

Message from the President

By Robyn Lenn OAM



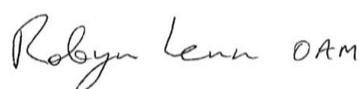
Dear ICJW members,

I am pleased to introduce ICJW E-Links magazine, May 2018.

Within these pages you will find updated community service information from a selection of ICJW's 35 affiliate organisations around the world. You will see a wide variety of volunteer programs dedicated to these organisations' local and Jewish communities. ICJW is proud to be associated with their committed and generous community service work.

The ICJW Executive joins me in thanking Community Service Chair Judy Lever and Vice Chair Clarita Spitz for their dedication in compiling and editing E-Links for the past quadrennium. Our thanks also to Sarah Manning, ICJW PR manager, for her assistance in setting up the magazine each time.

Warmest wishes,



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Introduction to E-Links

Here is the final edition of E-Links of the current ICJW administration. Once again, we have a wide variety of projects and activities to share with members around the world.

This is also my last newsletter as Chair of Community Services. It has been a pleasure to read and assist in the publication of all the articles and photos that you have sent through to us. I have really enjoyed working on this for ICJW, and I know that you will continue to support Clarita who will be carrying on in this role and Deirdre Hart, who will be joining her for the next Quadrennium.

We look forward to meeting many of you at the forthcoming Convention in Sydney, and to reading many more reports of your wonderful work in the future.

With thanks and good wishes to you all,

Judy Lever and Clarita Spitz,
ICJW Community Services Coordinators

ICJW Presidential Visit to Croatia

ICJW President Robyn Lenn OAM visited the Union of Jewish Women of Croatia, in Zagreb in November 2017.

The Union of Jewish Women is the oldest organization in the Jewish community, established in 1887, and they even were active during World War II, trying to save children in the camps by sending packages of food and medicine. After a long break during the Communist era and following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the UJWC reopened in 1991.

Today there are approximately 1,200 people in the whole of Croatia who identify as Jews. Our affiliate operates in four cities: Zagreb, Split, Osijek and Rajieka. In Zagreb they meet in the Jewish community building for regular meetings of their literature club.

Around 100 Jews live in Osijek, where the UJWC group runs Passover Seders, Israeli dancing classes and a Cheder for the children. They also organize an annual commemoration at the Dakovo Concentration Camp Cemetery, which is attended by survivors from Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia and Germany.

As President of the Union for many years, Dr. Melita Švob, a retired scientist in her eighties, has taken on the task of supporting the remaining Jews of Croatia, who are largely Holocaust survivors, as her purpose in life. She works to secure financial reparations for them, and takes them on excursions around the country.



Robyn Lenn and Dr. Melita Švob

Every year since 2007, Melita has organized a winter gathering for Jewish women in Opatija, a resort on the Adriatic coast, as part of the Café Europe program sponsored by the Claims Conference. They enjoy excursions, lectures, concerts, and even dancing. This winter they brought their photos to create an exhibition of the history of Jewish life in Croatia, which was displayed in Zagreb. Melita has also been active in collecting the names of those who perished during the Holocaust and submitting them to the archive in Yad Vashem.

Robyn joined a party of UJWC members from Zagreb and Osijek on a two-day bus tour of the Zagarje region of Croatia, visiting castles and museums and talking to them about their lives and communities. She made a presentation to Melita to express the group's appreciation of her work on their behalf.



Jewish community sports activities then & now, from the exhibition of the history of Jewish Life in Croatia

150 Years Young!

The Jewish Women's Association of Bern, Switzerland, celebrated its 150th anniversary in November 2017.

Chairwoman Karin Rom reports that the affiliate is actively involved in working for the welfare of members of their community, and particularly visiting older members in their homes. They organize the refreshments for Kiddushim in the synagogue and other social activities on Jewish holidays. The highlight of the year is an excursion in the summer, which is free to all members, thanks to a generous donor. With an active board and many active members, they hope to continue their activities for the next 150 years!



Anniversary Celebrations in the Bern Synagogue, with (l-r) Maya Graf, Karin Rom, Simon Münzmay, Michael Trischan and Johannes Dau.

Pluralistic Activism in Prague



Alice with NDI colleagues in Krakow

During the past 6 months, the Czech Council of Jewish Women has been part of a democratic pluralism project for national minorities, supported by the US National Democratic Institute (NDI). It currently includes participants from the Jewish, Roma, Muslim and African communities from four countries: Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia.

As reported in E-Links 2017, the goal of the project was to build an interfaith and multicultural coalition of minorities in Central Europe, and then to develop responses to xenophobia and religious-based discrimination by nurturing pluralistic activism in each country and in the region.

Alice Veselá participated on behalf of ICJW's Czech affiliate. She attended workshops in Bratislava, Krakow and Brussels and then helped to organize workshops for Jewish, Roma and Muslim university students in the Czech Republic. The students who participated are now implementing the project in their own countries and sharing their experience in their own communities.



