

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN
Greater Houston Section (GHS)
A Personal Story

NCJW women work well together. NCJW women support each other to do daring things. We aim to set the world “right”. We are a team. We get it done. We are powerful women. It is my family in Houston. Our goals are clear and unifying. A woman – a man (my husband is a life member) – or even a non-Jew can be involved in any level they want to be. We also do community service projects in conjunction with our advocacy.

All my life I was an “armchair activist”. I saw what was wrong in the world, and wanted to change things. I joined rallies and with other local activities for social change, but didn’t really have a home “base”. There are a lot of organizations dedicated to social change, but few really drew me into long term commitment. Left-wing organizations are often anti-Semitic, and I didn’t want to fight two battles at once in the same organization. (However, I earlier made anti-Semitism a key issue for me, and have taken it on in other ways, but that is another story.)

When I moved to Houston fifteen years ago, a friend of mine introduced me to NCJW. I thought, “This will be a good way to meet people.” Where I previously lived (South Bay Area of San Francisco), there wasn’t a visible NCJW nearby, or at least I hadn’t heard about it. (I found out AFTER I moved here there are a couple of sections in nearby cities, but they were a well-kept secret, at least from me.) Luckily, NCJW is more than a place to meet people. It was one place where I could realize my lifelong dream of doing what I can to move the society forward.

In Houston, I was encouraged to get involved. I was elected to the Board of one of four Branches the second year I joined. I’ve been a Board member ever since. I was treated as a valuable member of a team. This became the home to my activism. I started going to all NCJW conferences, leadership trainings, “Day on the Hill” in Austin, and Washington Institute, (the latter two are opportunities to advocate to our elected state and national officials.) I found my niche.

Here are some interesting facts about NCJW, Greater Houston Section. If you are new to NCJW, I hope you are inspired as I was and am.

With over 800 (and growing) committed members, the Greater Houston Section of NCJW ranks among the top NCJW Sections in the country. The comprehensive reorganization in 2007 of our local Section resulted in a new infusion of energy and enthusiasm of our core principals, and a renewed commitment to the advocacy of our established five priorities:

1. Advance the wellbeing and status of women.
2. Advance the wellbeing of children and families.

3. Enhance the quality of Jewish life.
4. Ensure and advance individual and civil rights.
5. Support a secure Israel and the wellbeing of all its people.

Here are a but a few of our Houston programs that focuses on advocacy and community service projects that NCJW, GHS is involved with or has supported. You can find out more by contacting your Branch Vice Presidents of Community Service and Public Affairs.

NCJW ADVOCATES LOCALLY, NATIONALLY AND GLOBALLY, and aims to link our advocacy positions with community service projects.

NCJW BELIEVES in reproductive rights for all women throughout the world. BenchMark is NCJW's advocacy campaign to save Roe vs. Wade. BenchMark works to educate and mobilize members, the Jewish community, and friends and allies everywhere to promote a federal bench with judges who support fundamental freedoms, including all women's rights to reproductive choice.

NCJW WORKS toward the elimination of all forms of harassment, violence, abuse, and exploitation against women. In 1980, as a community service project, NCJW, GHS founded AVDA (Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse), now a Texas incorporated, non-profit agency that provides a unique blend of services including advocacy, legal representation, batterers' intervention counseling, and community education and outreach.

NCJW SUPPORTS comprehensive, nondiscriminatory healthcare coverage and services, including mental health, that are affordable and accessible for all. SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) is a federally funded, state run program providing health care for children from working, low income families. NCJW members have advocated for funding and equitable enrollment policies at both the State and National level. Locally, NCJW members have volunteered at SCHIP enrollment drives.

NCJW PROVIDES or has provided useful items for teens that participate in a program designed to meet the needs of formerly abused and neglected teens in foster care in the custody of Harris County Protective Services called Preparation For Adult Living (PAL). Members have also participated at an annual conference for this program.

NCJW RECOGNIZES the importance of the First Amendment assurance of separation of religion and state. We support quality public education for all, utilizing public funds for public schools only. We oppose the use of public funds to finance parochial education through the use of vouchers.

NCJW HOSTS a Women's Seder for over 14 years. This intergenerational event celebrates the woman's role in the Exodus and emphasizes the women of the Passover story.

NCJW SUPPORTS the enactment and enforcement of laws and regulations that *protect civil rights and individual liberties for all and would provide equal rights for same-sex couples*. NCJW members *advocated for the James Byrd Hate Crimes Act in Texas*. We *opposed the State Amendment to ban gay marriage*.

PILLARS

NCJW's pillars are the truths or core strengths of the organization. These distinctive hallmarks have guided our work for over a century and will continue to serve as signposts in the years to come.

WE ARE PIONEERS. For over a hundred years, we have been at the forefront of social change, taking a progressive stance on issues to protect the needs of women, children, and families.

WE ARE INFORMED BY JEWISH VALUES and our understanding that these values have universal appeal. Together we sustain *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), *tzedakah* (charity or justice), *chesed* (acts of loving kindness), and a commitment to helping the weak and underprivileged.

WE ARE THINKERS AND DOERS. NCJW combines thoughtful reflection with effective action. We have a legacy of conceptualizing and implementing social change.

Mission Statement:

The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is 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.

NCJW has a network of 90,000 members, supporters, and volunteers nationwide.