

Mark Hirshberg

JP jpupdates.com/2016/09/26/jewish-organizations-unite-to-tackle-poverty/

A community service fair addressing the issue of poverty in the Jewish community took place at the JCC of Washington Heights-Inwood Sunday, and was co-sponsored by The Workmen's Circle, NYC Council Members Ydanis Rodriguez and Mark Levine, the Washington Heights-Inwood JCC, the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, and the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit.

Larry Moskowitz, the Social Justice Director of the Workmen's Circle, told JP at the event that 45% of Jewish children in the area live in poor households. Moskowitz noted that "support has grown" in efforts to tackle the issue of poverty within the Jewish community, adding that a Community Service Fair held at the Washington Heights Y in March attracted up to 300 people.

The Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty was also represented. Founded in 1972, the organization offers help to needy New Yorkers, including seniors, for whom it provides free home repairs. To be eligible, New Yorkers must be 60 years or older, reside in NYC, and show financial need, according to metcouncil.org.

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer told JP that the Met Council is a "lifeline" for many poor Jewish seniors in New York. Brewer said that NY City Council has worked with the JCC to address the issue of poverty, and that there are many organizations working to alleviate the crisis.

Another venerable organization participating in the event was the Legal Aid Society. Founded in 1876, the Legal Aid Society is the largest and oldest non-profit U.S. organization which provides free legal services for clients unable to afford legal counsel. A representative of the Legal Aid Society said the organization advocates for tenants who need repairs from their landlords, and those who are in danger of eviction.

The Workmen's Circle, which co-sponsored the event, is a Jewish non-profit organization promoting social and economic justice, Yiddish language studies, and Jewish community and education. The organization, which was formed in 1900, says it is "not defined by or confined by religious beliefs. For us, identity and belonging are found in our heritage, values, ideals, language, cultural traditions and celebrations. We have been cultivating a proudly progressive, diverse, and inclusive community rooted in Jewish culture and social action for more than a century."

According to sobering statistics compiled in a 2012 UJA-Federation report, one in five Jewish households in the New York area is poor, while one in 10 Jewish households are near poor.

The report found that one in four people out of all those living in the New York area live in a poor household, compared with "one in five people living in a poor Jewish neighborhood."

"The breadth and depth of Jewish poverty in the greater New York City area is staggering, and deeply concerning," Ann Toback, Executive Director of the Workmen's Circle, said in a statement.

"Since our founding more than a century ago, the Workmen's Circle has focused on helping generations of families overcome the obstacles of poverty, and to experience better and more beautiful lives."