

NCJW[®] | NY

National Council of Jewish Women New York

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE IN 2020: NCJW NY'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19



OUR MISSION

NCJW NY is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW NY strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms. NCJW NY serves New Yorkers from all walks of life, from all racial and religious backgrounds. For more than 125 years, NCJW NY has been fostering women's leadership and addressing the city's inequities through both direct social services and advocacy for systemic change.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

For the last nine months, our world has turned upside-down. When the coronavirus hit NYC, and everything in the city stopped, we at NCJW NY knew that we had the power and ability to make a real difference. The city's most marginalized communities—including immigrants, the unemployed, communities of color, the homeless, isolated seniors, and low-income families—were already struggling before the pandemic, and many are worse off than they were before.

With ever-increasing resolve, the volunteers of NCJW NY have risen to the challenge to meet the growing and changing needs created by the pandemic. With no clear indication if or when any additional government relief may come, NCJW NY's work is more important than ever.

In the following pages, you will read about how NCJW NY has responded to the crisis and how we've adapted our programs to create meaningful impact, even in the most difficult of times.

With appreciation,



Susan Siegel, President



Andrea Salwen Kopel, Executive Director

BUILDING POWER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND VOTER ENGAGEMENT

CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS DURING COVID-19

A study in New York State

Crisis Pregnancy Centers are facilities that provide resources to pregnant people but are often NOT medically licensed and do NOT offer the full range of comprehensive reproductive healthcare options

OPERATING STATUS

We contacted 100 CPCs by phone in late April and early May before the reopening process began in New York State. 95% were still operating in some capacity during the mandated shutdown of non-essential services.



Since 2018, NCJW NY's Pro-Truth Campaign has worked to expose and combat the dangerous and deceptive tactics of fake women's health clinics (sometimes called "crisis pregnancy centers"). The Campaign has built power by developing a coalition of grassroots activists, healthcare providers, and elected officials to educate New York women and girls about the existence of fake clinics and how to protect themselves and others.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the need for accurate information about and access to reproductive healthcare. In a time of stress and financial hardship, more women may have found themselves facing unintended pregnancies, and the pandemic has made quality healthcare even harder to access in underserved communities.

In the early weeks of New York's shutdown, we delved into researching if and how fake women's healthcare clinics were operating. The results of the research project are summarized on the left. This new research underscores the need to pass the CPC Study Bill in the New York State Senate. This legislation, passed by the State Assembly earlier this year, would authorize a study examining the unmet health and resource needs facing pregnant women in New York and the impact of crisis pregnancy centers. The Pro-Truth Campaign started, in part, because there was no comprehensive data about fake clinics in New York State. This bill will help us better understand where fake clinics are, what is actually happening inside them, and the ultimate impact on women's health outcomes. The release of the study will then help inform the development of policies to appropriately regulate CPCs and protect women's health.

With so much at stake in this year's election, particularly around protecting the advancements made in reproductive rights and other issues important to NCJW NY advocates, we decided to refocus our advocacy work on voter rights and access. In early October, we gathered virtually to participate in Vote Forward's letter writing campaign.

Over 50 volunteers wrote 1,580 personalized, nonpartisan letters to underrepresented voters in Florida, asking them to vote in this year's election. NCJW NY joined other NCJW sections across the country in this campaign, sending a nationwide total of over 31,400 letters to registered voters.



OFFERING IN-PERSON APPOINTMENTS

39 unlicensed Crisis Pregnancy Centers were offering in-person appointments during the Governor's mandated shutdown of non-essential services.

COVID-19 UPDATES AND INFORMATION

Only 7 clinics offered information on their website or social channels about COVID-19.



MATERIAL ASSISTANCE

38% of clinics surveyed did not specify how material assistance was provided, providing vague answers and avoiding a clear response. Our research shows that CPCs took advantage of the worst period of the pandemic to further their agenda of denying access to abortion.

