

ICJW – Promoting a Just Society Based on Human Rights and Jewish Values

Message from the President

By Robyn Lenn OAM



Dear ICJW members,

The impressive work you will read about in this Newsletter is a selection from ICJW's 33 affiliate organisations around the world. Over the years, E-Links has featured the work of various affiliates, thus building a picture of the many projects and programs with which we are associated. Each Jewish women's organisation under ICJW's umbrella is autonomous and chooses its community work to best support the needs of its own city and country. As you will read, these needs are vastly different in each country.

I congratulate each affiliate featured in this edition and thank their leaders and volunteers who make these programs so successful in upgrading the lives of the participants.

My personal thanks to our capable Community Services Chair Judy Lever and Vice Chair Clarita Spitz for collecting and collating the material submitted by our affiliates.

Warmest wishes,

Robyn Lenn OAM

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Emergencies in Ecuador & South Africa	2-3
Facing Challenges in the Ukraine	4
Changing Focus in Colombia	5
Reaching out in Mexico & Argentina	6
Helping Mums in Australia & Canada	7
A Volunteer View from the UK	8
Educational Programs in Hungary	9
Promoting Pluralism in the Czech Republic	10
ICJW's Visit to Neve Michael in Israel	11
Update from Uruguay	12
Forthcoming ICJW Events	12

Introduction to E-Links

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

We are delighted to bring you another e-Links magazine, and thrilled that we not only have a truly international spread of reports from our affiliates around the globe, but also an amazing range of projects and activities that represent the huge contribution our members make within their countries.

We start our global journey in three countries that have experienced disasters where our affiliates stepped up to help – an earthquake in Ecuador, disastrous fires in South Africa, and civil war in the Ukraine.

It is truly remarkable to see the variety of ways in which ICJW volunteers respond to the diverse needs of their communities worldwide.

Warmest greetings to you all,

Judy Lever and Clarita Spitz,
ICJW Community Services Coordinators

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Earthquake Emergency in Ecuador

Judit Hager de Steiner, President of the Sociedad Femenina Israelita de Ecuador, reports on our affiliate's response to a very serious earthquake that hit Ecuador in April 2016:

"The April 16 earthquake affected several cities on the Ecuadorian coast. Next morning, we sent clothes, blankets, mattresses, cleaning supplies, medicines, food and water to the area. It took several trucks to transport everything we collected for the survivors.

"Several Jewish organizations and individuals decided to send their donations through us and not through the Red Cross. We requested ICJW to help us collect the money, but unfortunately they could not do so, as the constitution does not allow the organization to collect donations for this type of help. Thanks to B'nai B'rith we were able to collect all the donations from people and institutions in Ecuador and abroad. The money was used to re-build the school in the town of San Plácido, in the province of Manabí, which had been totally destroyed.

"As part of our monthly food support to poor institutions, we have delivered an impressive amount of food to two local support centers that provide breakfast and lunch to people affected by the earthquake. More recently, we also sent a van full of donations to a kindergarten which specifically takes care of the children whose widowed mothers now have to work to support their families. Our help was sent through the Israeli representative of IsrAID, which helps to run this kindergarten.



Destroyed buildings in Manabí



IsrAID relief workers in Ecuador after the earthquake



Women of Action in South Africa

The Union of Jewish Women sprang into action when fires devastated the Eastern Cape.

June 2017 saw devastating fires ravage some of the most beautiful parts of South Africa along the magnificent Garden Route in the Eastern Cape. Hundreds of hectares of forests and over 700 homes were totally destroyed, leaving thousands of people with nothing but the clothes on their backs, and approximately 2,000 people jobless.

Living up to their motto, '*Women of Action*', all six branches of the UJW immediately sprang into action. The Durban branch delivered 157 boxes of clothing, bed linen, towels, pillows, toys and food, as well as 300 blankets. With money donated by our other branches, the Port Elizabeth branch purchased 80 kits for the local Fire Department, which included protective gloves, face masks and goggles. Parcels of blankets and clothing, food provisions and gas cookers were purchased for those who had lost their homes, who will be living in a warehouse for the next year.



