

Dear NFTY-NW,

Our ancestors wandered the desert for 40 years wondering when they'd find the promised land. For 40 years they walked and stayed strong. They had faith there would be a light at the end of the tunnel, a place for them to pause under a vine and fig tree, a moment alone in the shade. As NFTY navigated Covid-19, wondering when it would finally be over and we could return to our beloved community, I saw the parallels between our story and theirs.

This is the year we finally get to the promised land, and with that comes redefining NFTY and changing it for the better. **We need to initiate the NFTY experience from 8th-12th grade, as well as add new traditions to NFTY culture that make teens want to keep coming back because of how connected and integrated they feel.**

In 8th grade, I attended my first NFTY event, Spring Kallah 2020. I sat on the floor of my room all day long, glued to my laptop screen, and participated in all the programs and elections. After the ten-hour event was over, I thought: I will never come to one of these ever again. I didn't know anyone and I couldn't connect with anyone through my screen. But then, I got a notification that someone added me on social media. I briefly talked to them at Spring Kallah and they started to introduce me to their friends and soon enough I was running to board. My point is, I was involved with NFTY as much as I possibly could be from the beginning. Because of that, I get to have this extraordinary experience that wouldn't be half as meaningful had I joined halfway through. My plan is simple: make kids feel as welcome as possible, as early as possible. NFTY has the potential for life-changing experiences, and I feel like so many teens are missing out on it because they had a bad introduction. If elected, I want to work with the MVP in **making in-person or online visits to TYGs**, but also to directly talk to and engage with 8th and 9th graders in particular. Along with this, having more 6,7,8 NFTYx events will be beneficial to get kids in early to NFTY. It gives them an opportunity to dip their toes in the water without having to plunge headfirst into a Kallah. Having the opportunity to be a part of this community has changed my life. The least I can do is pay it forward to the new generation of nfty-ites.

Adding new NFTY traditions is what will draw the next generation back to NFTY time and time again. It gives younger kids not only something concrete to look forward to at NFTY but also it gives a chance to us, Regional Board, to redefine the culture. Traditions such as spell it with your butt or the awards that are given out at friendship circle are ones I'd like to take inspiration from in the coming year. Some examples being chants to do at mealtimes to determine who has the most ruach, hiding ruach the raindrop somewhere around camp for everyone to search for, or a simple lay your head on the shoulder of the person next to you and passing it along at siyum. **These traditions help unite our community on a deeper emotional level that wouldn't be achieved otherwise.** Even the smallest of traditions help everyone feel included and surrounded by the love we have in our community.

Over the past few years in my NFTY experience, I can't help but notice people being left out. Now, this isn't anyone's fault. But, in order to truly have a Kehilah Kedosha people can't be left on the side. Instead, be pushed to the middle in hopes that they feel the people around them who will support them unconditionally. I understand the anxiety people feel being in a new community and trying to get involved without knowing anyone. We as a Regional Board need to be able to make that transition into the community more seamless. **To ensure this is to make sure programming is inclusive and gives all members a purposeful role.** I plan to work with the PVP to create activities so everyone in our Kehilah Kedosha will be included.

Being President is to be a role model, to take the time to talk to those people and invite them, personally, into your community. It takes this personal connection to make the people on the outside, who don't feel included, feel welcome. This is absolutely crucial for not only the President to do but all of Regbo and all of NFTY. We must make them trust that even if it's awkward at first, they will get something positive out of the experience, something that once they have they won't be able to live without.

This year is going to come with a lot of changes to URJ and NFTY as a whole. If elected, I will capitalize on those changes and bring about a new era of NFTY. As some of you may know, URJ is struggling and by extension, NFTY is also struggling. This doesn't mean that NFTY-NW is struggling. We held Spring Kallah at Camp Kalsman at the beginning of March and it embodied why I put so much effort and love into this community. Jewish teens danced, sang, and were with their friends in the most magical place. There is nothing more important to me than giving Jewish teens that chance to be together. I hope to build a space for kids to learn about their Jewish identity as I continually do with my time in NFTY. And with that, **it is with great enthusiasm that I, Zelda Fishman, declare my candidacy for NFTY-Northwest Regional President for the years 5782-5783.**

Sincerely,
Zelda Fishman