

AGES
8-11

NURTURING A LIFETIME
OF VOLUNTEERING:

A TOOLKIT
FOR FAMILIES
VOLUNTEERING
TOGETHER

REPAIR
THE WORLD

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: NURTURING A LIFETIME OF VOLUNTEERING

Introduction	6
Who Should Use This Toolkit?	7
The Transformative Power of Service	7
What is in this Toolkit?	8
How to Use this Toolkit Most Effectively	8
Unit 1: What is Volunteering? Why is it Important to Our Family, to Judaism and to Me?	10
Our Family's Volunteering Values	11
Judaism's Volunteering Values	14
My Volunteering Values	16
Unit 2: Identifying a Family Volunteer Opportunity	17
Why Not Create Our Own Project?.	18
Where and What Type of Help is Needed?	19
Logistics, Challenges and Successes	23
Our Hopes and Dreams	25
Making a Commitment	26

SECTION 2: REFLECTING ON YOUR VOLUNTEER SERVICE AS A FAMILY

Introduction	27
Reflecting as a Family	28
The Arc of the Volunteer Experience	28
Creating Space for Reflection	29
Reflection in Three Steps	30
Unit 1: Beginning with the End in Mind	31
A Volunteer Calendar	32
Creating a Visual Keepsake	33

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Unit 2: Volunteering as Sacred Time	34
Offering Gratitude for New Beginnings	35
Creating a Family <i>Kavana</i> (Intention)	36
Unit 3: Nurturing the Qualities of a Good Volunteer	37
Honoring Others: <i>Mechabeyd Zeh et Zeh</i>	38
Listening to Others by Being Quiet: <i>Sh'tikah</i>	39
Greeting All with a Beautiful Face: <i>Sayver Panim Yafot</i>	41
Being a Good Guest	42
Unit 4: Integrating the Volunteer Experience as a Family	43
Our First Impressions	44
Cultivating Empathy	45
Showing <i>Kavod</i> , Honor and Dignity	46
The Power of Storytelling	47
Sharing the Story of Our Volunteering with Others	49
Being Aware of Our Privilege	50
Being a Humble Volunteer	52
Unit 5: When Things Don't Go the Way We Expect	54
When Something in Our Volunteer Placement Makes Us Uncomfortable or Nervous	55
Upholding Our Commitment	56
A Midpoint Check-in	58
Unit 6: Continuing Our Impact	59
<i>Tzedakah</i> —Another Way to Make a Difference	60
Spreading the Word	61
Unit 7: Celebrating and Expressing Appreciation: Concluding the Volunteer Experience	62
Measuring Growth	63
Measuring Success	65
Expressing Gratitude	66
A Concluding Blessing	67

Section 1

NURTURING A LIFETIME OF VOLUNTEERING

INTRODUCTION

One value that was sewn into the stitching of our character at a very early age had to do with our responsibility to help others... We were expected to be of assistance to our neighbors... "Being neighborly"... was synonymous with being kind, friendly, and helpful to our neighbors and something that we were encouraged to do on a regular basis through firsthand experience. It was a bit like mandatory community service.

— BeNeca Ward, author of *3rd Generation Country, A Practical Guide To Raising Children With Great Values*

As parents, we dream that our children will be blessed with health, happiness and prosperity. We also hope that they will appreciate these blessings and actively seek to share them with others less fortunate. How can we teach our children from a young age to use their talents, privilege and curiosity to help others? How can we encourage them to move beyond caring solely for their immediate circle of family and friends, and also to care deeply about their extended community as well as people around the world whom they may never meet? How can we teach them humility and patience, as we encourage them to envision and work toward a world in which there is more equity and justice as a result of their efforts?

The Torah's seminal and oft-repeated charge to "remember that you were slaves in Egypt" offers important instruction about how we can teach our children these values, beliefs and behaviors. Our ancient history of oppression, followed ultimately by redemption, compels us to leverage our power and privilege and work with empathy and in partnership with vulnerable populations. We must dedicate our voices, our hands and our resources toward loosening the economic, social and political fetters that enslave others. This is not only our responsibility but also our obligation.

At multiple times during the yearly Torah cycle, as well as around Passover tables each year, we publicly read aloud the injunction to remember that we were slaves in Egypt. As parents, we hope that our children will hear and absorb the deeper meaning behind this message. But we also know that while speaking about fighting injustice is important, it's not enough. As Rabbi Shimon taught in the 3rd century, "it is not what one says, but rather what one does, that makes all the difference in the world."¹ Our efforts must thus go beyond just talking the talk; we ourselves must model what it looks like to strive for change by getting our hands dirty, volunteering alongside our children and reflecting with them about the joys, challenges and struggles that are inherent when working toward change.

¹ Pirkei Avot, 1:17

INTRODUCTION

WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOLKIT?

This toolkit is designed to be used by families who wish to convey the importance of volunteering through the lens of Jewish tradition, ritual and text. Using this toolkit does not require a strong background in Judaism—nor even for both partners in a family to be Jewish—as much as an appreciation of Jewish teachings as a rich source of wisdom about communal responsibility. Rooted in this context, this toolkit asserts that when parents participate in hands-on service with their children, in essence, “practic[ing] the volunteer commitments that they preach,” parental teaching becomes optimally effective.² As noted by Chertok and Gerstein et al. in *Volunteering + Values: A Repair the World Report on Jewish Young Adults*, a regular commitment to unpaid service by young adults “appears to be a socially learned behavior influenced by parental modeling”; Jewish young adults, for example, who recall their parents volunteering frequently during their high school years are themselves more likely to volunteer regularly.³ Thus, actively engaging in service as a family when children are young can create “a habit likely to continue throughout the lifespan.”⁴

Chertok and Gerstein also found that for interfaith families, volunteering often serves as “an easily agreed upon and non-religious avenue for imparting compassion and a sense of moral responsibility to their children.”⁵ Volunteering can also bring disparate families together to connect around a shared sense of purpose and value.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF SERVICE

This toolkit advocates for families to participate in specific type of service opportunities: those that are already established, direct and ongoing.

- *Already established*, meaning that the volunteer opportunity is driven by the host organization (rather than being designed and driven by families).
- *Direct*, meaning that families work face-to-face with others.
- *Ongoing*, meaning opportunities beyond episodic or one-time volunteering. While one-time volunteer opportunities may certainly prime the pump for a lifelong commitment to service, it is only through sustained and regular volunteering that children truly internalize the value of service as critical to their development as conscientious and engaged citizens.

When we participate in already established, direct and ongoing volunteer service, we may find our comfort levels challenged and our schedules disarranged. Yet these discomforts and inconveniences are precisely what help move us—some may even say *transform* us—precisely because they force us into uncomfortable and uncharted places from which we ultimately grow. This reminds us of another important lesson from Jewish history: the Rabbis taught that the Israelites *needed* to wander in the desert for 40 years after being released from slavery before entering the Promised Land so that they could be discomfited and thus truly transformed by the experience. Otherwise, they might have taken their redemption for granted and not have fully appreciated the end result. Similarly, when we face discomfort as volunteers, we are jostled into a deeper awareness of and appreciation for our own selves as well as others. Thus, as parents who wish to raise aware and engaged world citizens, we must model for our children a deep commitment to volunteering despite any initial discomfort or scheduling difficulties.

² Pancer S., & Pratt M. (1999). Social and family determinants of community service involvement in Canadian youth. In *Roots of Civic Identity: International Perspectives on Community Service and Activism in Youth*, ed. M. Yates, J. Youniss, pp. 32-55. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ Chertok, F., Gerstein, J., Tobias, J., Rosin, S., & Boxer, M. (2011). *Volunteering + Values: A Repair the World Report on Jewish Young Adults*. New York: Repair the World. p.20.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.3

⁵ *ibid.*, p.20

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS IN THIS TOOLKIT?

This toolkit is designed for parents who embrace the idea of volunteering as transformative but need support in creating a meaningful experience for their family. It consists of two complementary sections. The first, based on Repair the World's "Service that Matters" guidelines, will help families articulate why volunteering is important to them. It will also guide families in selecting an appropriate already established, direct and ongoing volunteer opportunity.

The second section of the toolkit consists of activities (mostly under 15 minutes in length and requiring few materials, if any) that will help families reflect on their service together. Reflection is a critical part of the volunteer experience—as critical, perhaps, as the hands-on component itself—because it allows parents and children to process together any questions, concerns or inspirations that may arise. Research shows that such processing contributes to volunteers' long-term commitment to service by validating their feelings and helping them connect lessons derived from service to their personal behavior and beliefs.⁶ Children especially need time to process these connections and benefit greatly from hearing their parents' ideas and thoughts about the same experience. Many of the reflection activities in the toolkit use Jewish values or texts as a starting point for discussion, which serve to further connect families to traditional Jewish ideas and practices.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT MOST EFFECTIVELY

In order to address different developmental needs, this toolkit exists in three versions, each tailored to one of the following age cohorts: 5-7 year olds, 8-11 year olds and 12-15 year olds. Families with children representing more than one cohort should review the corresponding toolkits to select the activities that make the most sense for their family.

