

NCJW Utah / SSTO Annual Report – January 6, 2022



Spearheaded by the National Council of Jewish Women, Utah Section, the annual Shalom/Salaam Tikkun-Olam (SSTO) program came together again in late fall and early winter of 2021 to raise funds and distribute common household and clothing necessities to Salt Lake City's neediest populations. Organized by the friends and members of Utah's Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities and now in its 30th year, this multi-faceted project pivoted to assist with the national need produced by the influx of newly resettled Afghan refugees.

Operating within CDC guidelines to prevent the spread of coronavirus and its variants, a wellspring of concern and donated funds led to the purchase of 420+ new household goods to help 20 uprooted Afghani families (~100 individuals) set up their new homes. Such items comprised silverware, cookware and utensils, microwaves, tea kettles, coffee makers, rice steamers, kitchen and bath towels, bed linens, shower curtains, digital clocks, vacuum cleaners and, just recently, lots of much needed winter coats. The articles were distributed through Catholic Community Services (CCS) which is coordinating the Afghan resettlement project in cooperation with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a nongovernmental global humanitarian aid, relief, and development organization. Between October 2021 and September 2022, CCS expects to resettle between 500-600 refugees in Utah, and the majority of those arrivals will be Afghan. SSTO remains committed to helping.

In partnership with teachers at Salt Lake City's West High School, SSTO also focused on efforts to keep students in school. Purchasing new warm winterwear, baby, children and teen clothes from socks to shirts, winter coats, back packs, gift cards, hygiene kits, baby diapers, stress-reducing crafts for siblings, some 1700 essentials were distributed through a free, in-school "community store." WHS teachers and honor students set up attractive display tables and clothes racks to help 119 students and their families—some 587 individuals from all over: Afghanistan, Bosnia, Sudan, Iran, Congo, Somalia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru. To ease the burden and any social stigma of receiving these gifts and having to carry them in garbage bags during their bus ride home, most student selections were bagged, tagged onsite, and immediately distributed to their homes by a remarkable team of West High School teachers.

In addition, cash assistance was provided to South Valley Services Emergency Shelter

needing immediate help with facility repairs, and to the Food Justice Coalition, which distributes healthy food to unsheltered people.

Unable to participate in person, **everyone** involved on every level from donated goods to funds was there in the kindest spirit of **tzedakah**—the act of justice. The most varied project yet for SSTO, it was a phenomenally successful undertaking because of the continual outpouring of community engagement and good will.

In these challenging times, thank you, be safe, be well. Special thanks to **Annabel Sheinberg, NCJW Utah President; Lisa Cohne; Mark Cantor, Dennis Glass, Randy Silverman and the Tracy Mooney clan.**

SSTO Chairs: **Eileen Hallet Stone**, past-Pres. NCJW Utah; **Safi Safiullah**, Marmalade Branch Manager, SLC Public Library.

SSTO Committee Co-Chairs: **Carla Cantor**, community programmer, I.J. & Jeanne Wagner JCC; **Sue Corth**, retired audiologist, NCJW Utah board member; **Scott Klepper**, refugee activist; **Connie Buckner**, retired Murray City principal & reading specialist; **Missy Dawson**, Community Advocate, NCJW Utah Board member; **Deborah Milan-Niler**, chaplain.

SSTO SUCCESS!

From Valerie Gates, West High School Teacher and ESL Coordinator

We (the teachers) talked to the students a few days before they were invited down to the “store” so they would know what to expect. It was clear we hadn’t painted quite a clear enough picture. They at first were completely overwhelmed by the sheer number of items!!

It took telling the students several times that they could choose anything they wanted for their families and for themselves. It was truly wonderful to see how empowered our students were...selecting items for all the members of their households. Virtually, all students were each able to select a brand-new coat or jacket for every person their family.

It was so sweet to watch them hold up new shirts, sweaters, and pants and talk to their friends about how perfect each would be for their father or mother; to select specialty gifts that would delight their parents. Some students would FaceTime with their mothers to check on clothing and diaper sizes. Several parents were able to come to West High to pick up their students and all their items. They expressed such gratitude. There was a lot of relief along with joy on their faces.

West High teachers delivered all the packed bags and boxes to student homes on Friday afternoon.

Although this was a different SSTO, it was really awe-inspiring, comforting and respectful for the students to choose exactly what their families needed and wanted. Many of them planned to hide their bags of goodies under their beds in order to surprise their families on Christmas morning.

West High School teachers would like to express great appreciation for all the time, energy, and generous donations from so many groups and people. SSTO 2021 was a huge success!

Thank you,
Valerie Gates

A Few Observations on December 15: The Store at West High School:

“The young man only wanted a new coat for his mother and brother. He insisted he didn’t need one for himself. Even when they told him he could have whatever he wanted, he stayed the course and left with two coats only, one for his mother and the other for his brother.”

“She and her father had been evicted from their apartment, losing everything in it. Hesitant to take anything but spoons from a donated silverware set, she was surprised when handed the entire set -- and left with hope.”

“Passing by what looked like a trash pile with a broken table, a clock and sundry perceptively unusable others, a student stopped. Her eyes lit up! She saw a lamp! Her family needed a lamp—their living rooms was dark! No one knew if it would even work. Pulling it aside, a teacher plugged it and—adding to this student’s happiness—it lit up too! A basic necessity filled.”