



NCJ  NY

National Council of Jewish Women New York

2023 IMPACT REPORT

**IN COMMUNITY**  
**WITH ONE ANOTHER**

# WHO WE ARE

NCJW NY strives for **social justice** and **empowerment** for historically excluded and underserved individuals and families in New York City and state. Our hands-on approach combines **direct social services**—to alleviate the effects of inequity—and **passionate, focused advocacy** to effect lasting systemic change for the future.

## *We Believe...*

- Everyone in our city should have access to a choice of quality, nutritious food.
- People of all ages should have opportunities to learn, connect, grow, and thrive.
- During life's most challenging moments, New Yorkers deserve support and healing.
- By focusing on economic and reproductive justice for women and families, we can put our progressive Jewish values into action in our own community.
- We can make an outsized impact by mobilizing the skills, ideas, energy, compassion, and resources of our volunteers, donors, clients, and staff team.

**NCJW NY: MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN, FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION**

## A Message from the President and Executive Director



Kimberly Chirls (left) and Andrea Kopel (right) at the 2023 NCJW NY Annual Gala

Dear NCJW NY Community,

NCJW NY is about the power of community. Right now, in these difficult times of war and conflict, we need community more than ever. In the face of rising antisemitism and Islamophobia, even right here in our own enclave of the Upper West Side, we're providing opportunities to come together, speak out, and serve New Yorkers in need – all inspired by our progressive Jewish values.

**From launching our Jews for Repro NY Campaign as a robust response to the devastating *Jackson v. Dobbs* decision; to keeping our doors open for our Hunger Program during the height of the pandemic; to welcoming our Council Lifetime Learning participants back to in-person opportunities for learning and growth; our priority continues to be responding to the needs of underserved New Yorkers within a warm and welcoming environment.**

We could not be prouder of the way our volunteers and supporters have risen to meet the challenges of the past few years. **We hope that as you read through this booklet, you share our pride in the crucial accomplishments your partnership has made possible. We invite you to renew your commitment to NCJW NY and continue to be in community with us as we look to the future. Together, we can continue to change lives.**

In gratitude,

Andrea Salwen Kopel  
Executive Director

Kimberly Chirls  
President

## HEAR FROM THE NCJW NY COMMUNITY

*"In these difficult times of war and conflict, I am so grateful to lead an organization that embodies the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam (fixing the world). Today and every day, we stand up as Jews to make our city a more equitable place for New Yorkers in need – people of all racial and religious backgrounds."*

**Andrea Salwen Kopel, NCJW NY Executive Director**

*"When I came here and saw the kind of service you provide at the pantry, I decided this is something I would like to do, because there are a lot of people here who can be helped."*

**Gabriel Maron, NCJW NY Food Pantry Volunteer & Leader**

*"I love the mission of the organization, but I also love that it's looking to execute its mission through both a Jewish lens and a women-focused lens, which is not that common."*

**Lisa Watts, NCJW NY Board Member;  
Vice Chair, Latham & Watkins**

*"I can't walk that far anymore; I can't walk that fast anymore. But when I come here, I feel like, 'I can do this. And I'm good at it. And I love it.'"*

**Eleonore Rios, Council Lifetime Learning  
Participant**

*"There's opportunity for growth in each of our programs, and I'm looking forward to using those opportunities to serve our clients in the best ways possible over the coming years."*

**Tracey Onyeuche, NCJW NY Director of Community Programs**

*"When the pandemic hit and there were all kinds of financial implications, seeing everyone spring into action, better than some giant corporations I've worked with, reinforced my positive feelings about the organization."*

**Gail Hessel, Donor; Volunteer; Former Board Member**

## ADVOCATING FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

For decades, NCJW NY has led the Jewish community in fighting for reproductive rights and abortion access. In this watershed moment post *Roe v. Wade*, it is imperative for us as Jews and people of faith to reclaim the narrative around reproductive justice and religion. Many anti-choice activists confidently tout their claim that abortion is sinful, and God is on their side. But we know that this is just not true. Jewish texts and teachings support abortion access. **Abortion bans are against our religion.**



In response to the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* decision, we launched a new initiative: Jews for Repro NY. Our goal is to build on our long legacy of leadership to encourage and empower pro-choice Jews and Jewish leaders to use our collective power, and our collective outrage, to make a difference.