Fire in Plettenberg Bay (photo: Sowetan Live)



Firemen received protective gloves, facemasks & goggles



Boxes of clothing and bales of blankets ready for delivery



Bags for New Beginnings.

Lynne Raphaely, National President of the Union of Jewish Women in South Africa, reports that their regular outreach projects such as soup kitchens, feeding schemes, assisting crèches and caring for the elderly, continue to run successfully.

UJW Sewing School

The UJW Johannesburg branch runs a successful sewing school for unemployed women. [Click here to watch an inspiring video about the UJW and this project](#), as featured on South African TV (SABC).

Mandela Day

Every year on 18 July, UJW celebrates Mandela Day by doing special acts of kindness for those less fortunate than ourselves. This year most branches are embarking on a National UJW Project - 'Bags for New Beginnings'. Bags containing nappies (diapers), new-born baby clothes, blankets, sanitary towels etc. will be handed out on Mandela Day to mothers who have given birth in government hospitals and clinics.

Facing Challenges in the Ukraine

Eleonora Groisman reports from the Ukrainian Independent Council of Jewish Women, where civil war and anti-Semitism are presenting challenges to the Jewish population.

“Since the start of military activity in the Donbas region, the Ukrainian Independent Council of Jewish Women has been helping their members and other Jewish families in the area. Many people are living at or below the poverty line and together with other organisations, they have evacuated people from the war zone to other parts of Ukraine, and repatriated some to Israel. They maintain close contact with these evacuees. However, at the same time, a number of Jewish families (mostly elderly) have refused to leave and prefer to live the remainder of their lives in their own homes. With the help of volunteers, they are continuing to support these families by collecting medicine, clothes and food for them.

“Another problem of modern Ukraine is reconsidering the significance of certain historical figures, some of whom participated in Jewish pogroms. A memorial has been erected to figures who are viewed as Ukrainian national heroes, although some of them were enemies of the Jewish population. In addition, some Jewish shrines, cemeteries and monuments to the victims of the Holocaust are deteriorating in Ukraine, and neither the local authorities nor the Jewish community has the money to restore and maintain these structures.

“Recently, there have been several cases of anti-Semitic behaviour. A swastika was painted on a monument to 2,000 Jews who were shot in Kostopil in 1941. We have asked to have the case investigated and the perpetrators identified. Local officials called for an immediate investigation of this case, expressed regrets and said that this is a sign of society's moral degradation. Recently, a road in Kamianets-Podilskyi was partly repaired with the gravestones from a nearby Jewish cemetery. We asked the local authorities to return the gravestones to the Jewish cemetery, and to repair the road in a more appropriate manner, but this has caused local indignation.

“The cause of this anti-Semitism is quite complex. Ukrainians are seeing a fall in their standard of living as a result of rising prices and rents, while salaries and social security have not increased. People seek to lay blame on the Jews. Some believe that the Jews are in power in the government and mistreat other Ukrainians.

“Our affiliate and its members find themselves in a difficult situation. Nevertheless, they continue to celebrate Jewish holidays, including holding a wonderful Purim carnival and arranging a Passover matza-making contest.

“In May, a Ukrainian delegation headed by Prime Minister Volodymyr Groisman made an official visit to Israel. I was invited to the official meetings with Reuven Rivlin, President of Israel, and Knesset members. Bilateral relations between Israel and Ukraine were discussed, as well as the possibility of combining efforts to fight terrorism, ensuring freedom of trade, preserving the memory of the Holocaust and opposing anti-Semitism.”



Affiliate president Eleonora Groisman at the Israeli President's Residence with the Ukrainian Prime Minister as a member of the press corps.

Changing Focus in Colombia

Clarita Spitz reports on a change of focus at our Colombian affiliate - the Fundación Amigos de la Comunidad Golda Meir - from running the Golda Meir School to launching the new Golda Meir Community Development Center - *Centro de Desarrollo Comunitario Golda Meir*.

