

Far Rockaway  
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J-teen's trip to Far Rockaway was one of the highlights from the beginning of my J-teen career. Far Rockaway is located in Queens, about an hour and a half away from Westchester, yet so much separates the two communities. Hurricane Sandy had a huge impact on Far Rockaway, resulting in the destruction of countless homes, buildings and any infrastructure. Even though many organizations have gone and helped the people that live there, Far Rockaway is still in very bad shape.

The moment we entered Far Rockaway I could tell that those people had experienced something horrific, based on the homes that were missing roofs and walls. From that moment, I knew we had a purpose to be there.

We entered the West End Synagogue for dinner our first night, in order to get a sense of the Jewish culture that existed in Far Rockaway. The dinner we had that night was easily the most impactful event that occurred during our visit there. We ate dinner with workers from the Friends of Rockaway and a few Jewish, high school students that lived in Far Rockaway. Each of the students gave a short speech describing their own perspective and story regarding Hurricane Sandy. Although each of the three students had a moving story, the girl who spoke gave the most impactful speech. Her speech was descriptive with details from the night that Hurricane Sandy hit and it brought her and everyone else in the room to tears. I could tell that even though we were both students in high school, who were Jewish and close in age, we couldn't have been further apart in our backgrounds. She had physically been impacted by Hurricane Sandy, while all that happened to me was the power went out. A lot more went out for her during the week that Hurricane Sandy hit New York.

The following day we helped rebuild homes and work on getting people back into their neighborhoods. We spent around 3 hours working on the homes and it was rewarding to do some physical activity to help the community. I could tell that our work was really contributing to the lives of the people in Far Rockaway. It was astonishing to me how I went from a steady neighborhood in Westchester with fully built homes and schools to Far Rockaway with half built homes and half wrecked homes in just a hour and a half.

Finally, we went to a soup kitchen where homeless people could go and get free food whenever they needed. Two people, one man and one woman, ran the soup kitchen for three meals a day. They offered meals to anyone who needed and gave food for people to make at home who couldn't afford food from a grocery store. We helped organize food and donated food that we had brought from our homes to give to the soup kitchen.

Everything we did on the trip to Far Rockaway had meaning to me and showed me a little more what it is like to live there. J-teen's trip to Far Rockaway has inspired me to want to go to places like Far Rockaway, that still need help today.