Our Pro-Truth Campaign, which works to expose and fight the tactics of fake abortion clinics here in New York, continues to be a top priority. Through Jews for Repro NY, we've been able to take Pro-Truth to synagogues and Jewish community centers across the greater New York City region and activate more pro-choice Jews to get involved in this fight. Fake clinics often use their religious convictions to justify their dangerous and deceitful tactics. **We're here to say that religion does not sanction lying to people about their bodies and their healthcare options.**

### Some of the things we've accomplished this year include:

- Organizing a virtual forum with clergy from **nine synagogues and 12 state legislators** in Westchester where clergy members shared support for specific pieces of reproductive rights legislation.
- Meeting with **26 synagogues** in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Long Island, and Westchester about ways for the Jewish community to learn more and get involved in this work.
- Holding a Virtual Lobby Day with **eight New York State legislators** where we advocated for four different bills.
- Successfully advocated for the passage of the **Shield Law**. This law protects New York medical providers who offer medication abortion telehealth services to patients in states where abortion services are outlawed or restricted.
- Distributing **500 "How to Spot a Fake Clinic" pamphlets** through healthcare clinics, schools, and community-based organizations to populations targeted by fake clinics.

We're so proud of the success we've had in 2023, and our advocacy team is busy working to prepare for what is sure to be an extremely significant 2024. Abortion and reproductive justice will be on the ballot in many ways, including right here in New York, where we'll be fighting to get the Equal Rights Amendment passed. **We are filled with deep gratitude for your continued investment in building a world where reproductive justice is guaranteed!**

## Lisa Watts: Using Board Service to Execute NCJW NY's Mission

Lisa Watts first learned about NCJW NY in 2021, when she presented her longtime friend Nancy Mehlman with the Woman Who Dares Award at our Virtual Gala. Lisa left that experience inspired by NCJW NY's work.

**"I believed very strongly in the core values of the organization, and after learning about NCJW NY when I was a presenter at the virtual Gala, it really resonated."**



*Lisa accepting the Woman Who Dares Award at the 2022 NCJW NY Annual Gala*

One year later, at the 2022 Gala – our first in-person Gala since 2019 – we honored Lisa with the same award. As the Vice Chair of the law firm Latham & Watkins, Lisa is undoubtedly a leader in her field. After that, she decided to stay involved, and joined the Board of Directors where she continues to serve today.

"I love the mission of the organization, but I also love that it's looking to execute its mission through both a Jewish lens and a women-focused lens, which is not that common. And still, the organization has a broad mandate; it's not only focused on serving women. It's not only focused on serving Jewish people. That was pretty appealing to me. Besides all of this, I was also incredibly impressed with how the organization was run. All these things pushed me in the direction of board service."

Of NCJW NY's many programs, Lisa felt a strong pull toward our Council Lifetime Learning senior programming and its emphasis on the arts and creativity.

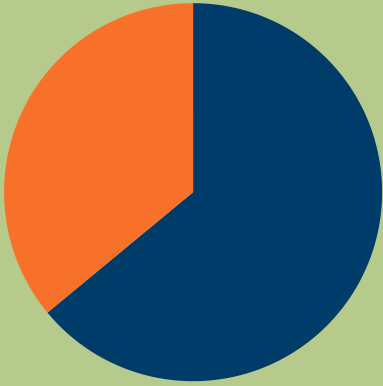
"I sat in on one of our watercolor classes once, and it made me incredibly proud. I've always thought focusing on creativity to keep the mind active and fresh is incredibly important, especially when we're in the city that has the most to offer art-wise. It's also such an easy way to build community and for people to find community in a safe place that meets you where you are."

Right now, Lisa is focusing on NCJW NY's strategic planning efforts to evaluate where we are and set us up for the future.

