

**Kol Ami Board Reports
For May 7, 2024 Annual Meeting**

PROFESSIONAL STAFF REPORTS

ECP: Merav Veetal, Director

The ECP had a wonderful and successful school year! We started the year off with 12 classes and over 110 children ranging in age from 2-5. Additionally, we held two semesters of our First Friends program. The ECP children thrived this year with more programming and additional opportunities for family/community involvement. Overall, it was a wonderful year in the ECP. Below are some key events that took place throughout the year:

- We opened in September with 12 working classes. One Transitional 2's class, three 2's classes, four 3's classes, three 4's classes and one 5's class.
- The staff had a wonderful transition back to school with an informative and fun Welcome Back Staff Meeting/Breakfast.
- The teachers had home visits and classroom visits to ease the separation process.
- The teachers made meaningful connections with the children from the very first day and within the first few weeks of school each class formed their own special community.
- We happily welcomed Rabbi Fenster and Morah Gavi to the ECP community. They have infused the ECP with a new sense of enthusiasm and joy and a sense of community. Morah Gavi is the new ECP Jewish curriculum coordinator.
- This year we continued our successful after-school programming and families have been very happy and grateful. The registration has been almost entirely full every semester. We offered two options per day for families – a stay n play and a specialty class.
- The children enjoyed apples and honey over Rosh Hashana, and the children heard the shofar being blown.
- Rabbi Fenster and Cantor Danny met with each class to show the children a Lulav and Etrog.
- The ECP continued our tradition of celebrating Shabbat as a whole school community by attending an outdoor service led by Rabbi Fenster and Cantor Danny. All the classes and their families gathered together and everyone has a wonderful time reciting the blessings, singing Shabbat songs, and dancing along to the bubble bus.

- The ECP held an in-person parent night, which was a very successful evening. Parents have requested more in person events to strengthen the community feel. Merav presented to the families and then the parents heard from the individual teachers in their children's classrooms.
- We held a Sukkot Parent evening spearheaded by Joele Levenson that was very successful and enjoyed by all who attended.
- Once the holidays ended we started offering tours for prospective families during school hours.
- The ECP held in person Parent Teacher Conferences. Parents appreciated the opportunity of coming into the school and meeting the teachers in person. Having parents in person further increased the home/school connection.
- The ECP held a hybrid in person/virtual Book Fair. We had many parent volunteers and the fair was a successful fundraiser for the ECP.
- The ECP, in partnership with the Temple held a wonderful Hanukkah event. Many ECP families attended and a great time was had by all. Our ECP families particularly enjoyed the art crafts and bouncy castles.
- With the support and approval of the Board the ECP made tuition increases for the 2024/2025 school year.
- Hillary Seif continued on as the ECP Chairperson. Hillary's role is to support the ECP, teachers and families. We are thrilled to have her as our partner!
- Registration for new families opened in December with significant interest from prospective families.
- The ECP held a school-wide Havdallah. We had a great turnout and all the families commented on how wonderful it was. We had pizza, crafts and Canter Danny and Leah leading the blessing.
- We have been so grateful to have Pam Pass come into our classrooms and teach the children once a week. Pam has made a wonderful connection with both our ECP children and their families.
- The ECP summer program registration has been off to a great start. We have a lot of children registered and many interested families inquiring every day.
- The ECP is holding our first mini-camp in the two weeks between school ending and ECP camp starting. Over 30 families have registered so far and we expect a few more families to still register.
- The ECP Staff had three in-service days throughout the year. Staff development is important for teachers to grow and learn best practice and current educational philosophies and practice.
- The ECP had a week-long celebration for Purim, including crazy hat day, pajama day, beach day, and costume day. Morah Gavi led an experiential "back in time" visit to Persia to learn about the Purim story. Cantor Danny and Rabbi Fenster led an abridged version of the Megillah for the ECP so the children could hear it and

have the opportunity to shake their school-made groggers when hearing Haman's name.

- In partnership with the Temple the ECP held a fun filled Purim celebration with bouncy castles, obstacle course, and carnival games. It was a very successful and fun event.
- The ECP had to close for half a day due to a main water break in White Plains.
- All of our ECP classes celebrated Tu B'shvat - the birthday of the trees. Some classes made nature based crafts, others made fruit skewers, and one class even baked a birthday cake for the trees.
- The ECP celebrated "Share the Love Week" by recognizing all the Kol Ami Staff and thanking everyone for all they do for all of us.
- Our in school specials have been an integral part of the program and really enhances the day for the children. Our specials include: Music with Shara, Music with Dolores, the Weinberg Nature Center animal class, Israeli Dance with Shmulik, Seven Species with Chef Andrea, Torah Alive with Julie, Sports and Movement, and Teva with Candice.
- In celebration of Oral Hygiene month, our 3s, 4s and 5s welcomed Dr. Taryn Katz, an ECP parent, to lead a presentation on the importance of dental hygiene.
- We were so excited to hold our first ECP Gala fundraiser at for the ECP Parents. The Araj family and Cindy Zeiman were honored and a huge showing of families and staff attended. We combined the gala with our annual art show. Each class made an original work of art and it was displayed beautifully for all to see. We are so appreciative to those that volunteered and attended. We The night was a fun night out for all.
- The ECP held a family Movie Day for all ECP children/families. The event was well attended and enjoyed by all.
- We celebrated Yom Ha'atzmaut by "travelling" to Israel. Clergy, Temple Staff, and congregants volunteered their time to help us run stations giving the children an incredible experience and lifelong memories.
- We held several family Shabbat Celebrations throughout the year. Rabbi Fenster, Cantor Danny, and Morah Gavi led a Shabbat service/concert and everyone had a wonderful time.
- We continue to have a strong and active Parent Association.
- We are so grateful for having Sarah Akst and Shana Greenwald as our PTA co-presidents. They continuously support both the ECP and the ECP families.
- We held a Friendship Ceremony/Graduation with Clergy, ECP Staff, Temple Staff and Parents and families. The children sang songs and received diplomas.
- The ECP held an end of year Family Fun Day for families with bouncy castles, a DJ, ice-pops, a concert with Danny and Itamar and lots of crafts. Everyone had a wonderful time.

