



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

**“Community Service”
by Gabe Zimmerman
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As part of my Bar Mitzvah I had to perform a number of hours of community service. I think that performing community service interlocks with this Bar Mitzvah because this Bar Mitzvah focuses on learning about yourself and your connection to the world. Also it reminds me that one of the basic tenets of secular Judaism is social action.

For my first community service activity, I organized and participated in a fundraiser for Free Wheel Mission. This organization builds and sends wheelchairs to poor disabled people around the world. I first learned about this from my friend Sam Gelda and his mother, Irene. After hearing about the organization Sam, Kyra, and I decided we'd take further “steps” to raise money to help Free Wheelchair Mission. The organization was founded by a man named Emanuel who as born in Ghana with one leg who had to overcome discrimination from every one around him in his town in Ghana where disabled people are “put out to pasture” to die. To improve the situation of the disabled, Emanuel bicycled across Ghana with one leg and has since competed in sporting events including triathlons for the disabled.

To help him raise money to build wheelchairs, Sam, Kyra and I decided we would ask people to “wheel” around Prospect Park and get sponsors to contribute money that would be donated to Free Wheel Chair mission. We got a permit from the NYC Parks Dept., made flyers and distributed them to friends and family.

The event was scheduled for May 18, 2007. On that day, friends showed up to “wheel” around the park. Some of my friends were on bicycles; some on scooters and one person was on roller blades. We were just beginning and all was going well, when one kid fell off his bicycle and wasn't wearing a helmet. He hit his head. He was not injured badly but was a little shaken up. My sister and her then “8th grade” friends went all the way around the park. Some on bicycles, but Kyra jogged the whole way around without stopping, over three miles!

In total, the event raised over \$1000.00, enough to build 20 wheelchairs. I learned a lot from this experience. For some of my friends it was the first fundraising event that they participated in. I am proud that I was able to teach them about the importance of doing community service and about the Free Wheel Chair mission in particular. In some ways helping my friends learn about participating in social action is even more important to me than the money raised. Also this is the first event that I organized, although I participated in others like the Aids Walk and Kyra and Liana's dance for Hurricane Katrina. Organizing my event was hard work and time consuming but after it was done its worth it.

My next community service activity also involved physical activity. Spurred on by our fearless and skilled navigator, Tanny Sasson, my family and he and his son David did 38 miles of the 5-boro bicycle tour to help raise money for Shoe4Africa, and A Running Start. These are two organizations that raise money for teens in Africa. Both aim to help teens combine learning with sports. I wanted to donate to these organizations because they help many people who have potential as Olympic stars as well as help them get educated. I think that sports and education work together, each helps a person with the other. I especially like A Running Start's program of matching college aged students with American universities. It makes me proud to know that the money I raised will help those less fortunate than I am.

This summer I had a great experience participating in a leadership program at Stanford University. Among the activities I did there was to work at a food bank turning several 50 lbs bags of beans into smaller bags. We made 1,238 1lb bags of beans, a record for that food bank!! My friends and I were glad to help out and had fun too.

My most recent community service activity was to donate a day of time to Publicolor. Publicolor is an organization I learned about from my camp counselors Jeremiah, Chris and Bridgette. The organization teaches disadvantaged teens the skill of painting, and provides them with literacy skills. Publicolor's painting mission improves unsightly community spaces like schools, senior centers and Ys. My mother, sister, our friend Giaco, and I spent a Saturday painting a middle school in the Bronx. It was a great experience because I got to spend time painting and helping a school community.

Even my bar mitzvah "favor" became part of my community service. We ordered your "favors" from a company called REBUILD REOURCES that assists those recovering from substance abuse addiction with both counseling services and job skills.

Overall I was glad I could help out so many different organizations in so many ways. Doing all this community service can be physically and mentally gratifying. From painting a school to helping disabled people in Africa get wheelchairs, they were rewarding for me and I hope it was rewarding for my friends and family that assisted me.

Finally, I will contribute 10 % of the gifts from my Bar Mitzvah to Doctors Without Borders. Doctors Without Borders is an organization that gives money to ensure medical care in areas that don't have access to it. This is important because I would not want a friend, relative or even a stranger to die because of an illness, which with proper medical attention, could be treated.