



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Community Service”

by Yana Lyandres

November 14, 2009

Community service is something everyone should do. Helping your community is a nice way to give back, in return for all that your community has done for you. For my bat mitzvah, I had to do thirteen hours of community service. It seemed like it would be a difficult task, but I was up for it.

At first, it was quite a challenge to find something that I could do. I wanted to help out at an animal shelter, but I was too young. Then, I wanted to assist disabled children at a summer program, but that was too far away for my parents to drive.

My first community service activity was helping teachers obtain books for poor schools in New York City. This falls under the category of Talmud Torah, or Teaching and Learning. The organization is called Project Cicero, named in honor of the Roman philosopher Marcus Cicero, who created extensive libraries in the first century. Project Cicero is an annual children’s book drive. It’s important because some schools don’t have enough resources to buy new books every year and they need help providing kids with a greater selection. My parents and I collected books, organized them, and sorted them for this great organization.

Another organization where I helped is called The Friendship Circle. The goal of the organization is to help special needs kids feel happy around the Jewish holidays and for them to interact with other kids. This falls under the category of visiting the sick, or Bikkur Holim. I was helping a special needs boy by playing with him and I found that experience to be very valuable. These kids don’t have enough interaction with other children, and when they do, I think it makes them feel safer.

My next community service was volunteering with the organization Dorot. The goal of Dorot is to support elderly people in various ways. This community service activity is also called Bikkur Holim, or visiting the sick. My mom and two of the girls from the City Congregation brought a Passover package to an elderly woman. We spent some time together sharing stories and getting to know each other.

This Rosh Hashana I visited another person through Dorot. I brought a Rosh Hashana package this time, and talked with a middle-aged woman. I learned a lot from her. She told me she got Polio when she was five years old and as a result, was disabled from childhood. I felt really bad for this very nice woman, but she had a fulfilling life despite her illness. She was married twice and had two children. She also has a few grandchildren. She had a good job and a loving family. Even though it’s not easy for her to get around she tries to go out and have fun. This woman taught me that no obstacle is too big to overcome.

“Adopt-A-Bubbe”, or “Adopt-A-Grandparent” which is run by Bergen County Jewish Family Center, is another charity I participated with. The object of the organization is for children my age to provide weekly telephone calls to home bound elderly people. That way they don’t feel as lonely. It was a lot of fun because I got to know a little more about the outside world and how all people are very similar, no matter what age.

I think my community service was a rewarding experience because I got to help people of all ages in a variety of different ways. I know these were small contributions, but each one does make a difference. Also, in the spirit of Tzedakah, I will donate a portion of my bat mitzvah money to PETA, an organization that helps prevent cruelty to animals.

I’d like to continue participating with the Adopt-A-Bubbe program after my bat mitzvah as well. It feels good to help out elderly people and I learned a lot about life! It’s also something I can do straight from home, without my parents having to drive me anywhere. All in all, it was nice to discover the many ways I can assist my community.