Parents can then set a rough timeline for when to complete each session. It may be helpful to schedule these sessions at the same time each week, such as before Shabbat dinner on Friday night or on the first Sunday evening of each month.

Recognizing that a family's commitment to social justice is one commitment among many, the sessions are highly adaptable to families' interests, needs and time considerations. Each session indicates an approximate time allotment and sometimes includes options or extension activities. Most of the activities can be adapted to be done at mealtimes, in the car, at bedtime, or whenever families have time together to talk and think more deeply about the important volunteer service that they are doing together. While there are many opportunities within the toolkit to document family conversations, some families may wish to also share their insights and experiences using social media.

What is "Volunteering" and "Service" Anyway?

In this toolkit the terms "volunteering" and "service" are often used interchangeably or in tandem to refer to the ways in which we use our talents, resources and time to help others in a humble and respectful way. Volunteering or service can take a variety of forms. It can include doing unpaid work, raising funds or holding a drive. It can take place at home or at an established organization. Above all, it entails putting others before ourselves and thinking about how we can pursue greater justice in this world.

⁶ Butler University Volunteer Center. Homepage. 17 July 2012. <<http://www.butler.edu/volunteer/resources/reflection-resources/#Why%20is%20reflection%20important>>.

INTRODUCTION

Though most of the activities are designed for families to do together, on occasion, advance work by parents is required. This generally occurs when an adult must confirm logistics with an organization, which is a conversation most easily had between two adults on the phone or over e-mail (rather than with the entire family present).

Families may wish to expand and enrich their experience by inviting another family or two to join them on this journey. Partnering with other families similarly committed to working toward social justice will not only help share the planning load, but will also give children additional adult role models as well as peers with whom they can grow in service.

As Pirkei Avot memorably pronounced: "You are not required to finish the task, but neither are you free to ignore it."⁷ Your family—in partnership with others in your local community and beyond—is taking an important step on the long road toward justice. *B'hatzlacha*—we wish you great success! May your hands be strong, your heart full, your mind clear and your service impactful.

⁷ Pirkei Avot, 2:21.

Unit 1

WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO OUR FAMILY, TO JUDAISM AND TO ME?

To fully appreciate their role as volunteers, families must first explore and articulate what motivates them to volunteer. This section of the toolkit offers three lenses through which to examine these motivations:

- The first section allows parents and children to explore their family's relationship to and experience with volunteering, as well as those of their relatives and close friends.
- The second section uses the wider lens of the Jewish family to help families explore what Judaism teaches about helping others through volunteer work.
- Finally, in the third section, each family member examines his or her personal motivations for volunteering.

ACTIVITY #1

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 20 MINUTES)

OUR FAMILY'S VOLUNTEERING VALUES

Before beginning the process of selecting a volunteer opportunity, take time to discuss why volunteering is important to your family.

STEP 1:

Explain to your child that you will soon be volunteering together as a family. Before you decide where to volunteer, however, you first want to talk about what volunteering is and why it is important to your family.

STEP 2:

Ask your child:

- What does it mean to volunteer? (to willingly do something without receiving money for it)
- Where have you volunteered before (helping at a school fundraiser, serving as a "reading buddy" or making cards for elderly neighbors)? How did it feel to help someone else?
- Where have you learned about the importance of volunteering?
- Why do you think it is important for families to volunteer together? What do you think we could give and gain by volunteering together, as a family?

STEP 3:

Have your child interview you using the questions below. Either write down the responses in the spaces below or video the interview for posterity. Also encourage your child to use these questions to interview other relatives or close family friends about their volunteer experiences.

- What is your first memory of volunteering?

.....

.....

- Did your parents or family friends volunteer when you were growing up? If so, where did they volunteer and what motivated them to volunteer there?

.....

.....

- Have you ever benefited from the service of a volunteer? If so, what was that experience like for you?

.....

.....

UNIT 1: WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO OUR FAMILY, TO JUDAISM AND TO ME?

STEP 5:

Family Values Crest (15 minutes)

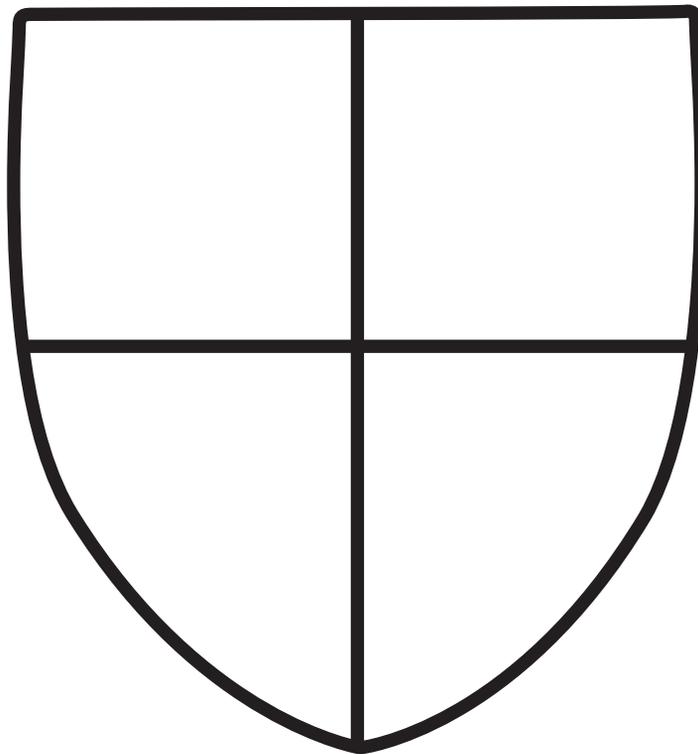
Artistically represent your family's volunteer values by illustrating a Family Values Crest.

Option: Family Volunteering Tree (20 minutes, plus prep time to gather photos)

Materials: *Photos, adhesive, markers, poster board*

Families can learn much about why they care about service, by tracing their family and friends' volunteer experiences. Gather photos of your relatives and admired friends. Paste them family-tree style on a piece of poster board, indicating below each photo the name of the person and the types of volunteer work in which he or she has participated. Note any patterns in these people's volunteering styles or interests. To shorten the activity's length, create a family tree with just names and no photos.

FAMILY VALUES CREST



ACTIVITY #2

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

JUDAISM'S VOLUNTEERING VALUES

Judaism has much to say about the importance of taking care of others. By exploring traditional and contemporary Jewish ideas that relate to this value, you can anchor volunteering in an even bigger family tree: that of the Jewish people.

STEP 1:

Remind your child that the Israelites—our ancestors—were slaves in Egypt and were then freed. The Torah describes the Israelites' condition of being slaves as being "strangers in the land of Egypt."

STEP 2:

Read the following Torah passage as a family and answer the discussion questions below:

[God] takes care of the orphan and the widow, and is friendly to the stranger, providing him/her with food and clothing. You too must be friendly to the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

—Deuteronomy 10:18-19

STEP 3:

Discuss:

- According to this Torah passage, why do we need to take care of other people?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Studying Jewish Texts:

If your family has never studied Jewish texts before, have no fear! In the context of this toolkit, Jewish texts are offered as springboards for conversation. You need not be a Torah scholar to find meaning in them and offer your own valid and valuable response to the ideas that they raise. Try this three-step approach to reading Jewish texts in this toolkit:

1. Read the text to yourself and/or aloud with a partner. On the first reading, consider the text's surface meaning. What do the words mean? Can you repeat them in your own words? Note that although the language of the texts in this toolkit has been simplified for children's comprehension, you may nonetheless wish to define further or paraphrase sections of the text for your child.
2. Reexamine the text a second time, this time exploring what you think it is trying to teach or convey. What values does it uphold? What unspoken assumptions might it be making? Where might you agree or disagree?
3. Use the discussion questions following each text to stimulate thought and dialogue among members of your family. Remember that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers; Judaism deeply esteems conversation and debate over answers.

Note: While the texts included in this toolkit are primarily Jewish in origin, if your family is informed by other religious traditions, feel free to include other meaningful texts that will help further connect your family to service.

UNIT 1: WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO OUR FAMILY, TO JUDAISM AND TO ME?

- Though we ourselves—living in the 21st century—were not literally strangers in the land of Egypt, why is it important to still remember that our ancestors were and behave as if we ourselves were strangers in Egypt?

- What does it mean to “be friendly to” the stranger? What does it look like?

- Who are the “strangers” among us? How can we be friendly to them and help them?

- How can we be friendly to the stranger through volunteering?

ACTIVITY #3

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

MY VOLUNTEERING VALUES

After exploring the values that inspire your family and friends to volunteer as well as Judaism's perspective on service, consider your own volunteering values. We each volunteer for different reasons. Why do you volunteer?

STEP 1:

Review the following list of reasons why people volunteer. If family members are motivated by additional reasons, add them to the list.

Why Volunteer?

