

NA'AMAT Now!



A publication of NA'AMAT USA

Spring 2020

Meet our executive board

This issue of NA'AMAT Now features profiles of five members of the national executive board, written by Sharon Sutker McGowan. The next issue will highlight the other members.

Jan Gurvitch, President

Jan Gurvitch was born a Labor Zionist. Her grandfather was involved in the Farband, part of the Labor Zionist Organization of America (LZOA). Her parents belonged to Habonim, the youth division



of LZOA, and her father was national vice president of Farband. Both of her grandmothers were members of NA'AMAT.

In 1970, when her three boys were young, her stepsister invited her to join a new NA'AMAT club in Brooklyn, where she lived in the same house she grew up in. "I was excited to have an opportunity to spend time with other adult women," Gurvitch said.

"What appealed to me was how they were enabling women to work. It was a women's movement."

Gurvitch was a leader in her chapter, president of the Brooklyn Council and member of the national board. At first, she was shy about speaking in front of people. "Being a volunteer provides a very safe place to develop new skills and talents that you didn't know you had," she said.

In 1986, Gurvitch was selected to attend a leadership seminar in Israel. She is

now the third national president from that seminar. She credited the women in leadership positions at the time with encouraging younger women. One of her mentors was Joyce Schildkraut, who installed Gurvitch as national president.

Gurvitch plans to lead through consensus. She also believes in building her skills and those of the board. Gurvitch recently organized a professional development seminar for 17 NA'AMAT leaders. "When you invite people, you're telling them that they're worth investing in," she said.

A "professional volunteer" who also was a licensed financial advisor, Gurvitch is excited about her next chapter. "I try not to get too impressed with the job," she said. "You do what you have to do, with one foot in front of the other. If you think about the enormity of the job, you lose your balance."

Debbie Kohn, First Vice President

Debbie Kohn was single and living in Brooklyn when she saw a notice in the newspaper that new NA'AMAT clubs were forming nearby. Taking care of a 1- and a 2-year-old, she longed for adult company, and was drawn to the group's focus on day care centers and domestic violence.

Since then, she has visited NA'AMAT's day care centers in Israel multiple times and remains impressed by the high quality of the centers. "The caretakers are exceptional in how they approach kids," Kohn said. "Because of [their training], parents can leave them with ease, knowing they are well taken care of."

Kohn was selected to participate in a 10-day leadership seminar in Israel in 1999. Seminarists were housed at Kanot,

NA'AMAT workers need help
At Passover, it is customary for Jews to give gifts to the needy. This year we are asking you to help our own. We have started an **EMERGENCY PASSOVER APPEAL** to help NA'AMAT day-care workers who are unemployed due to the coronavirus. Please donate at naamat.org or call (844) 777-5222.

one of two agricultural youth villages operated by NA'AMAT that serve students from underprivileged families "My heart belongs to Kanot. There is such spirit there, and these kids were lost before they came," Kohn said. "They can go on to be productive citizens and have confidence in themselves."



She has been on the national board since that seminar, serving as recording secretary, Eastern Area coordinator, treasurer and now first vice president. She has also been president of the Bessie Choina Club and of the Brooklyn Council.

Among her goals for NA'AMAT are to increase name recognition, grow membership, raise more money and take part in social action activities at the local level. "For example, we could get involved in helping female prisoners; collecting necessities for people in homeless shelters; volunteering at food pantries; or aiding women who have escaped sex trafficking," she said.

NA'AMAT has meant a lot to her all these years. "I feel it has given me focus, honed my leadership skills, increased my friendship circle and made me proud."

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Susan Brownstein, Fundraising VP

Susan Brownstein did not have a good experience at her first NA'AMAT meeting, but it taught her an important lesson. A friend invited her to the meeting, and although she didn't know anything about the organization, she decided to go. Only one person acknowledged her as a new person, and no one approached her to make her feel welcome. While people were getting refreshments, she slipped out the door.

Fortunately for NA'AMAT, Brownstein tried again. She had just gotten divorced, and was busy taking care of two



young children. "I had just moved into the area and hadn't made any friends. I was lonely; I needed a life," she explained. The group was holding a game night on a Saturday evening and about 10 women were

playing Bingo. "It was so much fun; they got to know me, and I got to know them." Brownstein became an active member of the Eilat club, and to this day she tries to make new people feel comfortable.

