

Dear NCJW members,

What a year. In 2019 and 2020, we celebrated our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, welcomed Geena Davis to Cleveland to speak on female empowerment, enacted 125 Acts of Kindness in the community, revamped out 13<sup>th</sup> school library ... and encountered a pandemic. Through it all, our theme "strong women, powerful voices" was our mantra and rallying cry.

As an organization, we believe that a strong woman stands up for herself, but a stronger woman stands up for everyone else. And this year -- in addition to all the celebrations that came with such a milestone our anniversary -- there was a lot to stand up for. From families being separated at the border to the amplification of structural inequalities in our schools and society. Through it all, NCJW/CLE volunteers did not shrink into powerlessness. Instead, to protest against the atrocities of immigration detention camps, we co-organized a rally to close the camps that attracted hundreds of attendees. To help parents that might be facing financial strain, we started a free and discreet community resource closet at Bedford Schools. Fighting against injustice and providing a voice to those in need is what we've done for 125 years.

And then came COVID-19. The onslaught of the pandemic was shocking for everyone. But we knew, once we took our eyes off the TV Screen, the need in the community was going to be even greater than before and that we needed to rally. So, using our voice and our collective strength, we got creative. Our volunteers sewed and donated over 2,000 masks to health workers and nursing homes; we arranged a drive-through parade outside of Menorah Park to cheer up residents who were feeling isolated, and started running weekly webinars on Zoom to keep our community engaged, connected and a little less alone. And we haven't stopped looking for needs to be filled.

Strong Women, Powerful Voices. That has been NCJW/CLE's heritage for 125 years. We don't have a crystal ball to portend the future, but we do know that whatever the world throws at us, NCJW/CLE will be standing strong and ready.

That, dear reader, is a testament to all of you. We are so grateful every day to be standing alongside such strong, powerful women (and men).

In gratitude,

  
Elaine Geller  
President

  
Mindi Axner  
Executive Director