- Our 2024/2025 class registration is filling up quickly with more tours being set every day.

Personally, I am so grateful for all the support and guidance I've received this year. This is the first year where the ECP Families have come together to form a cohesive, strong and loving community. I have enjoyed working with the ECP Team, the Kol Ami Staff and the ECP Families and I am looking forward to another wonderful year ahead!

[Executive Director: Jess Lorden](#)

Over the past year, we — the Kol Ami community — came together as we worshipped, learned, celebrated, grieved, and engaged, with an elevated commitment to caring for one another, and ourselves. Let us pause for a moment in gratitude and pride for our incredible community. May we continue to build on the strength and wisdom we have gained.

Here are highlights of the key projects, programs and events on which we focused this year:

Membership: Membership is now a full-year process. While the greatest number of new members join us in the late Summer and early Fall, we do tours and welcome new members throughout the year. I am pleased that our membership is now stable and growing slightly.

Rabbi Transition – Rabbi Fenster: It has been a joy to welcome Rabbi Fenster to Kol Ami and to support him in a successful transition. The installation weekend which began with an ECP Shabbat service and breakfast, continued with a beautiful Kabbalat Shabbat service and a full and festive oneg, the Torah study and luncheon on Saturday, the Shira Ami community sing-a-long and Havdalah service on Saturday evening, and concluded with the Religious School pancake breakfast on Sunday provided an opportunity for every member of our community to participate in a once-in-a-generation special weekend.

Rabbi Transition – Rabbi Fisher: It was an honor and pleasure to participate in the interview process for the final candidates for our associate rabbi position. The committee did a thorough and wonderful job and I am thrilled with the selection of Rabbi Fisher. Rabbi Fisher has joined us for calendaring and planning for next year. In addition, I am supporting Lisa Borowitz, Ellen Litt and Juliana Stone in planning appropriate events for congregants of all ages to meet Rabbi Fisher.

Israel: Since the start of the war on Israel, I have been working with Rabbi Fenster, our co-Presidents, and our Israel committee on bringing a series of meaningful programs to Kol Ami; programs to share information, provide support to community members, demonstrate solidarity with Israel, and provide joy in the face of darkness. I am pleased to share that we collected and sent to Israel 8 large duffel bags with over 400 pounds of much needed supplies for IDF soldiers.

Security and Security Grants: Security is a daily focus item for us in particular since October 7th. This year we implemented additional physical enhancements to our buildings and grounds with funds received from two New York State grants. We are working with Global Operations, a security firm, to apply for an additional federal grant and an additional state grant. I have been attending regular security briefings and we held security briefings for our Trustees and congregants. We participated with the 5 Temples of White Plains as well as Elliot Forshheimer, CEO of the Westchester Jewish Council, to meet with leaders of the FBI and the White Plains Police Department for a tabletop security exercise which we then repeated with our Trustees. I continue to be pleased with the support of local law enforcement with whom we meet regularly for updates on our security protocols and who are always willing to be present at Kol Ami when requested.

Kol Ami Celebrates 100 Years: Being involved in celebrating Kol Ami's 100th anniversary has been joyful and educational. Highlights of the year include our Hanukkah kick-off dinner, the Havdalah service and reception at the Salvation Army (our original home), preparing our history boards, our Purim celebration, our second seder, the film project which is capturing our history, the gorgeous quilt in which 100 congregants participated, our second seder, and our May 16th gala which is our concluding event. Hundreds of congregants have participated in the various activities. Special thanks to co-chairs Jess and Josh Wagner and the following staff members and volunteers who played a key role in one or more of the above-referenced projects: Fern Schwartz; Sheryl Brady; Lisa Borowitz; Petra Boykoff; Barbara Wexler; Erika Vujnovich; Zoe Fuentes; Amy Goldstein; Michelle Kroin; Alison Adler; and Zoe Fuentes.

Annual Meeting: I worked with our co-Presidents to prepare all aspects of our Annual Meeting, including the election of Rabbi Fisher.

High Holy Days: Significant planning goes into the High Holy Days to ensure the clergy reception, all worship services, and programs go off without a hitch. This is particularly true in a year with a new Rabbi. I am so pleased that our tradition of beautiful and meaningful services continued under Rabbi Fenster's leadership. I While we had robust live streaming for one service every day, more congregants returned for in-person worship services. We received wonderful feedback about all elements of our High Holy

Days worship services and programs. Our Simchat Torah service was once again well-attended. Thank you to Ernestina who helped me decorate the Sukkah. Thank you to everyone who participated in our services and supported our programs.

Other Holidays – Hanukkah and Purim: In December we enjoyed a very special, intergenerational and community-wide dinner and program for Hanukkah with over 400 congregants in attendance. In March we shared a fantastic community experience for Purim for congregants of all ages. The carnival was the most well attended in years: for dinner we went through 80 boxes of pizza, for dessert we ate 1,000 hamantashen, and the Megillah reading and spiel were so crowded that the 120 extra seats we had ready in the social hall were mostly full. We also collected over \$650 to donate to two worthy charities.

Yom Hashoah: I am thrilled that Rabbi Fenster joined me in representing Kol Ami at the Westchester County Yom HaShoah Memorial Commemoration ceremony.

Programming/Community Building: We have been incredibly busy with more programming than ever before. In addition to the Synaplex events referenced below, we worked hard to ensure the success of countless Kol Ami and community-wide programs, in particular programs pertaining to Israel. New this year was a Family Fun Day which was such a tremendous success that it has already been calendared for next year. I am also pleased to share that several new KASA programs commenced this year.

Synaplex: We are very excited to support Rabbi Fenster in his first year of Synaplex programming. We are already planning for next year's programs.

Tot Shabbat: Our Tot Shabbat program under the leadership of Joele Levenson continues to grow and thrive. This year Joele introduced new programs including a 100th celebration for our tots, PJ library and more. Next year we will offer more Tot Shabbat programs including Havdalah programs.

Cerini Review: We worked closely with the team at Cerini & Associates to provide the documents required for the annual review and to answer all questions. In December Cerini & Associates presented to the Executive Committee its finding regarding its annual review of our financial records. The full Board heard the report at the February meeting.