FEEDING MORE NEW YORKERS THAN EVER

Before the pandemic, our Monday Food Pantry was serving 100-200 families each week. As COVID-19 has ravaged our economy, the number of people visiting us each week has increased dramatically to 300-350 each week. ***From April 2020 to October 2020, we saw 22,519 individuals at the Food Pantry, a 101% increase in clients served compared to the same period in 2019.***

We wanted to understand the story behind this overwhelming increase, so we conducted a survey in early October 2020. We found that 43% of visitors had not visited the Pantry before the pandemic. Of those, about 17% reported that it was their first time at the Pantry, while 22% said their first visit was in the previous month. Almost half of the respondents said they do not visit any other food pantries, and just over 60% are not receiving any SNAP benefits. While we have not yet surveyed the Community Kitchen patrons, we know many of those utilizing the Kitchen, as they come back week after week, serving around 165 people each week. Most are homeless or under-housed men from the immediate Upper West Side neighborhood. However, we have seen a slight increase in visitors to the Kitchen (15%) compared to the same period in 2019.

Beginning in late March 2020, we made several modifications to the Hunger Program to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. Previously, clients were invited inside our ground floor café space to choose their food items using a “table-top shopping” model, interacting with dozens of volunteers. We are now distributing pre-packed, uniform grocery bags at the door, including fresh produce, dairy products from local farms, and non-perishable items. The Community Kitchen continues to operate on Sundays and Wednesdays, but instead of serving a freshly-prepared hot meal, we have shifted to distributing takeaway brown-bag meals at the door.

Since the program’s establishment in 1983, we have never turned anyone away—no one leaves empty-handed. All Food Pantry patrons receive enough groceries to feed a family of three for three days, and all Community Kitchen visitors receive one complete ready-to-eat meal, no matter what. We expect the need to remain at elevated levels well into 2021.



235,000+ MEALS SERVED



111,000+ POUNDS OF FOOD DISTRIBUTED



22,500+ PEOPLE SERVED AT THE FOOD PANTRY & 5,600+ CHILDREN FED



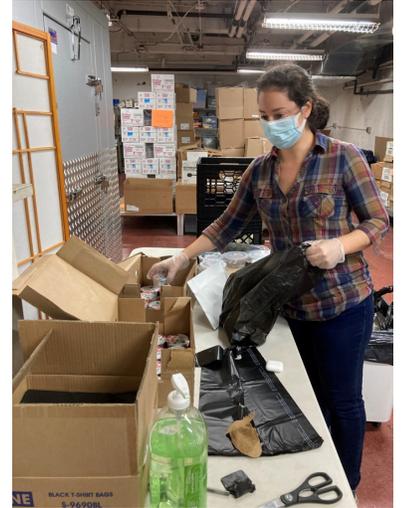
16 NEW VOLUNTEERS

THE NEXT GENERATION OF NCJW NY LEADERS

Like many of the city's emergency food providers, our Hunger Program is driven by nearly 30 volunteers. Unfortunately, the vast majority of those volunteers are 60 years old, and despite protestations, we sent them home for their safety. Aviva Zadoff, the Director of Volunteer Engagement, has worked tirelessly to bring in the next generation of NCJW NY volunteer leaders.

Natasha is one of our new Food Pantry volunteers, coming in week after week since June, helping to pack food for the long line of visitors outside of Council House. "I was doing some volunteering at other places before, but after working with NCJW NY, I decided I liked volunteering here more than other places." While Natasha has spent time in every role—from packing dry goods to sifting through fresh produce—her preferred assignment is packing fresh dairy products from local NY farms. But Natasha found something more than just an opportunity to help others. She also found "her people" in other NCJW NY volunteers. "I moved to the US a few years ago [from Brazil], and I was looking for a Jewish organization to be involved with. I have met many people who are like me—with similar beliefs, who are empathic and generous. I feel a sense of community." Being a part of a community and making change happen is what NCJW NY is all about!

Natasha prepares dairy bags for the Food Pantry



Rebecca packs fresh produce

Another new volunteer, Rebecca, felt helpless at the beginning of the pandemic and sought out opportunities to help. As a professional in the travel industry, COVID-19 brought her work to a halt. Having done some work with NCJW NY before, she responded to the call for volunteers on our Facebook page. "The pandemic was a big motivator. I wanted to do a little something to help out. It gives me somewhere to go, something to do, like a job. It keeps me busy." While volunteering and supporting the community has been a long-held value of Rebecca's, she says volunteering at NCJW NY has been a life-altering experience. "I have changed as a person—my priorities have shifted. It can't be work all the time, all day. I have a renewed perspective on what is really important in life."

Rebecca and Natasha are just two of NCJW NY's amazing volunteers—there is a whole new "crew" of dedicated volunteers who rolled up their sleeves and got to work. Our new volunteers have said they can't wait until Council House fully re-opens its doors—they are excited to be a part of NCJW NY's future.

