

Teens get hands-on empathy training

by Suzanne Pollak
Staff Writer

David Lavere spent two minutes trying to maneuver out the door of an apartment that was not handicap-accessible.

And while two minutes may not seem that long, it drove home the point to the high school student and board president of Micah Temple Youth that “it’s hard to do things to be independent. If you can’t drive, if you need to get over curbs, if you need to get to the Metro, it’s hard.”

Lavere, who attends School Without Walls, was one of 16 members of Temple Micah’s youth group who spent Sunday afternoon in the Fort Totten section of the District learning about the importance of accessibility and the challenges of physical disabilities. They spent time in two apartments, one made accessible for those with special needs and another that was not.

The event was sponsored by Yachad, which rebuilds urban neighborhoods by repairing homes, nonprofit facilities and storefronts by mobilizing volunteers and real estate professionals to work with homeowners, faith groups and neighborhood leaders. Yachad means together in Hebrew “which is how we do all our work,” explained Kendra Rubinfeld, program director.

“The changes between the two apartments were pretty small,” but it costs \$10,000 to fix up the accessible apartment, Lavere said.

Besides using a wheelchair, the teenagers wore glasses that greatly limited their vision. They wore socks on their hands and then were told to measure an exact amount of rice into a pan, get \$1.35 out of a jar filled with coins and open a pack of gum, said Brandon Klein, a 12th-grader at Woodrow Wilson High School.

Representatives from Temple Micah also talked to the students about Judaism and responsibility, said Klein, who called the two-

hour session “actually pretty fun and interesting.”

“We learned the responsibility of charity and how that works, how people are responsible not to make someone’s life perfect but to make it comfortable, liveable,” he said. “It’s not about giving them everything,” he added.

Spending time helping others is not new to Klein, who traveled to Romania with Habitat for Humanity recently.

“We worked on construction on nine houses,” he said.

The students also learned about Medicare and the proposed cuts to that program, said Lavere. The group was encouraged to write letters to Congress advocating against the cuts, he said.

Lavere said the program “definitely made me more aware” of how hard it is for those with special needs.

Hazel Rosenblum-Sellers, a ninth-grader at School Without Walls, said she learned how hard it would be just to step over the ledge to get into the bathtub.

“I want to have more access in my neighborhood,” she said. “I definitely feel like I want to help. I still have some money left over from my bat mitzvah, and I would like to help make things more accessible in D.C.”

Rubinfeld said Sunday’s program was a first for Yachad, which teamed with Temple Micah and the Religious Action Center to show the teens what she called hands-on empathy training.

The program arose from Yachad’s Ramp it Up! weeklong program last summer. Using much the same curriculum, participants learned about the world of special needs and housing. The culmination of that program was the building of one a handicap-accessible ramp, she said.

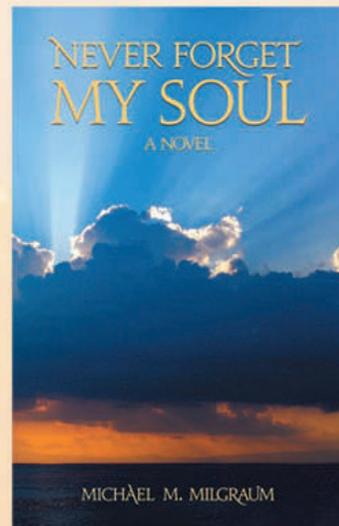
“The best way to understand the importance of accessibility is to experience life without it,” Rubinfeld said.



Hazel Rosenblum-Sellers tries to maneuver her wheelchair through the door while fellow Temple Micah youth group member Lizzy Zetlin watches.

Photo by Danny Moss

The Holocaust shattered... The children of survivors shudder...



We seek a path to psychological and spiritual healing...

Never Forget My Soul, a new novel, by psychologist Michael Milgram

“Dr. Milgram’s story demonstrates gently and with compassion that hope is renewed the moment a human being opens his heart to the plight of another. And much more than a mere story, *Never Forget My Soul* is a journey toward the discovery of ripened, abiding spirituality.” —Yael Danieli, Ph.D.

Available in print on Amazon.com, Barnesandnoble.com, DrMMsolutions.com and select bookstores.
Ebook coming soon.

TripperBus

Daily to New York City

\$25 or Less

Travel 4 times and the 5th ride is FREE.

Free Wireless & Electrical Outlets

Pick up and drop off in:

- ✓ Arlington, Va. {Rosslyn}
- ✓ Bethesda, Md.
- ✓ NYC - Penn Station

For schedules and reservations:

www.TripperBus.com (877) 826-3874

Operated by Access Limo, Inc. mc #324508 dot#701356

HIGHEST RATED

★★★★★

BUS SERVICE-TO-NY
by the Washington Post