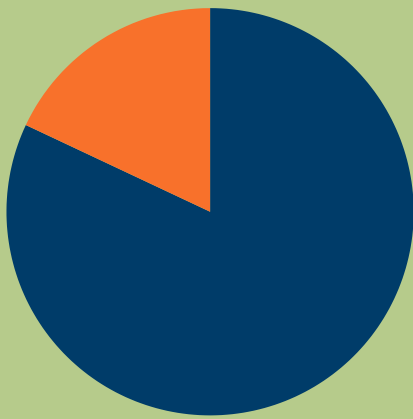
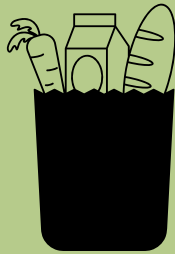
"This process is exciting, but also can be nerve-wracking! Overall, we want to make sure we don't lose the heart of the organization while also trying to think about ways that we can serve the broader community and best implement our mission."

## CREATING ACCESS TO QUALITY AND CHOICE IN FOOD

IN A RECENT SURVEY  
OF OUR FOOD PANTRY CLIENTS:



Nearly 64% of respondents indicated that NCJW NY had better food quality than other Food Pantries, as well as a better variety of foods.



Nearly 82% of respondents indicated our staff and volunteers were very welcoming.



2023 marks the 40th anniversary of our Hunger Program, which began in 1983 when a group of volunteers and supporters came together in response to drastic federal nutrition program cuts. Those volunteers thought their program would be temporary – a stopgap measure to alleviate the pressures on the hardest hit New Yorkers. Forty years later, the NCJW NY Hunger Program continues to serve New Yorkers through a variety of crises – including a pandemic.

We continue to stick to our roots of providing food to people who need it through our weekly Food Pantry and twice-weekly Community Kitchen. **Since the beginning of 2023, we've served 260,000 meals to nearly 34,000 New Yorkers.** But our Hunger Program isn't just about food. It's about providing resources, support, and guidance to clients trying to navigate an often clunky and confusing system.



*A Food Pantry volunteer assists a client*

Our Hunger Program Coordinator and Caseworker works one-on-one with our clients to connect them to various resources and benefits like Medicaid, SNAP (a.k.a. Food Stamps), tax preparation, and more.

This year, we also noticed that some of the refugees who recently arrived in New York City were coming to our Hunger Program, seeking assistance. We made sure to address their needs, which included shelter relocation, food access, and legal assistance.

***Your crucial partnership bolsters our commitment to building a world where New Yorkers do not face food insecurity. Thank you for sharing our transformative vision!***

## Gabriel Maron: Welcoming Our Community Into Our Food Pantry



*Gabe getting ready to welcome clients into the Monday Food Pantry*

Gabriel Maron, who goes by Gabe, has been volunteering for NCJW NY's Food Pantry for around a year and has made a real impact.

When he retired from a career as a chauffeur here in New York City 11 years ago, Gabe knew he wanted to do something in his newly found spare time to make a difference. Originally from the Dominican Republic, Gabe remembers how other people helped him when he first arrived in the United States.

"I've been blessed, because when I came to the U.S. in 1969, I got help from a few people who didn't know me. So, when I was steady here, I wanted to become a helper to a lot of people; people who came from my country, people who came from other places...they needed my help, and I was there to direct them how to do things and go to places."

After a friend recommended that Gabe check out NCJW NY's Food Pantry, he was signed up for his first volunteer shift the next week.

**"When I came here and saw the kind of service you provide at the Pantry, I decided this is something I would like to do, because there are a lot of people here who can be helped."**

Gabe felt especially excited to volunteer at the Food Pantry after watching how NCJW NY staff and volunteers created a welcoming, client-centered environment.

"It's very encouraging to see [NCJW NY staff and volunteers] are so dedicated to the Pantry. Everyone is very helpful to the people who come to get food. They are very accommodating to the customer, which is one of the most important things."

Lately, Gabe has volunteered for both the morning and afternoon shifts of the Pantry, spending his whole morning and early afternoon with NCJW NY every Monday. Most days, he spends in the front of the Pantry line, "directing traffic," as he calls it. "I am often the very first person the clients see when they come inside, and that makes me feel closer to the people."



## LEARNING, CONNECTING, AND GROWING FOR ALL AGES

### Council Lifetime Learning

Through Council Lifetime Learning (CLL), we're bringing back beloved experiences and classes, while adapting to meet the moment with new ideas and innovation. Over the course of 2023, **over 150 seniors** took advantage of the around **30 art classes, exercise classes, and discussion groups** offered through CLL. 2023 also saw the return of the Gerson Cultural Art Series: a series of concerts, lectures, and other performances open to the community at no cost once a month here at Council House. These performances are free thanks to a generous grant from The Gerson Family Foundation. From classic entertainers like Jazz and Cabaret musicians who are "fan favorites," to new experiences like Drag Bingo, we're proud to offer a wide variety of accessible entertainment and opportunities to gather, sip on refreshments, nibble on snacks, and have fun.



