

TIKKUN OLAM

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The buzz around urban beekeeping

BY JESSICA ELGOT

► LONDON'S JEWISH Community Centre is doing its bit to ensure a sweet new year with a campaign to promote urban Jewish beekeeping.

Community members are being encouraged to run their own hives to combat a dramatic decline in honey bee populations.

JCC's social action coordinator Solomon Slade launched the "Bee The Change" initiative, through which the centre is facilitating the training of two urban beekeepers, and getting synagogue and other groups involved in beekeeping. It is also hoped to have a hive in the new JCC premises in Finchley Road in 2013.

Deena Kestenbaum is one of the JCC's beekeeping trainees at City Farm, Kings Cross. The course is funded by the Mayor of London's Capital Bee project. Ms Kestenbaum will be studying for a year, learning about the anatomy of a bee colony and how the hive communicates.

"I have always been fascinated by the bee world," she said. "But it's not like chickens where all you need is some space and some grain. I'm so grateful this opportunity came up."

Alison Benjamin, who runs the course with Brian McCallum, said: "It's really important to start keeping bees



JCC beekeeping volunteer Deena Kestenbaum monitors her hive at the honey harvest at City Farm in Kings Cross

in cities, there's more of a diversity of flowers and plants. You can taste that in the honey. In the country, there are fields and fields of the same crop. In a city it's warmer and more sheltered.

"Bees can also be great for community cohesion. Some schools in south-east London have used beekeeping as a way of keeping kids calm because you have to be very careful and thoughtful when dealing with bees."

THE PLIGHT OF THE HONEYBEES

► THE decline of honey bees is a global phenomenon.

In 2008, the British Beekeepers Association reported that the bee

population in the United Kingdom had dropped by around 30 per cent between 2007 and 2008.

Scientists are baffled about why the

honey bee seems to be in terminal decline. Possible reasons include parasites, insecticides, loss of flowering plants and pollution.

Ms Kestenbaum will receive her own colony at the end of the course, and will be in charge of training future beekeepers, along with the JCC's other trainee, Sue Gessler.

Rabbi Eiran Davies began keeping bees a few months ago, and has funding for five hives which he intends to allocate to interested community members.

"I just read a book, and bought a nucleus of 10,000 bees from a guy in Stamford Hill," he explained. "I like to jump head first into challenges. It might be a bit naive but I wanted to take a risk. I would encourage anyone to have a go."

Mr Slade has been delighted at the enthusiasm for the cause. "What I like is that it's a grassroots project, rooted in Jewish values. There will be many sustainability features [in the new JCC] and I hope it will accommodate our hive."

New North London Synagogue also has plans for a hive of its own. "We think it's a great way to bring people together and teach important lessons around sustainability that are rooted in our faith," said executive director Claire Mandel.

A JCC "Honey to the Bee" education event is being held on Sunday from 2-4.30pm at Kentish Town City Farm. More details from Solomon Slade at JCC