A special thanks to all of our COVID-19 Hunger Program Volunteers, including Natasha Pryngler, Rebecca Sanders, Mimi Margalit, Suzanne Reisman, Laurie Rosatone, Ilana Frank, Shari Gottheim, Angelina Fryer, Lindsay Brockington, Melissa Noah, Leslie Flom, Lynze Schiller, Elizabeth Elkind, Hannah Deutsch, Annie Mandese, and Mark Foresi.

COUNCIL LIFETIME LEARNING GOES VIRTUAL

With social distancing being critical to survival, finding new and creative ways to engage local seniors has become even more important. Despite the challenges, we have been able to navigate and adapt our Council Lifetime Learning (CLL) program to bring community into our participants' homes.

When we decided to suspend in-person programming, it felt like anyone's guess if a pivot to virtual programming would be successful. Would our participants feel comfortable using technology, or would they shy away? Could we be effective at making this core program happen? The answer was a resounding YES! Early in the pandemic, we began utilizing technology to bring our CLL participants virtual opportunities to keep moving, growing, and connecting with others. Being able to connect directly, by teleconference or videoconference (Zoom), our classes and discussion groups help seniors retain a sense of community.

We could not have imagined that so many of our seniors would join virtual classes—more than 120 participants are taking advantage of our free virtual programming. CLL Virtual has been so successful that we have added a number of new virtual classes, keeping it fresh and exciting. Thanks to a generous gift from the Gerson Family Foundation, we have launched several expert-led lecture series exploring various topics. One such course was the seven-week Art History Lecture Series, which explored topics ranging from "Art as Propaganda" to "An Introduction to Chinese Art," and a music-focused series entitled "Great Opera Singers of the Past."



Participants show off their work from the new virtual CLL class, "Artist of the Week"

***"I THINK WE ARE ALL STRESSED OUT A LOT AND FOR AT LEAST AN HOUR (WITH MAYBE EVEN A RESIDUAL HANGOVER) WE FELT PRETTY MUCH LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE."
- MEDITATION PARTICIPANT***

LINC-ING OVER ZOOM

The Helen Bloom LINC Program (Lunch, Interaction, Nurturing, and Companionship) is our specialized program for seniors who experience memory loss and their caregivers. Usually, participants and their caregivers would meet three days a week in our brightly painted peach and blue multi-purpose room at Council House. Each session included an arts and crafts project, pet therapy, or a movement-based activity, followed by dancing and singing led by a professional musician.

After the pandemic forced us to suspend all in-person programming, we weren't sure how to make this vital program work in a virtual setting. With determination and ingenuity, Tom and Emily (the professional staff who lead the program) have developed effective virtual sessions, incorporating many of the same elements from the in-person programming. When we started offering bi-weekly videoconference sessions in April, we were thrilled to see the enthusiastic response. Many families have expressed their gratitude for LINC during this challenging time, recognizing the benefits their loved ones receive from participating in such an engaging program. In November, thanks to a dedicated gift from the Solomon Family, we were able to add a third day to the virtual program, known as "Solomon Fridays."

DONOR SPOTLIGHT: HELENE SOLOMON

In November 2020, the Solomon Family directed a gift to expand the virtual LINC program from two days to three days a week. Irwin "Cookie" Solomon and his caregivers, Kenni, Violet, and Cynthia, have been attending the LINC program since 2016. Helene Solomon, Cookie's daughter, drops in to the virtual sessions at least once a week. She said she was inspired to give because of the exceptional experience the family has had with NCJW NY and the LINC Program. "This program is so important, and I'm thrilled to be supporting this work. To do so much with so little is incredible, and really special. The cherry-on-top for us is how the program is driven by the values of NCJW NY."

Helene also expressed her deep appreciation not just for the program but also for the LINC staff and volunteers, including Letitia Maun, our Social Worker who oversees the program. "Letitia is really special. She is a fantastic listener. She is caring and generous and has given our family so much individualized attention. Emily and Tom, and the other professionals are like family, and they treat everyone like family. I'm so impressed by their talent, and they really know how to interact with this population." LINC is also meant to support the caregivers, giving them a moment of respite and to chat with the other caregivers. "The aides are treated so well, just like the clients. It's so important that they get to see each other too. They get to take a break and have some lunch. Taking care of the aides is part of the program. It's just so special."

