



Volunteering with a twist – with an emphasis on accessibility, flexibility and socializing.
(Photos: Gilad Tsafir)



You give a little, you get a little

Making every day count
with One Day Social Volunteering

• By RACHEL MYERSON

Values such as social responsibility and brotherhood are often the first that come to mind when describing Israeli society, yet, paradoxically, Israel has a surprisingly low rate of volunteering compared with the rest of the Western world.

The volunteering opportunities available cater only to those who are able to commit to regular times each week. When Elad Blumenthal and friends began searching for volunteering opportunities in Israel just over two years ago, they very quickly arrived at this road block. As students, their schedules did not cater to the regular time commitments requested, and they were left with no options.

So they decided to meet their obstacles head on through actively seeking out institutions needing a few extra pairs of hands according to their availability.

Their initiative grew quickly, as friends began inviting friends, with the group of volunteers doubling every week.

Sensing an opportunity to open the volunteering market to students and young professionals with demanding and often irregular work hours, One Day Social Volunteering, a nonprofit, bloomed. This is volunteering with a twist: an emphasis on accessibility, flexibility and socializing that is proving hugely successful with their targeted demographic: young people like themselves.

It has spread from its birthplace in

Beersheba to its flagship branch in Tel Aviv and onto Jerusalem and Haifa.

Not only does One Day refrain from demanding regular time commitments, it has also worked hard to maximize the results of more sporadic giving.

“When 25 volunteers are coming to a three-hour volunteering activity, you have 75 hours of volunteering work. There are many things you can do in that time frame if you know how to manage it [correctly],” explains Blumenthal, who has worked tirelessly to combat the typical inefficiency of one-off volunteering programs.

Each branch hosts numerous volunteering events per month, ranging from visiting homes for the elderly, helping out in animal shelters, serving in soup kitchens and spending time with children with special needs, to planting community gardens and repainting and redecorating homes of Holocaust survivors. The variety of options deliberately targets a wide range of interests, and thus participants. Each event is advertised on their Facebook page and sign-up is via Eventbrite. This is the extent of One Day’s marketing strategy; the organization has successfully relied on word of mouth since its inception.

Their lack of marketing has not affected their popularity one little bit. One Day’s noncommittal formula has ensured a 60 percent return rate, with many more previous participants unable to return due to waiting lists. In fact, the more events created, the longer the wait-lists, even with an all-time high in May 2016 of 12 events in one

month run in the Tel Aviv area and 12,000 volunteers since One Day officially began.

It appears that their inability to provide for their audience, which is largely down to unexpected and constant rapid growth in addition to the fact that the team is composed solely of volunteers, has only made people more eager to be accepted to each event.

Blumenthal is quick to point out that lack of space and marketing is “not a good thing,” and hopes that very soon there will be an assurance to volunteers that they will be accepted by the second time they apply for a One Day event. He attributes their success largely to the nature of the beast, which naturally attracts the most caring and social of volunteers, happy to fight for the chance to do good in their free time.

He also is keen to assert that they “haven’t reinvented the wheel,” but simply provided a service based on their personal experience. Whatever One Day’s secret, or lack thereof, they have been inundated with organizations wishing to partner with them. One particular success has been with Nefesh b’Nefesh, who found that the volunteering opportunities gave new immigrants a chance to mix with native Israelis.

The social aspect of One Day is its true triumph. The founders identified that when different groups of people are forced to communicate it is usually stiff and awkward, taking place in a static environment such as around a table. A common cause is a natural ice breaker,

and the volunteering missions have bonded young immigrants from all over the world, Israelis and both religious and non religious participants. After the volunteering activity is finished, the group partakes in a social activity, such as a picnic or a bar. The group has already gotten to know each other, and real friendships are formed.

Cody, a college graduate who is currently participating on an internship program in Israel over the summer, enthusiastically raves about the social opportunities presented to him by One Day. He has found meeting Israelis and hearing about their lives and society particularly inspiring. For him the enjoyment and interactive elements of the nonprofit are the highlight. “It’s hard to be in the real world and to socialize,” he says, but One Day gives you that opportunity. “It doesn’t feel like volunteering, which usually isn’t so fun, a bit boring or feels like work. With One Day, you enjoy it.”

Blumenthal’s ambitions stretch far beyond Israel. He aims to begin expanding abroad during the following year, and opening the concept up to a wider range of age groups. Because he and his whirlwind team are receiving no salary, partnerships and the support of other organizations are crucial.

If there is one initiative to support this year, One Day Social Volunteering could very well be it. They are only getting started.

For more information: www.facebook.com/OneDaySocialVolunteering/ and www.onedayvolunteering.org/