- To make the world a better place
- To give back to my community
- To learn more about social justice issues
- To practice my leadership skills
- Because it feels good
- To connect with other people
- Because my tradition teaches that I should
- Because it is something that my family and friends do, so I do too
- To put my Jewish values into action
- For recognition (such as on a résumé)
- Because it is my civic duty
- Because if I don't do it, who will?
- Because it's fun
- To have an excuse to do something that I love
- Because I was asked
- To challenge myself
- To learn new things
- Because the issue I volunteer on has personally affected me
- Because it is required (by school, for example)
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

STEP 2:

Read the list again. Ask each family member to silently select the three statements that best describe what motivates him or her to volunteer. Then take turns sharing the three statements that best resonate and discuss similarities and differences between your respective responses.

Unit 2

IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Congratulations! After discussing the values that your family, Jewish tradition and you yourself hold with regard to volunteering, your family can now begin to explore suitable volunteer opportunities in your community.

Although it might seem easier as a parent to decide on your own where your family will volunteer, by involving your child in the decision-making process, you will expose him or her to the myriad of social issues that exist, as well as the difficult reality that we cannot help everyone who needs it. These lessons, although frustrating at times, are important to discuss with children even at a young age and will contribute to a more robust volunteer experience together.

UNIT 2: IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

ACTIVITY #1

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)
+ADDITIONAL TIME FOR CHECK IN WITH THE ORGANIZATION

WHY NOT CREATE OUR OWN PROJECT?

Families seeking to help may be inclined to develop their own project or fundraiser to benefit a cause. While this intention is honorable and understandable, this toolkit specifically encourages families to volunteer in an existing organization in order to expose them to the inner workings of a non-profit and allow them to use their time in a way that expressly benefits an organization. Additionally, this process helps teach children the important lesson that we must help others in the way that they wish to be helped, rather than in a way that is convenient or pleasing to us.

STEP 1:

Read together the following Jewish text from around the 5th century that encourages people to work in partnership in order to be most effective:

Separate reeds are weak and easily broken, but when they are bound together, they are strong and hard to tear apart.

–Tanchuma Nitzavim 1

STEP 2:

Discuss:

- Why are reeds bound together stronger than when they are apart?
- What does this passage teach us about the power of working with others?
- How does this image of reeds bound together explain why it is important that we volunteer with an organization rather than create our own project?

UNIT 2: IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

ACTIVITY #2

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 45-60 MINUTES)
CAN BE BROKEN INTO SMALLER SEGMENTS AND/OR THE RESEARCH
STAGE CAN BE GIVEN TO THE CHILDREN AS "HOMEWORK"

WHERE AND WHAT TYPE OF HELP IS NEEDED?

Finding an organization where your family can volunteer can be eye opening: in your research you are sure to find that there is much need in the world and many people working to effect change. This realization can also be overwhelming; if there is so much need and so many ways to help, where can your family fit in? The activities below will help bring these tensions to light so that you can discuss them as a family as you select the best volunteer opportunity for you.

Materials: *Large piece of paper, sticky notes (three per person), computer with Internet access*

STEP 1:

What Problems Exist in the World?

Pose the question: What types of problems exist in our community? Have each member of the family write down as many issues they can think of. The list may include: homelessness, poverty, hunger, illiteracy, disease, etc.

After about two minutes, have everyone take turns writing down one issue at time on a large piece of paper, taking care not to duplicate issues.

STEP 2:

Determine the Issues that are Most Meaningful to Your Family

Explain that while each of the issues that your family identified is important, with finite time and resources, your family is only able to address one at this time. To winnow down the list for the purpose of your volunteer service:

1. Have each person place a sticky note next to the three issues that are the most personally meaningful and explain why.
2. Family members may be persuaded by others' arguments to change where they placed their sticky notes.
3. Identify the issue that received the most sticky notes.

Children's Books with Social Themes:

Many parents find children's books helpful to contextualize social issues such as hunger, poverty and the environment. To find these books, both fiction and non-fiction, visit your local library or type "children's books [name of a social issue]" into a web browser. The Association of Jewish Libraries' Values Finder website (<http://www.jewishlibraries.org/main/Resources/AJLValuesfinder.aspx>) offers a searchable database of Jewish children's books related to values and social justice issues.

Why Focus on the Local and Not Global?

This toolkit encourages your family to volunteer on issues that have local impact, that is, that affect people in your community (i.e., your town, city or county). Although social issues of global concern are very important—and often have ramifications that are felt locally—by volunteering on an issue with local impact, your family is more likely to better understand an issue and feel more personally connected.

UNIT 2: IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

STEP 3:

Research

Sit with your child and search the Internet to find two local organizations that work on the social issue that your family selected. You may also ask children to do this research on their own time and report back to the family later.

Remember that you are looking for organizations that offer volunteer opportunities that are *already established*, *direct* and *ongoing*. Offer the following definitions to your child as they do their research:

- *Already established*, meaning that the volunteer opportunity is driven by the host organization (rather than being designed and driven by families).
- *Direct*, meaning that families work face-to-face with others.
- *Ongoing*, meaning opportunities beyond episodic or one-time volunteering.

Examples of good volunteer opportunities for families with children between 8-11 years of age include:

- Preparing and serving meals at a local soup kitchen
- Unpacking and organizing food donations at the local food pantry
- Reading to or tutoring younger children in a before-school or after-school program
- Participating in local environmental restoration efforts
- Running errands and doing light domestic duties for homebound elders

STEP 4:

Be an Organizational Detective

Write down the following information about each organization you research:

- Organization's name
- Website address
- Contact's name, email address and phone number
- Organization's address

Searching Online for Family Volunteer Opportunities

The following sites may offer already established, ongoing and direct volunteer service opportunities in your community. You may also try an Internet search by entering "family volunteer opportunities [name of your city]" into your search engine.

Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies:
www.ajfca.org

Doing Good Together:
www.doinggoodtogether.org

Idealist.org:
www.idealist.org

Serve.gov:
www.serve.gov

United Way:
www.unitedway.org

The Volunteer Family:
www.thevolunteerfamily.org

Volunteer Match:
www.volunteermatch.org

UNIT 2: IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

- Mission statement [An organization's mission statement describes what it hopes to accomplish, such as "rescuing food in order to feed hungry people in our community" or "helping new immigrants achieve financial independence." Often, you can find an organization's mission statement stated in one or two sentences on its homepage. It can also be found on the "about us" webpage.]
- What activities does the organization do in support of its mission statement?
- What *already established, ongoing and direct* volunteer opportunities are available for families with children my age (and siblings, if applicable)?
- Is there a set time and date for volunteering? (for example, a tutoring program may only have availability for volunteers after school during the school year)

Parent Note: The organizations you research may not have volunteer opportunities for your family. If this is the case, there are two options:

1) You can call the organizations to see if there are any opportunities not presently listed on the website; or 2) you may seek out another local organization working on a different issue that has an appropriate opportunity. In the latter case, be sure to discuss with your child the importance of volunteering where you are expressly needed.

STEP 5:

Review the Organizations

Review the information that you found and collected about each organization.

Discuss:

- Which organization resonates with us most?
- How could our volunteering as a family help support this organization's mission?

STEP 6:

Select an Organization

As a family, select the organization whose volunteer opportunity resonates best. Be sure to have a backup organization in mind in case the first organization cannot accommodate you after all.

Giving Time vs. Giving Money

Most non-profit organizations indicate on their websites that one way to get involved is by making a financial donation. Giving money is certainly a powerful way to create social change in the world, and your family might consider also giving money—alongside giving of your time—to support a cause you care about. To help guide this conversation, see p.X in "Reflecting on Your Volunteer Service."

A Sticky Predicament:

As we decide where to volunteer as a family, we also must recognize that our volunteering alone will not solve the problem. If this is so, then why is it still important that we volunteer?

UNIT 2: IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

STEP 7:

Parent Homework: Contact and Confirm with the Organization

Contact the organization that your family identified to see if they would indeed benefit from your family volunteering with them. Respectfully state your offer to volunteer and be prepared to adjust your proposal in order to best fit their needs.

In your conversation, be sure to touch on the following logistics:

- Phone and e-mail address of your main contact at the organization
.....
- Your family's responsibilities as volunteers
.....
- When you will volunteer (day of week and time of day) and how often
.....
- The timeframe of your commitment (including start and end date, if applicable)
.....
- When and where you will receive an orientation
.....
- How you will get to the site where you will volunteer (if applicable)
.....
- Whether you need to bring any supplies, dress in a certain way, etc.
.....
- Other relevant information to relay to your family
.....

At the end of the call, be sure to thank the organization again.

UNIT 2: IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

ACTIVITY #3

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

LOGISTICS, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Although you have already confirmed most details with the organization, by reviewing some of the logistics with your child, you create space for lingering questions that may be on his or her mind about the experience. During this conversation it is also important to talk about how you will gauge your success and how you plan to address any challenges you may encounter.

STEP 1:

Share with your child the details about the conversation you had with the organization where you will volunteer.

Discuss:

- Our responsibilities as volunteers

.....

- Where (at what physical location) will we volunteer

.....

- When will we volunteer (day of week and time of day) and how often

.....

- The timeframe of our commitment (start and end date, if applicable)

.....

- The need our volunteering will address

.....

- Any details regarding an orientation, if required

.....

- If we need to bring any supplies

.....