*Students creating art during Pastels Class*

We've also brought back our beloved CLL Open House, for the first time since 2019. The goal of the Open House is to engage and inform potential and current members of our classes, programming, and services, as well as provide an opportunity for them to participate in some of our sample classes. We welcomed **22 new members** to Council Lifetime Learning through this event.

And, to expand our mission of making our programs more accessible for all our community members, we started our first class that offers bilingual instruction. Students can join instructor Sigfrido Benetiz at our Mixed Media Collage class and receive instruction and guidance in both English and Spanish.



*Students moving their bodies in Pilates Class*

Council Lifetime Learning is designed to provide quality classes at a fraction of the cost of similar programming. We also offer financial aid and scholarships for anyone who needs it, so cost is never a barrier to participation. Our on-site social worker serves as a vital resource for our clients, checking in when someone falls out of touch or experiences a loss or another destabilizing event. She facilitates several support groups and offers resources and referrals to help our participants deal with the inevitable challenges of growing older.

***Thank you for partnering with us in our unparalleled work serving seniors in New York City. Because of you, we can combat social isolation and slow physical and cognitive decline by providing high quality enrichment opportunities, social services, and community.***

## The Back 2 School Store

In August, our Back 2 School Store welcomed **over 200 children** in-person to Council House to shop for brand new back to school apparel: an outfit, a pair of shoes, a winter coat, hat, and gloves, school supplies, and a backpack.

But the Back 2 School Store has always been about more than providing new clothes to our participants. It's about building students' confidence as they venture through the store and empowering them with the choice to pick out what they like best, building excitement for the school year ahead.



*B2SS students play with a therapy dog while waiting to go shopping*



*Trying on new sneakers at the Back 2 School Store*

**IN A PARENT SURVEY  
OF THE 2023 BACK 2  
SCHOOL STORE:**

**100%**  
felt like the  
Store was  
organized well

**99%**  
felt like the Store  
helped their child feel  
more prepared and  
excited for school

**100%**  
indicated they would  
have their child  
attend the Back 2  
School Store again  
next year

***You have our deep gratitude for enabling us to provide this positive opportunity to children and their families during an often-stressful time when they are getting ready for the new school year.***

## Children's Literacy Program

NCJW NY's Children's Literacy Program is unique. Our reading tutors work one-on-one with students in grades Kindergarten through 5, who attend after-school programs of partner organizations. Tutoring takes place once a week, on a mutually designated day.

Tutors work with children not only to sound out words but also to explore a character's emotions or discuss a story's meaning. Upon completing a book with their tutors, children take their books home for continued enjoyment, creating their own sizable home library over the course of the year.

We're looking forward to continuing to rebuild the Children's Literacy Program in the years to come.

***Thank you for partnering with us to provide the resources to help build a love of reading in the next generation!***

## Eleonore Rios: Creating Art and Creating Community

Every Thursday, and sometimes Mondays, you can find Eleonore Rios in the fourth floor Art Studio at Council House, working diligently on her art. Eleonore has been taking our Stained Glass class since 2016.

"It all started when I was looking for some volunteer work. I actually came to the Pantry first to volunteer, but unfortunately injured my ankle shortly after and could no longer help out the way I wanted to. But when I was at the Pantry, Letitia [Maun, NCJW NY's Social Worker], told me what was going on up here," she said, gesturing to the Council House Art Studio around her. "I had done a little bit of glasswork and was really excited to discover it more."



*Eleonore working on some new stained glass pieces*

Eleonore's stained glass pieces vary in style. She's created abstract pieces, pieces in the shape of animals, like cats and dragonflies, and even some jewelry.

"They're designed to hang in a window and filter in the light," she said. "I've even started selling some of my pieces, and it's really nice when people are willing to spend money on something you've created. I sold three of my dragonflies at last year's CLL Art Show."

Although creating art in and of itself is incredibly important to Eleonore, the social aspect of CLL has been even more impactful.

