

Weekly Reader's *READ* Magazine
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teen spotlight

A Stitch In Time

This volunteer mends more than clothing. She can fix a smile, too.

Shifra Mincer was in sixth grade when she started volunteering at a soup kitchen with a school group. "I had never volunteered in my life, but something inside pulled me to go," she said. Every Monday afternoon, she would take the subway and then walk several blocks to the soup kitchen at the Hebrew Union College in New York City. According to her former teacher Victoria Ginsberg, Shifra soon noticed that many of the hundreds of homeless men, women, and children who ate there were missing buttons on their shirts, pants, and jackets, and Shifra decided to take action.

Each week for the last seven years, Shifra has offered her sewing skills in the soup kitchen, where visitors line up and wait for her services. With quiet dignity, she discusses choices of button and thread colors, treating each garment with care and respect. While sewing, she visits with her clients, repairing their spirits as she mends their seams. She is known to stay late.

"I realized that there would always be one more person to help ... one more coat to sew that would keep one man warm that winter," Shifra said. Her passion for helping others eventually led to a leadership role. Last year, she started a coed sewing club at her school to provide handmade items for people in New York City's shelters. When her group created heart-shaped pillows, some students had to struggle to run fabric under the needle of the sewing machine, but Shifra shared her knowledge of the craft, becoming a teacher as well.

At the soup kitchen, Shifra is known as the "sewing lady," but don't try to "buttonhole" her efforts to help others. On her so-called nights off, she often visits hospital patients and eldercare residents. Shifra took a vacation last summer—spending six weeks volunteering for activities such as fixing homes, cleaning streams, and delivering meals to homebound seniors. The young hero said it was one of the best vacations she'd ever had.



 To learn more about the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, go to www.barronprize.org.