(left) The Czech CJW and the Jewish Community of Prague held a reading of Megilat Esther for women on Purim.

Literature, Identity & Diversity in Hungary

Dr. Katalin Pécsi-Pollner reports from the Esther's House Association for Jewish Culture and Feminist Values in Hungary.

Checking School Books

Against a background of increasing anti-Semitism and Holocaust revisionism in Hungary, Esther's House has an important role to play in monitoring new Hungarian schoolbooks for 5th to 12th grade students. At the request of the government, their experts read and discuss new text books about History, Literature and Ethics from the viewpoint of Jewish culture and the Holocaust. The authors and editors of these books try to follow our advice. This is an important opportunity to influence the image of Jews and the representation of the Jewish culture in these school books, as well as ensuring that the tragedy of the Holocaust is accurately taught to the next generation in Hungary.

Cultural Activities

Esther's House has published a series of memoirs by Jewish women, together with the Novella Book Publishing Company. Entitled "Jewish Women Speak Out", these books are designed to break the silence that has concealed women's stories over generations. They have so far published five memoirs written by and about Jewish women, which are available online free of charge in three languages (Hungarian, English and German) at www.esthersbooks.com

Inter-Religious Activities

Following on from their involvement in the NDI project, Esther's House members have been involved in developing projects together with women from different minorities including the Roma people. Their next project will be making a video about Roma, Jewish and refugee women who have succeeded in changing their fate and making their lives better.



Inter-Religious Event (Katalin second from the right)

Leadership Training Event

In March 2018, Esther's House ran a training program funded by ICJW's **Isabelle G. Brown Memorial Fund for Volunteer Training and Leadership Development** on the topic of "Jewish Identity and Diversity". The 76 participants included members of Esther's House Association, university students studying Jewish Studies, and other people who were interested in Jewish topics or active in the Hungarian Jewish community.

They discussed the challenges of being a Jewish woman today, the role of Jewish women as pioneers, such as Regina Jonas, the first woman ordained as a Rabbi in 1935, and women in leadership positions. They also discussed dialogues between the generations of Holocaust survivors and their children and grandchildren, which is a major topic in the Hungarian Jewish community. The speakers were successful female community leaders and professionals and academics conducting research on Jewish Studies topics at local academic institutions.

The two-day program included a number of new experiences for the participants, including interactive Jewish studies, personal stories from Jewish converts and LGBTQ individuals, and co-operation with Muslims through the involvement of the Salaam-Shalom intercultural group.

Community Service Projects in Uruguay

Mónica Rozenbaum reports that the Council of Jewish Women of Uruguay continues to provide help to different Jewish and non-Jewish institutions.

CJWU activities include a community closet called "Meili" which they stock with donated coats for the needy, and a community group for handicapped Jewish people, to whom they donate clothes, toys, and electrical appliances. They also visit other public and local institutions, as well as different public hospitals.

One of their two new projects this year has been "Abrigo con Amor", meaning Sheltered with Love, which involves knitting scarves to be donated to needy people such as street cleaners. The other new project is supporting research into cancer by Dr. Cecilia Castillo and Prof. Frydman from the Tel Hashomer Hospital in Israel, who is analyzing different markers found in Ashkenazi people in Uruguay.

The group "Dor Hemshej" runs the "Shalom Bayit" program, to create awareness and prevent domestic violence. They also have a project to support public schools in the area which bear the name of the State of Israel or of important Jewish personalities. They are involved in many activities for these schools, taking groups of children to the Holocaust Museum, sponsoring their Israeli dancing lessons, and making various donations to improve the quality of their education.



Abrigo con Amor volunteers with their scarves



Public school students visiting Holocaust Museum with CJWU volunteers

International Women's Day in Argentina

CAMI Argentina celebrated International Women's Day on March 8 with an event in memory of Cherry Breitman, who was a member their Board of Directors for more than 50 years and an ICJW Vice President.



Taking Women to the Theater in Brazil

The League of Jewish Women of Brazil (Liga Femenina Israelita do Brasil) has a long-standing tradition to celebrate International Women's Day. In March 2018 we brought a group of 35 women to the Municipal Theater, to thank them for their work as volunteers helping children and needy mothers in the communities of Cantagalo & Pavão-Pavãozinho.

Lilian Bosboom reports that this tradition of taking women from poor neighborhoods to the theater began with Ester Schwartz, the longest serving president of LFIB. She explained that her motivation was egalitarian and sincere; she felt that it was wrong for her to enjoy the benefits of society when the poor could not do so.

