

Mazel Tov!  
You are ready to start your Mitzvah Project!  
Mitzvah Project Guide

לא עליך המלאכה לגמר ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל ממנה

You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. ~ Pirkei Avot 2:21

As part of becoming a B'nei Mitzvah and Jewish adult, Congregation Agudas Achim has developed a mitzvah project program through which our teens become active members of our larger community, giving back and directly making a difference in people's lives. We STRONGLY suggest that these projects at least begin (we won't say one should stop doing a mitzvah ☺) in 6th grade before regular meetings with the tutor, sponsor and rabbis become more frequent occurrences on the student's schedule. These projects are intended to provide an opportunity for each student to experience the importance of doing a mitzvah "ben adam l'chavayroh", that is, a sacred obligation between one person and another. There are two key guidelines to structure the planning of your mitzvah project:

- 1) Projects should involve some direct connection with an organization or other beneficiary, beyond simply collecting and donating, although this may certainly be one aspect of the project. Although animals may be a part of the project, working directly with people in some way is what differentiates the Mitzvah Project from other community service opportunities.
- 2) Although there is no required number of hours that one must dedicate to the project, the expectation is that this is an opportunity to engage with a particular part of our world that needs repair in a deep way. Therefore, we ask that the project be something with which the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is engaged for at least 6 months.

These guidelines show the importance of these mitzvot to Judaism. Such projects can also offer an important opportunity for families to work together, creating a meaningful experience while serving the community.

Please note that although CAA does not generally publicize mitzvah projects in the congregational emails or bulletin, information may be distributed through CAARS.

**For those in 6<sup>th</sup> Grade at CAARS, Planning Sheets will be reviewed in class on Sunday, December 12th. All other students may be in touch with Rabbi Swedroe with any questions.**

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to reach out:

Rabbi Neil Blumofe Rabbi Gail Swedroe Adra Lustig	<a href="mailto:neil.blumofe@caa-austin.org">neil.blumofe@caa-austin.org</a> <a href="mailto:gail.swedroe@caa-austin.org">gail.swedroe@caa-austin.org</a> <a href="mailto:adra.lustig@caa-austin.org">adra.lustig@caa-austin.org</a>
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# How to choose a Mitzvah Project

We've provided two different activities to help you determine a project that both addresses an issue that you are passionate about improving while also utilizing your skills. We've compiled a suggested list of projects (both remotely during COVID and in person) that we suggest you look at AFTER you've thought about how you want to improve the world and what you have to offer.

Once you've thought about what you'd like to do, we've included a worksheet where you can compile all the relevant information to do your project (contact info, times available, etc).

The projects that we have included are suggestions, places we have done the legwork to confirm will allow for 11 year olds (sometimes a chaperone is required) to volunteer, at least at the time of this printing. Other projects are certainly possibilities as well. If you have questions, please be in touch with

## **Activity: Getting to Know Your Values and Middot**

Pre-teens and parents each do on your own

STEP 1: What Are My Most Important Values?

*(Exercise adapted from Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner, Inspired Philanthropy)*

From the list below, choose three to five that are your own top values. (You don't have to rank them yet, and you can include something that is not on the list.) These should be things that you not only think are important, but that you see yourself living by or trying to live by. You might say that something is a "value" when it is an idea out there, and something is a "*middah*" when it has become a quality or a characteristic of a person.

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<i>ahavta l'reiacha kaomcha</i> /Love your neighbor as yourself	<i>bikkur Cholim</i> /Visiting the sick
<i>ba'al taschit</i> /not destroying	<i>cherut</i> /freedom
communication	<i>chochmah</i> /wisdom
creativity	democracy
<i>daat</i> /knowledge	dignity
diversity	equality
<i>emunah</i> /faith	honesty
<i>hachnasat orchim</i> /welcoming people into your home and community	<i>lo ta'amod al dam re'eicha</i> /do not be passive in the face of violence
<i>hakarat hatov</i> /recognizing the good in others	<i>kehillah</i> /community
<i>hiddur pnai zaken</i> /respect for elders	<i>mishpacha</i> /family opportunity
integrity	<i>pikuach nefesh</i> /saving a life
<i>kibbud av va'em</i> /respect for parents	<i>refuah</i> /healing
<i>ometz Lev</i> /courage	service
<i>rachamim</i> /compassion	<i>shalom</i> /peace
<i>kavod</i> /respect	<i>shomer et haguf</i> /taking care of one's body
<i>shomrei ha'adamah</i> /Guard the earth	<i>simcha</i> /joy
<i>tzedek</i> /justice	simplicity
<i>tzelem elohim</i> /all people are created in God's image	<i>tikkun olam</i> /repairing the world

