

ORTHODOX UNION

New Jersey NCSY Girls Return From New Orleans

OU Staff

February 15, 2012

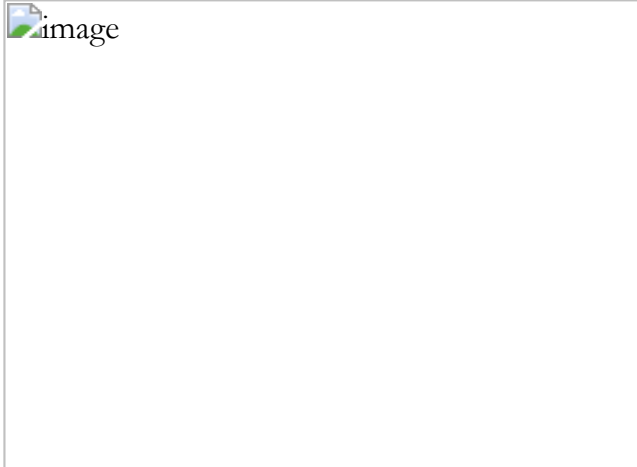
LARGEST NEW JERSEY NCSY ALL-GIRL DELEGATION FROM PUBLIC AND YESHIVA HIGH SCHOOLS RETURNS FROM LEADERSHIP MISSION TO NEW ORLEANS

The largest all-girls delegation of student leaders from both yeshiva and public high schools representing New Jersey NCSY has just returned from New Orleans. The teens worked with Habitat for Humanity on labor-intensive assignments to help in the continuous rebuilding efforts of the city post-Hurricane Katrina. While doing so, they invested energy and love to inspire and strengthen the local Jewish community over Shabbat.

NCSY | Jewish Youth Leadership is the international youth movement of the Orthodox Union.

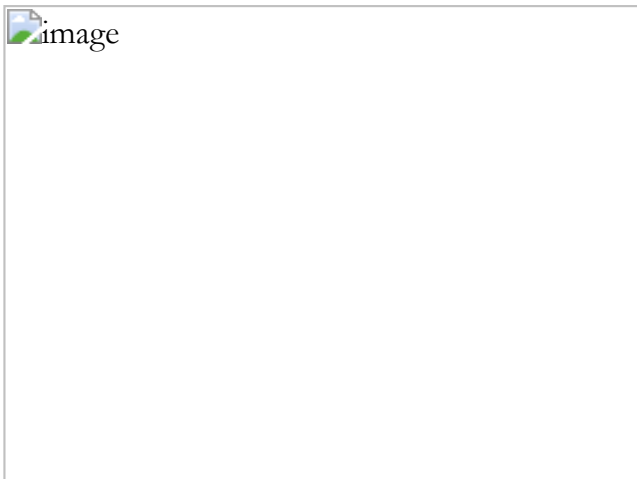
Led by Rabbi Ethan Katz, Associate Regional Director of New Jersey NCSY, the 17 students represented Bruria High School for Girls, in Elizabeth; Fair Lawn High School; James Caldwell High School in West Caldwell; Livingston High School; Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls in Teaneck; and Teaneck High School.

Reflected Netanya Stein, a student at James Caldwell High School, “The NCSY New Orleans Mission was better than I could have ever imagined. Not only did I make a difference in peoples’ lives there — from young to old — they made a difference in mine. It made me realize how lucky I am to live in an area where being Jewish is not uncommon, and we were fortunate enough to spend an inspiring Shabbat with incredible people who helped to improve the Jewish existence in New Orleans. The New Orleans trip was an amazing experience which I will never forget.”



New Jersey NCSY students Jessica Sabba Dery, Goldie Weiser, Malka Schnaidman, and Ellie Feldman haul lumber.

According to Ma'ayanot student Hannah Ash, “The trip was incredibly inspirational, and I truly felt like I impacted something in this world. Eventually someone will live in the house that I worked on the foundation. Eventually the kids we taught will teach their kids about Israel. Every single second that I was in New Orleans, the whole group and I felt that we were making a Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of God’s name).”



Rabbi Ethan Katz, New Jersey NCSY Associate Regional Director, with student Netanya Stein (center) and a volunteer from Habitat for Humanity.

