

Hello. My name is Amy Barr and I am the President of the Santa Cruz Reform Federation of Youth, otherwise known by the acronym SRFY. This is our temple's senior youth group. We are teenagers, in high school who are building community and learning more about being Jewish.

Some of you have probably not heard a teenager speak for many years. Some of you who have teenagers at home may listen to them speak every day. Others ... (pause) may wish you never heard your teens speak. But this is just five minutes so please bear with me. I would like to tell you about something really exciting that the youth group accomplished last year. At our suggestion, the temple board adopted a sweat-free resolution. Don't worry, this doesn't mean you aren't allowed to sweat! What this does mean is that the temple is agreeing that all merchandise with the Temple Beth El logo on it will not be made in sweatshops.

You are probably wondering how we came up with this idea. I could just tell you that we were all born socially aware, knowing how to make change happen, but that wouldn't be quite accurate. As members of SRFY, we are also members of a parent organization called NFTY, the North American Federation of Temple Youth. Our region of NFTY hosts four weekend retreats a year in Santa Rosa, each with a different theme. This is where we first learned about sweatshops. After an educational program our own Social Action Vice President, Aliza Gazek along with two of her fellow NFTYites decided to present a sweat-free resolution to the regional executive

board. It was passed. From there Aliza brought the idea back to Santa Cruz so that we too could pass this resolution in our temple and she initiated this effort.

And that is an example of why youth group is so special. It gives teenagers a chance to learn about important issues and to actually do something that makes a difference. (Pause) Another example occurred last March. For Mitzvah Day, we organized a group of about 30 teens to work with our local branch of Habitat for Humanity; an organization which builds houses for low income families. We raised two walls of what was to become a home for someone who might not otherwise be able to afford one. All the participants left with an amazing sense of accomplishment.

All SRFY events are planned by our board which consists of our wonderful advisor, 6 vice presidents, 2 other officers, and me. Being on the board is an opportunity to learn important leadership skills and is incredibly rewarding. We plan events like the Mitzvah Day project which have a more serious note to them, as well as fun events such as bonfires, bowling and scavenger hunts.

The fun events are meant to build community; nothing is more important during our teen years than having a support system of other teens. I can't even explain how much the friends I have made in youth group mean to me. When I have a bad day, the first people I call are those Jewish friends. When I have something intellectual I want to discuss or find a rally I want to attend in San Francisco, the first people I call are those

same Jewish friends. Our NFTY region alone has teens from all over Northern California, Nevada, Utah and Hawaii which means there is a great mix of people – and all of them are fantastic! These people have become so important in my life, I can't imagine a better weekend than a NFTY retreat.

Our Temple youth group is the gateway to the regional youth group. Between NFTY retreats, our local youth group provides opportunities to share that same learning and fun with our Jewish Santa Cruz friends.

On behalf of our board I would like to thank the rabbis and all of you for your ongoing support and encouragement of the youth group. Without you, we wouldn't have a chance to make a difference. The youth group is open to any Jewish high school student (not just Temple members), so if you know one, we would love to have them join us.

Thank you and Shabbat Shalom.