## STEP 2: Getting to Know Your Values

Pick two of your top five--maybe your top two, if you know them. You are going to write a "*middah* biography" for each of them. (Each person writes for 5 minutes)

What does that mean? The idea is to explore how and why each *middah* has become important to the way you live. This isn't going to be a paper; it doesn't have to be organized carefully. What's important is to get your thoughts out.

How to do it? First, think and write about how this *middah* has shown up in your life. In other words, write about some experience, past or present, that shows this *middah* in you or that describes how it became important to you.

Second, try and figure out where you got this value. Write about family members, friends, other people, books, classes, teachers, movies, events, history that might have communicated this value to you--Jewish and not specifically Jewish. Also, interview your family members to see if the *middah* is in the family--in their own lives, or in someone who influenced them--and whether they can tell you more stories of how this *middah* describes you.

When done, each family will take 5 minutes to share their responses with one another.

## 6 Questions to Ask Yourself To Find Your Personal Mitzvah Project

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Mahatma Ghandi

An opportunity, once again, to teach our children what is even more important than the tastiest caterer, the most eloquent dvar torah, and the most beautiful floral arrangements. That becoming a bat/bar mitzvah is to become a blessing, not only within one's family, but for all.

1. What am I *really* good at? (Or what are you *really* bad at but might try if you knew it was a way to make a certain mitzvah happen?)

2. What do I *really* like to do?

3. What bothers me so much about what is wrong in the world that I get angry, *really* angry and want to do something about it?

4. What can I do *right now*, today, in the next week, in the period leading up to my Bar/Bat Mitzvah to make a difference?

5. Whom do I know?

6. Why not?!

Once you've decided what you're passionate about and good at, it's time to get this mitzvah started. Use the worksheet below to help you in planning how you're going to make your vision a reality. **Please bring this to class on December 12th.**

### Putting Thoughts Into Action

<b>Bar/Bat Mitzvah Name:</b>			
<b>Project will benefit:</b>			
<b>I have confirmed that I can volunteer here)</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	
<b>Contact Person at organization (if working with different orgs, please list contact info - name, phone #, email - for each one):</b>	<b>Organization 1:</b>	<b>Organization 2:</b>	<b>Organization 3:</b>
<b>Dates/Times the organization accepts volunteers:</b>			
<b>Dates I plan to volunteer (either specific dates or how often):</b>			
<b>Supplies Needed (if any):</b>			
<b>The way I will raise \$/collect items for supplies (if any) is:</b>			
<b>The way I will get the supplies where I need them to be is:</b>			
<b>If advertising is needed to inform others of my project, the way I will let people know about it is:</b>			
<b>Contact info for people I may need to get in touch with to help me advertise:</b>	<b>Person 1:</b>	<b>Person 2:</b>	<b>Person 3:</b>
<b>This Mitzvah Project Embodies the Middah (Value) of: (See chart on next page for examples)</b>			

# Mitzvah Project Ideas

## **B'nei Mitzvah Project Ideas 5783**

We know that volunteering has become more challenging even while the need for helping one another has increased. We've updated our mitzvah project suggestions to better reflect the current realities (updated fall 2020/5781). As always, these are suggestions and not the only project options. We encourage our B'nei Mitzvah to find projects that allow them to directly impact the lives of others by giving of their own time and talents (If there is a collection element that one wishes to include as well, that is great! We do want the primary impact to be coming from our B'nei Mitzvah directly as much as possible.)

