

Students volunteer for Schechter Holocaust Services

This spring, Jewish Family and Children's Service hosted a special group of volunteers.

Seventh-graders from Jewish Community Day School in Watertown and German International School Boston visited the Waltham headquarters to make birthday cards for clients of the Schechter Holocaust Services program. The collaboration between the two schools was part of an ongoing partnership between JCDS and GISB that focuses on Holocaust education.

The Holocaust education program between Jewish Community Day School and German International School Boston was first launched in 2017 by Andrea Silton, of JCDS, and Andreas Weber, of GISB. When the two Middle School teachers were put in touch as part of a comparative religion course, they realized that they had an opportunity to explore the difficult history between Germans and Jews.

All of the students at JCDS are Jewish, and many of the students who attend GISB are from Germany, Austria or Switzerland, or have parents with roots in these countries. Silton and Weber wanted to put together a curriculum that would bring together their students, some of whom are the great-grandchildren of

Nazis and the great-grandchildren of survivors, to confront the shared legacy of the Holocaust.

The interschool program between JCDS and GISB is a mix of cultural exchange, confronting the past and applying the lessons of history to the present. Before delving into the more challenging parts of the curriculum, students from the two schools engaged in activities where they could socialize and discuss the ways in which they are similar and the ways they are different. A combined Christmas and Hanukkah celebration was a way for students to share their favorite holiday foods, music and traditions.

"They really do become friends," said Silton. "Some of the boys are on the same soccer team, and some of the girls text each other and follow each other on social media. My students are always asking when they will see the kids from GISB again."

The shared curriculum tackles the history of the Holocaust head on. Students in both schools read and discussed the book "An Orange in Winter," which tells the story of the Holocaust through the eyes of a young Jewish boy and his German friend. The middle schoolers were also visited

by speakers from Facing History and Ourselves, a Brookline-based nonprofit dedicated to educating students about racism, prejudice and antisemitism.

As part of the Facing History program, students heard from the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor and a German woman whose grandparents were Nazis.

During workshops and meetings, the students at both schools came up with the idea of doing some sort of service project together. Silton had previously visited JF&CS with a fifth-grade class and realized that volunteering with the Schechter Holocaust Services program could be a meaningful way for seventh-graders to observe Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Students from JCDS and GISB came to the office in Waltham and created handmade cards that will be sent to Holocaust survivors on their birthdays. When Volunteer Services Manager Ava Harder explained that these birthday cards may be the only one a survivor receives, the seventh-graders were aware of the significance of their artwork. The students added a "made by" credit on the back of each one they crafted.

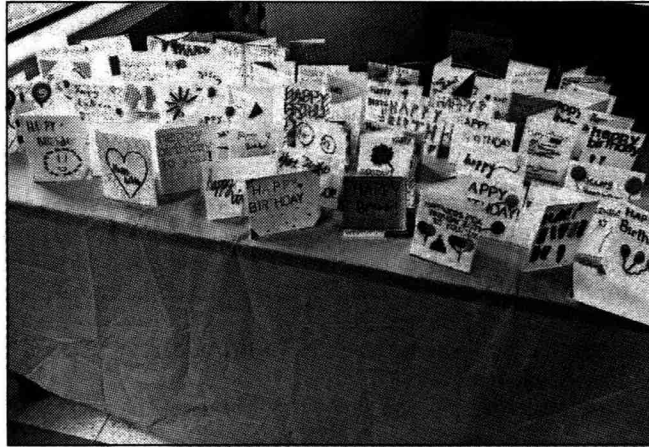
The middle schoolers also heard from Lora Tarlin, the



director of Schechter Holocaust Services, who spoke about the Yom HaShoah commemoration that had

occurred the day before in Boston.

For more information, visit <http://jfcsboston.org>.



Pictured are birthday cards made by students from JCDS and GISB. [COURTESY PHOTO]