

**National Young Leadership Cabinet
Study Mission Reflections
Simone Knego (Sarasota, Florida) & Brandon Prosansky (Chicago, IL) – Mission Co-Chairs**

“I speak for those who cannot speak.”



NYL Cabinet Study Mission Co-Chairs Brandon Prosansky (Chicago, IL) and Simone Knego (Sarasota, FL) welcomed Holocaust survivor Margot Friedlander as keynote speaker in Berlin.

These inspiring words from Margot Friedlander, a native Berliner who survived the Holocaust and eventually returned to her home country five years ago at the age of 88 after emigrating to the U.S., set the tone for the 2016 National Young Leadership (NYL) Cabinet Study Mission to Berlin and Israel. Seventy-three Cabinet leaders representing 31 different Federation communities across the U.S. and Canada participated in the mission.

The mission offered an unparalleled opportunity to honor the Jewish past, celebrate the Jewish present, and forge a profound sense of hope for the Jewish future. Prosansky noted, “The Cabinet Study Mission uniquely demonstrates the power of the collective. Not only do participants have access to incredible speakers and exclusive experiences overseas, we also have a platform that connects us as close friends, or as we say in Cabinet, our ‘chevre’.”

Seventeen mission participants competed in the Berlin Half Marathon, raising more than \$12,000 for two Federation-supported JDC programs:

the Accessible Health Zone, which serves people with physical disabilities, and Witness Theater, which pairs survivors with Israeli teens to share firsthand testimonials of the Holocaust.

In Berlin, participants said *Kaddish* for those who perished at the hands of the Nazi death machine and took part in emotionally charged memorial services at both Sachsenhausen concentration camp and Track 17, one of three train stations from which 55,000 Jews were transported to death camps. After these services, the cohort visited the House of the Wannsee Conference, the location where the Nazis conceived the Final Solution that resulted in the murder of millions of Jews.



NYL Cabinet Members Simone Knego (Sarasota, FL) and Jason Rubinoff (Toronto) at Track 17 in Berlin.

Impacted by Holocaust memorials and historical sites in Berlin, Knego urged, “It is not enough to just say we will never forget. We have to live our lives in a way that helps others to remember the atrocities that happened here.”

Knego saw her sentiments shared by others when the mission participants spoke with grade school teacher Christa Niclasen at the Locknitz Primary School in Berlin’s Bavarian Quarter. Eighteen years ago, after learning that more than 6,000 former Jewish Bavarian Quarter residents were deported by the Nazis, Niclasen challenged her students to find a way to memorialize those individuals. The school was built on the remains of a synagogue destroyed by the Nazis. The students initiated a tradition of stacking yellow bricks inscribed with the names and addresses of the departed to form a wall of remembrance.



NYL Cabinet Members gather at the Wannsee House in Berlin, where Hitler’s top lieutenants devised their ‘Final Solution’ plan. Photographed back row, left to right: David Goldfarb (Dallas, TX), Lee Murnick (Greater MetroWest, NJ), Cindy Feinberg (New York), Eric Wachter (DC), Seth Wong (Denver, CO), Jen Leemis (Chicago, IL), Samantha Yablon (New York). Front row, left to right: Simone Knego (Sarasota, FL) and Iris Epstein (Lehigh Valley, PA).

Inspired by the example set by the children – and moved by what they saw and learned in Germany – Cabinet leaders launched a campaign to help ensure that Holocaust survivors in need throughout the U.S. would not go hungry during Passover, and would have access to basic medical care and humanitarian services. The group acted in tribute to the thousands of Holocaust survivors who today live below the poverty line.



NYL Cabinet Member and 2017-18 Vice Chair-Designate Michelle Stein Hirsch (Cleveland, OH) visits with a student at the Locknitz Primary School in Berlin.

Each leader agreed to contribute and/or raise \$360 to JFNA’s [Fund for Holocaust Survivors](#) in the days leading up to Passover, and raise awareness for this important initiative throughout their social networks. The educational theme of the mission – from ‘degradation to dignity’ – heightened the group’s sensitivity to the challenges faced by many Holocaust survivors today, and compelled them to action.

Upon arriving in Israel, the group reflected on the transition from the Holocaust to the birth of the Jewish homeland. With a commitment to deepening their understanding of life in Israel today, mission participants visited an IDF base; attended a panel discussion with Yossi Vardi, considered the father of Israel’s hi-tech sector; and met with Eli Groner, the

Israeli prime minister's director general. They volunteered with SAHI, a Federation-funded Jewish Agency program that engages at-risk teens in service, and delivered Passover food



NYL Cabinet members visit the Western Wall during their annual Study Mission. Left to right: Jen Leemis (Chicago, IL), Stacie Friedman (Greater Metrowest, NJ), Lisa Jericho (Chicago, IL), Karen Daitch (Chicago, IL), Lindsey Markus (Chicago, IL).

packages to families in need. They also learned how The Jewish Agency's HaGal Sheli program helps teens overcome life's challenges through surfing, and how JDC's Accessible Health Zone helped world champion Paralympic rower Moran Samuel after she suddenly became paralyzed due to the rapid onset of a rare disease.

The NYL Cabinet Study Mission journey concluded with a visit to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, where participants joined together as motivated and empowered young leaders. Having learned, lamented, and laughed with each other, participants returned home inspired to speak up for those who may not have the means to do so themselves.

Nominations for the 2016-17 class of Cabinet members are open through May 10. For further information, contact [Lisa Robbins](#), (212) 284-6583.