

Organizing Youth Programs: Advice from the North East and South of the Border

Jonathan Katz, Marilyn Klein, Brooke Kibler,

History of our program

Bikur Cholim of Mexico through the Kehila Ashkenazi was established many years ago. Our work with children from the Jewish schools started 6 years ago. Today, we have approximately 50 volunteers that visit every day the major hospitals. When we find that somebody is sick in another hospital, we visit them also.

One of our greatest achievements has been going to Jewish schools once a year and meeting with children aged 5 to 12 in order to educate them about the concepts of *bikur cholim*, *mitzvot* and *tzedaka*.

Educational Programming with Children

When we meet a school group, our agenda is as follows:

- a. Theme presentation.
- b. A discussion of the voluntary nature of the work.
- c. A question and answer period, which helps clarify the Bikur Cholim program.
- d. Presentation of a video with a popular children's character, such as Shrek or The Pirates of the Caribbean, who emphasize our program's purpose.
- e. A discussion of the need to visit older adults, in particular sick people or those who live alone. We draw attention to the importance of always making sure that they have a written authorization from the people that we are planning to visit.
- f. Viewing a movie, which examines the different ways in which they can help without having to go to the hospital. For example:
 1. If they know of a family member or a friend in need, show interest by calling them to find out if there's you can do to help out.
 2. When visiting the family member or friend, smile and cheer them up.
- g. Drawing special cards*, and explaining that because of their young age, they are not always able to go to the hospitals. However, they can still help and contribute to Bikur Cholim in this way.
- h. To end the program, we ask the children to decorate the wine glasses that are taken every Shabbat to patients.

* It is important to note that when we visit the hospitals, people really get very emotional when they receive these cards. Often, they call or send letters to the children to thank them.

During the year we provide educational programming with approximately 2000 children. We hand out all of the letters that they create.

The Actual Visits

From Monday to Thursday, we visit patients and take an envelope that includes:

- a. The letter or card done by the children
- b. A triptych with *Tehilim* (Psalms)
- c. A telephone directory with the community's phone numbers

21st Annual Conference on Visiting the Sick ■ Sunday, November 9, 2008 @ UJA-Federation of New York

The Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council/JBFCS

Email: bikurcholimcc@jbfcs.org ■ Website: www.bikurcholimcc.org ■ 212.399.2685 ext. 212

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On our Friday visits, we hand out a bag that contains:

- a. The Shabbat Brachot
- b. A wine glass
- c. 2 challahs
- d. A kippah
- e. Grape juice
- f. Salt

We consider the involvement of children an extremely important issue, as they will be the generation to continue with this *mitzvah*.

Additionally, a select group of high school students currently accompany us to the hospitals.

Furthermore, every time there is a holiday, we take a significant present according to the occasion. For example:

1. Rosh Hashanah: A bottle with honey
2. Hanukah: A Sevivon (Dreidel)
3. Purim: A Rahashan
4. Passover: A matzo cover
5. Mother's Day: A Flower

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me.

Elena Bialostocky (sent via email)

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The Josh Klein Bikkur Cholim Society was established in 1999 in memory of a bright, active, loving, sixteen year old who died while awaiting a heart lung transplant at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

With over fifty volunteers, the organization sends visitors to four Harrisburg area hospitals on a daily basis, providing happy face toys, brochures on bikkur cholim, challahs for Shabbat, electric candlesticks, and baby tzedekah boxes. Over five thousand patients have been seen. Hundreds of meals have been provided to families with an illness crisis.

A vital part of the organization is educating the young people of Harrisburg about bikkur cholim.

BASICS FOR TEACHING BIKKUR CHOLIM TO YOUNG PEOPLE.

1. Give a definition of bikkur cholim.
2. Ask where you can find sick people.
3. Ask the children for their hospital/nursing home/sickness experiences.
4. Discuss a typical hospital visit:
 - a. knock on the door
 - b. ask permission to enter
 - c. identify yourself
 - d. ask permission to sit
 - e. be a good listener
 - f. encourage the patient to talk
 - g. do not talk about the illness
 - h. do not give medical assistance
 - i. remember that you are bound by confidentiality.
 - j. Emphasize that it's okay to feel good about doing a mitzvah.
5. Show the JBFCS video, The Act of Visiting
6. Role play a hospital visit
7. Create gifts for patients
Oriental Trading:
 - a. book marks
 - b. fans

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- c. jewelry
- d. suncatchers
- e. puppets
- f. picture frames

Joanne Fabric

- a. lap blankets
- b. pillows

Just For The Mitzvah

Lots of great crafts for the Jewish Holidays

Opportunities in which children/teens have participated in bikkur cholim in Harrisburg:

1. Conducted Friday night services at the Jewish Home.
2. Helped out at Mitzvah Day, located at the Jewish Home.
3. Fulfilled required community service hours for school by volunteering at the Jewish Home.
4. Donated outgrown stuffed animals to the pediatric ward of the hospital.
5. Had fundraisers for bikkur cholim to satisfy bar and bat mitzvah requirements.
6. Attended Hebrew High, bikkur cholim classes.
7. All Harrisburg JCC campers participate in Week of Caring and Sharing by learning about bikkur cholim, creating crafts and visiting the Jewish Home and Harrisburg Hospital.
8. Teens have become volunteers for hospital visits.
9. Classes on Bikkur Cholim were taught to area Hebrew School students.

Marilyn Klein

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