“In our affiliate, our main concern has always been the wellbeing and the future of the children of the Golda Meir School. Now, after more than 30 years managing the school and 23 graduating classes, on January 2017 we reached an agreement with the District Secretary of Education for them to take charge of the operation of the school, starting with a two-year trial period.

“We believe that this change will provide better opportunities for the students of the school. Our commitment to the city continues. We will continue to support students and their families through enrichment programs that are geared toward personal growth and empowerment, in addition to the school programs developed by the District.

“Most of the original school staff will continue working at the school under the new administration, and some will join our new endeavor, the Golda Meir Community Development Center. Where the school dining room used to be, we have installed a multi-purpose activity room. Here we are also reaching out to the youngest children of the neighborhood and their parents, and to seniors of the Barrio Las Américas community, to provide early childhood and adult programs.”



(above)

Clara Kovalski of Fundamigos, and Lotty Eidelman, affiliate president, with students and instructors from the new Center.



(left)

Inauguration of the Golda Meir Community Development Center and celebration of ICJW’s Colombia Vice President Dita Bromet Levy’s 70th birthday.



The Golden Age Group from the Barrio Las Américas community doing arts & crafts at the Center.



Clarita Spitz with students from the reading promotion program.

Mexico's VJM Projects Reach Out to the Entire Community

Lilian Grinberg, past president of the **Voluntarias Judeo Mexicanas**, sent pictures of the work they do helping the needy. She writes: "We contribute with the Annual Collection for the Mexican Red Cross, raising awareness among the children of the Jewish schools' network in Mexico. We participated in the *Day of Good Deeds* together with people from the local Mexican community - it was an unforgettable morning. We visited the residents of the *Eishel*, our Jewish Home for the Elderly, and shared with them a day full of songs and beautiful memories."



(above l-r) Entertaining Seniors at the Eishel Jewish Home for the Elderly; Supporting the Mexican Red Cross; (below l-r) Distributing Treats to Children with Special Needs; CRIT Therapists for Project Magic.



Coping with Children Challenging Authority in Argentina

Mirta Goldstein, President of one of ICJW's two affiliates in Argentina, the **Argentinian Jewish Women's Network**, reports on a project that they are running to help deal with a crisis of authority among children, called "*Concerned Parents, Attentive School: Challenges to Authority and Answers for Families & Institutions*". Together with Lic. Inés Wenger, they are offering reflection workshops for parents, teachers, care-givers and grandparents on these important issues.



Helping Mums in Australia

MUM FOR MUM is a free non-denominational program run by the National Council of Jewish Women in Australia in New South Wales. To date they have supported over 360 mothers from more than 50 nationalities.

Recipient mothers in the first year of their baby's life benefit from the emotional support of trained volunteers who are mothers themselves. The vast majority of mothers stayed with the program for the full year.

NCJWA has trained many of its members to volunteer on the program. In addition to the core *MUM FOR MUM* training course, they also receive external training on domestic violence, grief counselling, postnatal depression, sleep therapy, and the complementary role of Mothercraft nurses.

Nadene Alhadeff, *MUM FOR MUM* co-ordinator, says: "Witnessing the significant change in the lives of a family by providing consistent emotional support to the mother so that she is less lonely and anxious enables the mother to



MUM FOR MUM Mothers Group at NCJWA with a singalong session and infant massage workshop

delight in her child and become the best mother she can be. In addition, volunteers grow professionally through the training and supervision in healthy relationship building."

Nadene has also run successful groups for recipient mothers together with mothers from the Jewish community, which is a great way to spread the word to Jewish mums about the program. The program is also good for recruitment: *MUM FOR MUM* volunteers enjoy being members of NCJWA and being involved in their other activities relating to women and motherhood.

NCJW Canada – Busy in Vancouver

Debbie Altow reports on the activities of the Vancouver section of the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada.

