

Jacob Fortinsky

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### **J-Teen Rockaway Trip Reflection**

This past weekend was one of the most moving experiences I've had in a while. I feel as though not only did I help others over the course of the two days, but also I came out a better and more aware person.

When Hurricane Sandy struck my town last year minimal damage was done. Sure I lost power for a couple weeks, but never did I feel in danger, or as though life had changed. I also felt the same way for the people around me—that their life was just as fine after the storm as it was before. I didn't know anyone who had his or her life altered by Sandy. The most damage that Sandy had on my life up until this weekend was the week of school it got me out of.

I heard about people losing their homes to the storm, but to me those were only statistics—nothing personal. This J-Teen trip changed that.

We started building and repairing homes soon after we arrived on the Rockaway Peninsula and it all looked kind of how I expected it to look. It looked mostly cleaned up and I kept asking myself "Why do they need help a year after the storm?" But when we went into the homes I saw why. None of the homes had any infrastructure and they were just as damaged now as when the storm hit. And since there are not enough resources and money to repair that, all the time in the world won't heal their homes, and they will keep deteriorating. I was deeply moved by the amount of people that needed help from us, and made me feel that each of us had a

big impact on individuals' lives. I felt that every second spent painting walls and getting myself dirty directly helped someone's life.

This feeling only grew when we heard the personal stories of the people whom we were helping. The family who owned the house I was working on, almost lost their mother in the storm, and I felt empowered to know that I was working on her house.

In general I think many Jewish kids from Westchester feel as though they can only receive and very seldom give. But I think this weekend proved that wrong to 40 of us. We were able to give both our time and money to those who desperately needed it, and were able to see the impact we had on others.