

"Warm Fuzzies" for Cancer

By: Natalie Stern

Cancer. This word often brings feelings of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. However, my mitzvah project allowed patients facing this illness to think of warmth and comfort as part of their cancer journey. For my bat mitzvah project, I participated in the "Warm Fuzzies" program at the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center and hand made over twenty colorful fleece lap blankets. These blankets are used by adult and pediatric patients undergoing chemotherapy and other treatments at the Cancer Center. Patients are given a blanket in the infusion area and often bring it with them to all of their treatments. It means a lot to the patients to know that someone in their community cares about them during this challenging time.

I celebrated my bat mitzvah on August 21st, 2004 at Congregation Beth Ahm in West Bloomfield, Michigan and incorporated my project into the service. In my Haftorah (Shoftim), G-d shows his compassion and comforts the Jewish people after the destruction of both temples. The Jewish people now know that G-d is with them, and they are no longer frightened. In my D'var Torah, I explained how the Haftorah reminds us that our belief in G'd should not waiver even during the most devastating times. It is our faith in G'd that gives us strength, enabling us to go on. Then I related my mitzvah project to these ideas and explained how this is especially true for those facing serious illness. I talked about how the colorful fleece lap blankets displayed in baskets on the bimah would benefit patients at the Cancer Center. It was my hope that together with G-d, I could provide comfort and warmth to cancer patients undergoing treatments.

The values of *chesed*, *tzedakah*, and *tikkun olam* were an important part of my becoming a bat mitzvah. I displayed acts of kindness when I decided to do a project that would have an impact on many people's lives. Making the beautiful, warm blankets was very charitable because I bought the fleece fabric with my own money and spent many hours during my summer vacation to create them. In doing so, I think that I have made the world a better place. I have brought cheer to those facing a difficult time and let them know that others care.

I chose to do a service project for several reasons. Becoming a bat mitzvah was a turning point in my Jewish responsibilities and this project marked that new beginning. Reaching out and helping others in our community was how I wanted to share the many blessings I have received from G-d. I selected the "Warm Fuzzies" program because my family has been touched by cancer. My mother's breast cancer experience five years ago influenced my life and made me appreciate G-d's blessings. This project was my way of thanking the Cancer Center for helping to save my mom's life. The patients who receive these blankets will know that others are thinking of them and praying for their good health.

I plan to continue my involvement with the "Warm Fuzzies" program at the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center. Seeing the faces of patients when I delivered the fleece lap blankets to the Cancer Center motivated me to stay active. Also, a local article about my project in the newspaper has encouraged other b'nai mitzvah students and local organizations to support this program. As a look back on my bat mitzvah celebration, I am proud that I have demonstrated the true meaning of this milestone event and made a difference in the lives of others.