

Dear NFTY Texas and Oklahoma,

When I marched alongside the Torah during one of the last services at the URJ Kutz Camp, I could not but think about how the Tanakh teaches us "to do justice, to love mercy, and to march humbly with our G-d." Working alongside NFTY social justice organizers and our RAC adult partners, I have turned my passions of Tikkun Olam into symbolically marching with the Torah until justice is pursued. I felt like I was marching with the Torah in-hand when I wrote stacks of postcards to voters and engaged my local community with my Teen Justice Fellowship project. As a movement - not just a moment - NFTY has taken on the difficult task of speaking unapologetically in support of repairing the injustices imposed onto marginalized communities. The impact our organization has already made is extensive, but I know the pursuit of justice by the Reform Jewish Movement will not end here. In order for me to become more involved in my Jewish kehillah and its sacred culture, and to become more engaged in fulfilling the values that my Jewish identity beholds, I, Cameron Samuels, am declaring my candidacy to serve as your 5781-5782 NFTY-TOR Social Action Vice President.

I have had the honor of being able to grow as a person and as a leader in NFTY for the past two and a half years, and it has been such an essential part of my life since the moment I arrived at my first TOR event at Greene Family Camp. It has been great to have the opportunity to make an individual impact via my Jewish identity, but most importantly, it has been great to be part of the influence that Reform Jewish teens across North America have collectively made thanks to our movement's remarkable commitment to organizing, networking, and collaboration. I hope to continue this throughout the rest of my time in high school and in my adulthood – passing it l'dor v'dor for the continuation of our people.

Social justice is only reached when leaders organize campaigns to continuously connect people through shared values to learn and to serve in combating injustice. RAC-TX's Civic Engagement and Democracy Protection campaigns were perfect examples of how our movement has made an impact in our communities, and I believe that we could introduce similar ideas in TOR to strengthen our commitment to this organizing method that has been proven successful. I understand the limitations of holding one-time actions at regional kallot or NFTYx activities, so to maximize social action in TOR, these programs could serve as sparks to engage teens in year-round activities, community initiatives, and educational opportunities. During my tenure, I hope to make an effort to continue providing programs and guidance to teens of all commitment levels for them to remain continuously engaged in social action.

On that note, I intend to strengthen our adult partnerships with the URJ and the RAC while, at the same time, defining a distinction between the interests of teens and adults in progressing our movement forward. While the Reform Movement takes a strong stance on key social action issues, the methods of advocacy between teens and adults may vary due to the difference in personal experiences and self-interest. As a teen movement, we should make it a priority to support the advocacy of our adult partners, but remain active in teen-led campaigns.

NFTY's dedication to inclusion has been remarkable throughout the past few years in ensuring Jews of Color, the LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities feel welcomed in our sacred spaces. B'tzelem elohim has been an important Jewish value in my life, and we still have more work to do in strengthening the impact of the advocacy we have done while also taking it further to the next step. As SAVP, I want to make every participant a priority in TOR's inclusion advocacy so our spaces can be somewhere they find home like I do.

This year has been a roller coaster, but thanks to effective leadership and dedication to our youth movement, NFTY has been able to thrive even during a pandemic. We will have to continue adapting to new changes and challenges in the coming year, and from serving as my TYG's president, I know that working collaboratively as a regional board will be imperative to sustaining our community. I hope to bring dedication, ambition, virtue, and prosperity to NFTY, its Texas and Oklahoma region, and the Reform Jewish Movement.

L'tsaleach (with success and prosperity),  
Cameron Samuels (they/them)