



# Lirdof Tzedek, Congregation Emanu-El

NEW YORK CITY, NY

## WHO ARE THE LEARNERS? THE TEACHERS?

- 8th grade students
- Parents attend initial seminar with their children
- Coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Learning and one other teacher
- Staff at the organization student choose to work with in a given year

This is the program for 8th graders at the congregation. This year the students chose to work with ABC, the Association to Benefit Children in New York City. During one session, students invited family and friends to participate in order to expose them to ABC's work and mission. The Coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Learning and one other teacher work with the 7th grade as well, providing continuity between the two experiences. Members of the staff from ABC work with the learners during volunteer sessions.

## WHEN DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- Sunday seminars, one Sunday afternoon a month, during the school year, from 4:00-6:30
- Volunteer sessions, one weekday afternoon a month, during the school year, from 4:00-6:30
- Teaching session one Sunday morning in January
- Friday night dinner in May to honor all students participating in service learning

While students are required to attend the monthly volunteer sessions, they may also make arrangements to volunteer additional hours on their own.

## WHERE DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- Sunday seminars and teaching sessions meet at congregation
- Friday night dinner also at congregation
- Weekday volunteer sessions meet off-site at service organization, this year at ABC

## HOW IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED?

- During Sunday seminars, learners explore different ways of doing social justice including fundraising and philanthropy, community organizing and advocacy.
- Learners engage in interactive text study to explore the Jewish context for these approaches to social justice.
- Sunday seminars also provide learners with an opportunity to plan how to utilize their time most effectively during the volunteer sessions.
- Learners volunteer with one organization during the year vs. multiple organizations.
- During volunteer sessions, learners organize games, help children with homework, and share some of their own passions with the kids like sports or music.
- Learners are encouraged to keep a journal of their volunteer experiences.
- Learners also spend one or two Sunday seminars developing a teaching session for Mitzvah Corps kids to prepare them for their visit to ABC.

Throughout the learning in Lirdof Tzedek, the teachers incorporate group-building techniques to connect the learners to one another on multiple levels. In a safe learning environment, the 8th graders discover what is most important to them in the realm of social justice and consider how best to pursue it.

## WHY IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED THIS WAY?

- To help the organization the learners choose to serve
- To teach kids about social justice and their role in it
- For students to learn the real life skills needed to pursue social justice including advocacy, community organizing and fundraising
- To enable learners to understand pursuing social justice as part of their Jewish identity, that it's a way of expressing yourself as a Jewish person just as studying Torah or praying are ways to do so

By engaging with only one organization during the year, learners have an opportunity to develop deeper relationships with the population it serves and a more nuanced understanding of the social justice issues it faces.

### KEY FIRST STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

- Mitzvah Corps and Lirdof Tzedek are presented as a two-year curriculum.
- Personal phone calls to students entering 7th and 8th grades proved key in bringing them into the model.
- Calendars for the program get distributed in the beginning of the year.
- Lirdof Tzedek follows the 7th grade program, Mitzvah Corps. The process of study, action, and reflection in that model provides the learning necessary for Lirdof Tzedek.
- Working with a variety of service organizations on a short-term basis allowed the congregation to develop relationships with key people at each site.
- Important to identify a person at the social service agency to be the point person there.

Learners decide where they want to volunteer on a regular basis during Lirdof Tzedek at the end of their year in Mitzvah Corps. They choose from among the sites connected to each of their units of study: Feeding the Hungry (a soup kitchen); Welcoming the Stranger (a homeless shelter); Respecting all Human Life (Special Olympics); Guarding the Earth (partnering with the Green Apple Corps); Teach Each Child According to Their Way (working in an afterschool day care facility in Harlem - ABC); Respecting our Elders (working in a senior center); Taking Care of Animals (an animal shelter).

### GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR LIRDOF TZEDEK.

- At this point, no lay structure guides the design or implementation of the model

### BUDGET/RESOURCES

- Teaching salaries come under the religious school budget
- Transportation costs depend on the location of the service organization
- Cost of additional supplies to use on-site if the organization doesn't have the funding to provide them

In future years, parents may be enlisted to help with transportation.

### INTEGRATION OF LIRDOF TZEDEK AND THE LARGER CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Learners sold raffle tickets at the congregational Purim Carnival to raise money for and awareness about ABC.
- Learners came together to make a presentation to a city councilwoman to advocate around issues affecting the population served by ABC.

### IMPACT ON LEARNERS, TEACHERS, CONGREGATION

- Students express a richer understanding of their obligation to pursue justice in the world.
- One student in particular came to truly appreciate all that he had in the world, which, he realized, was far more than most people. And he wanted to help his friends come to the same realization so that they could be inspired to pursue social justice as well.
- The congregation's Tikkun Olam committee now supports the work of the Association to Benefit Children, following the lead of the learners in Lirdof Tzedek.