### **In-Person Opportunities**

#### **Austin Yellow Bike Project**

[www.austinyellowbike.org](http://www.austinyellowbike.org)

512-524-5299 or [austinyellowbike@gmail.com](mailto:austinyellowbike@gmail.com)

Yellow Bike Project is a volunteer-powered initiative to put bicycles on the streets of Austin and Central Texas by operating community bike shops, teaching bike mechanics and maintenance, and acting as a local bike advocacy group.

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Volunteer tasks include fixing up adult and kid bikes, sorting parts, organizing and cleaning the shop, and more. You don't have to know anything about bikes to volunteer! If you are interested in volunteering to learn or generally contribute, simply show up during open hours and talk to a shop coordinator to get started. No need to commit to a set schedule—just come in whenever you can and we'll put you to work.

## **Patio Pals**

Contact Joan Maniere at Joan.Maniere@shalomaustin.org or (512) 735.8129

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Volunteers will be matched with senior members of the Jewish community who are homebound or feeling lonely and could use a friend. Visits can be weekly or biweekly and will last about an hour on the patio or in the front yard of the homebound individual. Mask wearing and social distancing will be required, in addition to other COVID precautions.

## **Angel House Soup Kitchen**

<https://www.austinbaptistchapel.com>

angelhouse@austinbaptistchapel.com (no phone) to volunteer

The Soup Kitchen serves the poor who suffer from the lack of basic human needs: material needs, such as food, clothing, and household necessities; psychological needs, such as motivation, self-esteem, and rehabilitation; and social needs, such as support systems and meaningful relationships.

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Volunteers are needed to serve lunch on a daily basis from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. Weekends are booked 3 months in advance. Weekdays are booked a month to 2 months in advance. Please email to schedule a time to serve.

## **Caritas of Austin**

[www.caritasofaustin.org](http://www.caritasofaustin.org)

Hector Sloss at [hsloss@caritasofaustin.org](mailto:hsloss@caritasofaustin.org)

Caritas of Austin is a non-profit organization that currently serves 20,000 homeless, working poor and documented refugees in Travis County.

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Serve in our community kitchen. Every week day, our kitchen staff and dedicated volunteers serve lunch to our neighbors in need. Community Kitchen volunteers help prepare and serve lunch for over 300 people. Must be 12 years or older to volunteer.

## **Special Olympics of Texas**

[www.sotx.org](http://www.sotx.org)

Contact: Davis Johnson at 512-491-2937

Special Olympics provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Volunteer at different competitions: Help set-up and breakdown the facility, scorekeepers, skill officials, athlete escort, runners, awards. Sign up at: [www.sotx.org/news-events/calendar](http://www.sotx.org/news-events/calendar). No experience required; however, you must be at least 15 years of age, unless accompanied by an adult. Volunteers participate in an orientation prior to working with our athletes.

## **Texas Baptist Children's Home**

[www.childrenatheartministries.org](http://www.childrenatheartministries.org)

Contact Brenda Gilbert at [brenda.gilbert@tbch.org](mailto:brenda.gilbert@tbch.org) or 512-246-4244

We provide a haven of hope for children and families in crisis through residential programs for children and single-mother families, as well as community-based outreach and prevention programs.

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Make and deliver meals to the cottages, yard work, and house cleaning are a just a few ways you can help out. Visit [www.tbch.cahgift.volunteerhub.com](http://www.tbch.cahgift.volunteerhub.com) to sign up for volunteer opportunities.

## **Urban Roots**

[www.urbanrootsatx.org](http://www.urbanrootsatx.org)

512-750-8019 or [volunteer@urbanrootsatx.org](mailto:volunteer@urbanrootsatx.org)

Urban Roots is a youth development organization that uses food and farming to transform the lives of young people and inspire, engage, and nourish the community.

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** We rely on volunteer support to help us maintain our farm. Volunteers help us with planting, harvesting, preparing produce for market, and whatever else needs to be done. All volunteers must be 10 years of age or older. For volunteers under the age of 14, we ask that they are accompanied by an adult.

## **God's Family Dinner**

[www.ubcaustin.org/missions/gods-family-dinner/](http://www.ubcaustin.org/missions/gods-family-dinner/)

contact Lea Isgur at 512-740-2187 or [leaisgur@earthlink.net](mailto:leaisgur@earthlink.net).

