

## NCJW Celebrates 130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

It has been 130 years since a small band of women charted the National Council of Jewish Women of Greater Kansas City (NCJW). The section has grown from 17 women in 1894 to over 550 members in 2024, but the mission is still the same. A grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms.

The Greater Kansas City Section was founded by Mrs. Liebernan, the Section's first president. The organization was and remains, as Mrs. Liebernan said, "dedicated in the spirit of Judaism to advancing human welfare and the democratic way of life." By providing a coordinated program of education, services, advocacy and social action, NCJW attempts to achieve this goal and to fulfill unmet needs within the Jewish and the general communities. It aims to unite Jewish women interested in the works of religion, philanthropy, education and social reform.

When the Kansas City section was started, it took on several large projects. One project was free baths. Free baths were offered in a cottage next to Temple B'nai Jehudah at 11<sup>th</sup> and Oak streets. The aim of this project was to help tenement dwellers who lived in crowded conditions without a source of water. In addition, the Kansas City School District had only two kindergarten classes in 1893. NCJW opened another one for an additional 50 children at 18<sup>th</sup> and Grand Ave.

Other programs included The Penny Provident Fund which taught poor children thrift and economy, and a Sabbath School for children whose parents were unaffiliated with a religious organization. The Section gave soap and towels to Kansas City schools, and milk and graham crackers to public school kindergarten classes. Lastly, Council started a hot lunch program when the Red Cross and Federal funding were terminated.

Over the years NCJW has taught English classes, convened 15 civic organizations to start the Naturalization Council in Kansas City, started Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), held Parties for the Blind, supported legislation and classes for the blind, formed and sponsored the rehabilitation unit at University of Kansas Medical Center, started Ship-a-box program (sent clothing, education material, and play items to kindergartens in Israel), scholarships for graduating seniors, taught a non-secular program on Israel called Hello Israel, and Advocated (for gun control, abortion access, and voting rights).

Today, the section programs include the Back to School Store (grade school children are provided clothing and school supplies), Stacey's Closet (provides clothing during the school year to help keep kids in school), scholarships for graduating seniors, Period Project (provide select schools with period products to keep menstruating students in school), Mother's Day Jewelry Store (low income students shop for a piece of costume jewelry to take to the loved one), Basket's 4 Babies (layettes are given to new moms in shelters or at Operation Breakthrough), Suitcase to Start (a suitcase is filled with everything a young adult aging out of foster care needs), Birthday Books (a

new book, toothbrush, and floss are given to low income students for their birthday), and advocating for gun control, abortion access, and voting rights continues.

The section planning committee is preparing to celebrate with their members by providing a short program and light bites. It will take place on September 8<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m. at the Meadowbrook Park Club House. Members are encouraged to RSVP to [ncwjofkc@gmail.com](mailto:ncwjofkc@gmail.com).

The current Section president Carla Oppenheimer says, “This is an amazing organization that strives to make a real difference in the community... to make it a better place for everyone, and our members build meaningful relationships in the process. I look forward to honoring this milestone with a champagne toast at the 130<sup>th</sup> celebration.”