

Amanda Powers

Hadassah Foundation Contest

What are your aspirations as a female Jewish leader in your community? How do you want to change or add to the world?

Once upon a time, there was a princess who lived in a castle. Every morning, she went for a walk. One morning, as she was walking past the river at the edge of her village, she noticed something unusual floating along. As she got closer, she saw that it was a baby. She pulled the baby out of the water, brought it back to her castle, and took care of it. The next morning, and every morning after that, there were more and more babies in the river. As the babies got older, the princess built schools, so they could learn, and parks, so they could play. And every day, more and more babies floated down the river. Finally, the princess began to wonder where the babies were coming from.

Over the past few years I have begun to journey down the river, seeking to understand where the babies are coming from. Unlike the princess, I am not content to simply stay in my village, dealing with issues that float my way.

When I was nine years old, as part of the Tikkun Olam project required by my religious school at Temple Israel of Boston for students preparing for bar and bat mitzvahs, I started working with a group of friends to move homeless families from shelters into permanent housing. We held fundraisers to raise money to buy furniture and housewares. I spent my Saturday mornings cleaning and decorating apartments for these families. We brought dinner and arts and crafts activities to the shelters, to give the families a break. I did this for four years, until I was 13. Eventually, I began to wonder what made these families homeless.

The values of justice and advocacy I learned from my reform Jewish upbringing had always drawn me to social justice work, but after working with Heading Home, I felt like no matter how many families we helped, there would always be more. I felt hopeless.

I wanted to find a way to serve the community and fight for justice where I was making a real impact. I applied and was accepted into Boston Mobilization's summer internship program two years ago, where I first heard the princess story, and where I spent the summer learning how to run a social justice campaign. Now, two years later, I tell this story at the beginning of the workshops I lead on Methods of Social Change as Youth Staff at Boston Mobilization. I teach adults and youth from different organizations about the systems in our society that create problems like homelessness, and ways to make these systems more just. I lobby at the Massachusetts State House to advocate for change, so that maybe fewer and fewer people will be homeless, or unemployed, or suffering.

I also believe in educating and uplifting young women as leaders. As president of G.A.L.S. (Girls Achieving Leadership through Service) club at my high school, I mentored younger female students and served disadvantaged women around Boston through service trips, fundraising, and a drive for feminine products to be distributed to women's shelters such as Rosie's Place and the Women's Lunch Place.

My passion for social justice and my aspiration to make the communities I belong to a better place comes from my Jewish values: fighting for justice, helping those around me, and having difficult conversations. As a female Jewish leader, I aspire to uphold these values and to continue to make positive change in the world, by looking upstream and addressing the root causes of injustice through education, conversation, and advocacy.