Budget: I worked closely with Merav and Pam on their 2024-25 budgets for the ECP and RS, respectively, and also worked with Steve Brady and Simon on the admin and operations aspects of the budget. Part of this work included working with other

Executive Directors to ensure we understand our dues and tuition structures as compared to other Temples in our area. I worked closely with David Seif on preparing the overall budget. Further, in support of this year's budget, I worked with David Seicol and David Seif on an agreement to protect our pricing for natural gas and electric charges. The one-year agreement provides attractive rates, stability and predictability for our budget.

Supporting the ECP: I supported Merav in the re-accreditation of the ECP. In addition, I am very appreciative of the work of Bob Ziff and Maggy Weber who assumed the responsibility of doing a monthly walk-through of the ECP classrooms and hallways to determine if any repairs are needed so that we can maintain the building in top shape.

Nominating Committee: With input from the full staff, I supported Hank Rouda in the nominating committee process by identifying potential trustees.

Staff Openings: We are actively interviewing for a candidate to take on our marketing/communications/admin role. We are also interviewing for a new Director of Youth Engagement.

Technology Upgrades: We are so pleased to be working with Kevin Rosenzweig on our technology upgrades which are now in process. We also appreciate the continued support of Michael Elkin who has helped us with technology upgrades and security.

Confirmation: I enjoy working with Rabbi Fenster and the parents of the Confirmands to ensure the success of the Confirmation process. This year's Confirmation dinner/blessings and Shavuot service are scheduled for June 10 and 11, respectively.

2026 and 2027 B'nai Mitzvah: In the Fall, Pam Pass and I prepared the schedule of the 2026 b'nai mitzvah services and disseminated the information to parents. This Spring, Rabbi Fenster and I will meet with parents of children who will become bar/bat mitzvah in 2027. We began the process with them and will send dates to these families in the Fall.

Rentals: I am pleased to share that facility rentals have now exceeded pre-COVID levels. The rental of the gym and outside parties are the main drivers of our facility revenue.

Kol Ami at the Movies: Once again Dave and I taught our winter 7th grade elective in which we teach about Jewish values through watching and discussing blockbuster movies. Our class met four Sunday mornings in the Winter/Spring.

I am grateful for our amazing community and look forward to celebrating this 100th anniversary and for many years to come!

Religious School: Pam Pass, Director

We are completing another outstanding year, filled with joyous exploration, creative learning, and meaningful curricula. Our students continue to thrive this year, meaningfully connecting with each other and the larger Kol Ami community.

Our talented Religious School teachers continue to be warm, passionate, and inviting, creating rich lessons that draw in our students. Their enthusiasm, dedication, and willingness to create positive, meaningful, joyful, and connecting experiences for our children, week after week is inspiring. They are a stellar staff who deserve much gratitude.

Our class experiences continue to be our best enrollment tool – every family who had a trial class registered for Religious School and joined Kol Ami!

So many contributed to our success—clergy, staff, board members, parents, and Kol Ami congregants all dedicated their time and talents to our school.

ENROLLMENT HIGHLIGHTS

As of March 21, we have **296** students in our PreK-Grade 12 Religious School! This is **19** students above last year's enrollment and includes a whopping **74** new students. We also retained students at a slightly higher rate than last year.

Between tuition and dues, these families contribute greatly to Kol Ami's financial success and stability. Notably this year—new families have participated in our Religious School and greater Kol Ami communities in greater numbers than any other years in recent memory.

SPECIAL RELIGIOUS SCHOOL ACTIVITIES HIGHLIGHTS

~All grades:

- Sukkot Festival with Rabbi Fenster meet & greets
- Family Shabbats
- Book Clubs
- Israeli Dance and Music
- Pancakes & Pajamas breakfast as the final piece of Rabbi Fenster's Installation Weekend
- Year-end *Zimriyah* with new Religious School Museum

~Individual grades:

- **Kindergarten:** Leveled-up Shabbat Boxes and “My Jewish Me” Binders
- **Grade 1:** Shema & Modeh/Modah Ani Pillowcases and Synagogue Tour
- **Grade 2:** What’s in a Name? and Torah Cover Project
- **Grade 3:** Archaeological Dig, Sleepover, Book Club, and Welcome to Israel! Art Program
- **Grade 4:** Sephardic Celebración Program, B’nai Mitzvah Info Meeting for parents
- **Grade 5:** Holocaust Survivor Speakers, New Kristallnacht Art Installation, Challah making, and Shabbat Candlestick workshop
- **Grade 6:** Family History Project, 4 B’nai Mitzvah Workshops including a Group Mitzvah Outing with Grassroots Grocery
- **Chaverim:** The Chaverim Program continues to be the only special needs program of its kind among all the Westchester Synagogues. (In fact, all the other synagogues are looking for a way to include this community in their Religious Schools.)
- **Grade 7:** Yad making Workshop, Mikvah visit, and Death & Mourning Program, plus new Tech elective with Zoe Fuentes (in case you were wondering who all the tweens were learning from/helping Zoe during Friday night services).
- **Grade 8:** Holocaust Survivor Speaker, Kol Ami Holocaust Museum, create and lead the community Yom HaShoah Service

ISRAEL HIGHLIGHTS

~On October 8th, the entire school came together to create a collaged Israeli flag filled with hearts, Jewish stars, and doves. You can still see it on the Bulletin Board in the main hallway connecting both classroom wings.

~A new Welcome to Israel! Art program, incorporating meaningful and joyful art COLLAGES, had our 3rd graders happily connecting to Israel through beautiful Tu B’Shevat and Israeli city original, collaborative art.

~We had a special Israeli speaker join our 7th and 8th grade classes in October, talking about her strong desire to return to Israel, even though there was now a war. This personal dialogue impacted our students’ first person understanding of the meaning of Israel.

~Our 7th graders learned about Israel through myriad resources: curated Instagram reels, a *shinshinim* visit, art, Israeli sports heroes, and more. This rich learning piqued their curiosity about and heightened their connection to Israel and led to rich learning.

~Our 8th-12th graders attended a community program led by Rabbi Josh Weinberg (VP of the URJ), Shoshana Dweck (VP of Social Justice for WRJ/Co-chair of ARZENU), and Hank Rouda who shared insights and reflections on their solidarity trip to Israel.