"It's summer in Vancouver and we have just completed our year of activities, including: a huge clothing donation to a local Aboriginal children's organization, a series of inspiring speakers at a monthly luncheon event, our annual fundraising initiative, and the distribution of dozens of books for kids to day care centres and pre-schools. Our two flourishing book clubs continue to expand the social and intellectual capital of our members.

"We have received a very special donation on behalf of NCJWC by the Kort family of Vancouver, who have made a five-year pledge of \$5,000 per annum to successful applicants from the HIPPY program. HIPPY, brought to Canada from Israel, trains low-income, immigrant or indigenous mothers with small children to improve the school-readiness of their pre-school children, as well as helping the mothers to become active community professionals in the workforce. The Kort pledge will enable two candidates each year to complete their post-secondary education.

"We hope to foster more community awareness on the human trafficking issue and on organ donation through a series of alliances with other organizations. While membership (and revenue) continues to be a challenge, we are hopeful that an upcoming brainstorming session with members of the younger generation will generate some innovative ways to expand our numbers and our effectiveness."



Volunteer View from London

Nita Bharier describes her work over nearly 40 years running Day Centres and a Kosher Meals Service in North London with the League of Jewish Women (LJW).

“It always helps to be in the right place at the right time and most importantly with the right people. After being persuaded that there was a growing need for 'Kosher Meals on Wheels' in my local area, I was fortunate to meet up with Gillian Gold from LJW. (Meals on Wheels is the British term used to describe the delivery of home-cooked meals to the homes of elderly people.)

“We started the service from Palmers Green Synagogue kitchen and, after about 15 months, it was suggested the League should also open Day Centres around the country. In our area, we were able to use a building that was only used in the evenings for a Jewish youth club, so we opened the Day Centre four days a week, while continuing to deliver meals to the elderly in three London boroughs.

“As the service grew, we employed a cook who became a great asset. We also ran a trolley shop selling cards, toiletries and confectionery, and a portable library. We had help from local members of AJEX – the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen – who volunteered and were most helpful, especially when we took the elderly on outings.

“After 19 years, the owners decided to sell the youth club premises and we had to look for a new home. We had to stop the Meals on Wheels service, but this was taken over by the local council, which we felt proud about. Instead we were welcomed to Woodside Park Synagogue, who gave us their hall for two days each week. We were unable to employ the cook, so the food

was cooked by volunteers, with a dedicated team catering for the Day Centre.

“Despite falling numbers, the Day Centre continues to run with physical exercise and yoga classes in the mornings, followed by a freshly cooked 3-course lunch and afternoon entertainment. Every Pesach we hold a Mock Seder, with the children from the Yavneh Nursery coming in to sing traditional Pesach songs.

“We recently started the J.O.Y. programme - Joining Old with Young. It is very special seeing our elderly members doing activities and singing together with the young children. It is hoped that this programme, which is now a registered charity, will be extended to bring together other Day Centres and Nurseries.

“After many years, many of our women are now unable to volunteer, but I have stepped in to take over and now cook two days each week. Since starting the LJW Meals on Wheels service in 1979, a lot has happened in my life and I have been blessed with grandchildren and great grandchildren.

“One of the highlights was being awarded the British Empire Medal during the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Year in 2012. This could only have been achieved with the support of my fellow volunteers at my local Barnet group of the LJW and at the League Head Office. Looking back, I am most thankful that I was in the right place at the right time!”



(left to right) The J.O.Y. programme (Joining Young With Old), Serving Lunch at the Woodside Park Day Centre, and Nita Bharier collecting her British Empire Medal from Sir David Brewer, Lord Lieutenant of Greater London.

Educational and Inter-Cultural Events in Hungary

Our Hungarian affiliate Esther's House in Budapest just completed a semester rich with programs and events.

Their monthly book club has been running for four years. They choose books on women and Jews (and Jewish women!), reading and discussing both contemporary and classic novels from the 20th and 21st century. Sometimes they even invite the author or translator to address the group. The Esther's House Book Club has become so popular that people have to reserve places in advance, since they don't allow more than 30 people in order to keep the discussions interactive.