Brazilian society is built on wealth, privilege and social class distinctions. The poor had no access to the arts in general and people of color were not admitted to the theater. She was the first Brazilian woman to open people's minds towards a more egalitarian society in Rio de Janeiro. When she first took these disenfranchised women to the theater, she was confronted by the theater workers and the doorman refused to let them into the building, due to what we might call racism or discrimination.

Today things have improved somewhat for poor Brazilians and minorities, thanks in part to Ester Schwartz. However, although the government provides subsidies to take the poor to the theater, unfortunately, they do not go. Lilian once brought a group of black women to the Municipal Theater to see a show and they said that without her they would never have had the courage to enter the building. This is partly because of historical colonialism and racism, but also a lack of adequate education opportunities and the government's failure to expose public school kids to the arts and music at an early age. Ester Schwartz understood the importance of the arts in people's lives and she encouraged the women of the LFIB to be courageous in standing up for access.

As President of Liga, Lilian has created a project to continue Ester's legacy. "The Ester Schwartz Project" has brought women to the theater, movies and concerts on International Women's Day for the past 3 years. They brought a group of elderly women to a local theater for the first time in their lives.

Lilian was inspired by Ester Schwartz to work for the LFIB, and she is constantly inspired by seeing the happiness that this project brings to poor women when they enjoy a trip to the theater – something that most of us take for granted.



Lilian Bosboom (2nd from the left) with her guests at the Municipal Theater.



Participants (above) in their community, carrying donations of food on their heads, and (below) dressed up and having fun in the theater lobby.



The New Community Center in Barranquilla

In the 2017 edition of E-Links we reported on our Colombia affiliate, the Fundación Amigos De La Comunidad Golda Meir, setting up the Golda Meir Community Development Center (CDC) last year.

Clarita Spitz reports that they have grown successfully in the past year and are now attracting 180 children, 90 adults – mostly mothers who are heads of households – and 70 seniors to the Center each week. They are providing an oasis of support in the middle of the poor Las Americas neighborhood in Barranquilla.

The Center is run by volunteers who are responsible for raising their own funds, so they are constantly looking for sponsors for their different projects. They have been successful in securing funding from several foundations and Jewish families to cover the day to day costs of the Center.

Thanks to one of these donors, the Fundación can now provide daily snacks to participants in the programs. One foundation has generously funded health and entrepreneurship workshops and a program of nutritional assessment for all ages at the Center. Through this program, we hope to significantly reduce malnutrition rates in the population served by the CDC.

The Fundación has been welcoming groups of local people, members of the Jewish community, and past and present students of Colegio Hebreo Unión, to visit the Center. One group of girls who are preparing for their Bat Mitzvah came with their Rebetzin to make bracelets with the children at the CDC. Senior students from the Jewish school came to organize games and music to entertain the seniors in their Golden Age group.

Volunteers at the CDC run self-awareness workshops, empowering local women and helping them to be proud of themselves and their role as women. They also run courses in food preparation where participants can learn and share nutritious recipes. As part of the arts & crafts program, they use local materials like Iraca palm leaves, as well as recycled materials, to make toys for pets and other items. Some of these products are being sold for profit to help the Center to become economically independent, and there are plans to create micro-companies to assist with this plan.



Skills courses for single mothers



Self-awareness workshops for local women



Items for sale crafted from Iraca palm

Hand in Hand with the League



The League of Jewish Women in the UK runs an impressive list of welfare activities, including working with cancer patients, visiting people in hospitals, running contact centres, and supporting children, families and elderly people, the sick and vulnerable.

In June 2018, the League of Jewish Women will hold its 75th Annual General Meeting followed by a celebratory lunch and tea. Members will remember how this unique welfare charity began, and its contribution over the years to help improve people's lives in both the Jewish and wider communities.

New projects are evolving all the time, and one such project is "Hand in Hand". This welfare rota offers a gentle hand and arm massage to elderly people in hospitals and residential homes, often to people with dementia. Massaging hands, wrists and arms is for many elderly people the only form of physical contact that they have with another person. It is often as therapeutic for the volunteers as it is for the recipients, and they have started to give massages to the staff of the residential homes as well as the residents.



The League has 25 members trained in the art of gentle hand and arm massage. Penelope Conway, an osteopath by profession, a Past President of the League and President-elect of ICJW, trains all the volunteers at the League's offices in Camden. Members are provided with all the necessary equipment and oils contained in a special LJW bag.

League members also visit residential homes to lead interactive reading sessions of short stories to small groups of residents. They often use props to encourage their elderly audience to make comments about the characters introduced and the subject matter. Other volunteers are reading newspaper and magazine articles and start discussions with the residents.

Handicraft Projects

Another rapidly growing project is our knitting project, with members from eight LJW groups knitting as fast as they can to keep up with demand! One member is knitting multi-coloured bags that are used by patients to carry their morphine pumps around in the cancer ward at Queens Hospital in Essex. Others are knitting baby clothes for premature babies in hospitals, and blankets to be sent to poor communities in Eastern Europe.