STEP 2:

Discuss possible challenges you may encounter. These may run the gamut from not getting along with all of the people you volunteer with; being bored with the volunteer service; or being unable to fulfill your original commitment. If any of these or other challenges arise, how do you hope and plan to address them as a family?

UNIT 2: IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

STEP 3:

Explain that while thinking about challenges in advance is important, it is also important to think about what success might look like. Discuss as a family what this success will look like:

- From the perspective of the organization

- From the perspective of those whom the organization serves

- From our perspective as volunteers

Note that in the second section of this toolkit, "Reflecting on Your Volunteer Service," you will have the opportunity to return to these measures of success and see if you have achieved them.

UNIT 2: IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

ACTIVITY #4

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

OUR HOPES AND DREAMS

As with any new beginning, starting as a new volunteer brings with it many hopes and some anxieties. It is important to take time to discuss these hopes, dreams and concerns as a family.

Materials: *Three strips of paper per person, three containers (i.e., small bowls or baskets), pens*

STEP 1:

Give each person three strips of paper and a pen.

Have each member of the family privately write down a response to the following three questions, each on a separate strip of paper:

1. What do you hope to learn through volunteering?
2. What are you looking forward to as a volunteer?
3. What, if anything, are you worried about regarding volunteering?

STEP 2:

After responding to each question, fold each paper in half. Have family members put their folded answers to the first question in the first container, their answers to the second question in the second container, and their answers to the third question in the third container.

STEP 3:

Shake up the containers. Have each person select one strip of paper from the first container and read it aloud. Discuss any common themes. Repeat for the strips of paper in the second and third containers.

UNIT 2: IDENTIFYING A FAMILY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

ACTIVITY #5

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 15 MINUTES)

MAKING A COMMITMENT

In Judaism, one marks a wholehearted commitment to and expectations of another through a *brit*, or holy contract. By writing a family *brit* that states your family's commitment to the organization that you will be working with, you model for your children the importance of taking your commitments seriously, especially—and even—when one is volunteering without expectation of pay or external reward.

Materials: Paper, markers

STEP 1:

Write a family *brit* using the template below. You may wish to have your child decorate the *brit*.

OUR *BRIT*—THE COMMITMENT WE MAKE

Our family believes that it is important to volunteer because:

We therefore commit ourselves to:

By volunteering, we hope that:

We are excited to work together and with our organizational partner to make the world a better place.

Signed,

STEP 2:

Share the *brit* with a relative, teacher or rabbi in order to help hold your family accountable. Place it in a prominent place in your home. You may even choose to frame it.

Mazal tov! You are now ready to begin your volunteer service! Turn to page XX to find "Reflecting on Your Volunteer Service as a Family" for activities that will help enrich and deepen your family's experience before, during and after your volunteer service.

Section 2

REFLECTING ON YOUR VOLUNTEER SERVICE AS A FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.

—James Levin

When we take time to reflect upon an experience—to consider how it felt, what it meant and how it may have challenged us—we not only better understand the experience but also discover important lessons to apply to our lives in the future. Reflection thus allows us to nurture our sense of wonder, test our assumptions, open our minds to new ideas and clarify our values.

Judaism also encourages continual reflection as a way to raise our awareness and participate more fully in the world. We read the same Torah stories year after year in order to mine our shared historical narrative for new meaning and relevance. On the High Holidays, we reflect as individuals and as a community on our actions over the past year to consider how we can do better in the year to come. *Mussar*, a Jewish ethical, educational and cultural movement that developed in 19th century and has seen resurgence in the 21st century, encourages us to notice how we practice certain virtues (such as listening or equanimity) in order to become more ethical, balanced and self-aware individuals.

REFLECTING AS A FAMILY

In our busy world today, making time to pause and reflect can prove to be admittedly challenging. However, as parents who hope to raise children who not only know themselves but also appreciate the amazing world in which they live, we must cultivate in ourselves and in them the habit of regular reflection. As parents, we can model this habit by both reflecting in front of our children as well as alongside them.

Modeling reflection is particularly important when volunteering with children. While the experience of volunteering is itself powerful, in order to concretize the experience, unravel any assumptions or anxieties, and encourage children to appreciate the enduring power of service in their lives, we must reflect with them. We must share our observations, discuss our feelings about our volunteer work, talk about what it meant to us—or how it fell short of our expectations—and discuss its impact upon us. By doing so, we teach not only the importance of reflection writ large, but also discrete skills—such as critical thinking, the ability to observe objectively and thoughtful analysis—which are powerful tools that children can apply to many other areas of their lives.

THE ARC OF THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

To assist your family in reflection, this toolkit presents activities in six subsections designed to correlate and respond to the anticipated arc of your family's volunteering experience: before, during and at its conclusion.

- The first section, "Beginning with the End in Mind," offers ways to document the volunteer experience from the outset until its end.
- The second section, "Volunteering as Sacred Time," provides ideas to ground volunteering in Jewish tradition and ritual.

INTRODUCTION

- “Nurturing the Qualities of a Good Volunteer,” the third section, can be used before volunteering. Activities in this section will help families practice important skills including honoring others, listening to others, and being a good guest at the host organization.
- In the fourth section, “Integrating the Volunteer Experience as a Family,” families will consider how to process and share their experiences as volunteers with empathy, dignity and humility.
- The fifth section addresses the challenging but not insurmountable issue of “When Things Don’t Go the Way We Expect.” These activities are designed to respond to common challenges for volunteers, such as when something uncomfortable occurs in the volunteer setting.
- In the sixth section, “Continuing Our Impact,” families consider ways to leverage their resources to further the cause of the organization with which they have volunteered.
- “Celebrating and Expressing Appreciation: Concluding the Volunteer Experience,” the final section, helps families close their volunteer experience in a meaningful way.

The activities, which vary in structure, are generally under 20 minutes. They can be done at home, while walking to school, in the car, at mealtimes, or before bed. They may be used in the order presented or in any order that best speaks to your family’s experience.

Finally, while these reflections help support families before, during and at the close of formal volunteering, families are encouraged to continue to reflect upon the experience and its impact long after completing volunteering at any particular site. In fact, you may find it helpful to return to some of the activities long after completing your volunteering, in order to address an important related question raised by a member of your family.

CREATING SPACE FOR REFLECTION

This section offers many activities and texts to spur conversation and reflection. Key to the activities’ success, however, is the existence of a safe, respectful and open atmosphere in which all members of the family feel comfortable offering their thoughts and feelings. In order to create such space for reflection:

- 1) Indicate that your time together as a family, thinking about and discussing the volunteer experience is, “safe space” in which no one will be judged.
- 2) Approach conversations from a stance of “appreciative inquiry,” in which judgment is not pronounced but rather questions are asked to further understand another’s point of view. Statements starting with “What do you mean when you say...?,” “Can you say more about...?” and “I wonder...” reflect a stance of appreciative inquiry.
- 3) Ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute to the discussion, not just the members of your family who find that reflection and sharing come easily.
- 4) Remember that for some members of your family, reflection through art, acting or writing might come more easily than through conversation or discussion. If so, create space for such forms of reflection.
- 5) Acknowledge and embrace quiet moments during sharing. It is often during quiet times in the company of others that we do our best thinking.

INTRODUCTION

REFLECTION IN THREE STEPS

Though the activities provided are designed to provoke thoughtful response and conversation, you can reflect with your family about any issue at any time using these three lenses:

- 1) **Wide Angle:** Consider the *big picture* of your experience. For example, if you are working at a soup kitchen, you might reflect on the issue of hunger and why there are hungry people even though there is more than enough food for everyone on the planet.
- 2) **Microscope:** Think about the *details* of your experience. If you are working at a soup kitchen, you might reflect on how the organization you are working with tackles hunger and how you can support their efforts.
- 3) **Mirror:** Think about *your own actions, beliefs and feelings*. If you are working at a soup kitchen, reflect on how you might feel if you were hungry and needed help, or think about how you may yourself contribute to the problem or solution of hunger in your community.¹

¹Ways to Reflect. PDF. 20 July 2012. <<http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/parents/charactered/Documents/WaystoReflect.pdf>>.

Unit 1

BEGINNING WITH THE END IN MIND

Judaism pays close attention to the passage of time. We mark the ending and beginning of the week with Shabbat and Havdallah; the start of each new month on Rosh Hodesh with special prayers; and the beginning of the new year at Rosh Hashanah with reflection and celebration. Similarly, your family may wish to consciously mark your time as volunteers in special ways. Not only will this help you look forward, but it will also allow you to return at the end of your service to a record of where you were at the beginning.

UNIT 1: BEGINNING WITH THE END IN MIND

ACTIVITY #1

A VOLUNTEER CALENDAR

To mark your volunteer time as a family, use an academic calendar or a printed Jewish calendar, which many synagogues distribute without charge in the fall. You can also go to www.hebcal.com for a downloadable Jewish calendar.

Mark your volunteer calendar with volunteering milestones:

- The date of your first family conversation about volunteering
- The date you confirmed your volunteer site
- The date of your volunteer orientation
- The date of your first family reflection
- Your first day volunteering
- Other important dates to your family

Younger children might decorate the calendar, while older children might be assigned the task of keeping track of important upcoming events.

