

## FROM THE ARCHIVES: A LOOK AT BRIGHTSIDE WORK

Considered a fundamental part of Jewish life, *tzedakah* is an obligation with deep roots at Temple Emanu-El. One prime example is “Brightside Work,” a program of the Religious School in the 1930s and '40s that was intended to help new Jewish immigrants experience the “brighter side of life.”

From kindergarten through seventh grade, Religious School students made weekly donations that, in turn, were distributed to needy individuals or organizations. Sometimes donations took the form of fruit given to area hospitals for the festival of Succos or scrap picture books for children in a local convalescent home. Parents and other members of the congregation also were encouraged to contribute to Brightside Work through donations of food, clothing and money.



Brightside Work ledgers documenting organizations to which charitable donations were made, including the Fresh Air Fund, the General Jewish Hospital (Shaare Zedek) and the Grand Street Settlement.

In addition to ledger books in which weekly collections and recipients were recorded, the Temple Archives features numerous letters expressing thanks for Brightside Work donations, as well as requests for assistance. One such letter, dated October 12, 1938, is on behalf of the Vo-

ational Service for Juniors. Addressed to program leader Ruth Guttman, the letter reads as follows:

Dear Miss Guttman,

Vacations are over, and I want to tell you about Norman Black, about whom we wrote you last year.

Norman made such a good record in the electrical installation course at the Brooklyn Vocational High School that he was given a National Youth Administration job at the school, which covers his car fare and lunch expenses. He is back at school and expects to graduate in June.

This year we hope your boys will be interested to help Ralph Black—not a relative of Norman’s—who is full speed ahead at the New York School of Printing.

Federation referred Ralph to us when his father lost his job as a laundry collector, and there is no money to pay the boy’s bus and car fare of 40 cents a day. Our \$3 a week adds a bit for the lunch he seems to need so much and to smarten up his clothes a bit. The pressure at home is very great, and Ralph hopes he’ll soon be far enough along to get an apprentice job and continue his printing course in the evening. Just now he’s working hard at mathematics, as well as layout and design.

I think you’ll be interested, too, to know that Victor Nahmias, whom the Class 5 boys began to help under Miss Fernbach in January 1936, graduated from high school last June in spite of every handicap and has entered Brooklyn College. We have granted him \$20 for his books. It’s a long walk from the subway for him, and Victor has to go slowly, but he has to save the car fare, and he’s determined to manage it.

Of course we hope that your boys will want to contribute toward the \$3 a week that Ralph Black needs this year.

A version of Brightside Work still exists for today’s Religious School students. Simply called *Tzedakah*, the program likewise achieves funding through weekly student donations, which total nearly \$3,000 per year. Members of the student council then decide to whom and how the monies will be divided.

