

Building a Community of Givers

Quebec Association of Independent Schools - Hebrew Academy CLC, Montreal QC



It's the weekend, and while most students are thrilled to have a little break from school, Hebrew Academy Grade 11 student Nathaniel Ouazana eagerly returns to the building every Sabbath. There, for a little over an hour, he leads an international youth organization that runs fun, educational activities that promote a love of, and commitment to, the land of Israel. The unpaid position involves coordinating about a dozen counsellors, overseeing the programming, and caring for slews of Elementary School children who attend weekly.

Nathaniel has been volunteering for the past three years as part of Hebrew Academy High School's Chesed Program ('Chesed' can be loosely translated as Love and Kindness).



“I enjoy coming back to school each weekend and seeing the children with smiles on their faces, having a great time while learning valuable lessons and connecting with Israel.” Nathaniel Ouazana

At the core of Hebrew Academy’s mission, Chesed is such an integral school value that it constitutes a segment of High School seniors’ curriculum. As part of their graduation requirements, grades 9 through 11 students must perform a minimum of 20 hours of community service during the school year and are encouraged to donate even more of their time if they can.

“Chesed activities are an essential part of the student experience at Hebrew Academy from the time that the children are in preschool,” said High School Principal Dr. Laura Segall. “Whether it is visiting with the elderly or helping out at MADA, our very youngest students do so readily and with much enthusiasm. What becomes exciting when they reach the upper high school grades is to see these same children become active leaders in many of our local charitable organizations.

In order to support and facilitate students’ volunteerism, Hebrew Academy’s Community Learning Centres (CLC) Coordinator Tia Ayrton recently organized a school Chesed Fair, featuring representatives from Beit Halochem, MADA, Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem Synagogue, Chabad of the Town and the Eleanor London Côte Saint-Luc Public Library – just a few of Hebrew Academy’s partner organizations.

Hebrew Academy’s Chesed Program was created to enable students to practice acts of kindness, develop peer leadership and mentoring skills, increase social sensitivity, understand and accept civic responsibility; develop personally, including in the domains of self-image and confidence; and to inspire lifelong volunteerism.

“Part of our role as educators is to prepare our youth to become the leaders of tomorrow. It fills me with confidence for the future of our community when I see the seriousness and the care with which these young adults take on these responsibilities.” Dr. Laura Segal, Principal