~Our school partnered with Sisterhood to participate in the *Kalaniyot* project – In commemoration of the October 7 massacre, our 7-12th grade students painted clay flowers representing those that bloom in Israel (*kalaniyot*) in memory of those who were killed on this day and since. This will become part of a memorial in White Plains.

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL-ADJACENT INITIATIVES HIGHLIGHTS

- **DEI** – Zoë Shannon, Jess Lorden, and I have been working with our new DEI co-chairs (Rebecca Bergman, Genna Farley, Suzanne Lasser, and Howard Rodstein) and making significant inroads at Kol Ami. Details can be found in the DEI committee report.
- **ECP** – “Squid Pam” has been very happy visiting 4s and 5s ECP classrooms weekly, bringing a variety of fun Jewish activities around prayer, Jewish holidays, and Hebrew. The 4s and 5s picked up the words and signing of the *Shema* really quickly! We enjoyed piling invisible apples on their heads when we read “Eser Tapuchim al Harosh” (our Hebrew counting version of “10 Apples Up on Top”). We’ve also had fun singing “If You’re Happy and You Know it Clap your *Yadaim*,” “*Sivivon, Sov, Sov, Sov*” (Chanukah) and being spinning dreidels, Lacova Sheli Shalosh Pinot (My hat has 3 corners-Purim), and “Frogs are jumping everywhere” (Passover). Learning to count to *eser* (10) in Hebrew led the way to learning magic, playing games, and creating our own counting percussion groups. Visiting these 4 classes is a highlight to my week.
- **Young Families** – Joele Levenson and I partnered throughout the year on activities that combine Religious School events with our Young Families crew. Of note: our Sukkot Festival, Morning of Fun!—when we invite ECP 4s/5s families and others on Joele’s list to experience a Religious School Sunday morning, sharing the Religious School’s Passover materials, and more.
- **Essentials** – What a rewarding experience! Rabbi Fenster and I taught those interested in learning about the basics of synagogue practices and holidays. This was a class of eager learners and connected doers! One student related that she finally felt that she belonged during her younger daughter’s Bat Mitzvah service and that she could participate fully. Others have shared ways that their learning is enhancing their Jewish experience at home and at Kol Ami.
- **Sisterhood** – Adriene Klein, Ruth Berkowitz, and I found multiple ways to collaborate and plan events that appeal to Religious School families/students and Sisterhood members. Our joint Mishloach Manot fundraising had its most

successful year! Our partnership on the Kalaniyot project is a model for future collaborations. More details can be found in the Sisterhood committee report.

- **Religious School Parent Network** – We continued to have much anticipated and well-attended Parent Network events that provided unique and valued opportunities to connect to other Religious School families and to Kol Ami, and to find fun on cold winter weekends! I happily work with Charlene Bodner, chair of this committee, in an advisory role. More details can be found in the RSPN committee report.

SPECIAL THANKS TO...

- ...Gina Rubin, Religious School assistant, who continues to do a phenomenal job in her support role—the Religious School doesn't run without her!
- ...our Religious School parents who have been engaged, connected, appreciative, and supportive.
- ... Jess Lorden and Alison Adler, who support our school with enthusiasm and trust
- ...Zoe Fuentes, who gave us exceptional tech guidance and support
- ...the Board Volunteers, who provide show up every Sunday and help out with whatever is needed

COMMITTEE REPORTS

[Be The Light](#) - Ronnie Cohn/Debbi Marcus/Steve Brady

Be the Light has focused on two primary activities - getting out the vote and the NY RAC Climate Change initiative. In the fall of 2023 in coordination with the national RAC, individuals at Kol Ami wrote and mailed 3,000 postcards to residents of the State of Ohio providing critical voting information regarding the referendum on reproductive rights. In the winter we joined Planned Parenthood in Albany for a day of advocacy and in February we hosted Reproductive Shabbat in concert with Scarsdale Tremont and Woodlands synagogues. We currently are preparing for a 4,000 postcard campaign to get out the vote for both the NY ERA and national/local elections in November. Debbi Marcus currently sits on the steering committee for NY RAC's initiative to support the passing of the ERA. Actions beyond post carding will include education in our communities and outreach to clergy.

[Benefactors](#) - Jason & Melissa Eisenberg

- On the evening of March 25th, we had a small Benefactor get-together to hear a presentation from Yossi Klein Halevi, a Senior Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, titled *War in Israel: Reflecting Back and Looking Ahead*
- We are currently reaching out to Benefactors to remind them to register for the Centennial Celebration Gala
- As in the past, we will be sending out a letter to Benefactors in the membership materials (typically sent in early June) thanking them for their continued support
- We are discussing with Jess doing something in June around Shavuot - perhaps deliver something small (like a small cheesecake - traditional for Shavuot) with a message of appreciation/gratitude. More to come on this

[Coachman](#) - Alison Gilmore

Fall

We had a busy fall, with our school supply drive for Coachman children and then Thanksgiving. We met our goal of providing pies for Thanksgiving at the Coachman Family Shelter. White Plains Mayor Tom Roach welcomed everyone and we had an abundance of volunteers in the spirit of the holiday. We also gifted beautiful hand-knit hats and scarves from our KASA knitters group which was a new offering this year and was much loved by our guests! The Early Childhood Program provided cards and candy for a sweet send off. In addition to the regular KA communication channels, we leveraged social media to reach more people. A big thank you to the religious school and the entire Kol Ami community for their generosity and support.

Winter

Thanks to our KA community, children and teens from the Coachman Family Shelter and the Ossining Children's Center, received holiday gifts. This was especially well received by the Ossining Children's Center. We continued the use of social media to boost participation for this gift drive.

Spring

Planning is underway for the annual spring BBQ for Coachman families! The BBQ will be held on Sunday, May 19, from 5pm to 7pm. We secured buses (donated again so generously from National Express/White Plains Bus) to bring our guests to/from Kol Ami. We are reaching out to the KA community for volunteers with various aspects of planning/execution for the BBQ (shopping, grilling, etc.). Please join us if you can!

