

# J\*teen went to Brooklyn!

By Ben Claar



Cartoon by Ben Claar

**Brooklyn J-Teen Trip In Retrospect**  
**Sam Abecassis**

Teens Around Westchester  
Hopped aboard a bus  
To spend MLK weekend together  
For us, giving back was a must

Arrived At the Hotel  
The Bus ride went quite well  
But we had one thing on our minds  
Sandy Relief- it was about time

That night it was off to Beit Elohim  
For a delicious Shabbat meal  
Next morning we woke up  
Kane Street synongauge was quite an appeal

After, It was touring around the city  
That night we enjoyed a rock climb  
Next day The Brooklyn Tabernacle was quite pretty  
To church, for many, it was our first time.

Later Sunday, the real service work began  
To bring smiles to different faces- that was our plan  
After demolitions and deliveries,  
It was time that we had departed

Next morning off to a synagogue  
To help Rabbi Moshe and his books  
Finally off to Masbia  
Where we transformed into chefs and cooks

As we look back on the weekend  
Although we made new friends and had much fun  
It felt great to lend a helping hand  
From not just me, but everyone

## **What will you do?**

By Casey Berkowitz

Roofless houses, chilly nights  
A shelter full of hope, a woman's great might  
What will you do?

Supplies are overflowing  
Devastation's still growing  
What will you do?

A community's left bare,  
But so many people care  
What will you do?

Playgrounds are destroyed,  
People are still unemployed  
What will you do?

Gardens once full of pride  
Are now trashed with flowers dried  
What will you do?

Churches a' singing  
Temple prayers are ringing  
What will you do?

Soup kitchens cooking with love  
Hunger they will rid of  
What will you do?

Cars are astray  
"Help us out", they pray  
What will you do?

Children's books are out of place  
A tremendous need to fill the bookcase  
What will you do?

Newspapers have stopped screaming  
But tears are still streaming  
What will you do?

Young people are taking a stand  
Joining all peoples by hand  
What will you do?

Come together we must  
In us, they have put all their trust  
What will you do?

**After the service trip to Brooklyn on MLK weekend Abbe received this email:**

Hi Abbe,

It was such a pleasure to meet you all this weekend. You should be so proud of the AMAZING group of teens that you work with. Their energy, enthusiasm and work ethic was inspiring to us all. In a few short hours they were able to change people's lives, make new connections and help our community recover. I heard from one of the residents they helped, Frank Puleo, and he was truly moved by their kindness and hard work. He couldn't thank you enough.

Thank you all so much for the dinner, it was a nice change of scenery for all of the dedicated volunteers that attended. I chose to invite the families that have been affected, some of which lost everything they owned, and still come to volunteer nearly every day. Your organization provided them with a really special evening that will be treasured.

I would also like to express how touched we all were with your organization's generosity. It is simply amazing that J-Teen was able to donate nearly \$1,400 in gift cards to the affected residents, on top of all that you had already done. The families were speechless.

I wanted your group to know the names of the families they impacted that were at the dinner this past weekend:

John & Mary Douglas

Billy & Debbie Dong

Todd & Theresa Bilgore (and their 2 sons - Chris was volunteering alongside your group)

John Mooney

Steven & Ariane Galucci

Helen & Robert Brock

Jennifer McLinden (sons Jake and Joey were there)

Christine & Joe Coffey (children Cadence, Christian and Joe - who also volunteered with your group)

Linda Vergara

Princess & Arthur DiCrescento

Theresa, Mike & Claire Bianco

Mike Taylor (director who spoke), Nicole DeLeon, & Jameson Wells were also at the dinner.

You have an amazing group and we were honored to meet you all. We look forward to working with you again in the spring!

Sincerely,

Kelly Mead

Deputy Director of Programs and Services

**Aaron Afran**  
**2/14/13**

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a national holiday that serves the purpose of remembering the life and work of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. He strived towards equality for blacks living in segregated communities and for the abolishment of segregation. We can apply his work and conviction for the rights that all people deserve to the social action that J-Teen Leadership participated in on the weekend of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. King recognized an injustice and made it his issue to work towards the change of things that caused it. In essence, we at J-Teen acted similarly. However, our work was geared towards disaster relief.

Months ago, Hurricane Sandy devastated the northeast. Among the hardest hit areas were the low-lying coastal areas of Brooklyn including Gerritsen Beach, Manhattan Beach, and Brighton Beach, where we visited and did volunteer work.

Working out of the Holiday Inn Express Brooklyn in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, we traveled throughout the borough to various places of worship, organizations, and volunteer sites.

