



# **JFS Guide to a Meaningful B'nai Mitzvah Project**

**Weaving Volunteering Into  
Your B'nai Mitzvah Experience**



JEWISH **FAMILY** SERVICE



# Mazal Tov!

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**If you're reading this, you are on the powerful journey towards becoming — or supporting somebody who is becoming — a b'nai mitzvah.**

We, your friends at Jewish Family Service, know the experience can be one full of power and meaning...and questions. How do I weave all the pieces of this milestone together? How can I juggle all the commitments: learning to read Torah, practicing the service, writing a speech, perhaps planning a celebration...and doing a mitzvah project, too?! Just as it can feel exciting and momentous, having a b'nai mitzvah, made of many parts, can also be overwhelming. We hope that all aspects feel interconnected, and we are here to help you think about how your mitzvah project can fit in and feel good as well.

# Why a B'nai Mitzvah Project?

At JFS, we believe that a b'nai mitzvah mitzvah project is an essential part of this pivotal moment in your life; one ripe with opportunities. Here are five reasons why your mitzvah project is so impactful:

## 1. Doing good today links you to Jewish tradition.

Engaging in a personally meaningful good deed during a momentous time is a Jewish act in and of itself. It's seeing yourself as one important part of a bigger whole — and taking responsibility for it; recognizing a bit of brokenness in your corner of the world and working to repair some of it. Whether giving tzedakah (money for community needs) or participating in acts of tikkun olam (like volunteering), your mitzvah experience connects you to Jewish tradition, and weaves you into a tapestry that spans generations — just as much as the traditional service. In fact, you might find or create connections between the ritual aspects of your b'nai mitzvah, and your mitzvah project!

## 2. You put your values into action.

Your b'nai mitzvah is not only about connecting to tradition; it is also a chance to reflect on what matters to you. What are your hopes for our community — and the world? By exploring what matters to you, you can step into a lifelong journey of putting your values (the things you care about and how you want to be in the world) into action.

## 3. You experience the magic of community connection.

A b'nai mitzvah is a meaningful way to practice independence, while experiencing inter-dependence. Along the way, you'll need to use your inner power, skills, and qualities to meaningfully respond to a community issue — and you'll probably develop some new ones in the process, too! You'll encounter others doing the same. Magic can only happen when your powers, skills, and willingness to learn come together with that of others in the community.



#### 4. You engage with big ideas.

Taking on the questions and tasks of a b'nai mitzvah sometimes involves wrestling with complex ideas or tricky situations; it can be a learning and growth process in understanding and being an active part of the community in and of itself. And if you approach it with curiosity and care, the rewards can be great...no matter the “results” of your work. In other words, the process of your b'nai mitzvah is just as important as the result.

- **#Torah! Remember Jacob?**

After wrestling with an angel, his name is changed to Israel, which means “wrestling with God.” Jewish tradition shows us that by allowing ourselves to engage fully in a complicated process, we can leave the other side changed. Your name probably won't change after this experience, but you will emerge with new perspective and skills!

#### 5. You grow your community.

Volunteering or opting for another kind of b'nai mitzvah may connect you with people you might not otherwise get the chance to meet and learn from; perhaps you'll meet other people impacted by an issue you're curious about or affected by yourself. Think of the b'nai mitzvah as a chance to practice curiosity, humility, making informed choices, and reliability with everyone you meet.

We hope you're convinced that a b'nai mitzvah is more than just an obligatory task to complete — rather, a sweet way to deepen the experience of becoming a Jewish adult. So, what's next? In this packet, you will find:

- A guide for taking action towards a mitzvah experience or project as part of your b'nai mitzvah — packed with instructions, activities and juicy questions to spark your reflection and planning.
- An overview of the ways JFS would love to welcome you as a b'nai mitzvah volunteer.
- If you're looking for more in-depth direction and structured reflection, check out [“Nurturing a Lifetime of Volunteering; A Toolkit for Family Volunteering”](#) from Repair the World, which inspired much of what follows.

# A Guide to Meaningful B'nai Mitzvah Experiences

## A. Start Here

### Why is this important?

Begin your b'nai mitzvah experience thinking about the big picture: what is your vision of tikkun olam — a repaired world? Picture a strong community; where everyone is healthy, respected, and has the resources necessary to thrive.

**Think About:** How would it feel to be part of a community like this, where people:

- Are physically and mentally healthy
- Are respected, and experience a sense of dignity
- Have access to resources they need like housing, food, etc.

**Activity:** Put that feeling into words or images — journal, write a poem, draw, collage, or create another form of art.

**Think About:** What do you see in our community that prevents people from experiencing health, well-being, and stability? What problems are in the way of the world you're imagining?



## B. Put Yourself in the Mix

### Why am I doing this?

Let's make this personal. Reflecting on your hopes for your community, and your values, can help you understand this b'nai mitzvah experience not as a task to check off the list — but as the spark of a personally relevant, lifelong practice.

**Think About:** How would your life be different if you, and everyone around you were healthy, respected, and had the resources necessary to thrive?