Irwin "Cookie" Solomon and therapy dog Topper during a LINC session



The Solomon Family



HELPING SENIORS COPE WITH COVID

Since New York City's lockdown began, our social work team has been systematically reaching out to all of our elderly clients – prioritizing the most isolated and at-risk – to make sure their needs are being met, both physically and emotionally. Through these calls and check-ins, our social worker identified a need to develop a “Coping with COVID” Support Group. This new support group helps our participants process the experience of social isolation and devise strategies to manage the new and changing circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of this support group have shared that the group has provided community and connectedness during COVID. Their experience has been invaluable, with several members frequently calling the group their weekly source of “comfort and solace.”

“I LOST MANY OF MY FRIENDS’ COMPANIONSHIP DURING COVID. THE GROUP HAS BEEN A WELCOMING ANCHOR IN MY LIFE.”- COPING WITH COVID PARTICIPANT

GOING BACK 2 SCHOOL IN THE ERA OF COVID

Each year from 2015 to 2019, NCJW NY hosted the Back 2 School Store (B2SS) in early August. This unique one-day event transforms Council House into a very special “pop-up” department store, where children from all areas of NYC would come to “shop” for the back to school essentials, including a new outfit, shoes, a warm winter coat, and a backpack filled with school supplies and a reference book — entirely free of charge.

While we could not replace the unique in-store experience, we were committed to supporting under-resourced families in 2020. Through our nine partner organizations we were able to provide 300 low-income families with school supplies and other goodies. The backpacks included the usual school supplies required by the DOE, such as crayons, pencils, folders, notebooks, etc., as well as bonus items not normally available at the Store: a mini-whiteboard, activity book, hand sanitizer, a child-size mask, and a newly developed resource packet. The packet included information about the 2020 Census, voter registration applications, guidance for mask hygiene and children’s wellness visits, a map of Farmers Markets in NYC, and additional details about SNAP and other benefits available.

Director of Community Programs Naomi Skop Richter delivers backpacks to our partners at Union Settlement



PREGNANCY LOSS IN THE PUBLIC EYE

Pregnancy loss is more common than people think, happening in about 15-25 percent of known pregnancies. When the women of NCJW NY realized just how common it was, they formed a peer support group to offer a space to heal with others who truly understood the deep pain associated with pregnancy loss. Since 1983, the Pregnancy Loss Support Program (PLSP) has offered free counseling and support for parents who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth, or newborn death.



PREGNANCY LOSS SUPPORT PROGRAM

for Miscarriage, Stillbirth,
and Newborn Death

In early October 2020, Chrissy Teigen and John Legend publicly grieved a pregnancy loss. “We are shocked and in the kind of deep pain you only hear about, the kind of pain we’ve never felt before,” Teigen wrote on Instagram. The stigma surrounding pregnancy loss has created a climate of shame, making it even harder for some parents to process their grief. When Chrissy and John shared their loss with the world, many parents overcame their feelings of shame by sharing their own stories of pain and loss. In weeks following Chrissy’s loss, there was a noticeable increase of inquiries into PLSP compared to previous years.

The shutdown and social distancing have increased loneliness and isolation in all populations. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, we have continued to deliver this service successfully. Our peer-to-peer telephone support has continued uninterrupted, and our support groups are meeting via videoconference. We take pride in our ability to provide a meaningful experience that provides comfort, community, and healing — especially during this stressful and frightening time.

“I FEEL TREMENDOUSLY GRATEFUL FOR THE PROGRAM. IT SERVED AS MY BEACON OF HOPE. PLSP GIVES PEOPLE THE ENDURANCE AND FORTITUDE TO GET THROUGH SUCH A HARD TIME IN THEIR LIVES.” - CAROLE, A PLSP ALUMNA AND CURRENT VOLUNTEER FOR THE PROGRAM

THANK YOU
**FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT
OF NCJW NY THIS YEAR.
WE COULDN'T DO THIS
IMPORTANT WORK WITHOUT YOU.**

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PROGRAMS AND HOW TO
GET INVOLVED, EMAIL US AT INFO@NCJWNY.ORG OR VISIT
US ONLINE AT WWW.NCJWNY.ORG.



NCJW NY staff and volunteers pack backpacks for the 2020 Back 2 School Store Backpack Project, ensuring that even during COVID, kids are set with everything they need for the school year

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