Genesis: UJA's Centre for Jewish Innovation readies for opening

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In 2009, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto hosted a 'think tank' on the meaning and significance of social entrepreneurship. Panellists used the event to bounce ideas off of one another, one of which – creating an incubator to support young Jewish social entrepreneurs in Toronto – is now coming to fruition.

On January 31st, 2013, Genesis: UJA Federation's Centre for Jewish Innovation will be kicked off with a speaker series featuring Paul Alofs, CEO, Princess Margaret Hospital Foundation. Sharing a space with Hillel of Greater Toronto at UJA Federation's Wolfond Centre for Jewish Campus Life, the Centre will also act as an incubator to supply five residents – Shoresh Jewish Environmental Programs, Project AIM, Jewish Business Network, Annex Shul, and JED Institute – with UJA Federation's resources, including office space, technical assistance, and access to programs and professional staff.

(left to right) Yacov Fructer, Annex Shul; Richard Bass, JED Institute; Sherry Firestone, Genesis Board Member; Cheryl Reicin, Genesis Chair

"This is an effort to support people in being creative, and in being involved with meaningful, non-profit projects that enrich Jewish life locally and around the world," said Alexandra Kuperman, a talented, young social entrepreneur who will also serve as the Centre's Director. "Toronto's leaders in social entrepreneurship will share lessons and provide mentorship, infusing a spirit of innovation into the Jewish community that allows us to support the success of the emerging Jewish start-up organizations in our community."

"Genesis will be a way for UJA Federation to leverage its organizational resources and support the work of young social entrepreneurs in Toronto," said Robin Gofine, UJA Federation's Vice-President of Strategic Community Planning and Engagement. "High-profile community leaders and volunteers have become involved, and we're all very excited about this cutting-edge, progressive initiative."

Such high-profile community members include Sherry Firestone, real estate developer; Sam Ifergan, venture capitalist; Alan Berg, computer entrepreneur; and Cheryl Reicin, a Torys LLP partner who will also serve as the Centre's Chair.

"Genesis is a convergence of community, collaboration and the entrepreneurial spirit," stated Reicin. "If we want our community large and strong, we need to reach out in different ways. Rather than us developing programs that speak to younger generations, it is a whole lot easier for us to supply the infrastructure and assistance to help them make their own ideas and programs successful."

Acting as an accelerator for non-profit organizations, Genesis supplies the future leaders of Jewish Toronto with the expertise and necessary skill sets to nurture and develop their businesses.

"Who could resist the idea of assisting amazing young people who themselves are motivated to effectuate change and fill important needs in the community?" asked Reicin.

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