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**News Release**

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**TWO ISRAELI HIGH SCHOOL GRADS VOLUNTEER AT JEWISH INSTITUTIONS IN PITTSBURGH THROUGH THE JEWISH FEDERATION'S SHINSHINIM PROGRAM**

Through the generous support of a local, private family foundation and in partnership with the Jewish Agency of Israel (JAFI), the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh will be bringing two 18-year-old Israelis to Pittsburgh for a year of service beginning August 2018. The "Shinshinim" program (derived from "shnat sherut" in Hebrew that translates to "a year of service" in English) offers a unique and effective way to deeply connect and engage Pittsburghers with Israel through informal education and relationship-building.

The Jewish Agency's international Shinshinim program sends 18-year-old Israelis all over the world to volunteer in Jewish schools, synagogues, camps and community organizations for a period of one year. Here in Pittsburgh, the Shinshinim will expose the local community to Israeli society and culture through informal educational activities while establishing meaningful personal relationships with members of the community; thereby deepening American Jews' connection to Israel while giving young Israelis a chance to connect to pluralistic Jewish communities outside of Israel.

Typically in Israel, high school graduates are required to enlist in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF); however, teens selected for the elite Shinshinim program receive special permission from the IDF to postpone their army service for one year, allowing them to volunteer in Diaspora communities.

In preparation for the Shinshinim's arrival to Pittsburgh in August, Shani Turel was recently hired by the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh as coordinator of the program. Shani grew up in Misgav, the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh's Partnership2Gether (P2G) region, in Har Chalutz, is fluent in Hebrew and came to Pittsburgh in 2005 through the Spirit of Israel delegation. She is trained as an educator and taught in a unique and multi-denominational Jewish kindergarten class in Tel Aviv.

"The Federation is honored to sponsor the Shinshinim program and to bring a little more of Israel to the Pittsburgh Jewish community. With our two amazing Shinshinim and Shani as the program coordinator, we anticipate that the program will have an incredible impact on the community's connection with Israel, which will ultimately impact on Jewish continuity," explained the Director of Israel and Overseas Operations at the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh Kim Salzman.

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Shani will supervise the two Shinshinim – Raz Levin and Hadar Maravent. Raz is from Rosh Ha'ayin, twenty minutes outside of Tel Aviv, and served as a "young ambassador" for the State of Israel, and Hadar is from Karmiel, another Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh P2G region, and is a Diller Teen Fellow alumni with a vast amount of experience as a counselor for her youth movement.

The Shinshinim were selected out of hundreds of candidates and bring a highly impressive resume of skills that should greatly increase the Pittsburgh community's engagement with Israel.

While in Pittsburgh, the Shinshinim will stay with local host families. By hosting a Shinshinim in their homes for an extended period of time, the families will develop a meaningful relationship with Israeli youth, creating a long-lasting impact on their connection to the State of Israel.

The two Shinshinim will offer their time to various agencies and synagogues throughout the community, but will focus their efforts at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh (JCC), Community Day School (CDS) and Joint Jewish Education Program (J-JEP) in Pittsburgh.

Raz and Hadar will work with students at the JCC to bring Israel-related activities and education to teens that participate in J Line, Diller Teen Fellows, The Second Floor and other programming areas. They will play a large role in planning the teen activities for the community-wide celebration, Yom Ha'aztmaut.

“Bringing two post-high school teens to our community is a tremendous opportunity to provide added value to the youth and teens around Israel education and engagement. Allowing students in our community to connect one-on-one with peers from Israel will help create an authentic relationship with Israel for our students,” Senior Director of Jewish Life at the JCC Chris Herman said.

The JCC isn't the only agency thrilled to welcome the teens into our Jewish community. J-JEP Religious School Director Liron Lipinsky is looking forward to introducing this Israeli connection to her students.

“J-JEP is thrilled and grateful for the opportunity of having Shinshinim as part of our educational framework. We look forward to the additional Israeli connections our students will form,” Lipinsky said.

J-JEP is a collaborative effort between Congregation Beth Shalom and Rodef Shalom Congregation, whose mission is to provide innovative, experiential learning that will inspire and prepare students to engage meaningfully in Jewish life.

As part of the Jewish Agency's flagship initiative, these young leaders come to their new communities abroad as passionate ambassadors who teach, inform and serve as role models for life in modern Israel. Community Day School Head of Lower School and Hebrew and Jewish Studies Tzippy Mazer is also excited to expand Israeli culture in the classroom and strengthen her students' connection to Israel.

“Empowering children to forge a meaningful lifelong connection to Israel is a vital part of our mission at Community Day School,” said Mazer. “We are thrilled to welcome Pittsburgh's

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Shinshinim to CDS to enrich our students' understanding of Israeli culture, history and government in a way that becomes more deeply personal and impactful."

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To learn more about the Shinshinim program, or if you are interested in hosting a Shinshin in your home, contact Shani Turel at [STurel@jfedpgh.org](mailto:STurel@jfedpgh.org) or 412-992-5231.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, one of 148 independent Federations associated with The Jewish Federations of North America, raises and allocates funds to build community locally, in Israel and around the world. With the vision of a thriving, vibrant and engaged Jewish community, the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh aims to carry out its work in the context of cooperation and inclusiveness. For more information, visit [www.jfedpgh.org](http://www.jfedpgh.org).

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