

SUKKOT

SUGGESTED PROGRAMS:

1. Sukkah Sleep-Out for the Homeless: Raise Awareness
(Columbia University and Barnard College – Hillel’s Program Exchange)
2. “Seeds” of Life – Nutrition speaker for students when choices are made between fast food and fresh food.
3. Sukkot and Our Environment – How do they affect one and other?
Does the pollution in your city make it hazardous to eat or sleep in your sukkah?
4. Sukkot Sichot → CASE It!



An eight-day festival that begins on the 15th of Tishri (the first month in the Jewish calendar), Sukkot, meaning “booths” is named for the booths we build for this holiday. Also known as “*z’man simchateinu*” (the time of our joy), Sukkot emphasizes intense celebration — “You shall rejoice in your festival” (Deut. 16:14) and “you shall have nothing but joy” (Deut. 16:15). Nevertheless, our time spent in the sukkah (singular of Sukkot) reminds us that we have experienced great difficulty in the past. Tradition maintains that the booths commemorate the fragile huts built by the people of Israel during 40 years of wandering in the desert. Thus, while we revel in the abundance offered by the harvest season, we eat and sometimes sleep in makeshift shelters as if we, too, were still wandering without a home. Sukkot is an opportune time to remind ourselves that while we are now fortunate enough to have food to eat and shelter over our heads, the problems of affordable housing, homelessness and their root causes still rage in the streets of our cities.

Under One Roof

The word sukkah sounds a lot like the Hebrew word for conversation [sichot] (see CASE section E on next page). Create a conversation about housing issues and homelessness the focus of a Tzedek Sukkot program. Reach out to other campus groups and partner agencies by joining together under the sukkah roof for a dialogue. The sukkah provides an ideal space to examine personal attitudes toward homelessness and share resources with others.

- Have a nintergroup dialogue in your Hillel’s sukkah to discuss community housing issues.
- Invite associates of local housing agencies, as well as university faculty involved in social justice or a living wage campaign, to facilitate an after-dinner discussion.
- Divide the students into groups to analyze their personal attitudes toward helping others, including the role religious or ethnic background may play.
- At the conclusion of dinner, announce a service project in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity or a local housing initiative to take place in the following week.
- Organize a teach-in/sleep-in one night of Sukkot to increase awareness about homelessness and housing issues.

Issue: Local Housing Issues

CASE It: Sukkot Sichot

This Sukkot do something a little different. As you sit in your sukkah this year, assess and discuss the local housing issues in your community; try to find ways to improve the situation.

Community Partners:

- Habitat for Humanity (www.habitatforhumanity.org)
- National Coalition for the Homeless (www.nationalhomeless.org)
- National Low Income Housing Coalition (www.nlihc.org)
- Local City Council
- The Schools of Social Work and/or Public Policy on your campus

Advocacy/Awareness:

- Host a forum on housing issues in your community: invite council people, low-income individuals to share their experience, and service providers.
- Register low-income individuals to vote in Election Day (the first Tuesday in November).
- Have a table where people can write to their elected officials about the importance of programs for affordable housing and the homeless.

Service:

- *Ushpizin* is the custom of inviting biblical ancestors to sit in the sukkah as guests of honor. Traditionally, the representatives of the patriarchs were the poor. For one day during the festival, turn your sukkah into a soup kitchen and invite today's Abrahams and Sarahs into your home.
- Organize a "Night Without a Home" awareness sleep-out in front of city hall or on your campus.
- Build a house with Habitat for Humanity.
- Make special Tzedakah boxes from which the money will be donated to the issues of affordable housing and homelessness:
 - ◆ Attach a paragraph about homelessness to the Tzedakah box, the importance of giving, and where the money is being donated.
 - ◆ Distribute the Tzedakah boxes to local establishments and Jewish organizations
 - ◆ Donate the money after a period of time and have the campus paper run an article on the project

Educate:

- Did you know?
 - ◆ Two Hebrew words that sound alike are sukkah and sicha. Sukkah means booth, and sicha (plural: sichot) means conversation. You could advertise your program as Sukkot Sichot! Have a conversation about assessing your community needs.
- Quotable quotes:
 - ◆ Yosi Ben Yochanan of Jerusalem says: Let your house be opened wide, and let the poor be members of your household. –*Pirkei Avot* 1:5
 - *What does your household encompass: dorm, campus, community, country? How welcoming are you to the different campus households?*
 - ◆ It is a joy to live in one's own house. –*Y. Talmud, Moed Katan, 2.4*
 - *What is the joy if you don't have a house?*
- Try this:
 - ◆ Have an etrog on hand in the sukkah. The sharp, sweet smell can revive your spirits and remind you of all the work that can be done to improve the housing situation in your community. At the end of Sukkot, you can place cloves in the etrog and use it as your spices during Havdallah ceremonies.
 - ◆ Here are the steps for the custom of ushpizin (inviting in ancestors):
 - Make this invitation in Hebrew:

אֲזַמִּין לְסְעוּדָתִי אוֹשְׁפִיזִין עֵילָאִין אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד:

Azamin lisudati ushpizin ilayin Avraham, Yitzhak, Ya'akov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon, v'David.

I will invite to my meal these exalted guests: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David.

- Make a declaration that specifies one ancestor per day:
 - Today, on this day, the first day of Sukkot, we invite Abraham into our sukkah. (On the second day invite Isaac, and so on.)
 - Think of other ancestors, contemporary figures or family members you might want to invite to your sukkah.

Resources:

- National Low Income Housing Coalition: www.nlichc.org
- University Programs Department, United Jewish Communities: www.ujc.org
- National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness: www.nscanh.org