Think about how your own values can shape your b'nai mitzvah experience — whatever it becomes. Your values are the things you care about, and how you want to be in the world. Knowing your values matters; they keep you on track in bringing your vision for your community (and world), to life. When things get messy or complicated, you can return to and be guided by your values.

**Think About: #Torah!** Rabbi Hillel famously said (and you can find this on the outside walls of our JFS Seattle building!) “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?” (Pirkei Avot 1:14) What does this text mean to you? What values do you notice at play?

Values are the things you care about big-picture (priorities for society — e.g., freedom, equality, or justice) — and also how you want to be in the world (how you interact with other people — e.g., curiosity, humility, or patience). Identifying your own core values can guide your choices and actions throughout your b'nai mitzvah experience, and beyond!

#### Activity: Recognizing Your Core Values

- Make a list of ten values you hold. If you're having a hard time coming up with your own list, think back to the community you imagined in section A. What you pictured tells you something about values you care about. Also think about people or experiences in your life — including other parts of your b'nai mitzvah process (e.g., your Torah portion and d'var, practicing the service, etc.) that have shaped who you are; what have they taught you about your values?
- Now, narrow down your list: from these ten values, circle the five that are most important to you. What were some of the factors in making your choices? From those five remaining values, highlight the three that are most important to you. What influenced your choices this time?
- Using those three words or phrases, write your own personal value statement. A value statement is 1-3 sentences describing what you care the most about and what motivates you to act in your integrity. For example: “I'm motivated by my curiosity to learn from people who are different from me and want to help create a world where everybody has equal access to the resources they need to live in freedom.”



## C. Put it into Action

### How am I doing this?

This b'nai mitzvah experience can be about getting a 'taste' of volunteerism where you put your values into action briefly — or it can be about making an ongoing commitment to a cause or organization you care deeply about. Either way, this is a chance to contribute something meaningful to the strong community you've been dreaming about, in ways guided by your core values. Whether you choose to volunteer with JFS (see pages 10 -11), or pursue a b'nai mitzvah with another organization or community project, these actions and questions can help you put your energies to action:

### Finding an Opportunity

**Activity:** Considering your vision for our community and some of the problems you identified as standing in the way of it becoming reality, research local organizations who address one or more of those issues — and whose mission, activities, and values are in line with your own values. Look into these things:

- What is the organization's mission statement?
- What activities and programs do they run in support of their mission?
- What volunteer work do they invite people into?  
Are there opportunities suitable for people your age?
- Who does the organization provide programs and services for?
- What needs will this work address? How does this relate to your values or vision of strong community?
- Are volunteer dates and times set, or flexible? Is this one-time participation or a longer-term commitment?

**Hot Tip!** Check out Repair the World's [“Nurturing a Lifetime of Volunteering” toolkit](#), pages 19-21.

## Laying the Groundwork

**Think About:** Think about all the research you've done, and the kind of commitment you want to make:

- Which opportunities speak most to your vision for the community and your values?
- What skills, perspective, or experience could you bring into these volunteer roles?
- When are you available, and how can you prioritize fully participating in ways the organization needs?
- Map out any challenges that could come up in the weeks/months ahead? How might you address them?

**Hot Tip!** Check out Repair the World's [“Nurturing a Lifetime of Volunteering” toolkit](#), pages 21-25.

**Contact** your chosen organization(s), to inquire about volunteering. You may need to look into a few possibilities, with different organizations before you find the right fit.

- Share a bit about yourself (i.e. your name, the school you attend, why you are interested in volunteering).
- Ask if you can help out in any of the ways you researched, and what's involved in getting started.
- Answer any questions they have, and have and ask more of your own!
- If what you learn and discuss mutually feels right, confirm your desire to participate!

## Making a Brit— A Commitment

**Think About:** What has your research about organizations addressing needs in the community helped you realize about your own goals for your b'nai mitzvah? Reflecting on these things can help you commit to the organization, our community, and your own self:

- What do you hope to learn about, experience, or practice?
- What are you looking forward to as you begin your b'nai mitzvah?
- Do you have any concerns?
- What support will you need, and from whom?
- What will “success” look like: — From the perspective of your host organization? From the perspective of the people your host organization serves? From your perspective as a b'nai mitzvah doer?

**Hot Tip!** Check out Repair the World's [“Nurturing a Lifetime of Volunteering” toolkit](#), pages 26-28.





## Following Through

- Make sure you know how to begin your mitzvah; where to go (address) and when (date, start time), and whom to contact if anything comes up or changes. Follow any instructions (e.g. about attire or supplies to bring).
- Show up! Stay engaged the whole time, channeling your values and goals. And have fun!

## Closing the Loop + Marking Your Experience

- Revisit the first activity (“Start Here”). How have your ideas, values, and connection to your community changed and/or deepened throughout this b’nai mitzvah experience?
- Thank your host organization, and the people you interacted with. Remember: your b’nai mitzvah can be the beginning of a lifelong practice, so consider asking about how to continue supporting the organization.
- Consider sharing your experience!

