

Profile



Sophie Simkin

Action:
Philanthropy

Location:
North Hampton, MA

Initiative: B'nai Tzedek
Youth Foundation

As a young child, Sophie Simkin sold M&M's and pancake breakfasts, rang door bells, and carried many UNICEF boxes. "I always have thought that will be how I give *tzedakah*, raising money and trying to find more," says Sophie. But this year, she is giving on an entirely new level, not only raising money, but deciding where to allocate it.

Sophie is part of the B'nai Tzedek Youth Foundation, a group of 20 high school students from Western Massachusetts who are deciding how they want to give away \$7,000. At the beginning of the year, the group raised \$2,330 and the Grinspoon Foundation matched it two-to-one. Now, as members of the Youth Foundation, they have a full packet of proposals from Jewish organizations seeking funding. "It's incredibly empowering to conceive that I would be responsible and organized enough to give out thousands of dollars," shares Sophie. "Here I am with the opportunity to see on a larger scale how the smaller donations add up. It's amazing to see that we can provide such a big impact, such as an entire year of healthy snacks or programs or scholarships. It's also helped to show me the tremendous needs that exist."

The first time the group met, they were asked to rank how important money was to them and how interested they were in learning more about it. "I think I gave myself a negative five," muses Sophie. "I've grown up in Northampton, and some post-hippie mentality eschewing money had wormed its way into me. Before, I saw money as 'the root of all evil,' something that led to trouble and greed. But the foundation has shown me that money can help organizations help those who need it."

Sophie has always had a *tzedakah* box on her desk, but she's noticed that it fills up much faster since she joined the Youth Foundation. Despite seeing so many programs that need so much, the foundation's strategic approach can make challenges seem more manageable. "I can also see the 'every little bit helps' mentality much clearer," says Sophie. "There are organizations that need \$50,000 for a program, and they come all the way from New York to talk with us, just for our \$3,000 grant. If the people who need the money are willing to believe small donations add up, then I am, too."

Adapted from The Giver, March 2005.