

## Technology helps rekindle that giving spirit

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TORONTO & Not long ago & it was November actually & www.jchoice.org was launched. It is a web site outstanding in both design and purpose: to encourage the younger generation to learn about and undertake mitzvot (commandments) and empower the next generation of philanthropists.

Three years ago, Joshua Troderman, then an educator at Rashi School in Newton, MA, created an innovative multimedia program to teach his Grade 5 students about the Book of Exodus using the reggae music of Bob Marley.

A parent, David Rosenberg, was moved by the curriculum and its themes of overcoming oppression, creating equality, revelation and redemption and arranged a meeting with Troderman to discuss collaborating on something meaningful.

Rosenberg was concerned that young adults, those between 22 and 30, were generally not supporting charitable causes. Some felt a disconnect from Jewish charities, seeing them as entities their parents supported, others thought they did not yet have the means to contribute or were overwhelmed hearing of large donations, assuming that their small contributions would not make a difference.

Rosenberg and Troderman saw the challenges as reaching young people, creating an easy means of giving and enabling them to contribute in a meaningful way. At the same time, they wanted their target audience to establish a bond with each other and the broader world.

“Consciousness is increasing that mankind has a universal responsibility: we must look out for each other, what affects one affects all,” Troderman explained. “We were worried that if Judaism didn’t take an active role in tikkun olam (repairing the world), which is a Jewish concept anyway, we would be too late to make a difference.”

Troderman had started his own company to make his Torah learning workshops, using video and music, available on an interactive web site. The two men combined their passions, skills and resources to produce Jchoice, a visionary tzedaka (charity) and educational web site incorporating rich media and a custom-built social network.

They realized that their most effective strategy would be to grow a new generation of philanthropists from bar and bat mitzvah age upwards. Thus a companion site, www.TheBarMitzvahRegistry.org, was created to rekindle the tzedaka aspect of the milestone in a thoroughly modern way. Both web sites are technologically sophisticated and combine bright colours, visual elements and interactivity to attract younger users, while being easy to navigate and providing essential information to older donors about the percentage of income spent on administration, privacy issues and the like.

Friends and family can purchase JCard gift certificates in any denomination or deposit funds directly in a member’s account. Members can choose to support any of 70 carefully vetted charities & Jewish, secular, local or international & selected to appeal to younger donors.

“Younger Jewish donors strive to find causes that have meaning within the context of their own lives,” Rosenberg said.

Most of the featured charities are small, run by volunteers and have shoestring budgets and limited means to publicize themselves or advertise. Given the grim economy, they are thrilled to receive the exposure and tap into new sources of funding.

David Rosenberg is currently JChoice’s lead funder, but he plans to create an endowment that will eventually underwrite all administrative costs and is looking for partners worldwide.

Members can check the amounts being raised for their pet charities, post divrei Torah (Torah commentaries) and videos, enter contests to win grants for their accounts and interact with their chosen causes and like-minded people from all over the world using protected identities.

“These young donors want involvement. They have told us they want to understand the impact of their activism and to be able to dialogue with their peers regarding their charitable choices,” Rosenberg explained.

Together, Rosenberg and Troderman have harnessed the technological tools, which made our world a whole lot smaller, to create a closely knit community that paradoxically spans the globe and is engaged in repairing it.