



NECHAMA – Jewish Response to Disaster
P.O. Box 17249
St. Paul, MN 55117
(763) 732-0610
NECHAMA.org

Focus Area: Jewish Engagement

Over the years NECHAMA has deployed to approximately 35 states, engaging thousands of volunteers who have provided hundreds of thousands of hours of service to advance humanitarian relief efforts for communities impacted by natural disasters. Our programs range from day trips attracting local volunteers to missions lasting months (sometimes years) at a time attracting delegations from all over the country.

Throughout NECHAMA’s three-decade history, a significant majority of our volunteers have been Jewish. We have engaged Jewish volunteers of all backgrounds and denominations as well as those who are “just Jewish.” Our non-Jewish volunteers are representative of all faith backgrounds (or lack thereof). Additionally, because we do not proselytize and actively work to ensure our deployments are welcoming to all, we attract volunteers from marginalized backgrounds, with a sizable portion of our volunteers identifying as LGBTQ+. Regardless of background and identity, one thing is clear for all of our volunteers: our experiences are formative and deeply meaningful.

Our Jewish volunteers particularly express a deep appreciation for the Jewish presence of NECHAMA. NECHAMA is the sole national Jewish organization in a field primarily occupied by dozens of non-Jewish faith-based disaster relief organizations. Our Jewish volunteers specifically seek us out, expressing pride in wearing the blue and white t-shirts emblazoned with our logo, an embellished Star of David.

Per the latest Pew survey, 40% of young Jewish Americans (Aged 18-29) do not identify with a particular denomination of Judaism and do not consider themselves to be religious. For those Jews, opportunities for meaningful involvement in Jewish life are more limited. Most of NECHAMA’s volunteers are younger than 30. We understand our role in the larger Jewish landscape as being attractive to young Jews who may not participate in more formal and/or religious experiences. However, through volunteering with NECHAMA, discussing their version of Judaism with fellow volunteers, and embodying our foundational value of Tikkun Olam (repair of the world), these volunteers get to experience Judaism in a way that is meaningful for them.

One regular volunteer who began his service with NECHAMA at age 16 was raised by a Jewish mother and Christian father, neither of whom was particularly religious. He said: “I didn’t grow up in the Jewish community. I don’t go to synagogue. My social life does not generally involve other Jews. Nevertheless, I’m proud to be a part of the Jewish community and NECHAMA forged that connection.”

This volunteer found NECHAMA “to be a place for Jews who don’t always connect with the other organs of the community. It’s been a place for the weird ones, who don’t go to synagogue but who feel a connection to being Jewish and want to have a way to express it. The values the organization is based on are foundational to the Jewish community and those values are ones that many of us connect with. Beliefs and values are only important insofar as they inform our actions and NECHAMA has been an important channel for those actions for me personally and for so many incredible people I’ve met in over 20 years volunteering, working, and serving with this organization.”

Additionally, because our Jewish volunteers represent the full spectrum of Jewish affiliation, gathering together with those of different backgrounds stokes a sense of unity throughout volunteerism with NECHAMA. According to Pew, all three major Jewish denominations: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform find that they have the most in common with their own denomination and have the least in common with Jews who don’t belong to any denomination. Volunteering with NECHAMA is direct proof that there can be common ground among all Jewish people, through the avenue of community service.

NECHAMA is in a period of strategic growth and we are partnering with other Jewish organizations that support Jewish life, particularly young adult Jewish engagement. An investment into NECHAMA is an investment in the future of the Jewish community.