"When I first came to class, everyone was so welcoming, accepting, and helpful. It's an environment where you can get inspiration just from meeting each other. We talk about our work, and we criticize each other's work constructively! To me, this is a highlight of my week. There is just a bond in loving the same thing."

That bond extends outside of class, too. The group often has lunch together after Thursday class at a local diner and have gathered at each other's homes for dinner parties and holiday celebrations. "Many of my friends I've made earlier in my life have already passed away, so being able to come here and make such good new friends...it's so precious to me," she said.

When asked to describe her experience at Stained Glass class with, as she calls them, her "glassmates," Eleonore used one word: "gratifying."

***"When you're my age, and I'm going on 83, there are so many things that you can't do anymore. I can't walk that far anymore; I can't walk that fast anymore. But when I come here, I feel like, 'I can do this. And I'm good at it. And I love it.'"***

### The Helen Bloom Lunch, Interaction, Nurturing, & Companionship Program (LINC)

LINC is an innovative program for older adults dealing with memory loss and dementia, as well as their caregivers. Currently taking place three days a week at Council House, clients and their caregivers participate in activities like singing, dancing, crafting, and more. LINC is much more than a “day-care” program for older adults with memory loss; it utilizes proven strategies to engage with our participants and stimulate the mind, while also building community amongst families and caregivers.

We continue to work to make the program more accessible for different communities. Through a generous grant from the Sephardic Foundation on Aging, we’ve been able to significantly increase the pool of financial aid that is available for LINC families. Through this grant, we’ve also been able to incorporate a “sliding scale” fee model, allowing families to pay what they can for our services.



*Executive Director Andrea Salwen Kopel and her trained therapy dog, Gali, visiting clients at LINC*

### The Pregnancy Loss Support Program

One of the core tenets of the Pregnancy Loss Support Program (PLSP) is the belief that reducing the stigma around pregnancy loss, miscarriage, and stillbirth strongly diminishes feelings of shame, which allows families and individuals to heal.

In late 2022, we launched our new PLSP website, at [pregnancyloss.org](https://pregnancyloss.org). This website is a hub for both current and prospective clients of PLSP who might be looking for resources or support. When a prospective client decides they want to learn more, they can easily submit an interest form right through the website.

*“Working with my counselor, I remember just thinking to myself, ‘she’s gotten to the other side’ - a place that was so far for me. I couldn’t even imagine not being in the state that I was in. I thought this was the rest of my life - agony and pain and darkness. Seeing that she was well enough to help me through it... that right there was a huge eye opener for me.” - Safiya, PLSP Alumna*

Since the launch of our new website, we’ve seen significantly more online traffic, which is directly resulting in more inquiries and a higher level of service. Since the start of 2023, we’ve served **nearly 200 clients** through phone counseling and support groups.

***You make it possible for us to provide a welcoming community, helpful tools, and support for those navigating some of life’s most difficult challenges. Thank you!***

## Tracey Onyeuche: Making Council House a Center for Holistic Care



Tracey at the Monday Food Pantry

When Okwuchi Tracey Onyeuche, who goes by Tracey, came to NCJW NY almost a year ago as our new Director of Community Programs, our programs were in the process of rebuilding in a post COVID-19 world. She got to work straight away, building from the goals we had set for ourselves and thinking about ways to expand them.

A major part of that work stemmed from our goal to integrate our individual programs with each other.

“When I got here, it felt like a lot of our clients stuck to the programs they knew. One of my goals, and one of NCJW NY’s goals, has been to expand the ways in which our clients come to us for support.”

Tracey and her Community Programs team have started putting some of these ideas and values into action. The 2023 Back 2 School Store brought with it an opportunity to welcome 20 of our Hunger Program clients and their children into the Store to participate for the first time.

“For me, bringing clients from the Hunger Program into the Back 2 School Store was a no-brainer,” Tracey said. “It was really made possible through our Hunger Program Coordinator and Caseworker, Karla Ignacio, who has been developing relationships with our Hunger Program clients and could help us find the most effective ways to bring those who wanted to participate in. And we really look forward to expanding that in the coming years.”

When asked what Tracey is most excited for in the future, she spoke about her overall goal of Council House becoming a place where any person can walk in and get a variety of levels of support.

