

giving back

by Jillian Apel

Ramps for Kids

FJA senior makes a difference for those using wheelchairs.

He is a precinct delegate for the Democratic Party for Bloomfield Township District 11. He interned for Congressman Gary Peters. He did political campaigning for candidates Peters, Andy Levin and President Obama. He had an internship with X Site Validation Inc. in Farmington Hills, researching geography and its connections to disability prevalence. He also has cerebral palsy. But that doesn't stop him.

Daniel Elkus, a senior at the Frankel Jewish Academy in West Bloomfield, saw a way that he could make a difference — so he took action. Daniel does not use a wheelchair, but because he has cerebral palsy, he sympathizes with kids who do. Cerebral palsy is a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and to maintain balance and posture.

Motivated by the idea of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, and by a People to People Leadership Conference he attended in 2008, Daniel was looking for a community service project that would be meaningful to him.

When he learned about QuickRamps for Kids, a project of United Cerebral Palsy, he gravitated toward the cause. QuickRamps are portable wheelchair ramps that can be folded into suitcase form. They can be used outside of the house as well as inside. These ramps are gateways to the community for people in wheelchairs. Each ramp can cost from \$200 to \$500, depending on the length and angle of the ramp.

Daniel sent letters to family and friends, asking for donations to this worthy cause. He raised \$3,500, enabling him to donate 15 ramps for families in need in Metro Detroit.

"I wanted to make a lasting impact on people's lives," he said.

Daniel felt that by giving children access to the community, he would be enabling them to have more opportunities in life.

Daniel also made a documentary, illustrating to people how a QuickRamp can change a person's life. The video features Karyn Jordan of South Lyon, a girl in a wheelchair who



At the documentary premiere: Daniel Elkus of Bloomfield Township with Rola Jordan of South Lyon and her daughter, Karyn, 8, who was featured in Daniel's video and received a QuickRamp he donated.

received a QuickRamp donated by Daniel. Before receiving the ramp, she was unable to leave her house. This video shows how her life has improved with access to her community.

The documentary premiered Dec. 2 in Ferndale, and is now available online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=fThmh9GenfE. The video was made possible with the help of Leslynn Angel, president of the United Cerebral Palsy of Metropolitan Detroit, and Mike Ward of Doner Advertising in Southfield.

Daniel is still very much involved, spreading awareness and gaining more funding for this project that is making such a huge impact in people's lives.

"I felt it was my duty to improve the lives of those who couldn't improve their lives themselves and, by allowing them access to their community, I have brightened their lives immensely," he said. {}



Jillian Apel, 15, is a sophomore at Frankel Jewish Academy in West Bloomfield.

youth groups

by Hannah Schapiro

Mitzvahs and Munchies

Teens mix fun with good deeds.

Ann Arbor

Jewish children learn early to do mitzvot. Now a program in Ann Arbor hopes to keep teens doing good deeds by blending them with fun activities.

That's the idea behind Jewish Community Center of Washtenaw County's Mitzvahs and Munchies program. The most recent event was held Nov. 20 at Zap Zone, a laser tag arena. Seventeen teens attended.

Jeremy Simon, a sophomore at Community High School who attended, said, "It was free Zap Zone; I'd do it any day!"

While there having dinner and fun, the teens also made fleece scarves for the Ozone House in Ann Arbor, a youth shelter.

"It was a good thing to do because the Ozone House is a good organization," Simon said.

Deborah Huerta, Mitzvahs

Left: Jeremy Simon models a completed scarf.

Below: Ann Arbor Jewish teens get ready for laser tag battle.



and Munchies coordinator, along with Leslie Bash, JCC executive director, came up with this series of events for teens that would be meaningful and fun.

"I think these events are important because they allow teens who are part of different youth groups or Jewish organizations to come together for a good cause and form friendships and connections," Huerta said. "These events also give teens who aren't involved in other Jewish activities a way to connect with the JCC, the broader Jewish community and other Jewish teens."

Previously, there have been events for middle school students, but not high school students.

To learn more about upcoming events, contact Huerta at (734) 971-0990 or deborahhuerta@jccfed.org. {}

Hannah Schapiro, 15, is a sophomore at Huron High School in Ann Arbor.

