Andrea & Charles Bronfman Philanthropies.

Gofine said she sees the meeting as "a significant opportunity to embrace young people who historically may not have wanted to become involved with the organized Jewish community... It's an opportunity to enrich Jewish life."

As well, she said, it has created a group of peers, and she sees it as a way to "open doors to new groups of donors looking for new Jewish projects to become involved in."

Toronto was chosen as the conference site in part because of its "exciting and interesting models of innovative projects" including MaRS, a partnership of research institutions; and the Centre for Social Innovation, Gofine said.

Local participants included Risa Alyson Strauss of the Kavanah Garden, an educational Jewish community garden; and Assaf Weisz of Young Social Entrepreneurs of Canada.

Most of the participants work independently of the federation, said Gofine.

The Kavanah Garden – an organic teaching garden that has donated more than 400 lbs. of produce to tzedakah since

it opened in the spring – is located on land provided by UJA Federation on the Lebovic Community Campus in Vaughan, but has not been otherwise funded by the organization.

UJA Federation is exploring the possibility of launching an "incubator" in Toronto, to provide support and possibly work space as well as other resources to social entrepreneurs.

"These people are the future of our community," Gofine said.



Panelists discuss "The Meaning and Importance of Social Entrepreneurship" at last week's think tank. From left, are moderator Shawn Landres, Jewish Jumpstart, Los Angeles; and panelists Nina Bruder, director of JESNA's Bikkurim, an incubator for new Jewish ideas, in New York; Marcella Kanfer Rolnick, vice-chair of GOJO Industries; Rabbi Aaron Levy of Makom, a downtown Toronto Jewish community; and Risa Alyson Strauss of Kavanah Garden.

## Gene mutations can result in cancer

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About 40 per cent of ovarian cancers and 12 per cent of breast cancers are the result of these mutations, and they're potentially preventable.

"There are options that she can elect for to reduce these risks," Metcalfe said.

"That could be preventive surgery, taking medications to reduce her risk of developing cancer or she could elect to undergo very vigilant screening. For breast cancer, she would look at having breast MRIs, clinical breast exams. For ovarian cancer, there are ultrasounds and blood tests she can take."

Although none of the 22 women in the first part of the study who carried a mutated gene were Sephardi, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews are encouraged to enrol in the second part of the study as

long as they are between 20 and 70 years old, Ontario residents and have not had previous genetic testing for the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes.

"What we ask them to do is complete several questionnaires, because it is still a research study – this isn't being offered as a clinical service yet – so there are several questionnaires that they have to fill out and then they provide us with a saliva sample," Metcalfe said.

Women who are found to have a mutation will be retested to confirm the positive result and will then receive personal genetic counselling and individualized cancer risk management options.

It might take up to a year to receive the results from the test.

Metcalfe anticipates that many Jewish women will want to take part in the next

phase of the study. Within one day of the publication of the initial results, 1,500 women signed up for the second part of the study, which will start in March.

Metcalfe said her study group plans to make recommendations to the provincial government to make genetic screening more accessible to Jewish women.

"We're definitely going to do a formal economic evaluation. It makes sense to us that this probably wouldn't cost that much in terms of doing the testing as opposed to treating women for cancer eventually," she said.

"We will... see what the government might do with it."

To enrol in the study, contact Women's College Hospital at 416-351-3795 or visit the website at [www.womensresearch.ca/jewishstudy](http://www.womensresearch.ca/jewishstudy).

