

My Rewarding Baltimore Experience  
By: Harrison Singer

Every time I go on a J-Teen Leadership community service trip, I return home with new friends and a plethora of stories to tell; this held true for the Baltimore trip in which I am beyond thankful to have been a part of.

Leading up to our Veteran's Day weekend trip to Baltimore, I can truthfully say that I had fears: for one, I had accepted the offer to co-chair the trip, something I had never done before. Knowing that I would be in a position to lead a rather large group of teenagers had me feeling slightly anxious. In addition, after glancing at the names on the trip list, I realized that a vast majority of the teens attending the trip were younger than I was. With that said, I could not help but fear that I would have trouble bonding with my fellow trip members as I so often do on J-Teen Leadership trips.

After a noticeably quiet early-morning bus ride, we arrived at Paul's Place, where we would hear Ms. Dolly's captivating story about her troubled past. Listening to Ms. Dolly speak really gave me a fantastic insight as to what exactly Paul's Place can do for people and how truly wonderful the people there are. After a rewarding experience at Paul's Place, our group headed to Living Classroom, where we sorted through goods and school supplies before meeting over sixty young children.

Simply put, Living Classroom was the highlight of my trip, as we brightened the day for many kids by playing basketball, dodgeball and jump rope with them. For me, our group's experience at Living Classroom was the first time we bonded on a personal level, as playing sports with others often does. Nevertheless, I found it remarkable that come Friday afternoon, any fear that I had in not making new friends had vanished, and all told, seeing a happy look on each child's face at Living Classroom was something I will never forget.

It did not take long for me to be reminded about how special our group truly was, for Friday night was a fantastic Shabbat experience. Between a beautiful Shabbat dinner, an entertaining saxophone performance and a wonderful group conversation, I can certainly say that my week was brought to an end in the most memorable way possible.

After a long day on Friday, we all woke up (some earlier than others) to a delicious breakfast in the hotel lobby followed by a unique, but enjoyable, Shabbat-morning service. Playing fun games and discussing interesting things only made our group closer, and I am thankful for that. Following two riveting speakers, I had a wonderful lunch at the Inner Harbor, and later prepared for the Matisiyahu concert.

Even though I was not too familiar with Matisiyahu's music, the concert on Saturday night was most definitely a fantastic time. Although a large portion of the group got tired, forcing us to head back to the hotel, seeing my tweet on the big screen, making care packages for children's hospitals and drinking out of my awesome glow-in-the-dark cup were all made the concert an amazing experience.

Sunday was our final day, but we sure made the most of it. It might have been tough to miss out on the ongoing football games, but doing gardening work with Eliza was something I do not get to do too often. Anytime I take advantage of an opportunity to help others, I feel good about myself, but when it is the opportunity is through something I have never done before, the feeling is even better, as my love of trying new things is strong. In retrospect, that is exactly what our group's gardening experience provided me with, and I truly am eternally grateful. All told, when I think back on my gardening experience *and* our group's tour of Johns Hopkins University earlier that day, I can confidently say that Sunday was a marvelous day. After a long bus ride home delayed by an ample amount of traffic, our Baltimore trip had come to an end.

When I look back on my experience, I can absolutely call it a very rewarding one. While I have always been rather comfortable with public speaking, my leadership on position on the trip provided me with opportunities to hone my public speaking skills. Once again, I am thankful for yet another experience in which J-Teen has provided me with, as like always, I returned home with new friends and new stories to tell.

It important that I thank Josh and Diana from Repair the World; without them, our wonderful trip would not have been what it was. I would also like to thank Guy and Aviva for the work they put in towards making the trip great; without their guidance, I know that I would not be able to display the leadership skills I did.