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Whether it’s terrorist attacks in Is-
rael, anti-Semitism in Europe or
other dramatic events affecting
Jewish communities around
the world, today’s reality of
nonstop media coverage with social media at the
forefront allows Jews to monitor the various glob-
al crises affecting their brethren.

But how can the Jewish people learn about the
beauties of the routine daily lives of their coreligion-
ists in their communities near and far, communities
with their own unique expressions of Jewish heritage
and customs, and be able to connect with them?

That was the question asked rhetorically by
Smadar Bar-Akiva, the executive director of JCC
Global, the Israel-based organization that is the
umbrella for more than 1,000 JCCs worldwide,
making it the largest global Jewish network.

Bar-Akiva and her staff thus decided that they
were going to explore ways in which global Jewish
communities could connect with one another. To
assist in their quest, last year JCC Global formed
the Amitim Fellows Global Leadership Network, an
initiative that brought together over 50 JCC staff-
ers from 11 countries for a weeklong conference in
Budapest to brainstorm on what projects could be
implemented to fulfill their goal.

By the end of the week, the representatives had
formed a total of seven viable collaborative project
ideas with the other JCCs aimed at helping Jewish
communities connect.

One of the project ideas that took off with a bang
was developed by the representatives of the JCCs in
Orange County, California; Mexico City; and Kfar
Yona, with all three communities expressing inter-
est in focusing on building an initiative revolving
around Jewish teens.

The project created was dubbed the JCC Global
Family Tree Project for teens and their families, and
was launched this past June when 75 teenagers aged
14 to 17 from each of the participating Jewish com-

An innovative program spearheaded by the JCC connects Mexican, Israeli and US communities while exploring their family trees
Kibrit de Snaiderman says that the event was a success, allowing the teens to interact with their peers from the other countries. She adds that through the family tree project, the teens had the chance “to study the roots of their ancestors and their customs.” But most importantly, “while some live in Mexico, some in the US and others in Israel, they learned how their three cultures merge, and that in reality they have so much in common, and already are speaking the same language [so to speak].”

Kibrit de Snaiderman says that the project was destined for success from the beginning when the Amitim group gathered in Budapest a year prior and the various communities were given the liberty to choose which communities they wanted to work with.

“This was a natural joint venture,” she says. “We found JCCs in common, and already are speaking in common, and already are speaking the same language [so to speak].”

Seventeen-year-old Elian Wigisser is a Mexico City native, who was part of the group. She says that the overall program was an “amazing learning experience.” She believes that “while everyone is different in that each group has their own unique culture, we have a lot in common within our religion of Judaism, which is our uniting factor.”

She says that she is still in touch with the friends she made, and “now I know if I’m in California or in Israel, I have connections there.”

Wigisser might have the opportunity to use those connections in the near future, as Bar-Akiva explains that while the Mexico City experience is in the past, the program is far from over. She says that the plan is for the groups to gather twice more – in Orange County in the summer of 2016, and then in Kfar Yona in the summer of 2017.

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She says that the heads from the three cities are already scheduled to meet when the 9th World Conference of JCC Global takes place in Jerusalem this week (November 3-6) to begin organizing next summer’s gathering.