

Children from rocket zone get a break in Hungary
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Mensch Foundation tries to improve on what has been a very difficult summer vacation.

A group of teenagers from the North is enjoying a free trip to Hungary as part of the effort by the Mensch Foundation and others to improve on what has been a very difficult summer vacation. The travelers, aged 15 to 18, are due to return from their week-long trip on Tuesday. The foundation, in the words of founder Steven Geiger, "deals with understanding among racial and ethnic groups," as well as other humanitarian issues. In this case, that meant getting the children out of the bomb shelters, an idea that originated with David Admon, Israel's ambassador to Hungary. "I think they needed to get some fresh air," Geiger told The Jerusalem Post. "They get to see a place they hadn't seen before; not all of these kids have the financial resources to come to Europe." The teenagers couldn't escape the war; during the trip a 15-year-old boy named Raviv Kazachov learned that his 22-year-old cousin had been killed fighting in Lebanon three days earlier. He was so affected by the news that the group leaders took him to see a physician. "The war against Hizbullah has in a sense come to Hungary," Geiger said. Hezi Lazar, former Jewish Agency representative in Budapest and a member of the Mensch Foundation's board, accompanied the teenagers for their first three days. "Somewhere in Israel there are children who are suffering," Lazar said. "Let's do something to ease their suffering." The best way to do that, organizers decided, was to provide them with fun, novel activities while at the same time taking them to Jewish sites, to keep them from feeling homesick. In Budapest, they visited the Dohany Synagogue, where Theodor Herzl had his bar mitzva, the Jewish Museum, and the Jewish quarter. Two well-known Hungarian Jews, Tamas Somlo, a Hungarian entertainer, and Adam Fellegi, a classical pianist, volunteered performances for the group. The visitors stayed at a summer camp called Szarzas that had all the traditional activities and took a boat ride up the Danube. They were even hosted for a day by polo aficionado Gabon Ronai, watching a game outside of Budapest. In other words, the kids were kept busy. "I think they won the lottery," Lazar said, "to be chosen for this unexpected visit in Hungary, for no charge, and to have a good time in different places. Concerts, a wonderful youth camp, I think that if you asked them two weeks ago they never would have guessed they'd be in Hungary for such a wonderful trip." That was in stark contrast to what they left behind in

the North. "Their summer has been wrecked," Geiger said. "It's not just a matter of saving them from harm. These children had no vacation." The organizers plan to bring approximately 120 more children to Hungary in the near future. Lazar summed it up: "Being a Jew and a former [Jewish Agency] delegate and seeing these children who escaped from the hell in the northern cities feeling relaxed, it was a good feeling to see them alive again."