Esther's House also hosted two book launches in Berlin and in Budapest. They launched Katalin Pécsi-Pollner's anthology "Daughters, Mothers" in German, with three members of the group holding a round table discussion on this topic in Berlin and then in Budapest. They also organised a mini-conference discussing topics including the specialties of women's writing, Jewish women in literature, and feminist interpretations of the Bible. The auditorium was packed in both cities.



Katalin Pécsi-Pollner speaking about her book.

Katalin gave a speech to the Memorial Committee at Buchenwald, reporting on the activities of the Esther's House Association and about ICJW. She gave a presentation showing their activities in the fields of human rights and intercultural dialogue.

Our affiliate Esther's House has been invited to join the international organisation NDI (National Democratic Institute). They hope to start intercultural and inter-religious dialogues with the members of other groups. Two people from Esther's House took part in two 3-day long workshops, working together with Roma activists and with women in leadership positions in different religious groups. Together they have planned a number of different projects which they will work on together.

They are currently working on an educational film on positive women. The project was inspired by the NDI but they were not able to find the framework for financing it, so they have started to plan the concept before applying for support. The concept is to show 10 women – Jewish, Roma and Refugees – who were able to turn their bad conditions into a positive life. They want to use visual materials to make short films for high school students, for whom it is important to find good role models among successful women who come from minority backgrounds. They have found a great cameraman and 10 suitable women to be interviewed – both in Budapest and in the countryside. They are now working on the preparation of the interviews and hope to start shooting the film in October and looking for financial support for it.

[Click here for Esther's House Facebook page](#)

Promoting Democratic Pluralism

Following a program of workshops, the Czech Council of Jewish Women has been chosen to run a project to build an interfaith and multicultural coalition of minorities in Slovak and Czech society.



The National Democratic Institute (NDI) ran a series of workshops in Central and Eastern Europe on “Interfaith Interethnic Coalition Building to Combat Racism, Xenophobia And Religious-Based Discrimination.” The goal of the NDI program is to develop responses to xenophobia and religious-based discrimination in Central Europe by building a critical mass of national and regional activism.

Europe’s refugee crisis, terrorism, and economic recession are driving prejudice against religious and ethnic minorities and xenophobia across the continent. In the “Visegrad” countries of Central Europe—the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia— xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia increasingly dominate public discourse. In order to combat intolerance, civic groups need support to increase their effectiveness. Groups focused on individual minority communities need to build crossover alliances to achieve ‘critical mass’. If civic groups in Central Europe take collective action, reach out to mainstream audiences, and network across Europe, then they can respond to xenophobia, racism, and ethnic and sectarian discrimination in informed, integrated, and sustainable ways. The idea is to develop their skills, relationships and shared objectives, to promote democratic pluralism.

There were 25 participants in the NDI program, representing civic minorities groups in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The representatives from Slovakia (20) and Czech Republic (5) were from diverse ethnicities and religions – Muslims, Protestants, Romas, Jewish, Vietnamese, Ukrainians and Hungarians. The Czech Republic was represented by five representatives of minorities and religions – Muslims, Jews, Vietnamese and Romas. Civic representatives of groups included religious and ethnic minority communities, as well as mainstream organisations working in human rights, multiculturalism, or migrant aid across the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Verona Miletinova, as a representative of the Czech Jewish group, attended three workshops and one strategy meeting in the period November 2016 - April 2017. The NDI workshops were organised in cooperation with the PDCS (Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia). The lecturers and facilitators from PDCS as a non-governmental organization provided professional training and facilitation services, consultancy and advisory services, according to the conflict situation in the Slovak and Czech society. They showed methods of citizen participation in the development of civil society.

