

COMMUNITY

Starting a 'cycle' of care

Teen helps girls and women in need



Sophie Draluck collects supplies for women and girls who can't afford sanitary products.

By ROCHELLE NEWMAN
RUBINOFF

SOPHIE DRALUCK is only 16 years old and a junior in high school. But, in that short time, this Diller Teen Fellow has already accomplished more than many do in a lifetime.

Last year, while researching the need for feminine hygiene products in developing countries, Draluck came across a fact that made her stop in her tracks. "I read an article in the *Chicago Tribune* about the lack of access to menstrual products in African countries and that this is one of the leading reasons for school absenteeism among teens," she recalled. "I was so moved about the unfairness of this that I actually felt really moved to do something about it."

Her next discovery is what shocked her even more: "It

didn't take long to discover that this isn't just a problem in Africa. The stigmatization of menstruation, and the inequity surrounding the lack of access to sanitary products, are a problem all over the U.S.—even in my hometown of Highland Park."

That's when she founded Cycle Forward. "As I started to research access to sanitary products locally, the pantries and shelters reported to me that menstrual products, like tampons and pads, are some of the most requested—yet least donated—products. My research also showed that these products are very pricey—*impossibly* expensive for many women—which means they are effectively inaccessible to portions of the population," Sophie said.

Cycle Forward accepts donations of tampons and sanitary pads—and cash, which Sophie uses to buy these prod-

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ucts in bulk. She then donates them to the Moraine Township food pantry in Highland Park, PADS of Lake County, and I Support The Girls, which distributes feminine products and bras to homeless girls and women in Chicago.

At about the same time that she founded Cycle Forward, Draluck became a Diller Teen Fellow. The Diller Teen Fellows Program is a prestigious, yearlong fellowship for high school students interested in exploring topics in leadership, Jewish identity, social justice, and Israel. The program operates in 32 communities worldwide: 16 in Israel paired with 16 diaspora communities around the globe. JUF launched its first cohort in 2013 in partnership with JUF's Partnership Together region in Israel (Kiryat Gat, Lachish, and Shafir).

"I applied to be a Diller Teen because I wanted to become more involved in the Jewish community," Draluck said. The three weeks she spent in Israel,

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as the culminating experience of the fellowship, were life-changing. "Diller really helped me grow my leadership skills; it made me feel more confident to go up to these Jewish teens I never met before, tell them about my project and ask for their help. And through Diller, I'm now part of this global network of teens making a difference in the world," she said.

For Draluck, one of the pillars of the program with which she connected most deeply

is tikkun olam, repairing the world: "This was the driving force in my project because [my project] empowers women to go and live their lives to the fullest, healing a portion of the world."

Draluck has been recognized by StreetWise—a nonprofit that empowers, and provides resources for, homeless and at-risk populations throughout Chicago—as one of the 20 most inspiring Chicagoans making the city a better place to live and work.

Her mother, Suzie Draluck, couldn't be prouder. "I wish I could take credit for this," she said, "and I hope I've modeled being a good person, but, really, Sophie has been a really empathetic person since she was a child." ■

To learn more about Cycle Forward, visit cycleforward-now.org or email cycleforward-now@gmail.com.

Rochelle Newman Rubinoff is a freelance writer living in the northern suburbs of Chicago.



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