Looking forward

In the spirit of Tikkun Olam, we hope to explore expansion of our outreach and support beyond the Coachman Center with other organizations.

College Youth - Carrie Barotz/Judy McEvoy

The Kol Ami College committee sent Rosh Hashanah greetings to college students. We did not include gift cards this year as we felt too many went unused in past years. We helped disseminate information about AJC events, both to college students and to parents of college students.

DEI - Rebecca Bergman/Suzanne Lasser/Howard Rodstein/Genna Flemming Farley

- Providing additional fact finding group conversations; 3 were held
- Identifying activities, including speakers, who can share more about LGBTQ matters across the year. Options to celebrate Pride month and beyond.
- Workshop on gender shared by Zoe
- Jewish online DEI training shared by Zoe & Jes; 90 minute training that explores 5 marginalized communities within the larger Jewish population; LGBTQ+ Jews, Jews of Color, Jews with Disabilities, Fat Jews & Jews in interfaith relationships.
- Adopting a roadmap to help with our work on 'belonging' at Kol Ami and making everyone feel welcome

Food Pantry - Sara Elkin/Bob Ziff

Our Mission:

The mission of the Kol Ami Food Pantry is to provide food and support to all members our community in need. When individuals walk through our doors, they are greeted with warmth and respect, finding not only nourishment but also a welcoming space where they feel accepted and heard.

General Information:

Weekly, we serve a consistent flow of customers, ranging from 45 to 65 individuals, who visit our pantry. We assemble 130-180 bags per week for distribution, reaching local families, several White Plains Public Schools, St. Pius Church, Calvary Baptist Church, and our congregation during Shabbat services or when needed. Our operating hours are Tuesdays from 4:30-5:30 PM and Thursdays from 11:30 AM -1:30 PM.

Inventory:

Most of our food and dry goods are sourced from Feeding Westchester, much of it obtained at no cost. Weekly deliveries include fresh produce, dairy, frozen meat, canned goods, pasta, rice, soups, household items, and holiday turkeys. We are the fortunate

recipients of gluten and dairy-free baked goods from *By the Way Bakery* as part of their zero waste program. During the summer, Congregation Sons of Israel in Briarcliff provides abundant fresh produce, greatly appreciated by us and our customers.

Grants:

This year the food pantry received a \$10,000 grant from Westchester County. These funds were used to purchase bags for packing, a freezer, and a great deal of food to supplement what we were able to procure from Feeding Westchester. We also received several small grants from Shop Rite, administered through Feeding Westchester.

Drives/Collections:

Stop and Shop: In September, we joined other Westchester food pantries in the “**Feeding Our Families**” Food Drive organized by Feeding Westchester. We spent the day outside Stop and Shop in Eastchester. Through heat, humidity and thunderstorms, our dedicated crew of volunteers collected over 1500 lbs. of food, hygiene, and household items for our pantry. We were even featured on News 12!

Thanksgiving: Both the Ridgeway and Kodomono Kuni Schools held food drives in November. Together they collected approximately 500 pounds of food for the Kol Ami Food Pantry.

Oil Drive: Like the Maccabees, our Chanukah Oil Drive was small but mighty. We collected about 40+ bottles of oils and condiments. We hope to make this an annual tradition.

Soup: At the time of the Super Bowl, Ridgeway School held a “Soup-er Bowl Drive.” The students competed to see which grade could collect the most cans of soup. In the end, they donated over 900 cans of soup to us.

Diaper Drive: In the early spring, we asked the congregation to contribute diapers for families in need. They came through for us. The parents who received the baby products were thrilled!

Technology:

In April, we began implementing a digital sign-in/tracking program called Link2Feed, provided by Feeding Westchester. This transition was facilitated with support from Feeding Westchester, including a Chromebook and barcode scanner.

Kol Ami Boutique:

A dedicated volunteer turned client, Jackie, became an integral member of our team this year. Jackie took the initiative to establish the “Kol Ami Boutique” within the pantry.

She initiated the "Kol Ami Boutique" within the pantry, organizing and distributing clothing and household items to our clients. This is a clear demonstration of the depth of community engagement fostered here.

Our Team

Our pantry operates through the dedication of an exceptional team of wonderful volunteers, including Kol Ami congregants, students, and community members.

For all of their hard work over the past year, we offer a huge thank you to:

Rebecca Berrebi
Andrea Birenbaum
Kerry Blinder
Lisa Bostrom
Bonnie Eilen
Lori Gordon
Gene Kava
Jodi Klein
Nate Moscowitz
Charlotte Papir
Erica Papir
Audrey Prashker
Julia Prober
Jackie Vazquez
Robert Vazquez
Maggy Webber
Gail Young
Carole Ziff

Special recognition goes to Robert, a neurodivergent adult, who consistently assists with deliveries and aiding other clients. Several other clients also actively contribute to our operations, offering their skills in bag packing, translation, and cleanup without hesitation.

In addition to our regular volunteers, this year, students from both the ECP and Kodomono Kuni came to the pantry. They learned about food insecurity, *tikkun olam* and packed bags. It was a wonderful experience for all involved and we hope to continue these partnerships.

We would like to design and install some level of microgrid so that we can “island” during times when Con Ed’s grid is down. A micro grid involves numerous technologies such as solar, battery storage, and more. This would allow us to be a source of sustainability, reliability, and resiliency for the community. Just imagine, when the power is out all around us, we can seek sanctuary at Kol Ami where we will be able to charge our devices, have a hot meal, and spend time with our friends and family in a well-lit and heated/air-conditioned space. By submitting our Climate Action Plan to Adamah, Kol Ami is now eligible for matching grants and low/no interest loans to implement our climate action plan.

On our Earth Week Shabbat (just a week ago), we screened a movie for the congregation after Shabbat services called, “**Common Ground: Cultivating the connection between Faith, Food, and Climate.**” The film is a winner of the Tribeca Film Festival, and is about how regenerative agriculture can help heal the soil, our health and the planet while creating abundant food supplies and restoring lost ecosystems. The film profiles a hopeful and uplifting movement of people trying to fix our broken food system. Daryl Moss, a Kol Ami Green Team member and our in-house food expert, moderated a discussion about food and the food supply after the film.

