



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Community Service”  
by Sophie Silverstein  
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When thinking about community service, I found myself interested in three causes -- people, animals, and the environment. I felt that if I contributed to each of these fields, I would learn about three diverse topics and feel good about doing my part.

I originally hoped to help out at the ASPCA and delivers meals to AIDS patients for God’s Love We Deliver, but these, along with other organizations, have an age limit for volunteers, even with a parent present. So we were at a bit of a loss.

Eventually, my mom found a place where I could help: the Village Temple soup kitchen. This falls under the category of tikkun olam -- bettering the world. Volunteers help prepare food, dicing vegetables for soup, taking bread out of bags, cutting up day-old cakes. When we went there for the first (and last) time, I didn’t know what I was in for. There were a lot of high school students who were rather indifferent about the whole thing, going through the motions, which made me uncomfortable. I ended up preparing sandwiches and cutting up potatoes for soup.

At first I tried to comfort myself by saying, “Yes, this is not the best, but at least I will be helping people.” I was disappointed that I could not directly serve the people I was helping, but I knew that was a safety issue. So I decided to find a place that was more hands-on.

We soon discovered the Brooklyn Animal Rescue Coalition, or BARC, in Williamsburg. BARC is a no-kill shelter where volunteers walk dogs and play with cats. This falls under the category of tza-ar ba-alei chai-yim, or concern for the suffering of animals. I knew it would feel more rewarding because I’d be handling animals directly.

But then I read the rules-- “No person under the age of 18 is permitted to walk the dogs.” It did not look promising. But my mom, sister, and I got to walk two small dogs, one of which was almost blind, for about an hour and a half. I eventually got used to helping him navigate his way through the streets as we walked around Williamsburg, a cool and laid-back place. After we dropped off our first two dogs, we felt good about BARC. I knew I would spend more time there.

The next day, I went with my dad. We got two dogs that were big and strong. We were getting pulled everywhere and were pretty tired when we got back to the shelter. These dogs opened my eyes to the reasons why some dogs get put in shelters in the first place, as I my dad I discussed while we walked them. The next two dogs were smaller and gentler, so that walk was not as tiring.

The last time I went to BARC, I went with several others. The first dogs we walked were quite big and definitely a handful. We also petted and played with cats in the loft. This was especially fun because I was doing it with a friend.

Many of you know that I used to be deathly afraid of dogs. So helping out at BARC was more than me giving my time and help to animals -- I also gave something to myself, making up for all the years I was afraid of them.

Next, I helped a non-profit my mom is involved with called Chemo Comfort. This also falls under *tikkun olam*, bettering the world. This organization was founded by a neighbor, Anne Marie, who was treated twice for breast cancer and decided to share her tips on what helped her get through the difficulties facing those starting chemotherapy. Chemo Comfort donates care packages to first-time, low-income chemotherapy patients, containing items like ginger candy for nausea, sleeping caps for bald heads, and special mouthwash to prevent thrush. I helped label, stuff, and mail about 2,500 envelopes as part of Chemo Comfort's fundraising effort. I admire the fact that Anne Marie began this effort to help people through a dreaded and frightening experience, especially since I know that my mother lost her mother and father and her beloved Aunt Marilyn to cancer.

My last activity was to help plant flowers in my neighborhood. This type of community service falls under the category of *shmirat ha-adama*, guarding the earth. This is an annual event created and run by our neighbors. We plant fresh flowers in all the tree beds on our street. This is not necessarily saving the world, but it makes the neighborhood look nicer, helps neighbors be good neighbors, and helps me transition into spring quite nicely.

These last two activities I did are good examples of charity starting at home. I know I cannot save the planet overnight, or by myself, but doing something as small as planting flowers or stuffing envelopes can make a difference. But BARC was my favorite activity. I had the most fun walking the dogs and playing with cats, feeling that I was helping add some fun to their lives, and I learned about no-kill shelters and reasons that pets are abandoned. Going to BARC opened my eyes the most to its cause of helping animals.

It is a tradition for a Bat and Bar Mitzvah to donate a portion of their gift money to a charity as a way of supporting bigger causes that are difficult to be a part of directly. I have decided to donate to *two* charities. The first is Greenpeace, the well-known environmental activist campaign that tries to stop nuclear testing and commercial whaling and promotes the protection of Antarctica. Greenpeace advocates work the streets asking people to sign up and donate. While normally I try not to get stopped on the street, I was intrigued by what the advocate told me. I find Greenpeace a worthwhile cause and will therefore give them a portion of my gift money.

The second organization I will donate to is the VH1 Save the Music Foundation, which tries to help schools around the country implement music education programs. This appeals to me as a performer, as I value my own musical education. I am fortunate enough to receive training outside of school, but many children cannot afford it. So I want to help VH1 in their quest to help kids everywhere learn music.