

87 College Students Return from Transformational Alternative Break in Israel with Jewish National Fund-USA

Eight days of service, solidarity, and leadership building the next generation of Jewish advocates

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, February 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Jewish National Fund-USA](#), the leading philanthropy for building Israel's North and South, and Zionist engagement, welcomed 87 college students back from an unforgettable Alternative Break in Israel (December 28, 2025–January 4, 2026), an eight-day journey that blended hands-on service, immersive education, and powerful encounters with Israel's people, history, and resilience.



Alternative Winter Break Students at ADI Negev–Nahalat Eran's annual Race for Inclusion

Representing 29 colleges and universities across North America, the students arrived as individuals and returned as a unified community—deeply connected to Israel, to one another, and to Jewish National Fund-USA's mission of building a strong, vibrant future for the land and people of Israel.

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Service anchored the week. Students cooked and packed meals for Israel Defense Forces soldiers, volunteered in agricultural fields left untended while farmers served in reserve duty, and supported frontline communities still healing from October 7.

In the southern Israeli city of Ofakim, students worked alongside local resident Osi Lankri, whose family home was directly impacted by rocket fire from Gaza. Inspired by her commitment to giving back, many students participated in a blood drive hosted at her home, answering an urgent national need with quiet courage and compassion.



Students write personal notes to IDF soldiers

At a Jewish National Fund-USA-supported [rehabilitation village](#) in Israel's South, joy took center stage as students ran, danced, and celebrated alongside residents with disabilities—an experience that reminded participants that inclusion and dignity are pillars of Israeli society.

The group also visited an IDF base to learn about Jewish National Fund-USA's Special in Uniform program, which integrates young adults with disabilities into meaningful service roles. Students met participants, observed training exercises, and gained firsthand insight into how inclusion strengthens Israel's social fabric.

In the southern Israeli city of Sderot, located less than a mile from Gaza, students stood at the Police Station Memorial commemorating the October 7 attack, then experienced hope in action at Jewish National Fund-USA's fortified Indoor Playground, a safe haven from rocket attacks. There, they learned how Jewish National Fund-USA empowers residents through education, employment, and culture—rebuilding daily life even amid uncertainty.

“This was my third time visiting several of these sites since October 7,” said Barnard student Eliana Birman. “And each of those places looked so different each time I was there. I really appreciated how these sites have been developed in the last few years, and I'm grateful to Jewish National Fund-USA for turning these places into a beautiful way of commemorating the lives lost and making sure to tell everyone's story individually, which I think is something that we did throughout the trip.”

Students broke their fast together at the playground and received a security briefing from IDF Spokesperson Major Liat Diamond, grounding their experience in real-time context and lived reality.

One of the most moving days brought students to the Nova Festival Memorial and the T'kuma Car Cemetery, where they heard directly from a survivor and stood before the stark evidence of terror. These moments, students reflected, transformed headlines into human stories—and grief

into responsibility.

At Project Waddi Atir, students volunteered alongside members of the Bedouin community, learning how Jewish National Fund-USA supports groundbreaking sustainable agriculture that blends traditional knowledge with cutting-edge science. For many, it was their first encounter with Bedouin culture—an eye-opening example of coexistence and shared future-building.

Educational visits to the Ayalon Institute, Atlit Detention Camp, Mount Herzl, and Jewish National Fund-USA's Ammunition Hill traced Israel's journey from underground resistance to modern sovereignty. Students learned how these sites are preserved through the Society for the Preservation of Israel Heritage Sites, ensuring that Israel's story—its struggle, sacrifice, and resilience—remains alive for future generations.

At Kibbutz Kfar Massaryk, students experienced contemporary kibbutz life, shared meals with local residents, and danced together in an unforgettable moment of joy that turned strangers into family.

Shabbat offered space for reflection and connection, thoughtfully led by the Yavneh team and students themselves. Learning sessions explored themes of faith, responsibility, tradition, and identity—demonstrating the intellectual and spiritual growth that defined the week.

“Seeing the impact we as students have been able to make has been amazing,” said President of Yavneh on Campus Eyal Lubin, who attends the University of Pennsylvania. “I try to do as much for my fellow Jewish students on campus, and I think this trip has really strengthened my resolve, and I've returned to campus reinvigorated and ready to bring more energy and enthusiasm about Judaism, Zionism, and Israel.”

Alternative Break also provides opportunities for participants to socialize with their Israeli peers. Through a shared dinner and dialogue with Israeli Gap Year participants in the Eshkol region, the moment underscored peer-to-peer connection, leadership, and the shared responsibility of young adults shaping Israel's future.

Impressively, before departing for Israel, Alternative Break participants raised \$191,400, with nearly every student meeting their fundraising commitment. Even more significant is what comes next: students have committed to speaking on campus, hosting programs, and serving as ambassadors for Israel and Jewish National Fund-USA in their communities.

Graduating seniors are already being connected to JNFuture professionals to ensure a seamless transition into post-college Jewish life, with tree dedications in Israel planned to mark this milestone and honor their continued connection.

Why It Matters:

This Alternative Break was about more than travel. It was about service, heritage, inclusion, resilience, and leadership—and about helping students understand their role in carrying Israel's story forward.

As one theme echoed throughout the week: showing up matters.

Jewish National Fund-USA extends profound gratitude to its partners (donors) who made this journey possible. Their support does more than fund a trip—it helps shape the next generation of Jewish leaders.

For more information about Alternative Break, visit jnf.org/alternativebreak or email education@jnf.org

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