

Philadelphia Elliot Efrat

As a student who goes to Schechter Westchester, I always hear about J-Teen and service trips that it offers. Up until my Junior year, I turned away from the opportunities it offered and thought that my regular monthly food pantry visits were sufficient. After going on the Philadelphia trip, I realized that all this time I was wrong. I was wrong to think that community service was simply an objective at my school and a number of hours on a form. The food pantry didn't mean anything to me. I moved food and placed cans in brown bags. I didn't even get to see the impact of my work or the families I was working for. Philadelphia was different. I got to work for and present myself to a city that needed my help. I got to walk the streets of those in need and learn about the service I was fulfilling. Philadelphia was not the ordinary form of community service, rather it was a meaningful form of lending a hand to those in need.

When I thought about the city of Philadelphia, I thought about its universities, sports teams, and action. I was never able to connect to the city, especially being a New Yorker and rival of the sports teams there. J-Teen proved to me that there was an aspect of the city that I could instantly connect with, and that was the Jewishness at the University of Pennsylvania. This set the tone for the trip and gave me incentive to get to work. As I learned about the history of the city and the people who need help there, my concrete ideas expanded into more in depth thoughts about my impact there. I was a kid who connected to a city and was now ready to help in any way shape or form. While walking through Phili, the murals that cover the city left me with a smile on my face. All these experiences lead me to believe that I had never understood Philadelphia until I got to visit and view it with my own eyes. As opposed to the more vague and intangible work at my food pantry, Phili became more of a realistic service and in a way effortless. While working, in the back of my mind, I knew the causes I was working for, who I was working for, and the exact outcome my work could produce. I knew where the organized clothes in the warehouse were going, who was receiving the food that I helped box, and the children that could attend a colorful and clean school. Phili allowed me to get a hands-on-experience that showed me what true community service means.

Before Phili, community service was a greedy desire of mine that meant absolutely nothing other than a pass on a report card. After Phili, I learned that it is in fact extremely helpful and that it is a dream come true for many people that we share this world with. For people with low-income

rates and little food to bring home, my service can have a huge impact. J-Teen taught me that community service was not for me, rather it was for the common good of other people. I got to work in a meaningful and fun environment around friends and other people who were there for the same reason. I was able to put my fortune into perspective and share it with others who are not as fortunate as I am. I am extremely lucky to be in my position, and Phili made me share my happiness with others who were in need of it. This trip was an experience of a lifetime, taught me many lessons that I can apply to my everyday life, and changed my perception of community