

A couple of weeks ago I joined JTEEN to a trip to Far Rockaway weekend to help Sandy victims. The weekend opened my eyes to the suffering that victims of the devastating hurricane are still experiencing. We left the JTEEN office Sunday morning, stopped off at the beach and arrived at our first project. Our task was to redevelop and paint houses that were destroyed during Sandy. It was incredible to actually visualize the water level at which the water had risen to and to really see the tremendous destruction. We worked there for a few hours and headed off to a food pantry where we had lunch. The food pantry director explained her whole mission of the place and explained how it was run. It was so nice to hear that although it was a kosher food pantry, everyone was given food, despite their kashrut observance level. After lunch, we went back to the houses to continue our work on sanding and painting the walls. It was great to see the progression of the house and I could imagine the appreciation from the owner. I did not have to imagine it because after we went to a synagogue that was destroyed and had dinner there. The house owners were there and spoke to us. They were so appreciative and grateful of the work and time we had put into the houses. The synagogue spoke to us about the devastation they had gone through and how there is so much that needs to be done. During dinner, we also heard from a Sandy victim that started her own organization. This organization helps Sandy victims and supports them. This girl was only a teenager and was very inspirational to me. It showed me that even though she was so young, she could make a difference. And that was exactly what we were there for. We went back to the hotel that night and had time to reflect on the day. We had time to hang out with our friends and go into the town. It was so great that not only did we perform mitzvot, but along the way we created friendships and got

closer with others. I know that I am closer to people who I wouldn't have even said hi to before the trip. The next day we went back to finish off our jobs at the houses. Once we were done, it was so gratifying to see the huge progress that had been made in one day. The house was far from finished but definitely somewhere. Last stop, we went somewhere very memorable. As I walked in, I thought I was walking into a restaurant but learned that it was not quite a normal restaurant. It was a soup kitchen that as designed as a regular restaurant where you order your food with a waitress and eat tasty food. It shocked me how amazing it was that people who could not afford to go to a normal restaurant could come here without feeling poor. How great it is that they serve hundreds of meals to people everyday without a cost. Everyone is welcomed and can come as often as they need. It not only motivated me to do better and give more, but made me appreciate what I have and realize that I am so lucky. The trip in whole, was a great experience. It gave me something that I had never before seen and instilled values in me that I had heard before, but never absorbed. To see these devastations first hand is astounding and saddening. I will definitely do more of these community service trips in the future, as it gave me so many experiences and memories that are rare and hard to find.