

YULA Student Picks His Cause

» by Kelly Hartog, Contributing Writer

WHEN MOST 15-YEAR-OLDS MIGHT choose to spend their summer going to camp or the beach or just hanging out with friends, Hayden Klein decided to do something more.

Klein, a sophomore at Yeshiva University High School of Los Angeles (YULA), chose to spend last summer working at a day camp with teenagers from ETTA, a Jewish nonprofit that serves people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"Every year I would go to day camp, a sports camp, or hang out with my friends, but this year I wanted to do something a lot more meaningful, something bigger than just going to camp," Klein said. "I wanted to get that great feeling that I was doing something important and something to benefit my community."

ETTA, he said, was the perfect choice for him, because he'd heard wonderful things about the organization from his teachers and friends.

At a day camp at Shalhevet High School, Klein was paired with an ETTA teenager. They spent their days doing a variety of activities, from singing and dancing to taking trips to places such as Knott's Berry Farm.

"I really bonded with all the participants there," Klein said, not just the teenager he was paired with. "You get to see them as just human beings, without the label of being autistic or having Down syndrome. They're just like everyone else. They have



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goals and they want to succeed in life. They're amazing people.

"I love seeing them outside of camp, too," he added. "We say, 'Hi' and recall



things that we did over the summer. It's a really cool feeling."

Klein said a lot of his desire to get involved in volunteer work comes from good examples he has observed.

"I come from a very giving community," he said. "My grandmother worked in children's education and I learned a lot

from her [about giving back]."

Members of ETTA's staff were so impressed with Klein's work that, at the end of the summer, they asked him to join the organization's Youth Board. As a board member, he helps organize fundraising events during the year, and he is pushing to expand to throughout the year the summer activities the participants enjoy.

"I was in shock when they asked me to join the board," Klein said. "I'm one of the youngest kids there. It was a real honor."

At its annual gala in November, ETTA also presented Klein and seven other high school students with its Moselle and Lazare Hendeles Youth Leadership Award.

YULA's head of school, Rabbi Arye Sufrin, said Klein's volunteerism goes beyond his work with ETTA. "He is on our flag football team where our coach, Dayvon Ross, is currently undergoing chemotherapy. The entire flag football team was involved in fundraising to help with medical bills by running a Hanukkah barbecue."

Klein hasn't decided what he wants to do when he graduates from high school — beyond visiting Israel and going to college. "But I'll always stay involved and give back," he said. "I just have that type of mindset." ■