The latest LJW innovation is 'Twiddle Muffs' – tactile muffs decorated with buttons and bows, knots and beads reduce stress among dementia patients in hospital wards and residential homes. So far LJW members have donated over 150 muffs and they are struggling to keep up with demand. They now have both knitting and sewing groups working on the project, demonstrating how LJW welfare projects are being adapted continually to meet the changing needs of society.



Example of Twiddle Muff as presented (below) to the staff of the dementia ward of UCL Hospital



Updates from Around South Africa



The Union of Jewish Women South Africa (UJW) is committed to bettering the lives of all South Africans, offering them freedom from the constraints of poverty, loneliness, lack of education, unemployment and hunger. Myra Goldenbaum reports on the innovative community service projects run by three of their smaller branches.

East London Branch

Members of this branch spent time over Easter handing out Easter Eggs and hats in the surgical ward at the Frere Hospital. UJW supports local single mothers by delivering hampers of baby equipment, and they recently donated knitted items and baby clothing that was sent from Australia to the Breath of Life home for abandoned babies. They have donated a new garden bench to the Masimanyane Women’s Support Centre, a safe house for women in distress.

Port Elizabeth Branch

For the past 6 years, the PE UJW branch has been sending volunteers every month to the Breaking Barriers of Blindness programme, to help with the rehabilitation of blind children and to prepare food for impoverished and visually impaired people. On Mitzvah Day, volunteers from UJW prepared and served lunch at a local homeless shelter. They raised money to donate a guttering and water tank system to the Molefe primary school, and presented text books to the Karma primary school. They have also donated new prayer books to the synagogue in Port Elizabeth.



UJW volunteers at a home for abandoned babies (above) and a home for blind children (below)



Durban Branch

The Durban branch of UJW organized their second annual Domestic Workers Appreciation Tea Party in February. It was an outstanding success attended by almost 200 women, who enjoyed top caliber speakers, entertainment, and a scrumptious tea. In March, UJW treated residents of the Beth Shalom Home to a Pesach Braai or barbecue. Following a successful Golf Day, they gave a financial donation and hand-made knitted items for children to the South African Childhood Cancer Foundation.

Domestic Workers Appreciation Tea Party in Durban

Doing Good Deeds in Mexico

Lilian Grinberg reports on the community service activities of the Voluntarias Judeo Mexicanas - Mexican Jewish Volunteers - in Mexico City.

The VJM decided this year to get involved in the Day of Good Deeds, which was started in Israel and has spread to Jewish communities around the world. They took a group of young volunteers to visit the community of Huixquilucan, where they sang and played music with the community's elderly members.

They celebrated the International Day of the Child by putting on a show at a local school for children with special needs. They had raised money to donate a number of much-needed wheelchairs, stabilizers and walkers, and they were proud to be invited to the school's end of year graduation ceremony.

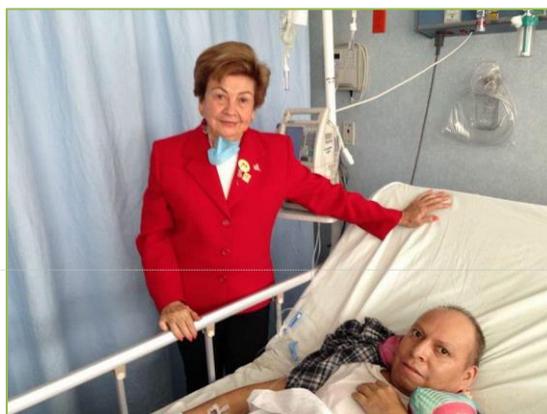
Recently there have been a number of earthquakes and other natural disasters in Mexico, and the VJM has been helping those affected, together with other Jewish groups.

For the past 15 years, the VJM have been visiting the sick in the Hematology Department of Mexico's General Hospital and at the National Institute of Pediatrics and Hospital of Naucalpan. Known as the Ladies with the Red Jackets, they help to support patients during their recovery.

Every week a group of VJM volunteers visits the Crit Telethon Infant Rehabilitation Center to do magic therapy. Teaching disabled children to practise magic tricks encourages them to forget their disabilities while having fun. More importantly, they learn to do something that others cannot do, which gives them a sense of power and accomplishment, so that they can earn the admiration of others by showing off the tricks that they have learned.



Good Deeds Day Volunteers (above) and VJM donated wheelchairs (below)



One of the VJM Ladies in Red Jackets

FORTHCOMING ICJW EVENTS

- **ICJW Executive Meeting** in Paris: Monday 5th November and Tuesday 6th November, 2018.
- **Human Rights Day:** 10th December, 2018
- **UN Commission on the Status of Women** (CSW63) in New York: 11th to 22nd March, 2019.