At the end of your volunteering, return to this physical record to note your progress and growth.

UNIT 1: BEGINNING WITH THE END IN MIND

ACTIVITY #2

CREATING A VISUAL KEEPSAKE

Some families may find it meaningful to mark the volunteer experience through photographs.

As a family, discuss how you might use photographs to document your volunteering. At its conclusion, you may wish to create a photographic memory book using an online site.

The Power—Positive and Negative—of Photography:

While photography is a powerful mode of expression, if used inappropriately, it can cause harm. Keep in mind the following considerations when taking photos as a volunteer:

- Only take photographs with the express permission of the organization and any people whom you may photograph.
- Do not use the photographs for any reason other than for personal use.
- Do not post photographs of other people online or publicly without their permission.
- Be wary of hiding behind the camera; it can serve as a barrier to developing an authentic personal relationship with the people with whom you volunteer.
- Be careful not to over-photograph a scene.
- Be discrete when photographing.
- When photographing yourself or your child, consider how to frame the scene such that you or your child are not portrayed as the “hero” of the shot but rather as an equal participant. For example, if your family is bringing meals to an elderly person, consider taking a photo of your child holding hands with the elder rather than serving him or her a meal.
- Do not bring your camera into any situation where it would radically shift dynamics and call greater attention to extant inequities (for example, by bringing an expensive camera into a homeless shelter).

Unit 2

VOLUNTEERING AS SACRED TIME

By grounding volunteer service in Jewish tradition and ritual, it becomes connected to sacred Jewish values and becomes holy work.

UNIT 2: VOLUNTEERING AS SACRED TIME

ACTIVITY #1

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 2 MINUTES)

OFFERING GRATITUDE FOR NEW BEGINNINGS

In Jewish tradition, new beginnings are marked by the recitation of the *shehecheyanu*, through which we offer gratitude for having reached the occasion of starting something new.

Recite the *shehecheyanu* as a family before beginning volunteering for the first time to frame your new experience Jewishly and celebrate it together.

HEBREW TEXT

Transliteration:

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, shecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higyanu lazman hazeh.

Translation:

Blessed are You, Sovereign of the Universe, for giving us life, sustaining us and allowing us to reach this day.

UNIT 2: VOLUNTEERING AS SACRED TIME

ACTIVITY #2

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 5 MINUTES)

CREATING A FAMILY KAVANA (INTENTION)

The word *kavana*, or intention, comes from the Hebrew root meaning "to aim." Before prayer, many Jews offer a *kavana* (plural: *kavanot*) in order to aim their hearts in a prayerful direction and more deeply connect to the moment.

As a family, write a *kavana* to recite together each time before volunteering. The *kavana* can take the form of a blessing or a mantra.

When crafting your *kavana* together, consider:

- What are we "aiming for" as volunteers?

- Where do we wish to direct our hearts as we volunteer?

- What are our hopes and aspirations as volunteers?

Write down your family *kavana* and recite it together each time before volunteering.

If preferred, you may also use one of the following *kavanot*:

- Divine One, open our hearts and strengthen our hands as we volunteer today.
- Keep an open mind, an open heart and open hands.
- Be curious, be present, be kind.

Unit 3

NURTURING THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD VOLUNTEER

The activities in this section highlight important qualities and skills for families—parents and children alike—to consider and practice before volunteering. These qualities include:

- Honoring Others
- Listening to Others
- Greeting All with a Beautiful Face
- Being a Good Guest

UNIT 3: NURTURING THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD VOLUNTEER

ACTIVITY #1

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

HONORING OTHERS: MECHABEYD ZEH ET ZEH

Judaism teaches that the value of *mechabeyd zeh et zeh*—honoring others—is fundamental to powerful human connection. In a volunteer setting, honoring others is integral to a positive experience for both those serving and those being served.

Materials: Paper, markers

STEP 1:

Read aloud the following Hasidic saying: Treat others the way you want to be treated.

In every person there is something precious, which is in no one else. And so we should honor each for what is hidden within him/her, and for what none of his/her comrades but only that person has.

STEP 2:

Have each family member list some of his or her respective unique qualities. If family members are having difficulty coming up with ideas, take a few moments for each family member to offer examples for each other, such as "Dad is a whiz at fixing anything electronic," "Sam finds creative solutions to difficult problems" or "Laura is a loyal friend."

STEP 3:

Using the markers, have each member of the family draw a self-portrait illustrating his/her unique qualities. The self-portraits do not need to be realistic, that is, they should depict the person's unique qualities rather than the person's actual likeness.

STEP 4:

Share your portraits and explain their significance.

STEP 5:

Discuss: As volunteers, we will encounter many people who are different than us. How can we honor their unique qualities just as we honor uniqueness in ourselves?

UNIT 3: NURTURING THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD VOLUNTEER

ACTIVITY #2

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 8 MINUTES)

LISTENING TO OTHERS BY BEING QUIET: *SH'TIKAH*

Sh'tikah, being quiet—both by closing one's mouth as well as focusing one's mind—is an important skill to practice when serving as a volunteer.

STEP 1:

Explain that the Hebrew word *sh'tikah* means being quiet. Ask: Why is *sh'tikah* important? What can your mind focus on when you are quiet? (other people, things outside of yourself, thoughts inside of yourself)

STEP 2:

As a family, read the following text from Pirkei Avot, a collection of rabbinic teachings from the third century CE:

I have spent my whole life among wise people, and I have found nothing better for a person than silence.

–Pirkei Avot, 1:17

STEP 3:

Discuss:

- Why do you think Pirkei Avot teaches that people who are silent are “wise”?
- How is silence a sign of respect toward others?

STEP 4:

Do the following quiet listening activity as a family:

1. Partner with another person. Sit close together, knees touching.
2. Person #1 has 90 seconds to talk about “a highpoint of this week...” or “something I have been thinking a lot about lately...”
3. Person #2 must sit silently and listen until the 90 seconds is up.
4. Person #2 has 45 seconds to paraphrase what Person #1 said.
5. Person #1 has 20 seconds to talk about how it felt to hear back what he or she said.
6. Switch roles.²

² National School Reform Faculty. Pair Communication: Active-Listening Exercise, developed by Emily White and Nancy Mohr. 29 July 2012. <http://www.nsrffharmony.org/protocol/doc/pair_communication.pdf>.

UNIT 3: NURTURING THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD VOLUNTEER

STEP 5:

After the activity, discuss:

- Did you feel listened to during this activity? What did the other person do or say (or not do or say) that made you feel listened to?
- As volunteers, why is practicing sh'tikah—being quiet—and listening well important?

UNIT 3: NURTURING THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD VOLUNTEER

ACTIVITY #3

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

**GREETING ALL WITH A BEAUTIFUL FACE:
SAYVER PANIM YAFOT**

A person's facial and body language can convey volumes before words are ever exchanged. As a volunteer, nonverbal language—especially when first entering an organization, can relay important messages to the people who you encounter.

Materials: *Old magazines, paper, scissors, glue*

STEP 1:

As a family, read the following text from Pirkei Avot, a collection of rabbinic teachings from the third century CE:

Greet all people with a beautiful face.

—Pirkei Avot, 1:15

STEP 2:

Discuss:

- What does it mean to greet someone with a "beautiful face"? What might a "beautiful face" look like? (smiling, saying hello, making eye contact)
- How does greeting someone with a "beautiful face" affect the way in which someone responds to you?
- As volunteers, how can we greet others with a "beautiful face"?

STEP 3:

Using old magazines, scissors and glue, create a collage together of friendly smiles. Write at the bottom "Greet all people with a beautiful face" and hang it in a prominent place in your home.

UNIT 3: NURTURING THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD VOLUNTEER

ACTIVITY #4

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 15 MINUTES)

BEING A GOOD GUEST

Volunteers must remember that despite any sacrifices they might be making in order to volunteer, the host organization often also sacrifices staff time and organizational resources to support volunteers. Therefore, as guests—albeit ones intending to help—volunteers must prioritize the needs of the organization and seek to be good guests when they serve. The following activity will help families discuss how to be good guests as volunteers.

STEP 1:

Read together this passage from the Talmud, a collection of rabbinic teachings and laws compiled in the 6th century, which compares a good and bad guest's respective responses to a host. As you read it, consider how you might be a volunteer who emulates the behavior of the "good guest" rather than the "bad guest."

What does a good guest say? "How much trouble my host has taken for me! How much meat he has set before me! How much wine he has set before me! How many cakes he has set before me! And all the trouble he has taken only for my sake!"

But what does a bad guest say? "How much after all has my host put himself out? I have eaten one piece of bread, I have eaten one slice of meat, I have drunk one cup of wine. All the trouble which my host has taken was only for the sake of his wife and his children [that is, he would have done it anyway; he did nothing special for my sake]!"

—Brachot 58a

STEP 2:

- The good and bad guests seemingly have the same experience yet view the experience differently. What is the difference in the perspective between the "good" and the "bad" guest?
- When we enter an organization as volunteers, we are also guests there. What troubles do you think the organization will take on our behalf? (assigning staff time for orientation, making special accommodations)
- As a "bad" guest/volunteer, how might we understand the accommodations that the organization makes on our behalf? As a "good" guest/volunteer, how might we understand this same experience?
- How can we express gratitude to our host organization, in recognition of its work on our behalf?

