



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Community Service”**

**by Ben Farber**

**May 12, 2007**

Part of the preparation for my bar mitzvah involved putting my values into action by doing community service. Recently, in school, I helped a few of my friends start a project to help build a school in Cambodia. Cambodia is a country in southeast Asia where 40% of the population is below the poverty line. In the U.S., 12% of our population is below the poverty line.

We are working with an organization called American Assistance for Cambodia, which was founded by an American journalist named Bernie Krisher in 1993. I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Krisher when he came to my school recently. He is a very interesting man who has done a lot in his life and would be a great third role model.

The Rural Schools Project has built more than 300 schools in Cambodia since 1999. We need to raise \$13,000 to build the school. \$10,000 goes to the building of the school, which has 3-6 classrooms, and \$3,000 is for supplies. The funds are matched by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. The schools are built on land donated by the villages. The school that we will help build will be called the Bank Street School of Cambodia.

I have been really involved in this community service project and I plan to continue it. We held a bake sale in March at our school science fair. In one day alone, we raised over \$1200. I really liked all the parts of it: baking, selling, counting the money, and working on a project with my friends. There is a tzedakah, or donations, box for this project here today, on the table with the guest book, and my friends and I would greatly appreciate it if you would help us. Fifteen percent of any gift money I receive for my bar mitzvah will also go into this fund.

As I mentioned earlier, Mom, Cynthia and I give money to Heifer International every year. Heifer is an organization that gives animals to people in different parts of the world who need them to survive.

Both of these community service projects are examples of the highest form of giving, according to the Jewish scholar, Maimonides, who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. He said that there are eight ways of giving, and there is a hierarchy among them. The one at the top is helping someone become self-sufficient so that they are no longer poor. Building a school and giving to Heifer are ways to do that. When you build a school, people can become educated and therefore have a greater change of getting well-paying jobs. As for giving animals, after the animal is donated it continues to produce milk, eggs, and babies that can be sold, so the family has a steady income from it.

Another community service experience that I had was on Christmas Day 2006. Mom, Cynthia and I went to volunteer at Goddard-Riverside, which is an organization on the Upper West Side that gives people without a lot of money a place to come and have Thanksgiving and Christmas meals. I liked going around and serving people their food. They all seemed very happy and satisfied with their meal, and they were nice to me.

I also did a community service project through the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y called “Sports on the Go”. The program involved going to a public school, Beacon Elementary on 96<sup>th</sup> Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, to play after school sports with the kids. I participated in Sports on the Go for two hours, once a week for 8 weeks during the spring of 2006. I wanted to do something that involved sports because I like sports. Sports on the Go is a community service because it gives the kids in an under-funded school a chance to play sports with their friends and with people they can look up to. Otherwise they would not have an after-school sports program. For the first hour, we would play with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, and for the next hour, we would play with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Since I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, some of the kids were almost as old as I was. Also the other volunteers were all older than me.

Even though I liked helping the kids, there were things about Sports on the Go that I didn’t like so much. I was very shy and quiet, and saw some of the older volunteers behave negatively. Some of them made fun of the little kids behind their back. They also made remarks about not liking having to do volunteer work, and they just talked to the other volunteers, and did not interact with the kids much. The adults supervising the program also did not seem that enthusiastic.

I think it is better to do community service that you care about because it is more fun for the volunteer and for the people you are helping. If you enjoy the community service work that you are doing, then you are more motivated and more productive.

I have done some other social action activities, like going on the AIDS Walk, the walk to raise money to fight breast cancer, and some anti-war marches. I prefer activities where you are actually **doing** something instead of just walking.

From doing this community service work I have found that it is great to give your time doing things for people who need it, because it makes you feel really good. Also, if you are going to do community service, pick something that you know you are going to like, because you will have a good time.