

March 1992

Service Projects

1. Loaves and Fishes Soup Kitchen  
Springfield  
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2. Longmeadow Jewish Nursing Home  
Longmeadow, MA  
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3. Horizon House Shelter  
Springfield, MA  
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4. Jefferson Avenue Shelter  
Springfield, MA  
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5. Amitzim

On the whole, service projects were quite successful this summer. The soup kitchen and the two shelters were options that Machon had not used before. As an introduction, we played a simulation game on homelessness with Meir Laken (a friend of Elliot Goldberg who was visiting for the weekend). This helped the campers to begin thinking about the relevant issues. It gave them a chance to learn about the structure of community service and how it can be problematic for a significant number of clients. The game dealt specifically with the issue of homelessness, but the general points were transferable to the other projects. Even if we cannot get Meir again, this portion of the program should not be skipped. Talking about expectations BEFORE beginning the actual service helped focus and prepare the campers.

Our Yahadut sessions gave us the opportunity to focus on the general structure of community, the Jewish community, and relevant texts from the tradition. If we honestly believe that service is an integral component of the Machon program AND we want to participate in the Ramah/Jewish vision of behavior, we must design a coordinated curriculum which designates time for campers working in a nursing home to devote a significant amount of time to learning about the Jewish views on aging, campers working in a soup kitchen should spend time with texts on hunger....

During the weeks we were involved in service projects, we divided the campers into their project groups and had a few debriefing sessions. The goal of the meetings was to give them the opportunity to express themselves concerning their: fears, concerns about the system, feelings of accomplishment. In previous years, there had been no system of reflection and the campers had no vehicle for releasing their thoughts on this vital work. This should ALWAYS be done. One of the most exciting parts of these discussions was that they had a chance to both share with their friends, and discuss service options for the rest of the year.

This year, the structure of this program was different from previous summers. Instead of spreading the visits out over the entire summer, the experience was concentrated into two intense weeks of service. Another change was that they left after breakfast and ate "packout" for lunch. This eliminated the early wake up which had left them exhausted in previous years.

The more intense structure allowed the campers to be far more involved than simply going twice a week. By working for an entire week at a time, the service becomes your responsibility and you are quite helpful to the shelter or kitchen. With periodic visits, it is difficult to be as logistically and emotionally

involved, and the experience become more focused upon watching, rather than doing. To be fair, the intensity of the daily work left the campers very tired and it might be better to look for a solution which combines the schedules of the past two years.

#### Individual evaluations

##### Soup kitchen

This was an incredible experience and should be continued in the future. The directors were very appreciative, the kids got to know the "regulars," they worked hard. Each day the kids set up and served lunch. The major issue was that there is not enough work to sustain more than 10 people (we had sent 18).

##### Long Meadow Old Age Home

Camp has had a long term relationship with this institution. We sent about 20 people and it was quite successful.

##### Amitzim

Eight campers worked with Amitzim. For a few, this was not their top choice and they had a difficult time. In the future the campers need much more structure to make this a good experience and a Machon counselor must always be present.

##### Horizon House

A homeless woman's shelter. The campers were supposed to help with general maintenance and child care. Unfortunately, there were no children. Therefore, they had little personal contact and felt unappreciated. As a result, this was cancelled mid-summer. (5)

##### Jefferson Avenue Shelter

Shelter for women with children. At this shelter, the campers spent most of their time with the children and were able to form solid relationships with the residents. This was a most positive experience which should be continued. (5 maximum)

One of the greatest difficulties with the service projects is that the individual institutions can only accommodate a relatively small number of campers. Therefore, we must find a number of places. Unfortunately, this leads us to problems with transportation and coverage (especially when counselors have days off).