

mitzvah Couch Surfing

Erich found a way to turn college waste into hope for the California needy.

ERICH SORGER

A 10-minute mitzvah is all it takes to spark a new idea that can repair our world (*tikkun olam*). The other day I was wrestling the old brown couch into the back of my dad's minivan. It was similar to a couch that had sparked an idea four years ago at the National Council of Jewish Women Los Angeles (NCJW/LA), which "gives the less fortunate a fighting chance."

It all started when my dad and I were throwing out our recyclables behind my house and I saw a black backpack hanging on our fence. Just then a disheveled, emaciated man approached, about six foot three, with long hair and a withered beard. His name was Dwayne and he was homeless—all his worldly possessions were in this half-empty bag. Over time he had lost his job, his money, most of his possessions and finally his house. He told us that the homeless shelters weren't safe, and the nearby church couldn't help him. My dad wasn't convinced.

As we walked Dwayne to the church, I thought about how American activists are fighting for the poor in Africa, India and South America but we ignore the needy on our own street corners. To our amazement, the pastor said, "We

"WE DO NOT RELY ON MIRACLES."



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can't take them all in," and closed the door. My dad was speechless. He gave Dwayne some

money, advice and sandwiches, and apologized that he could not do more.

Later that day, while driving by UCLA, a monstrous couch on the pavement caught my eye. I asked why it was there. My dad told me when college students move out, they leave what they don't want on their front lawns for the city to pick up as garbage.

I convinced him to help me load the couch into our van because he had told me about a group called NCJW/LA that accepts donations, sells them at their thrift store and uses the profits to help the needy. While my dad could give Dwayne money, I didn't have any. I figured I could give back by donating this couch. As we rode home, we saw a computer, then a chair and then a mattress. Finally, when our van could hold no more, I made my first donation.



That day, *tikkun olam* gave me such a wonderful feeling that I knew I could do more,

which is how my project "Dollars for Dwaynes" was formed. With my friends and family I would find abandoned reusable items and donate them. One day it would be a couch and the next day a desk, which has since translated into \$18,665 in donated items over the last four years. These items sold in thrift stores have funded programs that help children, women and families.

With a generous scholarship from the Diller Teen *Tikkun Olam* Awards, I am furthering my *tikkun olam* vision. Dollars for Dwaynes came about because I saw a way to recycle "trash" to help the needy and the environment. Your 10-minute

mitzvah could make an immediate difference or ignite a helpful idea. Thinking a little differently will repair our world and bring peace to our planet. ★

ERICH, 17, is from L.A. and studies Management and Technology at the Wharton Business and Penn Engineering Schools. A published poet during his leisure time, Erich hopes to make the world a better place through robotics.

Based on the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* ("repair of the world"), each year up to five deserving teens, 13 to 19 years old, from throughout California, are awarded \$36,000 each for community service and for demonstrating outstanding leadership and commitment to improving the world around them. The Diller Teen *Tikkun Olam* Awards seek



to recognize Jewish teens who are exceptional role models in their communities and beyond. These awards can be directed toward the recipient's college education or toward furthering his or her *tikkun olam* vision. For more information, check out www.sfjcf.org/diller/teenawards or email dillerteens@sfjcf.org.

Content is sponsored by the HAROLD GRINSPOON FOUNDATION, creator of the B'nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy Program in western Massachusetts, which consults with communities to replicate the program in North America. For more information, go to hgf.org or email Gail@hgf.org.