

TOWN JOURNAL

Teens Coming Together to Make a Difference

Jewish Federation Provides Opportunity to Give Back to Its Community

By Gena Ansell-Lande

THE JEWISH FEDERATION in the Heart of New Jersey will host its fourth annual local J-Serve, part of the international day of Jewish teen service on Sunday, March 19 at the Solomon Schechter Day School in Marlboro. This year teens from all over Monmouth County, including the Two River area, are expected to participate in hands-on volunteer projects and explore Jewish values, all while considering volunteer opportunities for the future.

"J-Serve encourages teens in 6th-12th grade to participate in local causes, while also educating them about community needs," said Susan Antman, the federation's executive vice president. "This international day of service teaches teens their contributions matter, they can inspire others to lead by example, and coming together makes a meaningful change in the world."

For the first time, the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey is engaging a teen advisory committee in planning and leading some of the J-Serve projects. Some of the projects include: socializing and charoset tasting with seniors; inclusive activities with youngsters with special needs; crafts that benefit both young cancer patients and homebound seniors; and meeting Holocaust survivors who will share their stories.

This will be the second J-Serve event for sisters Cakie and Amanda Dym of Rumson. Cakie is a seventh-grader at Oak Hill Academy in Lincroft and Amanda is in ninth grade at Rumson-Fair

Haven High School. The Dym family spent two years living in Israel. The girls' mother, Leigh Dym, thinks this event made a significant impression on her daughters.

"This was a wonderful way for the girls to connect with their Judaism and spend time with other Jewish teens in a social setting," she said. "Even though most didn't seem to know each other, there was this lovely connection and synergy happening. They all seemed genuinely happy to be a part of something bigger than themselves and to be able to add their contribution."

Cakie enjoyed the variety of options to choose from at last year's J-Serve event. "Some people did yoga, others went to the cemetery to bury old papers, and some studied Jewish history. There were sign-up sheets on the wall that allowed you to choose whatever sounded interesting to you."

Amanda enjoyed getting a chance to hear the guest speaker Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers share their experiences. "They were very interesting and I loved that there were so many other Jewish teens there. It's rare that you find so many Jewish kids coming together outside of Hebrew School."

The J-Serve event is about living out the principles of tikkun olam, which is a Jewish concept meaning "world repair." It has come to connote social action and the pursuit of social justice.

Both girls participated in other projects throughout the day including decorating placements for Jewish senior citizens, which



COURTESY J-SERVE

Members of the J-Serve Teen Advisory Committee help plan and lead teens in volunteer projects. This year's J-Serve will be held on March 19.

were later given out by Meals on Wheels, writing thank you cards to IDF soldiers, in Hebrew and English, and making blankets by tying together pre-cut pieces of felt to be given to senior citizens.

Laura Safran, director of Community Impact says the event is now in its fourth year locally. "J-Serve is the Jewish service component of the annual Global Youth Service Day of Youth Service America. This is an international initiative that connects over 14,000 teens across 90 communities and 20 countries to service learning opportunities. Each year, J-Serve shows all teens who participate that service-learning can be fun and meaningful, and teens can have a concrete impact in their community."

For more information on this event, visit jewishheartnj.org/jservice or contact Alyssa Amabile at 732-588-1815 or alysaa@jewishheartnj.org.