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Thornhill teen helps Hurricane Sandy victims

Cara Stern
Staff Reporter

A Thornhill, Ont., teen spent three days in and around New York City earlier this summer to help people still struggling with major property damage from Hurricane Sandy last year.

The June 25-27 trip, called Stand Up and Rebuild: A Teen Issue Summit on the Power of Service, was organized by the Jewish youth group BBYO. About 100 people, mostly from around the United States, took part in the trip.

Dylan Nowogrodski, who starts Grade 11 next month, was the sole Canadian student on the trip. He said he's never seen anything like the damage caused by the hurricane.

"There was a house that was getting rebuilt. It was pretty bad," he said, explaining that the trip mostly took place on Staten Island, New York City's hardest-hit borough, and in New Jersey.

"There was a lot of water damage, some of the walls were stripped apart, and all of the insides looked empty."

Nowogrodski said he helped create a greenhouse made out of clear water bottles, and he helped to clean a refrigerator that was filled with mould so it could be used to store food donations.

He also learned how to collect mulch to give to farmers to help them enrich their soil, and he helped with planting vegetables.

The group listened to stories recounted by victims of the hurricane.

One woman told the students she lost her husband and child, as well as her home, to the hurricane.

"It was very emotional and inspirational," Nowogrodski said, adding that the stories had a profound impact on him because they offered perspectives he would never hear at home.

He said the skills he learned could come in handy one day.

"I live in Thornhill, where it's not common for us to get a natural disaster," he said.

"But if something were to happen, I'd be one of the first to help."



Dylan Nowogrodski cleans out a refrigerator to store food donations for Hurricane Sandy victims. [BBYO photo]

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