



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Community Service”  
by Abigail Cheskis  
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For my bat mitzvah I have done many community service activities. The main activity I did was making blankets out of fleece for children at a shelter run by Westhab. Westhab was founded in 1981 with the purpose of providing homes to homeless people in Westchester County. By now they have moved 4,000 families into permanent homes. This activity falls under the category, Tikkun Olam, which means bettering the world. In all I made thirty-three blankets. The process of making these blankets involves no sewing.



In order to make a blanket you cut two pieces of fleece, one that has a design and one that is a plain color, you lay the pieces on top of each other and you cut slits on all of the sides. Next you tie the fringes, like you were about to tie your shoe, but you don't make a bow, you make a knot. After you tie all of the sides, you're done! It really isn't a lot of work to make one blanket, but when you're making a lot of blankets it takes many, many, hours. I worked on the blankets while watching TV, listening to music, and talking to my family.

When I got to Westhab I hosted a little ice cream party. There were four different flavors of ice cream, toppings, whip cream, and chocolate sauce. The children at the shelter really enjoyed the sundaes. Next I laid out the blankets and the kids came up and chose a blanket. It was a little bit chaotic, but a lot of fun. All of the children loved the blankets. They said they were warm and soft, and they put the blankets around them like capes! It was adorable and it made me feel like I really made these kids' lives happier! I was very inspired by this trip to Westhab, so I have decided that some time in the spring I will go to the shelter again and teach the children how to make the blankets. I am going to volunteer there on Tuesday afternoons to help teach knitting, too. Because of the happiness that the kids felt from the blankets they got I decided to give 13% of the money I get for my Bat Mitzvah to Westhab.

Another important community service project I did involved the tsunami of 2005. I was on vacation when I heard about the tsunami and as soon as I got home my friend and I came up with the idea to have a Tsunami Sale. We bought a lot of little things from a party store and we baked a cake or two, some brownies, and some cupcakes. My friend, being part Greek, baked a pastry called Baklava. In all, the Tsunami Sale raised three hundred dollars and we gave the money to the American Red Cross. I would definitely do a sale like this again. The sale was a fun experience and it helped people on the other side of the world. I also learned that no matter how young or small you are, you can still contribute to big things.

At that time I was doing a lot of knitting and I would occasionally bring my knitting in to school to knit during indoor recess. My teacher really liked my knitting and thought it would be an interesting idea to use knitting for a project to help the people who were affected by the tsunami. The class could knit an afghan and then raffle it off. Most people had to be taught how to knit. I taught many people and so did my teacher. The knitting craze caught on in the other classes and the students in those classes wanted to knit part of the afghan also. Each person knit one or more squares and one of the moms volunteered to crochet the squares together. In the end we sold many raffle tickets, and I was very lucky to be the one to pick the winning ticket out of the box. Someone from my grade won the afghan. We raised a little over a thousand dollars and donated it to an organization called USINDO (United States Indonesia Organization). The money we gave to USINDO was to be used to rebuild a school. This project falls under the category of Talmud Torah which means teaching and learning. From doing this project people in Indonesia get to have a school where they can learn and play, people from my grade have learned a new skill that they can use in their free time, and someone got a warm, cozy blanket. This project made me feel like I had done a big thing in the world and that, if I really try I can help change the world.

In 2006 I went on the AIDS walk with a group from the City Congregation. This falls under the category of Tikkun Olam. I also worked in the congregation office a couple of times and did some congregation office work from home.

All of my community service activities were definitely worthwhile and I don't regret doing any of them. Helping other people, teaching other people and doing any type of community service has always been something I have fun with, enjoy, and feel like it's the right thing to do.