

Search

- HOME
- ABOUT US
- ARCHIVES
- ADVERTISE IN JLNJ
- SUBSCRIBE/UNSUBSCRIBE
- ANNUAL GUIDE
- PAYMENT
- JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST
- SUBMIT ARTICLES

YOU ARE HERE: HOME > NEWS > NCSY ASSISTS IN NEW ORLEANS

# NCSY Assists in New Orleans

THURSDAY, 06 MARCH 2014 09:59 BY ALIZA CHASAN

Like  Tweet

Eight and a half years have passed since Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and organizations like NCSY are still making relief trips. This past week, Rabbi Ethan Katz, Regional Director of New Jersey NCSY, led 29 teenage girls- 20 from NCSY and nine from local public schools- on a relief trip to the Louisiana city.

"The condition in the poorer neighborhoods hasn't changed that drastically in the last few year; it's still in horrible shape," Rabbi Katz said.

The five day trip was packed full for the girls: they worked with Habitat for Humanity, did a tour of the Jewish neighborhood, worked with Apex to help at risk youths, spent Shabbos with the local community, visited a Jewish Senior Citizens Home, and worked with Green Light New Orleans to help people in poorer neighborhoods with energy conservation.

Day one with Habitat for Humanity involved working on two houses at opposite ends of the completion spectrum- at one house they were doing final landscaping and at the other they were laying beams for the base of the house.

"The girls truly gave it their all, working a full day; they worked to their maximum," said Becky Katz, a Ma'ayanot math teacher who accompanied the girls on the trip.

Eliana Koehler, one of the Ma'ayanot students on the trip, said that though everyone felt exhausted by the first day's end, it was a satisfied exhaustion, one of accomplishment.

"I was amazed to see, despite the lack of sleep, that everyone possessed an enthusiastic smile and was excited to help make a difference. For us, it was not just nailing boards and neatening lawns, it was a warm feeling knowing that we built a home," Koehler wrote in a blog she kept on the trip. "We built a place for a family to grow, prosper, make memories, cry, laugh, and everything in between. We created that atmosphere. It was therefore not surprising to see the surrounding enthusiasm because there was a reason. The idea that we were a small gear in a larger machine that would one day make a loving home, that was a common thought threading through every single mind in the group."

Not all of the work done was manual labor. The girls also created Purim related programming at a local Jewish Day school and visited a Jewish Senior Citizens home that does not normally receive teenage visitors because, according to Katz, there are no Jewish teenagers in New Orleans. Over Shabbos, the program participants gave divrei torah in the shul and over the meal.

The old Shul in New Orleans was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina along with many sefarim and sifrei Torah. The girls visited the cemetery where the ruined books were buried. Dr. Murray Leben, Chairman of the NJ NCSY board who joined the students on the trip, was especially touched by the local Jewish community's story.

He and Rabbi Katz both bought one of their daughters with them. "I specifically wanted to expose them to the tremendous chessed we give out and the tremendous inspiration we get back," Dr. Leben said. "I think we get more than we give."

Koehler agreed that she, and the 18 other students, received something important. "As we walked away, although we all looked the same, we were changed. We had a new perspective as to what it meant to give and what an impact that can make," she said. "It was only one day, not even 24 hours but the power of those hours is something that I will never forget."

This was a first time trip for both Leben and Becky Katz, but the 12<sup>th</sup> trip for Rabbi Katz and the 22<sup>nd</sup> NCSY trip to the city overall. The trips are part of an ongoing project to help teenagers learn the gravity of natural disasters and give them the ability to help those in need.

"It lets you see what high school students are capable of doing when you let them try things," Mrs. Becky

- LATEST NEWS** **MOST REVIEWS** San Statehood
- Politicians, Activists Warn of Crude Oil Spill Dangers
- Help a Local Family Regain Mobility
- Frisch Lag B'Omer Program in Memory of Alisa Flatow, z"l, Features Charlie Harary
- YU Men's Tennis Makes History With First Round Win in NCAA Tourney

### PREVIOUS ISSUES

MAY 14, 2015

MAY 7, 2015



SUBSCRIBE/UNSUBSCRIBE PAGE

Katz said.

By Aliza Chasan

[+](#) Share / Save [f](#) [t](#) [↗](#)



Add a comment...

Comment

Facebook social plugin

[RESET USER SETTING](#) [TOP](#)

To contact us, submit letters, etc, please call us at: [201-371-3212](tel:201-371-3212) or email: [editor@jewishlinknj.com](mailto:editor@jewishlinknj.com)  
For advertising and Web-related inquiries, email us: [ads@jewishlinknj.com](mailto:ads@jewishlinknj.com)