We need additional people to help prepare dinner on Thursdays at the University Baptist Church at 21st and Guadalupe. We meet from about 12:30 - 3. The work is not difficult, and is very rewarding. The need is particularly critical over the summer, as "regulars" go on vacation or are dealing with health issues. You do not have to commit to coming every week, but we could use additional help whenever you are available.

## **The Jewish Music Foundation**

Contact Samantha Goldberg at [mazeltovcocktailhour@gmail.com](mailto:mazeltovcocktailhour@gmail.com)

Help this local treasure transform their newly purchased workspace by helping organize music and/or assisting with painting the space. The Austin Klezmer Bund is a project of the Foundation, and directors Samantha Goldberg and Dylan Blackthorn are long-time members of our community.

## **In-Person and Remote Opportunities**

### **Generation Serve (Formerly Little Helping Hands)**

<https://www.generationserve.org/>

Phone: 512-358-6943

Little Helping Hands is a nonprofit organization that facilitates family volunteering by creating and organizing monthly volunteer opportunities suitable for children as young as 3 years of age.

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Through their website, families can view a wide variety of hands-on volunteer opportunities supporting numerous nonprofits/groups and sign up for them directly, making it simple for parents/caregivers and their children to experience the value and importance of community service together in a fun and positive learning environment.

## **United Way**

[www.handsoncentraltexas.org](http://www.handsoncentraltexas.org)

United Way for Greater Austin is a local nonprofit & community service organization providing resources and volunteer opportunities with local Austin charities since 1924

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** To get involved, individuals can sign up through their website.

## **Mobile Loaves & Fishes**

<https://mlf.org/volunteer/> and <https://mlf.org/remote-volunteer-opportunities/>

MLF empowers communities into a lifestyle of service with the homeless. We provide food, clothing, and promote dignity for our homeless brothers and sisters.

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Prepare & deliver meals to homeless in their communities. If you are looking for a remote volunteer opportunity, specifically, fill out the interest form and they will be in touch about what projects match your skill set.

## Community First

<https://mlf.org/volunteer-community-first/>

Contact Anna Campbell at [anna@mlf.org](mailto:anna@mlf.org) or 512-551-5417

Mobile Loaves & Fishes believes that the single greatest cause of homelessness is a profound, catastrophic loss of family. That's why our focus at Community First! Village is to do more than just provide adequate housing. We have developed a community with supportive services and amenities to help address an individual's relational needs at a fraction of the cost of traditional housing initiatives. We seek to empower our residents to build relationships with others, and to experience healing and restoration as part of engaging with a broader community.

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Work in the garden, work with animals, set up a home for a resident, volunteer at the community inn in person or create something to beautify the spaces of Community First Village remotely.

## Remote Opportunities

### Yad Ezra – A Helping Hand (Through CAA!)

Contact: Carolyn Austin - [yadezra@caa-austin.org](mailto:yadezra@caa-austin.org)

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Prepare a meal or dessert for a member of our community who has recently experienced a life-cycle moment. Depending on the particular circumstances, there may be an opportunity to deliver it immediately or freeze it for a future need. Let Carolyn know that you are interested in being on our list of volunteers to contact when there is a need in our community.

## Love for Our Elders

<https://loveforoureldest.org/letters>

**B'nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** Send a letter to an elder member of the community who may be feeling particularly lonely at this time.

## **Ronald McDonald House**

<https://rmhc-ctx.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Remote-Volunteer-Projects-Flyer-3.pdf>

Contact: Rene Carlin at rcarlin@rmhc-austin.org or 512-472-9844

The Central Texas Ronald McDonald House and Ronald McDonald Family Rooms provide a comforting “home-away-from-home” for families to stay so they can fight their child’s illness or injury together. RMHC CTX also supports families who have lost a child through the Healing Hearts program, which provides burial assistance and bereavement support.

**B’nai Mitzvah Project Opportunities:** All in-person opportunities are currently suspended. However, their website has several remote volunteering options including sending messages of hope and blessings, creating activity packets, and several crafting projects (making blankets, hats, masks).