

Student Spotlight

The students we work with at TCI are some of the most interesting, passionate and creative teenagers around! They come from diverse backgrounds, have varied interests and different personalities. They join TCI for inter-school events like our weekend *Jewbilee* retreat for independent school students or our service learning program in New Orleans, and many take part in Jewish student clubs at their school. This month we'd like you to meet some of the students involved with TCI...

Jake, a sophomore at New York's Fieldston School, is a self described "out of the box" Jew. Jake has never affiliated with a Jewish institution, but has always felt a strong connection to Judaism. So when it came time to become a bar mitzvah, Jake sought out and studied with a rabbinical intern, borrowed a Torah and held the service in a restaurant. He first encountered TCI through his community service class at Fieldston, which had collaborated with us to run a Jewish service learning trip to New Orleans. On the trip, while visiting a local synagogue damaged by Hurricane Katrina, Jake experienced the meaning of community in a whole new way. "In New York City there is no need to venture any further for anything, including Jewish community. Here in New Orleans, you feel this connection with these Jewish teens, a sense of loss for their synagogue but also a stronger sense of community – a Jewish community extending to Israel and across the globe." The TCI trip has not only inspired Jake to visit Israel, but has captured his interest in Judaism and deepened his desire to learn more.

Marisa is currently a senior at Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Massachusetts and was one of the first five members of Keshet, the Jewish student group on campus. Coming from a Hebrew Day school, Marisa always had a sense of pride in her religion. However, it was different to become accustomed to a school where she felt like the minority. "I was amazed when there were only four other students in the club. Everyone knew there were more girls who were Jewish, but they just did not want to affiliate themselves with the religion." Since freshman year, Marisa has seen Keshet grow from a small club with only a few students to one of the most popular and active groups on campus. "I couldn't be more proud of the work we do as a group and the effect we have had on the other students. Keshet has really helped educate the community about Judaism." Marisa feels that it is important to be welcoming to all students and so Keshet has many non-Jewish students who are active as well. Working with TCI and participating in *Jewbilee*, and *Matazahpalooza*, Marisa has met Jewish students, who attend other independent schools, which has helped her to become a leader in creating a strong Jewish club that is constantly evolving.

Grace first heard of TCI when her ethics teacher at San Francisco's Mercy High pulled her aside to suggest a Jewish retreat, TCI's *Jewbilee*. Why Grace? "Everyone in my class knows that I am *the* Jewish girl." Grace was brought up "casual in her Jewishness". After trying several Jewish youth groups, she discovered TCI. "TCI is the first place I feel comfortable with who I am, regardless of how observant I am..." At *Jewbilee*, Grace was thrilled: "All of a sudden there are all these people who share my traditions and faith." For the first time instead of defending her beliefs, she could discuss them: "Through TCI, I've made friendships that are strong because we discovered our faith with each other."