



## Shanghai's Aussie Connection



**Carole Sterling, chair of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, recently visited China and was updated on the dynamic activities of Kehillat Beijing and Kehilat Shanghai. The latter, in particular, shares strong bonds with Australia. PETER KOHN caught up with Carole at the recent UPJ conference in Perth.**

On her way to the Union for Progressive Judaism (UPJ) conference in Perth, Carole Sterling, chair of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), was able to visit comprehensively with Kehilat Shanghai, the dynamic Progressive congregation of China's mega-metropolis. This is of special interest to us here at TBI, as our congregation is "twinning" with Kehilat Shanghai.

And Carole met with congregants and leaders at Kehillat Beijing, the rapidly growing Progressive congregation in Beijing. These Jewish communities are developing strongly, as are Progressive Jewish communities in Japan and in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation.

During her visit to Shanghai, Carole met with Arie Schreier, Kehilat Shanghai's president, who updated the WUPJ chair on the latest developments at Shanghai's Progressive congregation, which is thriving alongside a Chabad and a Sephardi congregation.

Kehilat Shanghai, an affiliate of the UPJ and WUPJ, has congregants from all walks of life -- singles, families, interfaith couples, seasoned entrepreneurs, executives, young professionals, teachers, students, artists, and Jewish travellers and tourists looking for somewhere to share Shabbat or High Holy Days. The congregation continues Shanghai's link with Jews dating back to Russian and Iraqi arrivals in the 19th and early 20th century and the World War II refugee community.

Chatting with me at the UPJ conference, Carole said Kehillat Beijing expressed its concerns to her about leadership succession but she is confident that both the UPJ and the WUPJ can provide support and assistance to the Progressive synagogue of China's capital.

In Shanghai, Carole had dinner with the Board of Governance of Kehilat Shanghai and sounded out some of their priorities, aspirations -- and also concerns, which include leadership development, she noted.

Carole said she was interested to see the high proportion of Israelis involved with Kehilat Shanghai.

In fact, president Arie Schreier is an Israeli who grew up in a Reform congregation in Netanya, and was part of the Reform youth movement in Israel (Telem Noar).

In 1982, Arie was hosted by a Reform congregation in San Diego, California, on the Eisendrath International Exchange, a program run by the North American Federation of Temple Youth and the Union for Reform Judaism in the US. (In 2014 Rabbi Jonathan Stein who served as the Rabbi of the same congregation in San Diego, came to lead the High Holy Days services in Kehilat Shanghai).

Between 1997-1999, while living and working in Beijing, Arie was an active member of Kehillat Beijing. In later years, when he moved to Shanghai and started a family, Judaism became very important for him in raising his family. "He took his experiences as a youth leader in the Reform movement forward into his present-day role with Kehilat Shanghai," said Carole.

Arie is an accomplished Israeli-born businessman who holds masters degrees in Entrepreneurship and Innovation from Swinburne University in Melbourne, and in Public Administration from Tel Aviv University, as well as a BA in Political Science and International Relations from Tel Aviv University.

Carole was particularly impressed by the level of cooperation between Shanghai's Jewish community organisations of various ideologies. "It was very apparent there, and it isn't always clear in other communities -- this relationship between the congregation and community on one hand and the Limmud program, Moishe House (a nondenominational community for Young Jewish Professionals in Shanghai), and Chabad.

"There's much more interdependence because there needs to be, as the numbers are much smaller and also the unique and complex status of Judaism in China," she said.

"In certain ways they cooperate, and I've seen this in other countries and in other regions that I've visited -- such as in the Former Soviet Union, specifically in Belarus and Minsk. The Progressive rabbis have a wonderful relationship with Chabad there, and they get supplies such as challah and matzah from them."

Kehilat Shanghai in a way is helping out with some sensitive issues that its Orthodox neighbours have, in areas such as intermarriage and the status of children from intermarriage, said Carole. Kehilat Shanghai provides a place for these families to go so they do not need to feel uncomfortable at the Orthodox communities.

Carole and the Kehilat Shanghai board discussed ways in which the WUPJ and UPJ can help them as part of WUPJ's and UPJ's goals of developing Progressive congregations in the Asia-Pacific region.

Rabbi Fred Morgan, the UPJ Movement Rabbi, visited Kehilat Shanghai over Pesach in 2016, with 170 people in attendance at the event. Rabbi Morgan held numerous meetings with individuals and groups within the congregation and met with service leaders to talk about how they would like their services to work. He also led a highly successful session with the Kehilat Shanghai cheder (school) and spoke at Moishe House.

Shira Appelboom and Josh McCarroll from Netzer were recently at Kehilat Shanghai, assisting with the running of Limmud Shanghai.

"By taking part in Limmud, Joel and I learnt so much about the youth and the Jewish community," said Shira. "We had a great time getting to know the kids. They are extremely intelligent, outgoing and responsive, and they participated very well in the activities that we ran.

"All in all, it was very successful and we would like to thank you, Arie, for coordinating and pioneering this amazing opportunity. It also would not have been possible without Alyshea and the other Kehilat Shanghai members who helped with all our logistics and helping us plan before our arrival. A special thank you to Sam Moshinsky, without whom this trip would not have taken place. And Roger Mendelson, who encouraged this initiative and promoted the idea amongst the UPJ."

Rabbi David Wolfman, a US rabbi formerly of the URJ, now works as a synagogue consultant, and recently led a family retreat for Kehilat Shanghai. "What the congregants really liked was that their spouses, partners and children were able to join in and connect," Carole was told.

A characteristic of the two congregations in China is that their largely Western membership is long-term but not permanent, with an average residency in China of two-to-five years. Also, while in China, people travel a lot within the country, so "it can be three Shabbatot before they see the same people again", explained Carole.

"Twinning is a big priority for the World Union," she said. "It's about comparing best practices. It's about building relationships and community and sharing. It worked well in Former Soviet Union countries and now there's an opportunity to extend it to the Asia-Pacific region. It's really a two-way relationship."

*Peter Kohn is a TBI congregant whose family lived in Shanghai during World War II. He has written two novels that deal with this critical time and place in 20th century Jewish history.*