Our shabbat experience was graciously provided on Friday night by Congregation Beth Elohim and on Saturday by The Kane Street Synagogue. CBE was a true leader in combatting the devastation of Hurricane Sandy with an exemplary program providing meals to victims. On Sunday, we spent the morning with the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church and experienced how they worship.

We met teen organizations either based out of the Brooklyn area or that were here with similar intentions to ours. We went rock climbing with the Beit Jeshrun Youth Saturday night. They spoke of the work they had done and planned on doing. It was interesting to compare the way our trip was going with theirs. We had lunch on Sunday with a Russian-Jewish teen group based out of the Kings Bay Y. They contributed heavily to immediate relief in the surrounding area.

Our next destination on Sunday was the Gerritsen Beach Community. We assisted in the continuing cleanup and recovery of the area. Some of us participated in handing out food and other resources, others worked in removing insulation from a house that needed to be completely refinished as a result of the hurricane. Later

that night, we had dinner with a group of hurricane victims from Gerritsen Beach. We heard their stories and presented them with gift cards. Monday was the last day we worked on relief in Brooklyn. Our first destination was The Mazel School in the Brighton Beach/Coney Island community. It is an Orthodox Jewish Day School for students ages K-6. Compared to the rest of their community, The Mazel School was hit particularly hard by Hurricane Sandy. They suffered significant water damage to their lower school and library. Consequently, they needed to remodel the lower school and do and do an inventory of their library. Our role in their rehabilitative efforts was to work with their collection of books. We carried boxes of books out of their synagogue and back into their lower school.

My experience in Brooklyn will not be forgotten anytime soon. In addition to the impact we had on the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy, we also truly experienced the borough. I really enjoy the close-knit communities that are maintained in certain neighborhoods of Brooklyn despite its massive population and close proximity to Manhattan. In fact, this feeling is to the extent that I would enjoy someday becoming part of one of these communities. I feel that living in Brooklyn for whatever time period would make me very happy.

As for the service we did and the connections we made, I am very glad I participated in this trip. We saw the impact we made very directly. We met and learned about the people we were helping. The work we did made very good use of our time and resources. While there is still much more to be done in the vein of Hurricane Sandy relief in Brooklyn and beyond, my sentiment is that what we did was invaluable and a wonderful way to spend Martin Luther King Jr. weekend.

## **Ben Burton**

My trip to Brooklyn was my very first JTeen Trip, and to be honest I didn't know what to expect. All of the JTeen trips that I heard about went to places where they had to fly to and there devastation was made very public, like New Orleans, Cuba, and Haiti. So, when I heard that this JTeen trip was going to Brooklyn, I wasn't too excited because I thought that Brooklyn was local, boring, and that Hurricane Sandy happened a while ago and that everything there wouldn't be too bad.

Now looking back on the trip, I couldn't be happier that Brooklyn was our destination. Friday and Saturday were nice, as we got to see various Synagogues and we were able to see how differently Shabbat was celebrated in each one. Another really cool thing that we did Saturday, is that we were able to get a tour of Brooklyn. I think going on a tour of Brooklyn was a great idea for the trip, because it would be unfulfilling if we said that we went on a trip to Brooklyn and that we didn't really see the city or were unable to learn about its history. Friday and Saturday were nice but Sunday was really the most meaningful day of the trip for me.

On Sunday, we went to Gerritsen Beach and joined with the Gerritsen Beach Cares group to help them on their mission of Hurricane Sandy Relief. Our stop at Gerritsen Beach really showed me how much there still was to do for the victims, and how many people are still greatly suffering. While we were there, we delivered supplies that were requested by the victims who lived near by, cleaned up a couple of nearby parks, and helped give out supplies at a non-profit organization who has been stationed at the Beach every single day since the storm. The woman who worked there told me that this was her 87th straight day helping out since the storm; her house was wiped out, she lost power but she still felt that it was her responsibility to take a leadership role in her community. That woman was a real inspiration.

Another highlight of the Gerritsen Beach Cares mission was going to a woman's house who lived right by the water. She was a single parent and had two young kids, and her house was wiped out completely by the storm. Although all we were able to do was clean up her yard, and move her swing set, it was a real eyeopening experience to see how much devastation people still had to face, and how much of a difference such a small thing made to her.

As I've reflected on my experience of my first JTeen trip, I really had an amazing experience, as I was able to really make a difference, see all of the devastation that is still happening so close to me, and make friends along the way. I really look forward to going on more JTeen trips going forward.