



While many *kashrut* organizations do a good job of upholding *kashrut* standards, we believe there is one factor that makes us unique in the kosher world: the fact that Klal Yisrael benefits from the funds generated by OU certification. The OU is a non-profit organization; as such, all the income earned from companies that pay for certification is reinvested back into the Jewish community.

The Jewish Student Union (JSU) is one such beneficiary of *kashrut* revenue. The brainchild of Rabbi Steven Burg, OU managing director and NCSY international director, JSU started as a club for Jewish students in three public schools in California. Targeting non-affiliated Jewish teens, the club offered free pizza, a dynamic and energetic educator and an opportunity to connect with fellow Jewish teens and explore Judaism in a way that is interesting, fun and relevant. The clubs were wildly successful, and thanks to the largesse of Jack Gindi, z"l, and his wife, Rae, who believed in Rabbi Burg and in the value of reaching out to these teens, the program was able to expand. JSU is currently in more than 250 schools, in over twenty-five states, and some 20,000 teenagers across the country attend a JSU club each week.

JSU is addressing a dire need in our community. Tragically, thousands of young Jews, whether or not they live in Jewishly populated areas, have no relationship whatsoever with their Jewish heritage, religion or community. This isolation is not by choice. These teens simply have not been given an opportunity to learn and see the beauty of belonging to the Jewish people. This is where JSU comes in. Free food brings teens in the door. A friendly, sincere club leader makes them feel welcome. They become part of a social network of fellow Jewish students. And then the education begins. Week in and week out, they are introduced to the basics of Judaism. They explore four thousand years of Jewish history; they struggle with moral dilemmas and gain an appreciation for the wisdom behind the Torah's system of morality. They learn Jewish theology and philosophy and are able to respond intelligently to important life questions.

JSU participants learn that what they see on CNN does not necessarily reflect the truth about Israel and the Middle East. Though the world works hard to delegitimize Israel, these teens get the facts about Israel and learn to counter the propaganda and negative images of the Jewish State. Some students sign up for NCSY's TJJ (The

Jerusalem Journey), a four-week summer program that literally transforms an unaffiliated teen into a passionate, committed member of Am Yisrael. These students become leaders on their college campuses because of the Jewish education and inspiration they receive in their clubs.

The OU is proud of JSU—both of the teens who participate in the clubs and of the dedicated staff members who devote themselves wholeheartedly to stemming the tide of assimilation. Our goal is to expand this program to 150 more schools in places like Stamford, Connecticut, Mount Kisco, New York, San Francisco, Washington, DC and additional parts of New Jersey. The reality is that when Jewish children grow up on the fringe, and the potential they have to contribute to the tapestry of our people is lost, we all suffer. Finding these teens, bringing them in, educating them to appreciate the depth, relevance and beauty of Torah, and inspiring them to grow and become part of the Jewish community are responsibilities we all share.

So remember, every time you buy Tootsie Rolls or Gatorade or any of the thousands of OU-certified products, you can be proud that you have contributed to JSU and to building the Jewish future. ■

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