

Time's the Enemy of Giving Teens

By Kevin Madigan

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A room full of teenagers on the NFTY Convention's final day Feb. 16 discussed what giving to others means in a session titled "Beyond the Ice Bucket Challenge," after the campaign that raised \$115 million to fight amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

Most of those at the session said they give of themselves and their time but struggle to balance that giving with high school life. The teens created pie charts illustrating their activities.

A teen from San Antonio said: "I am extremely busy. There's a lot on here. A tiny sliver on my pie chart is devoted to sleep — a minuscule triangle. A good portion is stuff I do after school, and I'm trying to get a license, so lots of hours are spent driving."

Another teen said she's on a NFTY board and is involved in sports and animal rights while interning at a back clinic, and that's not all. "I play the viola, and I'll start tutoring in summer. I have to keep up with all that, plus homework, and not lose touch."

That bit about losing touch struck a chord with another girl, who advised striking a balance.

"Think about the big picture in



Brianna Holtzman and Scott Rubenstein led NFTY participants in creating pie charts showing all the demands on their time.



Photos by Kevin Madigan

how to give of your resources," host Brianna Holtzman said. "You guys are in high school, so the amount of your resources may seem really limited. You can't pledge \$60,000, but maybe you give up your Starbucks for a week to make a difference. If you're babysitting, put some of that aside."

Holtzman, a representative of the Jewish Teen Funders Network, said there's no wrong way to give. "But there is a way to take the impact you want to have in the world and make it stronger, to amplify it."

Scott Rubenstein of Phoenix, NFTY's 2014-15 programming vice president, co-hosted the session. He recounted his early experience with philanthropy. "In preschool my mom

got hold of a Jewish National Fund tzedakah box and put it in our kitchen. Whenever Dad or Mom had spare change, they would throw it in there."

Rubenstein started an endowment fund with his bar mitzvah money. He gives grants "that cater to our vision. I've had a hand in granting half a million dollars in Arizona and in Israel. It's been a really great experience for me."

Teens in the room had plenty of stories of their own, often motivated by personal connections. One took part in a fundraising walk and gave money to

a juvenile diabetes charity because her brother has the disease. A girl whose grandfather survived the Holocaust donates money to an Israeli organization that supports survivors. Another donated time to a food bank and had friends and family help make sandwiches after seeing homeless people.

"You guys are making a real change, and it's really incredible," Holtzman said. "If you spend a little time thinking strategically about your time and resources, your impact will go so far." ■

Philanthropy's Puzzle

By Kevin Madigan

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A breakout session on teen philanthropy at the BBYO International Convention's Summit of Jewish Teens featured a detailed presentation by Stefanie Zelkind, the director of the New York-based Jewish Teen Funders Network.

The philanthropic activities of her organization include social justice initiatives, grant making, volunteering, advocacy, alternative vocations and tzedakah drives.

Teens in the program are taught how to evaluate grant requests, consider proposals, know what questions to ask and which criteria to use, then arrive at a consensus.

"It's all part of a big philanthropic puzzle. We see teens get very involved and passionate about it, and it's an opportunity for us to do more, go deeper, and educate them about the work of philanthropy and to explore Jewish values," Zelkind said.

Melissa Kurtzman, one of two teens in the discussion, spoke about the work she does for the Children's Medical Center foundation in Dallas, Texas, where she lives. She was a patient at the hospital 10 years ago and now sits on its Junior Leadership Board.

"We raise funds for the hospital and for other nonprofit and for-profit organizations. We learn how they get their money as well as the inner workings of their departments," she said.

The hospital's big event every year is the Red Balloon Run & Ride 5K run/walk and 5K to 10K bike ride. Every dollar is raised from registration fees, personal pledges and other funding efforts, Kurtzman said.

Through the Dallas BBYO council, Kurtzman raises money for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and takes part in the annual Light the Night Walk to honor a young cancer victim.

Ultimately, it's not about the money, Zelkind said. Philanthropy gives teens a chance to deal seriously with responsibilities and priorities. ■

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