

Julianna Storch
Learning from Alumni

For most teens, including myself, B'nai Tzedek was our first exposure to philanthropy. Outside of witnessing our parents' giving and learning about the value of tzedaka in Hebrew school or day school, we did not have any hands on experience with giving away money to those in need. B'nai Tzedek provided me with a hands-on introduction to the world of philanthropy. And as the first taste of giving for teens, it provides a positive experience of giving made easy.

I learned a tremendous amount during my two years on the B'nai Tzedek board through speakers, seminars and field trips. I became more financially literate. I learned how to find charitable organizations that were in line with my passions and values. And I learned how to research those organizations and ask the right questions to find out about the work they do and how they make use of their donations.

But the most important lessons learned were those that I learned by doing. I learned that tzedaka is not just an ideal. It is something that we do, a part of our daily life. The asked question at B'nai Tzedek was not "Will I give?", rather, "who will I give to?". The program instills teens with the value of tzedaka and the routine of giving that will hopefully continue for many years to come.

And through involvement in B'nai Tzedek, teens join a community of givers. They learn that philanthropy is an integral part of their Jewish identities. And tzedaka is something that can connect us all to the greater Jewish community. B'nai Tzedek brought together teens from different facets of the Phoenix Jewish community. It brought us together around the common mitzvah of tzedaka. In doing so, it promoted a cohesive, pluralistic Jewish community.

The practical knowledge that I attained in B'nai tzedek along with the experience in a diverse Jewish community united around the value and practice of philanthropy prepared me for continued Jewish communal work.

From my experience on the board I learned that we can best foster a cohesive Jewish community when we focus together on a common goal. This encouraged me to find other common goals and activities that can unite my large and diverse Jewish community on Columbia's campus. And my work with the foundation and charity organizations prepared me for work on the Columbia/Barnard Hillel's development committee to approach fundraising from a 360 degree angle. As a board member of B'nai Tzedek's new and growing program, I learned fundraising skills from our endeavors to rally support from community members. And as a teen philanthropist, I learned to look at an organization from the giver's lens and am now better able to present our Hillel to donors. I know to examine and focus on our goals as an organization, how the work we do achieves such goals, and how philanthropy from others enables us to do so.

I am confident that my experience with B'nai Tzedek will continue to help me in the future in my communal work both inside an outside of the Jewish community. And as an

individual, I am constantly encouraged to think deeper about philanthropy and explore new and different organizations in need when I receive my B'nai Tzedek donation form in the mail every year.