

Profile



Alina Olshenitsky

Action:
Direct Service

Location:
Honduras

Initiative: American
Jewish Work Service
(AJWS) Alternative
Break

Alina Olshenitsky, a senior at the University of Toronto, loaded her backpack into a pickup truck at the airport and tied it up with rope. Eventually she and 12 other students reached San Rafael, a tiny place hidden deep in the mountains of Honduras and home to no more than 100 residents.

Alina came to Honduras with other students from Hillel of Greater Toronto who were participating in an Alternative Break program organized by American Jewish World Service (AJWS). Working with AJWS' partner, Proyecto Aldea Global (PAG), a local non-governmental organization committed to grassroots sustainable development, Alina spent a week helping community members rebuild a school.

Waking daily at 6 a.m. to the sounds of roosters, donkeys, and fresh mountain winds, the group worked on the school. Together with the local workers, they mixed piles of sand and cement, filled in the cracks in the floor and painted the walls.

Though the work was hard, the kindness with which the locals welcomed the students to their village and the spirit of mutual cooperation that developed brought an intense level of meaning to the work.

"I found myself thinking about my own history as a Jew and the continuous struggles which we have faced throughout much of our history: suffering, oppression, neglect," remarked Alina. "The light in the eyes of the local community members assured me that they, just like the rest of us, were created in God's image, *b'tzelem Elohim*, and the answer to why I was there as a Jew became clear. Their smiles convinced me that God's light is present in every human being, and that as Jews, one of our roles is to make sure that this light is able to shine as brightly as possible."

Adapted from Finding Light: AJWS Alternative Breaks in Honduras (www.ajws.org).