

Grandparents' & Special Friends' Day/Chai Celebration Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School – June 2016

Three years ago the idea of an annual Grandparents' & Special Friends' Day was inaugurated at the Paul Penna DJDS in order for students to share their learning with special people in their lives. The first highly successful event, a pop-up museum displaying Jewish artifacts of personal significance, was followed by portfolio highlights from the school year. As the staff looked ahead to the third Grandparents' & Special Friends' Day, which was to be celebrated in June of 2016, we had an additional factor to consider. Our school was celebrating its 18th (Chai year) anniversary and since Paul Penna DJDS is centred around an integrated curriculum, we knew we wanted to incorporate this important milestone.

In February 2016 during our monthly staff meeting, we engaged in a large group brainstorming session and came up with the *big idea* of "Turning Dreams into Reality" following Theodor Herzl's famous quote, "אם תרצו, אין זו אגדה" (If you will it, it is no dream). This resonated with the staff as our school was created from the seeds of a few individuals' dream to create an egalitarian, pluralistic, community-based Jewish Day School in the heart of downtown Toronto where none previously existed. Once we had our focus, the teachers divided into smaller groups and planned collaboratively to find meaningful ways to connect this *big idea* to the core unit being taught in each grade. The grade 4 and 5 Hebrew and core teachers developed integrated activities toward the completion of their final product. A detailed description of each grade's project is included in this submission as well as samples of the students' work.

In the past, this well-attended event was focused solely on the pop-up museum exhibiting students' accomplishments. This year, however, it was felt that an extra element was required due to the important milestone being marked and the opportunity for intergenerational learning. In addition to the showcasing of work, the staff developed a questionnaire whereby students interviewed their guests about personal dreams and how to turn them into reality. The questions included:

1. What does Theodor Herzl's quote mean to you?
2. Tell me about some dreams or goals you had when you were younger and how you accomplished them.
3. What advice can you give me about reaching my goals?

After the Chai Celebration event, a book was created and displayed outside each classroom for students and parents to enjoy. This addition to the event was profoundly moving. The rapt attention of the children as they listened to the important stories of their elders left a strong impact on both generations. An assorted selection of the interviews is included with this report as well as photographs of the interactions (See Part 18).

On the day of the event, dream quotes from well-known individuals were displayed around the room to complement the school exhibit (See Part 2). Grandparents and Special Friends attended the exhibit in one of two viewing sessions and were guided through the gallery by students. Following the exhibit, students conducted their interviews and finally refreshments were provided to complete the tour.

Both students and their grandparents/special friends expressed that the event was a highly meaningful experience with real life implications on how to turn dreams into reality, the only drawback being a lack of time to adequately view all of the exhibits. As well, some students rushed their guests through the exhibit in anticipation of the interview and snacks. If a school is to recreate this event, it would be important to consider these factors and ways to overcome them.