Unit 4

INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY

The activities in this section will help families process and share what they observe and encounter during their volunteer experience.

UNIT 4: INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY

ACTIVITY #1

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

OUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS

After your first volunteering session, take time to process what you saw and experienced.

STEP 1:

Discuss with your child his or her first impressions of volunteering. Ask of your child and share yourself:

- What is one thing that surprised you?
- What is one thing you learned?
- What questions did our volunteer raise for you?

STEP 2:

Have your child write a poem in a format of their preference (rhyming, acrostic, haiku) that incorporates their first impressions of their volunteer experience.

UNIT 4: INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY

ACTIVITY #2

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 5 MINUTES)

CULTIVATING EMPATHY

Empathy—seeing the world from another’s perspective with compassion and understanding—is critical for healthy human relationships. By practicing empathy, volunteers—especially those who work with people from dissimilar backgrounds—can find meaningful connection.

STEP 1:

Read as a family the following adage from Rabbi Hillel, who lived and taught in the 1st century BCE:

Do not judge [think you know what someone else is feeling or thinking] your friend until you are in his place.
–Pirkei Avot, 2:4

STEP 2:

Discuss:

- In your own words, what is Rabbi Hillel saying?
- Can you really be in someone else’s place? Can you really know what it feels like to be someone else?
- How can remembering what Rabbi Hillel taught us help us as we volunteer?

ACTIVITY #3

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

SHOWING *KAVOD*, HONOR AND DIGNITY

As volunteers, we must always remember to treat others with *kavod*, honor and dignity.

STEP 1:

Your family may be volunteering with people who are less privileged than you are: people who have less money, fewer resources and less power. Pirkei Avot, a 3rd century rabbinic text, reminds us that no matter the difference between two people on the surface, we learn from every encounter we have with another person and must therefore always treat others with *kavod*, or honor and dignity. The passage teaches:

One who learns from his fellow a single chapter, or a single law, or a single verse, or a single saying, or even one letter—must treat the teacher with honor.

—Pirkei Avot 6:3

STEP 2:

Discuss:

- According to this text, who are our teachers? Is there anyone from whom we cannot learn?
- How are the people with whom we volunteer our teachers?
- If the people with whom we volunteer are our teachers, how should we treat and speak about them?

If you volunteer with people who have made choices that you do not condone (for example, past drug abuse), it may be challenging for you to relate to them without judgment. Although you may not respect someone's decision, Judaism teaches us to still show each individual *kavod*, honor and dignity. As parents, it is important to talk about your own struggles around this tension with your child, to both model self-reflection as well as teach that the answers to some challenges are not always clear, even to adults.

UNIT 4: INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY

ACTIVITY #4

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

We live in a world of stories. We read them in religious and secular contexts, impart them to our children and tell them daily to our friends, partners, colleagues and ourselves. Professor Bruce Jackson, writing in *The Antioch Review*, explains that stories are powerful mechanisms of communication because:

Ordinary life is disorderly, cluttered, and full of things that don't seem to make a great deal of sense. It's in our stories that things make sense. Stories are how we know things and how we remember them... We organize the events of our lives in terms of these narratives. These stories are not just file cabinets or movies of ordinary life; they are also the devices with which we explain and justify ourselves to ourselves and to others.²

Rabbi Will Berkovitz, writing from a religious as well as anthropological perspective, asserts that the very act of listening to and telling stories is holy. As he writes:

Many of the holiest moments in life are not found in churches or synagogues or in the cloistered study of sacred literature. No, the sacred moments that sustain and bind us together are the sharing of our common humanity through simple encounter – the telling and hearing of our stories, the passing along of our experiences.

Moreover, asserting that “everyone has a story to tell and deserves to tell it,” Berkovitz continues:

The telling and hearing our stories is a rare instance of a gift given and received in two directions – at once an act of solidarity and reciprocity. It knits together the fabric of our separate lives into a common tapestry. We are taught at an early age not to talk to strangers, but often we keep people as strangers when we could be building relationships.³

Sharing stories is certainly important and has the potential to be holy, community-building work. Yet much depends on how we tell stories about others and retell others' stories. Since we tend to tell stories from our own perspective, when we tell stories that feature other people or stories in which other people are protagonists, we run the risk of unintentionally misrepresenting them. As volunteers who may be working with less privileged populations, this dynamic can be particularly tenuous and problematic. For example, many volunteers inadvertently portray themselves as self-sacrificing heroes and the individuals with whom they volunteer as dependent or weak. In other cases, not fully understanding the culture of the other person in the story can cause volunteers to inadvertently pass judgment on others' actions.

² Jackson, Bruce. "The Stories People Tell." *Antioch Review* 55.3 (1997): 605-320. Academic Search Premier. Roosevelt U. Lib., Chicago. 8 Feb. 2007 <http://search.ebscohost.com/> p.305.

³ Huffington Post. The Priest and the Prostitute: Storytelling as a Gift to God. 29 July 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-will-berkovitz/storytelling-gift-to-god_b_1166538.html>.

UNIT 4: INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY

Take for example, the following blog post by a college student who volunteered in Africa for eight months:

Let's start at the beginning. As I was sitting on the plane from Addis Ababa to Douala... my first interaction with a Cameroonian ended in a proposal... a wedding proposal that is. And since then? I guess I've had about a handful of chances to marry some random Cameroonian men, but am sorry to report that this girl is not yet engaged. And it seems that whenever I talk to men in Cameroon I get the chance to share that I feel I am too young to think of marriage, kids, and yes I already know that if we had babies together they would be a beautiful mixed caramel color... Sometimes it can be hard when my roommate and I walk to the supermarket and get yelled at in every direction, but I also have found that personally these people aren't here to make us upset or scared, they just think it's pretty weird that two young and pale white girls are walking to a supermarket in the middle of Douala, a place without much tourism and the only diversity coming from neighboring countries or the few old American or European men that are here on business. As Mama Simone would tell me, they are just yelling at you because they think you're beautiful! Although, I have to say I don't think after sweating in the hot and humid weather all day after taking care of a bunch of kids who wipe their noses all over me and maybe having running water that day to take a shower—actually deserves any recognition whatsoever, but I guess I'll take the compliment...⁴

Though undoubtedly written with the best intentions in mind, this blogger reveals some negative and naïve impressions about Cameroon and the people with whom she volunteered for eight months.

Her blog post demonstrates that when we tell stories about other people, we quickly create images and ideas about those people in others' minds—images and ideas that can be helpful or harmful. We are therefore obligated to consider thoughtfully how we tell stories that represent the people with whom we volunteer with dignity, honor and sensitivity.

This toolkit certainly does not seek to discourage volunteers from telling stories about their experiences to others; in fact, story-telling, in addition to creating connection between human beings, is a critically important way of motivating others to join and do good work themselves. Rather, when telling stories, families must consider how they speak about others with dignity and respect—in other words, in the way they themselves would want to be treated and spoken about.

⁴ Words Across the Universe. 29 July 2012. <<http://wordscrosstheuniverse.blogspot.com/>>.

UNIT 4: INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY

ACTIVITY #5

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

SHARING THE STORY OF OUR VOLUNTEERING WITH OTHERS

By considering what it feels like when people tell stories about us, we can better sensitize ourselves to how we speak about others.

Materials: Paper, markers

STEP 1:

Have your child tell, write or draw a comic strip about an interaction he had with another person while volunteering.

STEP 2:

After telling his version of the story, ask him to retell/rewrite/redraw the story again from the perspective of the other person in the story.

STEP 3:

Ask your child:

- What was it like to retell the story from the other person's point of view?
- Have you ever overheard someone telling a story about you? How did you feel when you heard it being told (curious about what the speaker would say; pleased that another person was talking about you; frightened of what the other person might say; worried that he or she was oversimplifying or misrepresenting your side of the story)? If you could have interrupted the speaker while he was talking about you, what would you have said?
- Think about what it feels like when you hear someone telling a story about you. How does that affect the way you might tell a story about someone else?
- When we tell stories about our volunteering, how can we do so while still showing respect to the people with whom we volunteer and remembering their perspective?

STEP 4:

To drive this point home, relate a time when a story was told about you when you felt that you were not being represented fairly. By sharing this personal experience with your child, you shed light on the complexity of emotions that one feels when stories are told about us without the benefit of our direct voice.

Another Perspective:

There are many children's books that retell classic fairy tale stories from the perspective of a supporting character. Read one to your child (for example, *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka) and reflect together on how the story feels different when told from a different character's perspective. Is the story any less "true" when told from another character's perspective? How do you think differently about the story when you hear it from another point of view?

UNIT 4: INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY

ACTIVITY #6

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 15 MINUTES)

BEING AWARE OF OUR PRIVILEGE

A person of “privilege” has an advantage over others, often because of his or her skin color, financial resources or gender. For example, people with white skin may—knowingly or not, willingly or not—experience racial privilege, which means that they are treated better because of the color of their skin. Similarly, middle- or upper-class families experience privilege because they have the financial resources to purchase things that allow for a higher quality of life (such as being able to buy a car rather than having to take the public bus; live in certain neighborhoods; and attend certain schools (such as higher performing public schools or private schools) that are not equally accessible to everyone.