[Israel Action Committee - Rachael & Moshe Arenstein](#)

Kalanyiot - Three sessions were held to paint the ceramic flowers that will become part of a 5 Synagogues of White Plains art installation marking the events of October 7. Kalaniyot, anemones, bloom in Southern Israel in the area around Gaza at this time of year. Kol Ami is participating in this event organized by the Westchester Mishlachat. One of the artists, Yael Frankel came on February 28 to talk about the project provide instruction. About 100 people including Sisterhood and KA teens painted that evening. The remaining flowers were painted by the Board and five families as part of the March 17 Monthly Mitzvah event. The flowers will be installed at Temple Israel Center (TIC) agreed to dedicate a significant piece of land on its property, Mamaroneck Ave, and their staff and maintenance people are already preparing the ground and right after Pesach we will be able to start “planting” the flowers. The **special dedication event will be held on Yom Hazikaron, May 13th, at 12-1pm.** Nisim Luke, father of Shani Luke z”l, who was kidnaped and murdered on the Nova festival and her body is still held in Gaza will speak at the dedication. Please stop by the installation even if you can’t make the dedication event.

Parents Circle – Families Forum, Speakers from the group were scheduled to speak with the congregation via Zoom on April 14 but the event had to be rescheduled and we hope to have representatives from the group join us in person in the fall. The Parents Circle is a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization made up of more than 700 bereaved

families. Their common bond is that they have lost a close family member to the conflict. But instead of choosing revenge, they have chosen a path of reconciliation.

Koby Mandell Fundraiser - Amongst the other Israel related events, the Comedy for Koby event on March 17 to benefit the Koby Mandell Foundation raised \$38,000 for the foundation. The Five comedians performed for a crowd of 500 attendees. KMF said that this was one of their most successful events to date. Thank you to Jess, Alison, Zoe, Rabbi Fenster and the custodial crew who helped make this event a success.

Shinshinim 2024-25 - Rachael and Pam Pass met with Shachar Liran-Hanan, the Westchester Shlichah and Karen Avneri who oversees the shinshin program to discuss plans for having a shinshin/it next year at Kol Ami. Pam submitted an application for 2024-25.

Yom Ha'atzmaut - Plans are underway to participate in the pan-Westchester Yom Ha'atzmaut program with the Westchester Mishlachah on May 19.

Sister Synagogue in Israel - Hank Rouda has arranged for Kol Ami to be matched with a sister synagogue in Israel. More details to come.

Israel Day Parade – Debra Asher Zitrin is coordinating the Israel Day Parade to take place in NYC on June 2. Debra will coordinate with the Westchester Jewish Council on organizing a Westchester marching group. She will keep Jess, Judy and Rachael updated on planning.

[Membership](#) - Pat Grossman/Alison Adler

The 2023-24 year has been filled with growth, engagement, and community building, reflecting our goals of being a warm, welcoming and vibrant synagogue community for all members.

Membership Growth:

The year began with a significant milestone as we welcomed more than 50 new families into our synagogue community. This achievement is particularly noteworthy given the rabbinic transition we experienced, showcasing our resilience and appeal to new members. We are proud to be the only Westchester area synagogue that has experienced a continued upward trend in membership over the past three years.

New Membership Committee:

To enhance our membership efforts, a new Member Relations committee was formed with Janet Hershey, Ilene Miller, and Pat Grossman as designated chairs. Their dedication and hard work have been instrumental in creating a warm and inclusive environment for new and existing members alike.

Welcoming Initiatives:

Our committee initiated welcoming gift baskets for all incoming members, which included essential items for Shabbat celebrations and heartfelt notes from our Temple Co-Presidents and our Member Relations Committee Chairs. This personal touch has helped new members feel valued and connected from the start.

New Member Dinner:

Our November new member dinner was a resounding success, with over 200 people in attendance. The evening was thoughtfully organized, including a pre-neg for young families, engaging musical entertainment, a meaningful Shabbat service, and a festive dinner that fostered camaraderie and joy.

Centennial Celebration Kickoff:

We kicked off our Centennial Celebration with a Hannukah dinner that saw record attendance of over 300 people. The event was a true reflection of our vibrant community spirit, with Rabbi Fenster leading a rollicking game of Family Feud. Our Member Relations Committee worked tirelessly that evening to ensure that everyone was well fed and able to make connections with each other and experience the joy that permeated the room.

International Potluck Dinner:

Our annual International Pot Luck dinner, held in honor of Susan and Paul Davis, was another highlight, showcasing the rich diversity of our community through food, music, and fellowship. The event brought together congregants of all ages and backgrounds, reinforcing our shared values and traditions. We are now focused on creating a centennial cookbook to celebrate our community's culinary heritage, to be released shortly.

Mom's and Dad's Nights Out:

Building off the success of the new member dinner, we partnered with Joele Levenson, our Young Family Ambassador, to plan a Mom's Night Out and Dad's Night Out this winter. The intent was to help new young families and established ones cultivate connections in smaller, more intimate settings. Both evenings were well attended and provided another entry point for community engagement.

Future Plans:

Looking ahead, we are planning to sponsor an outdoor summer concert in July and have some more ideas for innovative programs to further engage and retain members as we move into the 2024-25 year. More details to come!

Overall, the past year has been marked by growth, unity, and meaningful connections within our Kol Ami community. We are grateful for the dedication of our Member Relations committee, and, as we move into the next year, we are excited about the

opportunities to welcome new members, deepen community engagement, and continue our legacy of inclusivity and belonging.

Refugee Resettlement - Rachael Arenstein

The Abedi family participated in Refugee Shabbat in February where Tahmina spoke movingly about her experience working on women's empowerment programming in Afghanistan and how that started her journey to the U.S. as a Special Immigrant Visa holder which is granted to people who performed a service to the U.S.

Tahmina has started a job in April at White Plains hospital. The committee has worked hard to help her with childcare arrangements and Sadaf has started at the YMCA two weeks ago. The Resettlement committee (along with Hitchcock) paid the first month of childcare but, as of April the family will be fully financially self-supporting with the exception of orthodonture payments will continue until she is working full-time.

Non-financial support from the Kol Ami and Hitchcock committee members will continue.