In June 2017, the Czech Council of Jewish Women was one of four organizations chosen to receive NDI grants. They will start a project in September 2017 to show the possibilities of building an interfaith and multicultural coalition of minorities in Slovak and Czech society. This and the other chosen projects will hopefully help reduce xenophobia and racism, in line with the program’s main goals - to work for democracy and promote democratic pluralism.



Helping Children at Risk in Israel

Our affiliate, the Council of Women's Organisations in Israel, is a coalition of various women's organisations, of which three focus on social welfare projects: WIZO, Emunah and Na'amat.

During the ICJW Herczeg Jerusalem Educational Seminar in May 2017, the delegates visited the Neve Michael Children's Village in Pardes Chana, part of the Emunah network of facilities for children at risk.

Neve Michael is a children's village for boys and girls aged 5-18 who cannot live at home because it is simply too dangerous, or because their biological family is dysfunctional. Neve Michael is a unique facility that combines an elementary school, family homes, a children's crisis center, a teenage girl's emergency center, and other vital services for at-risk children.



Hava Levene addressing delegates from ICJW

As well as touring the facility and enjoying lunch in their beautiful dining room, the ICJW group heard an interesting presentation by educational psychologist Dr. Uri Bengio about how they help children at risk, and an inspiring lecture by the Resource Director, Hava Levene. Here is an extract of what she said:

"I have been part of Neve Michael for many years. The children that live in our Children's Village arrive at our doorstep after suffering from severe neglect, physical or sexual abuse. Sometimes they have witnessed a loved one being murdered. Others have been left alone for days with no one to care for them. Imagine being a six-year-old not being able to live at home! Life has fallen apart for so many of our children, and our mission is to help them to cope.

"There are always little incidents that break my heart. Like when six-year-old Rami came to me one day with what he described as a very serious problem. His two front teeth had fallen out, but now he lives at Neve Michael, and the tooth fairy won't be able to find him, because she doesn't know that he no longer lives at home! Eight-year-old Sari told me that she loves me because I smell like her Mommy, of chicken patties and good perfume. And then she added: "You know, I can never kiss my Mommy again. She is dead. My father choked her."

"The children in our care need us to give them a chance to succeed and have a beautiful future. At Neve Michael we try to mend broken souls and help the children to dream and to succeed."



Petting Zoo and Dining Room at Neve Michael

Building Bridges in Uruguay

Monica Rozenbaum reports that the Consejo Uruguayo de Mujeres Judías - the Council of Jewish Women of Uruguay - works with different Jewish and non-Jewish institutions.

“Our Uruguay affiliate helps to run the *Community Closet, Meili* - the community’s group for people with disabilities - and *Avodati*, which collects donations of clothes, toys, electrical appliances, mixer for challot, refrigerators, etc. They also help other public and local institutions, including a number of public hospitals.

“Our younger women’s group *Dor Hemshej* continues with their program “*Shalom Bait*”, to disseminate, create awareness of and prevent domestic violence. They have a project to support public schools in the city and in the rural areas which bear the names of the State of Israel or of important Jewish personalities. They do different activities about Israel, take the children to the Holocaust Museum, hire an Israeli dance teacher for them, and make donations to projects designed to improve the quality of their education.

“This year, the Council of Jewish Women has started two new projects. “*Abrigo con Amor*” meaning “sheltered with love” is a project to knit scarves to be donated to people in need. They are also supporting a research project into cancer by Dr. Cecilia Castillo and Prof. Frydman from Israel, which involves studying 100 Ashkenazi people to analyze different genetic markers in order to screen and prevent cancer.”



Bringing students from the Ana Vinocur Public School to visit the Holocaust Museum, and teaching them Israeli dancing.



Knitting Scarves with Love!



FORTHCOMING ICJW EVENTS

The League of Jewish Women will host the **ICJW Executive Meeting** in London, UK, on Monday 13 and Tuesday 14 November, 2017.

The ICJW Quadrennial Convention will take place in Sydney, Australia, from Sunday 27 May – Wednesday 30 May, 2018, with an Executive Meeting taking place on Sunday 27 May and Thursday 31 May, 2018.

