

# The Stream

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## Ma'ayanoters Participate in NCSY Mission to New Orleans

as reported by **Hannah Ash '14** and **Rachel Furhang '13**

The concept of *tikun olam* is often understood as an ethical and a spiritual precept, but it can have very "down to earth" and concrete meaning as well, as evidenced by the recent NCSY Mission to New Orleans. Although Hurricane Katrina took place in the summer of 2005, significant damage remains, and resources, both financial and available manpower, remain in short supply. To help with the restoration efforts, the New Jersey chapter of NCSY, under the leadership of Rabbi Ethan Katz, organized a volunteer mission to New Orleans from February 8-12. The girls-only group, 17 strong, represented Fair Lawn High School, James Caldwell High School, Livingston High School, Teaneck High School and Ma'ayanot. The Ma'ayanot contingent was comprised of **Liad Arussy '14**, **Hannah Ash '14**, **Malka Schnaidman '14**, **Ayden Sopher Harellick '14**, **Hannah Tessel '14**, **Goldi Weiser '14**, **Tovah Berman '14**, **Rachel Furhang '13**, **Tamar Landsman '13**, **Hennie Silverman '13**, **Adina Schwartz '13** and **Ally Kreitman '13**. Faculty chaperones were Ms. Elana Flaumenhaft and Rabbi Zev Prince.



*The NCSY Mission to new Orleans*

Upon arriving in New Orleans, the volunteers, working under the aegis of "Habitat for Humanity," were put to work rebuilding the foundation and repairing some shelves in a house in the ravaged Lower Ninth Ward. They had the opportunity to visit Congregation Beth Israel in the Lakeview section of New Orleans, which stands vacant and desolate, its congregants scattered to other venues. That congregation's Torahs, it was explained, had been buried in a non-Jewish cemetery initially, but now, through the efforts of Jewish volunteers, have been re-interred in a more appropriate burial ground. Thursday evening brought some time to visit the old French Quarter, hear some jazz at the famous Preservation Hall, and sample the signature beignets at Café du Monde (which are now kosher!).

On Friday, the NCSY group visited a pluralistic Jewish day school, the student body of which ranges from kindergarten through grade 5, and engaged the students in activities ranging from *Tu b'Shevat* to the *Parsha haShavua* to Israel and the significance of the Kotel. In the afternoon, the group visited an old age home and involved the residents in similar activities.

Shabbat was spent with Congregation Beth Israel, also in New Orleans proper. The Rabbi of the *shul*, Rabbi Uri Topolosky, and his wife, Mrs. Talia Topolosky, together with members of the congregation,

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Ma'ayanoters Participate in NCSY Mission to New Orleans

(Continued from page 1)

were the hosts. On *Shabbat* afternoon, Mrs. Jackie Guther, who was President of the *shul* during Hurricane Katrina, told of the *shul's* evacuation and how, initially, congregants felt safe, telling themselves that "the *bima* was up three steps, the *Torahs* up three more..." so that the rising waters couldn't possible do any real damage-but they were wrong, of course, and had to rebuild. Rabbi Topolosky led a musical *havdalah* service, in which participants could play musical accompaniments to the melody. To read more about Rabbi Topolosky, formerly Associate Rabbi at HIR, and his congregation, click [here](#). The final activity, *motzei Shabbat*, was a visit to a Family Mardi Gras Parade, complete with beads, music and floats.

by Goldi Weiser '14

Last week, 12 Ma'ayanot students in tenth and eleventh grades had the privilege of participating in a mission to help rebuild a flood-ravaged area in New Orleans. We were accompanied by four students from other schools. Under the leadership of NCSY Rabbi Ethan Katz, Rabbi Prince, and Ms. F we had the opportunity to do a great service for the New Orleans community. After arriving on Wednesday night, we helped build a home with "Habitat for Humanity" on Thursday. We went to visit the old Orthodox synagogue that was destroyed in Hurricane Katrina. We saw their *mikva* and the sanctuary that was once the home of several *Sifrei Torah* that were destroyed by Katrina. We proceeded to visit the burial sites of

those *Sifrei Torah*. Seeing the destruction wrought by the hurricane and helping to rebuild a home was a renewing experience that demonstrated firsthand the importance of helping others.



Rabbi Prince, Adina Schwartz, Tamar Landsman, Goldie Weiser, Ayden Sopher-Harellick and Ms F

The following morning we visited the local Jewish day school and organized workshops for the students. New Orleans Jewish Day School is a small school for students from nursery through grade 5, most of whom are not religious. We ran educational programs for the students to help them connect to Judaism. In honor of *Tu'BShevat* the fourth and fifth grade students wrote about people that inspired them from *Tanakh* or from their personal lives and pasted these stories as leaves on a tree to create a "tree of inspiration." With the students in nursery and kindergarten students, we made dirt out of chocolate and planted "seeds" of M&M's. The students also made their own *luchot* in honor of the *parasha* and wrote wishes and prayers for the Kotel.

These children ordinarily would never have the opportunity to connect to Judaism and Jewish culture in this way. Their only opportunity for Jewish education at all is the New Orleans Jewish Day School, which ends after fifth grade. Being role models for these children and giving them an opportunity that we all take for granted - the opportunity to participate in a vibrant Jewish community and learn from the adults in our lives about Judaism - was an especially meaningful experience.

Later that day we visited a nursing home that has some Jewish residents. The residents receive few visitors

(Continued on page 5)

## Ma'ayanoters Participate in NCSY Mission to New Orleans

(Continued from page 4)

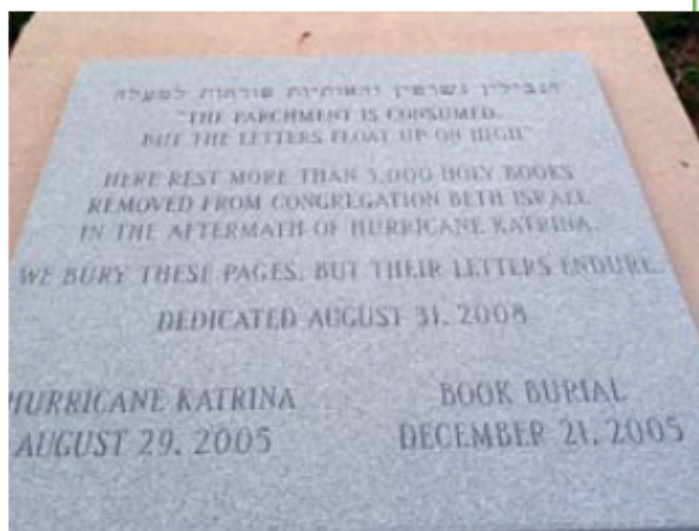
and our visiting, talking and singing with them brightened their day and made a difference for them.

We spent a beautiful *Shabbat* with Congregation Beth Israel in New Orleans and at the home of their leader Rabbi Uri Topolosky. The close relationship between the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox synagogues in their time of need was inspiring. Filling the room in the *shul* and adding *ruach* to their *Shabbat* was a rewarding experience for us and, hopefully, added love to the *Shabbat* services.

Traveling to New Orleans and being able to help a community in all different ways, from the young, the future of the community to the elderly members, was a priceless experience.



*Hanna Ash (in front) and Liad Arussy (behind, with Malka Schnaidman peeking out), "carry their weight"*



*the photo above "speaks for itself"*



*at left, Ma'ayanot students become the "teachers"*

*at right, mission participants get an orientation to "Building 101"*

