

Two weeks ago, I had the opportunity to go on a volunteer trip to Philadelphia with J Teen leadership over Veteran's day weekend. During the four days, we volunteered at many sites and organizations across the greater Philadelphia area, ranging from packing food and delivering it, to working on a community garden. On this trip, I met people from all over Westchester and participated in many experiences I had never been involved in before.

Towards the end of the trip, as one of our volunteer projects, half of us went to the Markoe Street community garden near University City. We helped to weed the beds, collect trash and take ivy off the fence. I was assigned to help to pull weeds and prune the kale beds. Along with that, we got to interact with members of the local community, a microcosm of the Philadelphia community. During my time at the garden, I was able to talk to the local gardeners to learn about the garden and the community. I had learned that many members of the community use the products of the garden and find serenity in the garden. Prior to this visit to the garden, I had very little formal gardening or planting experience, besides for having a small garden in my background. Knowing how cold it got, I might have been a little more prepared, but I will learn from my mistakes. My time at the community garden was both fun and meaningful and I learned a lot!

In summation, this trip was educational, eye-opening and a nice break from my own community. I was able to gain a new perspective on other communities and populations along with being a volunteer in a new city. I had been to Philadelphia prior to the trip, but I obtained a new view of the city and its inhabitants while exploring a new part of the city on this trip. Although our purpose was to give back to the community by giving our time and volunteering, we also were able to have some. Including escape the room, having free time to explore the city in more depth and a walking tour of the murals in the city. Volunteering over the course of the weekend made me want to get more involved and proactive in my community. This trip was a learning experience for me and I'm glad I got to share these experiences with others!