

On Monday, they panhandled

Jewish teens converge on Hub to learn how to lead

By Michael Kosowsky
Special to the Advocate

On a recent summer day, Jewish teens peddled copies of *Spare Change*, the newspaper of Boston's homeless people, on the streets of downtown Boston.

None of the teens was homeless. None of them had ever sold – or read – a copy of the newspaper before. And just about all of them were from out of state.

The teens were participating in the second annual Impact: Boston, a joint program of Brandeis University's Office of High School Programs and the B'nai Brith Youth Organization.

They came from Newton, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Cleveland – even as far away as Washington state. Between June 23 and July 4, they fanned out over Greater Boston, working with the homeless, registering people to vote and learning how to be leaders.

The 92 participants in the program were divided into eight groups, based on a questionnaire they had filled out prior to the program. Each group spent three to five hours a day volunteering at a community service organization. Afterward, they returned to Brandeis for an hour and a half "Connections" session, where they related their efforts with ideas spelled out in Biblical, Talmudic and Midrashic texts. At night, they gathered together for speakers or other events.

"The program emphasizes that in order to be agents of change, teens can't simply think they are going to save the world through a few hours of volunteering a week," said program co-director Shimshon Stu Siegel. "Instead, they must dedicate themselves to seeing and treating society much differently than

perhaps they ever have before."

Liat Deener-Chodirker, a sophomore at Gann Academy who lives in Newton, summed up why she chose to participate: "I wanted to make a difference."

As part of the program, the teens heard talks in Harvard Square by several homeless people. Ben Cutler, a high school senior from Cleveland, said many of the Impact participants were so moved that they gave away their dinners that night.

Alli Marbach, a high school senior from Atlanta, said that on the first day of the program, the teens who would be working with *Spare Change* did a stint of panhandling to experience what it's like to have to beg for a living. The panhandling came as a surprise to the teens, who were told to dress comfortably for the day. "It was so intense," Marbach said. "The homeless came up to us and gave us both money and advice" about how to beg more effectively.

In fact, added Daniel Grill, a high school junior from Pittsburgh, they found that while the homeless gave them money, "the people in suits" just passed them by.

The teens asked the homeless about their lives on the street. Afterward, many of the homeless, who had been unaware that the teens were homeless, said those five-minute conversations were the highlight of their day.

The Impact participants gave their panhandling proceeds to *Spare Change* and donated their time writing articles, poems and even a crossword puzzle for the weekly paper, which is published and distributed by people in need.

The newspaper is still receiving dividends from Impact: Boston. Each group of teens listed a cause on the fundraising

Web site www.jchoice.org. The teens who worked with *Spare Change* collected over \$500 in donations in the first five days.

They also participated in a workshop designed by community organizers to show that where you live may affect how the government treats you.

The teens were divided into four color-coded groups: blue, green, yellow, and red. The blue and green groups represented the wealthy suburbs of Boston; the yellow, a low-income community; and the red, a slum. Each group was given the task of approaching "city representatives" for funding for new buildings in their communities. Playing the role of city officials were members of the nonprofit Boston Mobilization, an organization that educates students and residents in lobbying government.

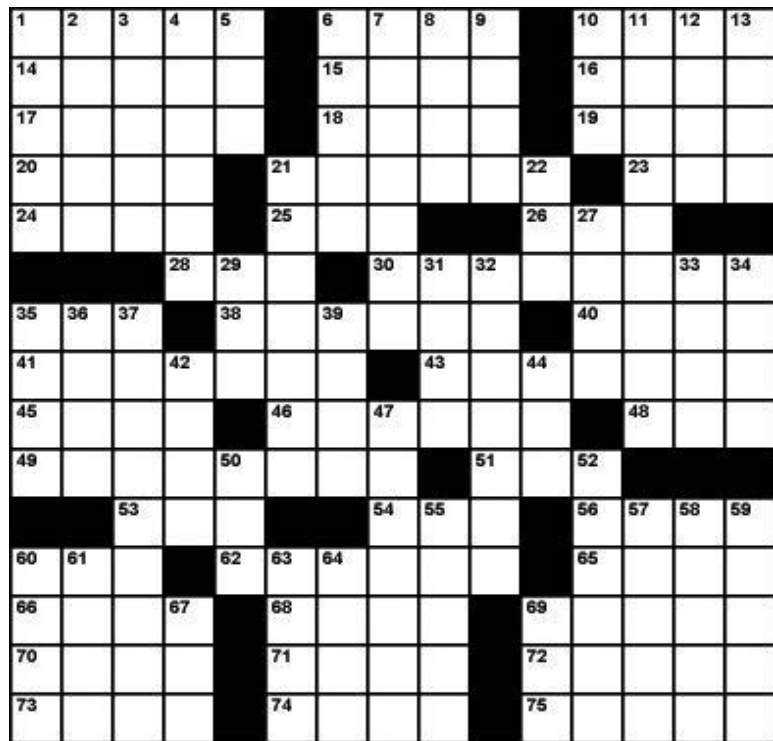
"They were very nice to you if you were in the blue or green group. They treated the yellow group really badly. If you were from the red group, you were treated like a convicted felon," said Jaclyn Turner of Atlanta.