The following activity does not seek to make families feel guilty about their privilege, but rather to become aware of it and to think about how their privilege might affect their relationship with those they serve.

STEP 1:

Ask: What does privilege mean? [Note that your child may be most accustomed to hearing the word “privilege” used in relation to the “privilege” of watching TV or having a cell phone rather than as a social construct.]

Define privilege by explaining that it describes a situation in which “one person has an advantage over another person, often because of his or her skin color, financial resources or gender.”

STEP 2:

Discuss:

- What privileges does our family have (financial, racial, socio-economic, etc.)?
- What advantages do we have as a result of our privilege? (we can live wherever we wish, attend good schools, buy things we want when we want them)
- At the organization where we volunteer, how might others perceive our privilege? (For example, if your family is working with people living in poverty, what might they think if you come in with flashy cell phones and flashy clothes?)
- Do you think we have to disguise our privilege in order to be effective volunteers? Why or why not? Is it even possible to disguise our privilege?
- How can we use our privilege to help the people with whom we volunteer? [Think outside of just giving time—are there other resources we may have access to as a result of our privilege (such as politicians' time or the ability to donate money) that can be leveraged in order to make a difference in other people's lives?]

UNIT 4: INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY

STEP 3:

Read the following text by Martin Buber, a contemporary Jewish philosopher:

We cannot avoid using power ... so let us ... love powerfully.

STEP 4:

Discuss:

- In your own words, what does Buber think about power?
- How can we use our privilege, and the power that it brings with it, to "love powerfully"?

UNIT 4: INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY

ACTIVITY #7

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

BEING A HUMBLE VOLUNTEER

When we volunteer, it is easy to feel good about ourselves—to pat ourselves on the back and feel self-satisfied. However, Jewish tradition reminds us to treasure humility in our interactions with other people, remaining aware that there is always something to learn from others and always room for us to grow.

STEP 1:

Ask your child:

- What is humility or being humble? (to be modest, not overly proud or arrogant)
- Why is humility important?
- People who are not humble often behave as if they know everything and have nothing to learn. What is the risk we run if we behave this way as volunteers?

STEP 2:

Read and/or act out the following vignettes as a family. Identify how the volunteer is not expressing humility and suggest alternate, more humble, responses.

Vignette 1—Setting: A soup kitchen

Volunteer 1, after serving soup to a man dressed in shabby clothes, to Volunteer 2: "Seriously, that man could have showered before he came here. It's gross. How can other people eat with that smell around them?"

Volunteer 2, in a whisper: "I know. These people aren't taking care of themselves, are they?"

Vignette 2—Setting: An elderly home

Elderly Man: "You're so sweet to come read to me. Since I turned 90, my eyes have just gotten worse and worse—it's so hard not be able to read. I used to love it so much. But before you begin reading, can you do me a favor? I would love a cookie and the nurses tell me that I cannot have another. Can you go get me one?"

Head nurse, overhearing the conversation: "Mr. Goldberg, you cannot have another cookie because of your diabetes."

Volunteer 1 to Volunteer 2 in a hushed voice: "Sheesh, really? He's 90! Why can't he have another cookie if he wants it? Why is that nurse being so bossy and controlling?"

UNIT 4: INTEGRATING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AS A FAMILY**Vignette 3—Setting: An animal shelter**

Executive director, completing a mandatory tour for prospective volunteers: "And so, here at this animal shelter, we regretfully have to make difficult decisions. When there is animal that has not been adopted after six months after all our best efforts, we have the policy that we must put that animal to sleep. It is not our preference, but we have learned from our years of experience that this allows us to make more room in the shelter for other animals that we can then find loving homes for."

Volunteer 1: "I'm sorry but that just doesn't make sense. If it were me, I would never put any animal to sleep. All animals are equal and you can't just kill an animal because it hasn't found a home in six months."

STEP 3:

Offer an example of time during your volunteer work when you did not practice humility. What might you have done or said differently in order to demonstrate greater humility?

Unit 5

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO THE WAY WE EXPECT

Despite our best hopes and intentions, as volunteers, there will be times when things don't go the way we expect. In order to strengthen the experience—both for ourselves as well as for the organization we serve—we must reflect on the challenges we face in order to understand, if not ameliorate them.

ACTIVITY #1

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

WHEN SOMETHING IN OUR VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT MAKES US UNCOMFORTABLE OR NERVOUS

As volunteers, we sometimes encounter situations that may make us uncomfortable or nervous. For example, volunteers who work with people with mental illness or physical disabilities may experience situations that they are not accustomed to. While feeling uncomfortable or afraid is okay and normal, it is important as a volunteer not to become paralyzed in these circumstances.

Children may indicate that there is something or someone that makes them uncomfortable or nervous when they volunteer. You yourself may have some uncomfortable feelings that arise in you when you volunteer. Sharing these feelings as a family is very important. The activities in this section offer some framework for discussing these feelings and for bolstering one's courage in new and sometimes unsettling situations.

STEP 1:

Read together this Jewish text from the 5th century that encourages us to be brave even when we are uncomfortable or nervous.

A man walking on a road saw a pack of dogs and felt afraid of them, so he sat down among them.
—Genesis Rabbah, 84:5

STEP 2:

Discuss:

- Why did the man sit in the middle of the dogs if he was afraid of them? What do you think he hoped to accomplish by confronting something that he feared?
- Have you ever tried something that made you nervous? If so, what was it? How did you gather the courage to confront your fear?
- How does this story relate to any uncomfortable feelings you have when you volunteer?

Discomfort vs Danger:

Emphasize to your child that feeling discomfort is not the same as feeling unsafe or in danger. At any point when volunteering, if your child feels physically or emotionally unsafe, tell her to speak to you or another adult immediately and cease volunteering there. Also be sure to communicate and explain these concerns to the organization.

UNIT 5: WHEN THINGS DON'T GO THE WAY WE EXPECT

ACTIVITY #2

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 5 MINUTES)

UPHOLDING OUR COMMITMENT

Before beginning your service, your family expressed its hopes and dreams. But what happens if your volunteer experience doesn't turn out the way you hoped or expected? How can you continue to be positive, give the benefit of the doubt as applicable and/or make adjustments to your volunteering in order to make it a meaningful and positive experience for all?

Materials: Copy of your family's volunteering *brit* (Page XX)

STEP 1:

Discuss as a family how sometimes when we do something over and over, we begin to tire of it. We may feel this way sometimes about going to school, practicing an instrument, or playing a sport. However, if we keep going, even if we are tired, in the end we often feel good and are very proud.

As volunteers, we can sometimes feel the same way. When we get tired, we need to remember why we wanted to volunteer in the first place. We can remember the story of Noah to inspire us to continue our volunteer work.

STEP 2:

Ask your child:

- What is the biggest project that you have built out of blocks or something else?
- How long did it take?
- How long do you think it took Noah to build an ark that was 450 feet long? [If you have time, visit a soccer or football field. Walk around the perimeter to give your children an idea just how big the ark was.]
- What would have happened if Noah had given up and left the ark half built?⁵

STEP 3:

Refer back to your family *brit*. Discuss:

- As volunteers, why is it important that we do what we say we are going to do?
- How does it feel when someone makes a promise to finish something but then doesn't finish it?
- What can we as a family do to continue to enjoy our time volunteering together?

⁵ Adapted from: Kids of Integrity. Perseverance: Bible Stories. 29 July 2012. <<http://www.kidsofintegrity.com/perseverance-bible-stories>>.

UNIT 5: WHEN THINGS DON'T GO THE WAY WE EXPECT

Tweaking the Volunteer Experience: If your child becomes resistant to volunteering, consider:

- Changing the time of day of the volunteering
- Incentivizing the service by having the child take photos or record it
- Engaging the child in a different role

Remember, however, that any changes that will affect the organization must be made *in ongoing communication* with the organization so as to minimize the stress on their staff to make accommodations. However, do not guilt or force your child if he/she does not want to participate. While commitment is important, developing a lifelong love of and appreciation for service is also important, and that cannot be done through guilt or compulsion.

UNIT 5: WHEN THINGS DON'T GO THE WAY WE EXPECT

ACTIVITY #3

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)
+ ADDITIONAL TIME FOR A CHECK IN WITH THE ORGANIZATION

A MIDPOINT CHECK-IN

As you approach the middle of your time volunteering, it is important to check-in both as a family as well as with the organization where you serve.

STEP 1:

Have each family member check in, offering one example of where things have been going well.

STEP 2:

Have each family member offer one example of where things might be improved. For each example, explore:

- Why do you think things aren't going as expected?
- What can we do to improve the situation?

STEP 3:

Have one member of the family speak with a representative from the host organization to make sure that your needs and theirs are still matching up well. Be prepared to listen and share, as well as make adjustments as needed in coordination with the organization.

STEP 4:

Taking the organization's feedback into account, as a family talk about how to adjust your volunteering in order to be the most helpful and best partner you can be.