Religious School - Charlene Bodner

In 2023-2024, the RSPN continued to support the Religious School by helping families feel connected to each other, to Religious School Families, and to Kol Ami through fun and meaningful activities. Our Religious School grew this year with many new families across most grades. Our offerings built a strong sense of community, while enabling families to have fun and engage with their children in meaningful activities.

Our Monthly Mitzvah program spearheaded for the 3rd year by Mara Pilavsky organized meaningful activities for our families to perform regular mitzvot throughout the year. We had solid turnout at each event, specifically with our younger school-aged families. We supported the Kol Ami Food Pantry by assembling Lego Kits from previously donated clean, gently used, and new Legos, and by assembling Soup Jars for easy meals at home. The community also painted handmade ceramic *kalanivot* (Israeli national flower) as part of a White Plains art installation marking the events of October 7th. This was the 4th prong—Grades 7-12 Religious School, Sisterhood, our Board, Religious School families—in completing our goal of painting 300 *kalanivot*. This effort was spearheaded across Kol Ami by Rachael Arenstein, and we are grateful our younger students could participate in this important and meaningful activity. Families also helped clean the trails around Kol Ami as part of our broader Kol Ami Earth Day celebration.

The RSPN also hosted the 2nd annual Religious School Indoor Mini Golf fundraiser at Kol Ami with great success! Over 150 participants ranging from Religious School families, broader Kol Ami community, and even some non-members joined in on the fun. Many Kol Ami spaces were transformed into a lively mini golf course where participants of all ages were able to putt, mingle, win prizes, and stay active on what was one of the coldest days of the winter. This was also an opportunity for our 7th graders to support their Mitzvah Project efforts. Caryn Trobvic and Judith Schiamberg were instrumental in bringing this magical wonderland to our community.

We hosted our fan favorite annual S'ips and S'mores Havdalah service which brought together our Religious School families out on another chilly evening to celebrate Havdalah under the stars and over fire pits. We are grateful for offering this beloved activity for the past 4 years with the leadership of the Rosenzweig family.

With many new families joining the Religious School in Grades 2 & 3, we hosted a Meet & Greet to help them transition into the Religious School, connect with one another, and reinforce our cohesive community.

We are incredibly grateful to all the families who have volunteered, led, and participated in our many social and fulfilling activities. The RSPN continues to build upon our meaningful offerings over the years and are excited for what's to come in the future.

[Sisterhood](#) - Ruth Berkowitz/Adriane Klein

Events

- July: Sisterhood summer potluck at Ruth Goldberg's house had an incredible turn out with dozens of women and an abundance of wonderful food. We said good-bye to the outgoing presidents and welcomed the new ones.
- Sept: StapleFest was held on Thursday, Sept 7th at Kol Ami to prepare High Holiday food donation bags and assemble Rosh Hashana gift bags for congregants. We had an amazing turn-out (~ 30 people) and completed all the bags.
- Oct: College speaker and wine & cheese in the sukkah on Monday, Oct 2nd at 7:00. We had a great turn-out with 25 people for the speaker and about 10 additional folks for the sukkah event.
- Oct: Challah making event (to support each other while engaging in Jewish tradition) on Friday, Oct 13th at 12:00 at Susan Arovas's home. Thirteen people attended and were so grateful for the chance to connect.

- Nov: Chicken soup making in the Kol Ami kitchen. About a dozen women participated in the event led by Stacey Gold. Chicken soup made by Sisterhood members has been available for congregants who are sick and in need of a bit of love and warmth. Volunteers from the food pantry and sisterhood members have delivered soup to those who have called in to ask for it.
- Dec: Holiday Boutique at Kol Ami on Sunday December 3rd from 9:00-2:00. We had 24 vendors, ranging from jewelry to cookies to oils to judaica. The event raised over \$1,000 after expenses from table fees, the gift shop and the raffle, and brought together about a dozen volunteers who enjoyed contributing to the event. We had a good turnout of shoppers, especially from 11-12 when religious school got out and families came up to shop.
- Dec: Joint WRT-Kol Ami Sufganiyot tasting for Hanukkah on Tuesday Dec. 5th at 8:00-9:45, with music and candle lighting with Cantor Kleidman. Most attendees were WRT folks, with 4 people from Kol Ami.
- Feb: Sisterhood co-sponsored (with the New Member Committee) the International potluck on Friday Feb. 23. It was a huge success, with over 100 attendees and so much amazing food and fun.
- Feb: Flower painting, organized by Rachael Arenstein, for a local art installation to commemorate the lives lost on and due to Oct. 7th. We had about 30 women in attendance, and people loved it.
- March: Many sisterhood volunteers delivered mishloach manot to Congregants for Purim. The mishloach manot funds are split between Sisterhood and the Religious School.

Sponsorships

- Cello player for high holidays (\$2,000)
- Rosh Hashana baskets (\$1,200)
- Religious School petting zoo (\$1,450)
- Bar for gala (\$3,600)
- ECP hanukkah candles (?)
- International potluck dinner (?)
- Installation (\$1,000)
- Seder (\$1,000)

[Technology](#) - Kevin Rosenzweig

Security

- In order to increase security, the main door (School entrance) and Worship entrance access control systems were replaced with a modern access control system that logs video images of people entering the building. User access control is continuously modified as necessary.
- 2 iPads were purchased and implemented for the guards to monitor cameras on the move
- Regular maintenance and issue resolution was provided for security cameras
- Additional views for the security cameras for the guards were created
- VPN access eliminated in favor of file sharing via Microsoft Cloud with Multifactor authentication security

Infrastructure

- 2 old servers were decommissioned to complete the upgrades of the prior year
- A stadium access point was added to the sanctuary area to provide WIFI/internet access to over 1,000 devices at a time to satisfy the need for WIFI access during high holiday services given that the cell phone service in the building is not consistent
- The network was upgraded with 2 new switches to satisfy WIFI and streaming needs
- A new laptop, monitor and other peripherals were purchased for Rabbi Fenster
- Old, ineffective printers were all replaced by the same AIO devices for consistency of support and toner requirements
- Photo printer was added to the youth lounge/ teacher's lounge for ECP teachers to print photos
- A computer was added to the youth lounge/ teacher's lounge for ECP teachers user

Email

- All Kol Ami email was migrated from Gmail platform to Microsoft 365/ Exchange with Multifactor Authentication for security.
- An email security platform, called Proofpoint, was implemented to monitor email threats, zero day viruses and other email security concerns.