Ellie Feldman, from Bruriah, described her thoughts in the following essay:

“This past week I had the unique and amazing opportunity to participate in a chesed (loving-kindness) trip run by NCSY with sixteen other girls from various backgrounds. Over the course of the four days, which were full of giving and were really was an eye

opener, I didn't only give to others but I also gained so much knowledge about who I am as a person.

The first day of the trip we volunteered for Habitat for Humanity – a non-profit organization dedicated to building simple, decent, and affordable housing for the homeless using volunteer labor. Each time I volunteer for Habitat I am in awe of what I'm doing; with each nail I hammer I have this sense of fulfillment knowing that with my small contribution people will have a home to live in.

This particular trip was focused on the New Orleans area and our help was particularly needed ever since Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005. After working most of the day at the construction site we headed to the old Orthodox synagogue that was destroyed by Katrina. Rabbi Katz spoke to us about the community's pain when they realized that the Torah scrolls had been destroyed and we went to the cemetery to see where they had been buried.

Rabbi Katz went into great detail when he described how the community had accepted what had happened and he reminded us that although the Torah is our life force, the actual scroll is like a person holding a neshama (the soul) — the contents and what is said will never be destroyed even if the actual scroll is waterlogged or even burnt. This really touched many of the girls because although not all of them had the privilege to go to yeshiva, each and every one still loves Torah. When we saw pictures of the scrolls being carried out of the water many shed a few tears.

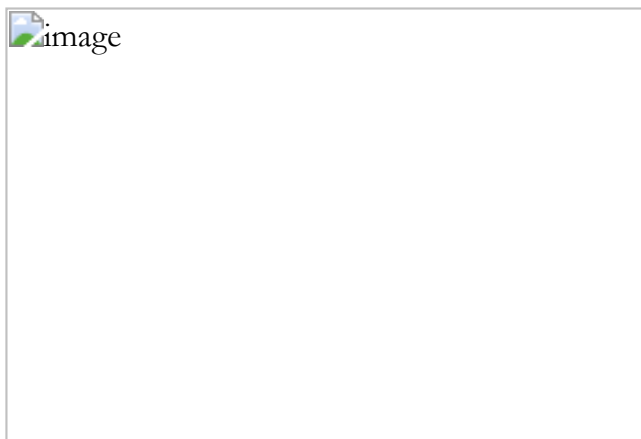
The next morning we spent running Jewish educational programs for the only Jewish day school in all of Louisiana, interacting with the children. From there we proceeded to the nursing home and spent the rest of the afternoon visiting the elderly people who were extremely glad to see us. We made sure to split up into groups so that no person was left without someone to talk to. Many of the residents spoke about the effects Katrina had on them and they were overjoyed to see us because they almost never get visitors — especially not a group of Jewish teenagers.

For Shabbat, the rabbi of the community, Rabbi Uri Topolsky of Congregation Beth Israel, and his wife hosted us for meals. We were able to meet different members of the community and fully understand the mesirat nefesh (self-sacrifice) that this community

had gone through. Because the Orthodox synagogue had been wrecked, both the Conservative and Reform temples offered the Orthodox congregation space to rent so that they could continue to hold services.

Ever since Katrina, the community has become extremely united and believes firmly that if one Jew is suffering then they are all suffering, and it doesn't matter which synagogue they belong to. I was so impressed with the unity and love that they each had for one and other even though they disagree in their hashkafa (observance), this was the first time I have ever seen an Orthodox and Reform synagogue sharing the same playground and having so much respect for each other. I think I can honestly say that this trip changed my life and view in so many ways; I learnt about the importance of unity giving to others and mesirat nefesh.

The fact that the community picked itself up and rebuilt itself after all it has been through is a real inspiration to us all.”



New Jersey NCSY students lay foundation for what will become the house porch.

Rabbi Katz will be leading a second delegation from Wednesday, February 22-Monday, February 27 consisting of boys and girls from Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School of Livingston, NJ. An additional student leadership mission, consisting of students from The Frisch School in Paramus, is currently in planning stages for late March to Alabama or to Joplin, MO.

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