Thank you for engaging in this b’nai mitzvah process with us. We hope that this guide supports you and your family in identifying the things that you care about and translating them into thoughtful action. We hope it helps set you up to join in a long tradition of a Jewish commitment to tikkun olam — repairing our broken world. We can’t wait to see where this b’nai mitzvah journey leads!

# Volunteer with JFS in Honor of Your B'nai Mitzvah

## Holiday Giftbag Making & Delivery

Volunteers are needed to fill holiday baskets with food and deliver them to community members in need, in honor of Jewish holidays year-round (at Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah, Tu B'shvat, and Passover). Choose to join one or all four!

**Commitment:** 3 hours per event

**Impact:** Events provide support to people experiencing food insecurity including older adults, people with developmental disabilities, people living with persistent mental illness and brain injuries.

**Interacting with clients:** Yes

**Requirements:** Adult participation is required, and a vehicle is needed to make deliveries.

## DIY Food Drive

Help support our Polack Food Bank by organizing your own food drive! You'll sign-up for a food drive slot and mobilize your community to donate specific items. You'll then sort those items on your own before dropping them off on a predetermined date.

**Commitment:** 2 hours

**Impact:** Provide support to people experiencing food insecurity

**Interacting with clients:** No

**Requirements:** The commitment to running your own mini-drive; an adult with a car to help you drop off your items.

## Home Delivery

The Polack Food Bank operates a home-delivery program, providing healthy food and toiletries once a month to community members unable to come to the Food Bank. Volunteers are needed to prepare, load, and deliver needed items to homes on a designated route.

**Commitment:** 3 to 4 hours per month. We ask that volunteers commit to a minimum six months for this role.

**Impact:** Deliveries provide support to people experiencing food insecurity, and older adults.

**Interacting with clients:** Yes

**Requirements:** Adult participation is required, and a vehicle is needed to make deliveries.

## Gleaning

Assist Food Bank staff in gleaning produce from the local Capitol Hill Farmers Market and/or from our local farm partner, Oxbow Farm & Conservation Center. These are seasonal opportunities offered during the summer months.

**Commitment:** 2 hours

**Impact:** Gleaning benefits people experiencing food insecurity.

**Interacting with clients:** No

**Requirements:** Volunteers will need to provide their own transportation to and from Oxbow Farms in Carnation, WA for farm gleaning, and their own transportation to the Capitol Hill Farmers Market for Farmers Market Gleaning

## Advocacy

Organize an advocacy effort that engages your peers and their parents. Ask us how you can add this onto another project above.

**Commitment:** Varies

**Impact:** Using your voice to ask community leaders and politicians to support various policies and practices can positively impact the lives of the people who use JFS services, including those experiencing food insecurity, older adults, people who have developmental disabilities, persistent mental illness or brain injuries, or refugees and immigrants.

**Interacting with clients:** No

**Requirements:** A willingness to use your voice, while following the education and leadership of those directly impacted, to influence leaders and politicians.

## Monetary Donation

You might consider asking friends and family to donate money to JFS to support individuals and families in achieving well-being, health and stability. Funds can be directed to a particular program or can be used to purchase needed items for individuals and families. Your gift is part of a generations-long tradition that makes a world of difference today for our neighbors in their most vulnerable moments. Please contact us for more information.

**Commitment:** Varies

**Impact:** Donations benefit our Jewish and non-Jewish communities, including those experiencing food insecurity, older adults and Holocaust Survivors, people who have developmental disabilities, persistent mental illness or brain injuries, or refugees and immigrants.

**Interacting with clients:** No

**Requirements:** N/A

## DIY Drive

JFS staff can work with you to determine the greatest needs for in-kind donation items, and help you build a wish list to share with your community. A great project to do on your own time and schedule! Past teen-led drives have included:

- Coats, apartment items, stuffed animals or children's books for newly resettled refugee families.
- Gloves, hats, toiletries or a themed food drive for people who visit our Food Bank.
- Holiday cards for isolated older adults.

**Commitment:** 2+ hours

**Impact:** Collecting in-kind donation items can benefit the range of people using JFS services, including those experiencing food insecurity, older adults, people who have developmental disabilities, persistent mental illness or brain injuries, or refugees and immigrants.

**Interacting with clients:** No

**Requirements:** A willingness to take the lead managing a project on your own, organizational skills around accepting donations and continual open communication with JFS staff members around what you are collecting.

## Event Help

Volunteers are needed to assist with our in-person volunteer events. Duties might include event material preparation, leading hands on workstations, assisting with check-in, and general set-up and clean-up.

**Commitment:** Varies

**Impact:** Provide support to people experiencing food insecurity including older adults, people with developmental disabilities, people living with persistent mental illness and brain injuries.

**Interacting with clients:** No

**Requirements:** A willingness to provide hands-on support as needed. Some heavy lifting may be involved.

# Let's Connect!

Whether you already have an idea in mind for your b'nai mitzvah project — or if you need help getting started, send your thoughts and questions to [volunteer@jfsseattle.org](mailto:volunteer@jfsseattle.org). Please include your name, date of your bar/bat mitzvah and your synagogue/temple/community group. We're eager to hear from you, and to work together!

