



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Community Service”**

**by Alicia Blum**

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Community service is an important part of the City Congregation Bat and Bar Mitzvah program. This was pretty easy for me - I love doing community service! It feels good to help the neighborhood and world! And I am fortunate to go to a school where community service is part of the curriculum.

I have really done a lot of things, but let me describe two of my important projects:

One project I really enjoyed was helping little kids in a program called Head Start. Head Start is a government program designed to help children from birth to age five, who come from families with incomes below or at the poverty level. The goal of Head Start is to help these children become ready for kindergarten, and also to provide needed requirements like health care and food support. President Lyndon Johnson approved Head Start in 1965 as part of his War on Poverty.

For our project, my classmates and I went to a pre-school that was a few blocks away from my school, Friends Seminary. We played with the kids there, who were about three to four years old. When I went to Headstart, one little girl singled me out as her “big sister”. She was really sweet and nice. Her name was Odelia. She loved to have books read to her. I found myself reading a lot about the Disney Princesses!! Especially Sleeping Beauty! ☺ I hope that I made a difference to Odelia and that I was a good role model. I hope that I and the Headstart program have helped her in school.

I also enjoy doing community service in my neighborhood - every little thing helps make the city a better place! Just last spring, my schoolmates and I learned about a program called Safe Haven for a project that we did in our Health and Wellness class.

What’s Safe Haven? It’s a community program to help protect our children on the streets. Merchants and residential buildings join the program and are asked to put a decal on their doors or windows that says SAFE HAVEN in black letters on bright yellow background. This decal means they have agreed to let a child who is in trouble - maybe being followed or threatened - come and get assistance. This can be as simple as allowing the child to wait a few minutes until the danger is past, or making a call home or to the police. Many public and private schools are promoting the Safe Haven program, teaching their students what the Safe Haven sticker means and how it can help a child in danger.

As part of my class assignment, I asked a store near our house to be a Safe Haven. I asked our local butcher, Mr. Simchick, to be a local Safe Haven. I explained to him what a Safe Haven was and why it was so important for the neighborhood. Luckily he knew me already and he has twin daughters my age, so it was a bit easier than I thought it would be. He agreed to put the Safe Haven yellow sticker right on the glass window next to the door. So now if you ever pass Simchick Meats or see the sign in a store window, you will know what it means.

Getting involved in the community is a lot of fun. Of all of my community service projects, I particularly enjoyed the Safe Haven project. I really feel that I have made a difference to my neighborhood. Whenever I pass Mr. Simchik's store and see the Safe Haven sign on the door, I know that I was responsible for making this program happen. If your school is involved with Safe Haven, I recommend you get involved so you can have a Safe Haven in your neighborhood.

Another important part of the program for a City Congregation Bar or Bat Mitzvah is to donate a portion of their gifts to a worthy cause. I am donating a portion of my gift money to the Haiti Relief program of the JDC - the American Joint Distribution Committee. Working with its partners on the ground, the money JDC raised was used to provide emergency medical care, food, water and mattresses. In the future, the money will be used to rebuild Haiti. I am proud to contribute to this amazing effort.