

Service Trip to New Orleans

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During the weekend of January 18 - January 21, the J-teen leadership and other interested students traveled to New Orleans for our “back to our roots” weekend. The weekend promised to help us understand and help address sources of community problems. I felt strongly that this weekend opened my eyes to many of these issues. One of the many things we did was a SBP rebuild project where the group took on the responsibility to paint and to prepare flooring for homes that were dedicated to victims of Katrina who were still without adequate housing. It is shocking that after 14 years, these victims have not received the kind of help that they needed. This experience helped me to understand how lucky I am and I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to support this group. I also became very aware that people of all communities need to work together. Another important part of the weekend was the Avodah workshop about social justice. This workshop taught me that there are root causes about social problems that require more thoughtful attention than the typical quick solutions. Finally, I want to discuss the impact of going to the Community Garden. Although our group was there to help her in her sole role of keeping up the garden, it was upsetting to think that when we go, she will go back to tending the garden alone. For the neighborhood, the Community Garden has a special place. Jeanette teaches residents how to grow their own produce, which gives them a free source of fresh food. Because this is such a poor community, buying fresh produce is too expensive. The connection between healthy eating and success in school is well-known; this community does not have to rely on the dollar meal at McDonald's because they have Jeanette. My takeaway from this weekend was that there are some groups that do not make a lot of noise, that are trying their best to cope with difficult situations and that get no outside assistance. Those groups especially are worthy of more of our support.