Unit 6

CONTINUING OUR IMPACT

Beyond volunteering time, how can we leverage our resources in order to make the greatest impact?

UNIT 6: CONTINUING OUR IMPACT

ACTIVITY #1

TZEDAKAH—ANOTHER WAY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Volunteering one's time is an important way to make a difference in the world. Giving money—in Judaism, known as *tzedakah*—is another way in which we effect change in the world. Money allows non-profit organizations to turn on the lights, pay staff salaries and support volunteer programs.

Your family may therefore find it very meaningful to give *tzedakah* to the organization with which you have been volunteering. You may choose to give on a regular basis (such as through automatic monthly donations), on special occasions (such as on holidays or in honor of a birthday) or as a culminating donation of appreciation.

Before donating, discuss:

- When and how often do we want to donate funds to this organization?
- How much money do we wish to donate to this organization?
- Where else do we plan to donate *tzedakah* this year? Do we want to give more to this organization or social issue because we are familiar with it through our volunteering?
- How much of our donation should be from kids' money or from parents' money?
- Do we want our money to go to the organization's general fund or to a specific area that the organization works on (also known as "earmarking")?

For additional resources, activities and texts designed for children and families on the value and importance of giving *tzedakah*, including a giving plan that will help you identify your *tzedakah*-giving priorities, see *Where Do You Give? A Tzedakah Curriculum*, an initiative of American Jewish World Service, at <http://wheredoyougive.org/education-portal/>.

UNIT 6: CONTINUING OUR IMPACT

ACTIVITY #2

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)
+TIME TO CARRY OUT COMMITMENTS MADE

SPREADING THE WORD

In addition to volunteer time and financial donations, non-profit organizations benefit from word of mouth, that is, people talking about the organization and its good work. Such endorsements can be more powerful than an organization's best direct marketing campaign, and can lead to additional passionate volunteers and financial donations.

Material: Paper, pens

STEP 1:

Explain that one of the most powerful things that your family can do to help the organization where you volunteer is to share your experiences with others. Remember that whenever you tell the story of your volunteer experience, you should do so with dignity and respect.

STEP 2:

Have one family member write down on a piece of paper one idea for spreading the word about the organization. Have that person pass the paper to the next person to write down a second, different idea. Go around until the family runs out of ideas.

STEP 3:

Commit, as a family, to do at least one thing on your list by a certain date. Be sure to hold each other accountable to this important task.

Suggested ways to promote the organization where you volunteer:

- Speak about your volunteer experience at work, school or synagogue
- Encourage a community service club (at school or work) to volunteer at the organization
- Write about your volunteer experience in a local newspaper
- Participate in fundraisers or campaigns run by the organization
- Use a social media site to highlight the work the organization does
- Commit to additional volunteering with the organization or a similar organization
- Advocate for issues that affect the organization with which you volunteer

Unit 7

CELEBRATING AND EXPRESSING APPRECIATION: CONCLUDING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

As your volunteering time comes to a close, it is important to recall the famous *Pirkei Avot* text that "it is not your responsibility to complete the work but neither can you ignore it."⁷

⁷ Pirkei Avot 2:21

ACTIVITY #1

(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)

MEASURING GROWTH

Although you have volunteered together as a family, each of you has grown personally as a result of the experience. Take time to talk about how you have each grown as a result of what you have seen, heard and experienced.

STEP 1:

Using the template on the following page, have each family member illustrate their growth as a volunteer from the beginning of the experience until now.

- Next to the eyes, indicate powerful things that you saw.
- Next to the ears, list powerful stories you remember hearing.
- Next to the hands and feet, list things that you did that felt impactful.
- Next to the heart, list things that you intend to do or continue doing in order to support the cause for which you have been volunteering.

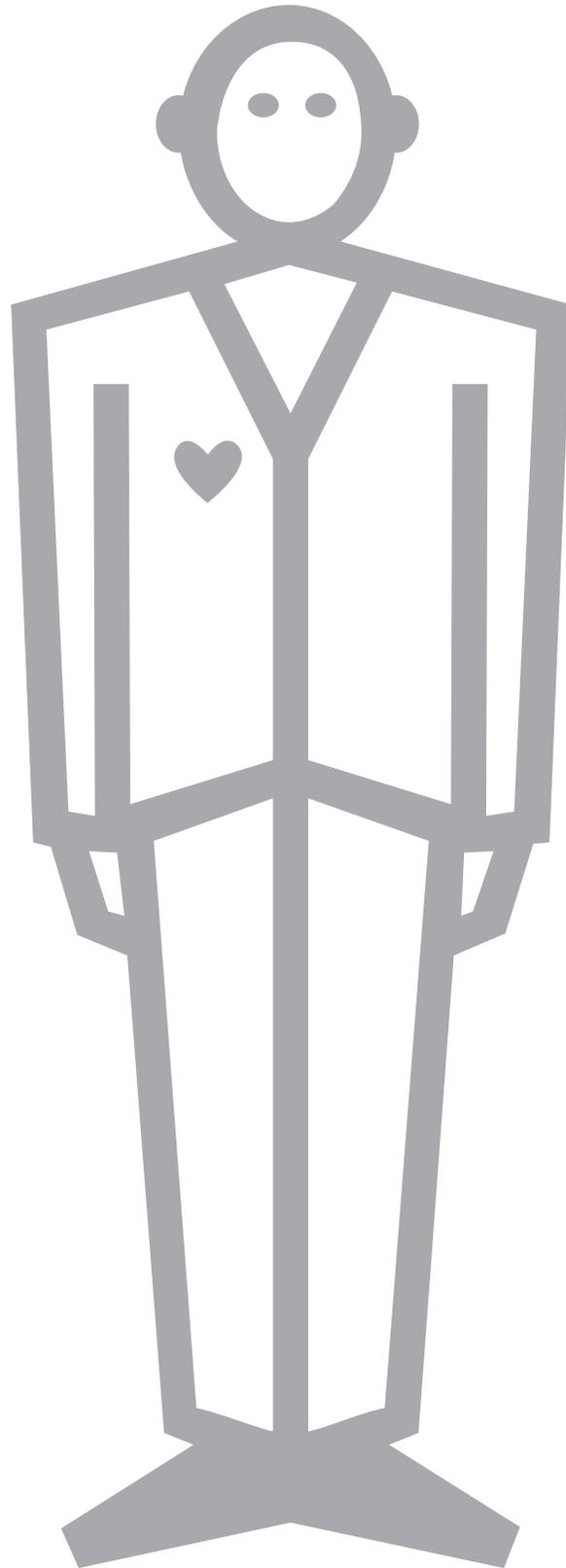
STEP 2:

Share and explain the illustrations.

STEP 3:

As a family, take turns acknowledging how each other has grown. For example, a parent may state that she has noticed her child is more humble in the way he speaks, or a daughter may acknowledge that her father has become a better listener over the course of their volunteer service together.

UNIT 7: CELEBRATING AND EXPRESSING APPRECIATION: CONCLUDING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE



UNIT 7: CELEBRATING AND EXPRESSING APPRECIATION: CONCLUDING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

ACTIVITY #2**(APPROXIMATE TIME: 10 MINUTES)**
OR 45 MINUTES IF HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH A STAFF MEMBER**MEASURING SUCCESS**

Before beginning your volunteer service, your family discussed how you would measure the success of your efforts. As your time volunteering comes to a close, it is important to revisit those measures.

STEP 1:

Review your family's original predictions for what success might look like, not only to your family but also from the perspective of the organization where you served. Do you think you were successful? Did your metrics for "success" change over time as you got to know the organization and your volunteer role better?

STEP 2:

If possible, arrange time to speak with staff member from the organization to get his/her perspective on your success and growing edges as volunteers.

ACTIVITY #3 (APPROXIMATE TIME: DEPENDS ON THE PROJECT SELECTED)

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Completing your volunteering can be an emotional experience. There may be feelings of sadness as well as accomplishment and celebration. Above all, there may be a sense of gratitude. As a family, it is key to consider how to express your own appreciation.

STEP 1:

As a family, consider how to offer gratitude to the organization that has hosted you. Appreciation is important for everyone, especially for staff of non-profit organizations who are often underappreciated.

Ways to Say Thank You

- On your last day, personally thank and say goodbye to anyone who played a special role in your volunteer experience (i.e., staff or clients/guests of the host organization with whom you volunteered).
- Create or write hand-written thank-you notes to the people in the organization who helped you along the way—from your original contact person to special people with whom you volunteered.
- If you have been taking photographs throughout your time volunteering, use an online site to make a photo book to give to the organization.
- If you have recognized a need at the organization (for example, new chairs for the waiting room or a new coffee maker), consider purchasing and donating that needed item.
- Consider making a financial donation to the organization.

ACTIVITY #4

A CONCLUDING BLESSING

Upon concluding a book of the Torah, it is traditional to recite "*hazak hazak v'nithazek*"—"Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another!"

As a family, recite this phrase together as you conclude your service.

May you go from strength to strength in pursuit of a more just world in which all families of the earth work together toward *chesed* (loving-kindness), *tzedek* (justice) and *shalom* (peace).

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