In the end, Marbach said Impact: Boston surpassed her expectations. "I learned that just because I may be *better off* than someone in no way makes me *better* than them, and I truly learned the meaning of the words 'kindness' and 'generosity.'"

Deener-Chodirker added, "I became aware of the fact that every single human being in this world, regardless of their specific circumstances, has a story that cannot be seen, but can be heard, if one chooses to listen. ...

"If everyone could go through a similar experience at my age, I guarantee you that this world would see the difference."

For more on Impact: Boston, visit bbyo.org/teens/experiences/impact_boston.



Across

1. Puppeteer Lewis
6. Teva product
10. First murder victim
14. Mountain
15. Noah to Ham
16. Jewish restaurant
17. Power for Rickover
18. Bialik writings
19. Musician Getz
20. Israeli drug company
21. Haman's hat had three
23. "___ Promise," by Potok
24. Paradise
25. "___ Maamin," Wiesel novel
26. Golfer Alcott
28. Gompers or Davis
30. A, B, C
35. In vogue
38. Songwriter on "My Fair Lady"
40. Few
41. Sabra
43. Soul (Yid)
45. Shema starter
46. Home to Babel
48. Herman Barron's score
49. Biblical tribe
51. Agnon, initially
53. "Sea" to Marceau
54. Gaza to Beer Sheva (dir)
56. Ten commandments
60. 502
62. Equipment for Chagall
65. Life or Knowledge
66. Megillat Esther
68. Boxer "Dangerous" — Rosenblatt
69. 12th Century talmudic scholar
70. Village of Simeon
71. "Rock of ___"
72. Cove
73. "Blazing Saddles," actress
74. Comes before shin
75. Jacob's boy

Down

1. Israel in 1948
2. Acted the bigot
3. Angel of Death path
4. Masada siegers
5. U.S. Taxmen
6. Feather, candle and ___
7. Tyrant over Bar Kochba
8. Ne'ilah, "___ the gates"
9. Seder manner
10. Classifieds
11. Fleischer studio comic
12. Eilat, old style
13. Ancestry
21. A. Lerner musical
22. Cheer
27. Make the tsmimes
29. Purim drink?
31. Equipment for Leibovitz
32. Kedem equipment
33. Poet Lazarus
34. Seder salt water
35. Vigoda TV nickname
36. Babylonian Talmud editor
37. Ritual with a babe
39. Not on Shabbat?
42. Starter bet for B. Greenstein
44. Speak
47. Enemy to Sadducees
50. Noodge (Eng)
52. Bimahs
55. Prepare shiva clothes
57. Four (Hebrew)
58. Make the Tallis?
59. Pesach dinner
60. Garbage (Yid.)
61. Bissel (Eng)
63. Purim month
64. Maimonides
67. K - O connector
69. Sarnoff org.

Pint-size philanthropists



Preschool students Lyla Dussault, Joshua Levine and Lily Haspel present a check for \$73.86 to Dr. Peter Greenspan of MassGeneral Hospital for Children last week. Every Friday morning, students at the Bernice B. Godine Early Learning Center at the Leventhal-Sidman JCC in Newton bring in tzedakah and sing a tzedakah song. At the suggestion of Joshua, the class decided to give their tzedakah to MassGeneral this year.

Solution to this week's crossword puzzle