File Sharing

- Personal and shared Documents were all moved to the Microsoft cloud with access only via Multifactor Authentication for security

Support

- Remote and onsite tech support was provided by Vicana Systems Corp.

AV

- The sanctuary received 3 new cameras and wiring in time for streaming for the High Holidays

Other

- A data policy was started and in the process of being reviewed.

Young Families – Joele Levenson

Over the past year the role of Young Family Ambassador has grown from its initial focus of a monthly Tot Shabbat program into building a community of Jewish young families through outreach and robust programming. Our young families represent Kol Ami Members, ECP families and local families who choose daycare over preschool, who are looking for Jewish connection on their first step of their children's Jewish journey.

This past year I've started a weekly e-newsletter, The Peek, as a dedicated resource for young families to learn about all the young family happenings at Kol Ami. It highlights programming both for families and adults and can be used as a resource on ways to Stand with Israel.

The year kicked off with a Havdalah and Ice Cream Event to welcome Rabbi Fenster and featured an inflatable water slide and water play culminating in a sweet Havdalah service and Ice Cream treats. It was followed by Family Fun Day at Ridge Road Park. Both events received a great turnout both by young families and volunteers. At Family Fun Day, everyone enjoyed the magician, the bbq, the playground, chalk, ball games and of course the ice cream truck at the end.

High Holy days continue to be celebrated with family services on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and followed closely with the Sukkot Family Festival. In partnership with the Religious School, we welcomed young families to participate at age- appropriate craft tables as well as everything the festival had to offer.

Senior staff all partnered to organize the Hanukkah party and the Purim Carnival with inflatables, crafts and food. Children bounded in at Purim ready for the bounce castle in costume and it was a joy to see their smiling faces.

The centerpiece of the young family programming includes of course Tot Shabbat, with 10 traditional Tot Shabbat mornings filled with music led by our clergy, a nosh, and a craft/open play. Feedback is incredibly positive, evidenced by the great turnout on average of 30 children on any given morning. Shul Shoppers have often commented our Tot Shabbat program is the best in class. This year I added 4 special themed Tot Shabbats partnered with congregants for Challaween (where we made challah's to bake at home), PJ Library Hanukkah Crafts, Kol Ami's

Better Together Teens (where we celebrated Ha MishPacha), and PJ Library Earth Day (where we planted marigold seeds in individual pots to take home).

This year I've added a drop in playgroup for babies 14 months and younger with a caretaker on Friday mornings. It has been wonderful to see the group connect and the babies to develop. They engage in sensory play, bubbles, music and a story. It is amazing to watch them change so quickly almost week to week!

The year wrapped up with a Tot Party celebrating Kol Ami's Centennial Anniversary. It was a huge turnout of over 170 people attending and everyone enjoyed dancing to bandleader Jeff from Ramblin' Dan's Freewheelin' Band, eating pizza and cupcakes, covering themselves in temporary tattoos and glow bracelets, doing a pizza craft and posing for pictures in front of the 100 year balloon backdrop.

Overall, connections are being made and the community is growing. Positive experiences have led to new members, enrollment in summer camp, the ECP program, the First Taste religious school program and Religious School for next year. For others it is providing a positive experience as they begin their Jewish family journey. For me it has been pure joy.

Youth Engagement – Zoe Shannon

I am so grateful for all the things I've learned returning to Congregation Kol Ami. Thank you for the opportunity to engage with your youth & offer meaningful moments - spiritually & academically for our teens.

Over the last two years, I've worked closely with our teen leadership Va'ad to run weekly kehilas. Had the opportunity to continue bringing inter generational programming through being rewarded the Better Together Grant. As well as continued to figure out ways to engage with the larger community through shared experiences like the RAC trip, grassroots grocers, and combined Va'ad trainings. Two exciting successes were the opportunities to engage the younger tween population to help the transition between B Mitzvah and post B Mitzvah engagement through launching a successful Junior Youth Group and creating the Westchester Jewish Basketball Leagues first all girls basketball team for 7th & 8th grade.

I've had the opportunity to spearhead the relaunch of the DEI committee with focus groups to better understand our community's needs. This was an offshoot of an audit we did through Keshet's Shivyon project - an opportunity to reflect on our ability to welcome and make space for Jews with ranging backgrounds, identities, and abilities. Along with Hitchcock Presbyterian Church, Westchester Youth Alliance, and New era creative space, thanks to the hard work of Abbe Marcus in collaboration with Howard

Rodstein, we were able to bring our first interfaith, inter community group of teens to Alabama for a week of learning alongside Montgomery teens. This was an extremely moving experience, our teens then launched their film they created out of this experience at the Yonkers Film festival.

Other meaningful travel experiences included our high school service and surf trip to Puerto Rico with Sababa Camps. Where our kids not only learned to surf, but also engaged with the local community and had workshops about Puerto Rican history, culture, and politics as well as environmental justice. We used this week as a way to relaunch our Jewish Youth Climate Movement Kvutzah.

Two years in a row we've brought a large group of teens to DC for the URJ religious action center trip. Our kids consistently return with intriguing stories about their time on the hill. Of course, a private tour and riding the senate subway will remain the highlight for many- with the added benefit of persuading law makers to vote on acts impacting mental health, gun control, lgbt+ freedom, and antisemitism.

Our Youth Group was huge this year! We had 18 active students with ranging positions. Elections are being held on May 1st and a graduation ceremony and Va'ad election results on May 24th during Shabbat services! Thanks to our Va'ad we had a wonderful Grassroots grocers event, amazing high holiday activities, trips, Shabbaton, Curling, and a successful purim carnival. This year on our first day of school we ran a grant in collaboration with Jewish Ed project and the Food Pantry: Food Pantry Cook Off. A full on cooking battle with celebrity judges and pantry food items to bring awareness to our food pantry and community resources. It's been an honor to be a part of these wonderful activities and this meaningful community!!