***“I really am excited at the prospect of being a ‘one-stop-shop’ for people, and we’re already on our way there. I see Council House as a place where clients can come for emotional support, where they can come for direct services, where they can come for education and information, and where they can come for social events and community. There’s opportunity for growth in each of our programs, and I’m looking forward to using those opportunities to serve our clients in the best ways possible over the coming years.”***

## Gail Hessel: A Multi-Generational NCJW Legacy

As a longtime supporter, volunteer, and former Board member at NCJW NY, Gail Hessel has worn many hats.

"I'm a second-generation Council woman," she said. "My mom was active in Council around 60 years ago, so I knew of the organization."

But Gail, an Upper West Sider, didn't become involved until she saw clients lined up for the Food Pantry on 72nd Street on a Monday morning. "I had been wanting to make a contribution to a local organization that did work I felt good about. When I saw the pantry line, I decided to donate to NCJW NY. That was the beginning."



Gail Hessel in the Council House Art Studio

From there, Gail joined NCJW NY as a volunteer with the Children's Literacy Program. As a lifelong reader and lover of books, becoming a reading tutor was a perfect fit. Eventually, her passion for reading and education led her to the Back 2 School Store.

"I first signed up for one volunteer shift [at the Back 2 School Store], and thought, 'Wow – this is a great experience...' Now, I do several days as a personal shopper for children at the Back 2 School Store, and I'm also part of the volunteer planning committee."

Eventually, Gail decided to join the Board of Directors, and even served as Board Treasurer.

***"When I joined the Board, I came to appreciate that not only was this a compassionate, caring organization, but that it's also really well-managed and is very efficient financially."***

Gail remembers feeling especially impressed by NCJW NY's leadership when COVID-19 hit, and organizations scrambled to respond.

"I spent my career on Wall Street evaluating all kinds of organizations. The extraordinarily effective leadership team [at NCJW NY] was so impressive. When the pandemic hit and there were all kinds of financial implications, seeing everyone spring into action, better than some giant corporations I've worked with, reinforced my positive feelings about the organization."

After completing her term on the Board, Gail has remained a mainstay here at Council House, continuing her volunteering for both the Back 2 School Store and Children's Literacy Program.

"There are many people who are looking to support or get involved in organizations that genuinely help people. NCJW NY affords those opportunities."

## GET INVOLVED

Join the NCJW NY community as we make an impact in our city.

### Our Volunteers

NCJW NY engages **over 400 volunteers** every year in a variety of programs and initiatives. Whether it's working with kids as a personal shopper during the Back 2 School Store, helping to plan a lobby day in Albany for reproductive justice, or serving clients fresh produce and shelf-stable groceries at the Food Pantry, there are countless ways to get involved as a volunteer. Our volunteers do much more than pack food bags or lick envelopes: they partner with our staff and take on leadership roles to create real change.

### Learn About Volunteer Opportunities

Contact Aviva Zadoff at (646) 884-9466 or [azadoff@ncjwny.org](mailto:azadoff@ncjwny.org)

### Donate

Online: [www.ncjwny.org/donate](http://www.ncjwny.org/donate)

Contact: Sarah Burstein at (646) 884-9465 or [sburstein@ncjwny.org](mailto:sburstein@ncjwny.org)

Mail a check to:

NCJW NY

241 West 72nd Street

New York, NY 10023

### Interested in Learning about Including NCJW NY in your Estate Plans?

Contact Amy Greenstein at (646) 884-9462 or [agreenstein@ncjwny.org](mailto:agreenstein@ncjwny.org)  
or fill out the form online at: [weblink.donorperfect.com/rebekahslegacy](http://weblink.donorperfect.com/rebekahslegacy)

### Honor a Friend or a Loved One and Send a Special Card

[weblink.donorperfect.com/alloccasions](http://weblink.donorperfect.com/alloccasions)

### Learn More About Our Programs

Visit us at [www.ncjwny.org/programs](http://www.ncjwny.org/programs)

### Not Already On Our Mailing List?

Visit us at <http://weblink.donorperfect.com/ncjwnymailinglist>

### Have a Question or Idea?

Email us at [info@ncjwny.org](mailto:info@ncjwny.org) or call us at 212-687-5030

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