

Dear Jewish Agency for Israel,

I am writing as a volunteer for the 2008 Safe Summer Camp program for children of Sderot that was held in Nitzana. I would like to share with you some of my experiences, which have enriched my perspective.

When I arrived at Nitzana, I was a bit apprehensive because my Hebrew skills are minimal. However, everyone, including the children, helped me in any way possible to feel comfortable. It did not take long to feel as if Nitzana was my home away from home. In fact, the children actually taught me a lot of Hebrew and I learned so much else from them. The children shared with me their experiences of living with the everyday reality they face in Sderot. They said many of their parents sent them to boarding school because of the constant kassam fire they are under and that they came to Nitzana just to have a safe place where they could enjoy summer.

Nitzana provided just that: the children seemed to be genuinely happy to be here and to interact with each other, making new friends and being with their peers. The abundance and variety of activities at Nitzana provided each child the opportunity to learn and connect with not only the land of Israel, but also with global issues. Building solar powered cars, outings at the sand dunes, and riding camels, combined with lectures on science and the environment are just a few examples.

The trip to the sand dunes was particularly rewarding because the whole group had to work together to bring all of the supplies out for a field cookout. Then, we were each given a specific task to complete, ultimately producing a delicious dinner. Everyone truly cared for each other and it really hit me when in the middle of the desert, just before we were to eat, a member of our group offered to pour water so I could wash my hands. Small acts like this have been persistent throughout my stay at Nitzana and show just how much everyone is dedicated to making the most out of this special program. In just

the span of a few days, I was able to bond with the children of Sderot as well as the wonderful young people who are currently doing a year of voluntary national service before their military enrollment. I expect to keep in touch with various people I have met here. It is truly amazing to see so much positivity and so many different people coming together in Nitzana, despite all the hardships the children and people of Sderot are living through.

In addition, having the opportunity to volunteer as an American fostered a deep connection with the Jewish community at large, especially the people of Israel. The atmosphere at the camp encouraged each person to share their experiences in an open manner. I feel Nitzana contributed to my growth on many different levels, culturally and spiritually. For example, I prayed with Ethiopian immigrants and was exposed to the intricacies of the Negev, Israel's southern region which I now know is more than just a desert. It is breathtaking to be in the middle of some of the most innovative environmental research and technology, which inevitably affects us all. I believe the children of Sderot developed the same strong sense of appreciation for the land of Israel (especially the Negev) that I have at Nitzana because of all of these unique aspects of culture, science, and spirituality, which are inherently part of the Program .

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Jewish Agency and everyone that made it possible for me to volunteer at Nitzana. I know my experiences here will serve as an integral foundation for my future .

Kol Tov,

Ryen Tara Freedman