She has been on the national board for about 5½ years, after being co-opted to the fundraising committee. She then became co-vice president of fundraising with Jan Gurvitch, and is now flying solo.

A former teacher, she is an "enthusiastic amateur crafter" and now runs her own online business, selling affordable crafts materials such as soap and candle molds.

Brownstein is particularly interested in supporting NA'AMAT's work with teenagers. She came up with the national Tech for Teens program, which provides updated technology equipment such as computers for NA'AMAT's technological high schools in Israel. She also instituted the online NA'AMAT USA Marketplace,

Did You Know?

... that former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir is quoted as saying Pioneer Women and Moetzet Hapoalot (Women Workers' Council) were the "first and last women's organizations for which I ever worked."

which lists vendors who donate a portion of purchases to NA'AMAT.

In her current role, she plans to highlight Tech for Teens and to launch "Teens for Tots," a program for Bar and Bat Mitzvah students to raise funds for NA'AMAT's day care centers as tzedakah projects.

Doris Katz, Leadership VP

Like many NA'AMAT members, Doris Katz followed in her mother's footsteps. Katz's mother, Caroline Shmagin, gifted her daughter with a life membership.

In 1993, Katz attended her first national convention in New York, where she lived. Sylvia Lewis, the new president, urged Katz to become an active member. One Labor Day, Katz visited a volunteer fair and saw a NA'AMAT booth. She told the women, "I am so happy I found you!"

That was the beginning of a journey that led Katz from the South Shore Club in New York—where she soon became president—to the national board. She initially served as Eastern Area coordinator.

Katz and her husband have four children, 14 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. She is a retired high school drama and English teacher.



Katz said her current role is to give members tools to grow the organization. At the first meeting of the board, she led a training session where she encouraged members "to reach out to women who have no idea about what we do...If we lead the leaders, they will lead others. It's a domino effect."

Katz talks to everyone she can about NA'AMAT. "I enjoy the triumph of getting women to join us." She organizes monthly meetings in Boca Raton during her winters there.

Katz said she was particularly inspired by the NA'AMAT International Solidarity Conference in Israel in February 2015, where she met women from nine countries. She developed relationships with women from Canada and Brazil, including Canada's president, Doris Wexler-Charow.

During a visit to the NA'AMAT Israel offices in Jerusalem, the seminarists came upon a room full of plaques. After searching

the walls, Katz spotted one in honor of her parents toward the bottom of a back wall. It was a special moment during a special trip.

Selma Roffman, Membership VP

Selma Roffman was raised as a Zionist, and spent her junior year of college living in Israel. It was 1967, the year of the Six Day War, and the trip made an indelible impression on her. Even before that experience, she always wanted to be a part of building the Jewish homeland.

But it wasn't until spring 2016 that she thought about joining NA'AMAT. Her good friend Gail Simpson suggested that she start a NA'AMAT chapter in Philadelphia. Roffman, who had recently retired as a Jewish educator, told Simpson that she was not an "organization person." But she said if someone with experience running a group would help her, she would give it a shot.



That person was Linda Abrams, who had been a sisterhood president and was also new to NA'AMAT. Abrams and Roffman invited 10 people to a meeting, and the Rimonim chapter is now flourishing, with about 50 members. Eight members were among the 80 participants in last year's Israel convention, organized by Roffman as national convention chair.

Roffman was attracted to NA'AMAT because of the organization's deep involvement in Israelis' lives. Visiting the Glickman Center for Family Violence Prevention cemented that feeling. "The focus on social services and education services was part of what I like to be involved with."

Roffman plans to work to get more people involved in NA'AMAT: "to make people aware of our mission, get them on board and have them fall in love with helping the country of Israel," she said.

Roffman and her husband Marty have four children and 12 grandchildren. She is active in her synagogue and chairs the annual Israel Celebration day in her community. She received an honorary doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in November 2018 for her work as a Jewish educator, including serving as the principal of two Jewish day schools.

Message from the President



By Jan Gurvitch

While the country and the world continue to deal with the coronavirus, NA'AMAT's work on behalf of the women and families of Israel is moving forward. I am happy to share with you that our national organization has adopted a new strategic plan to help us meet the challenges of a new decade. We have long seen ourselves as a best-kept secret in the world of Jewish nonprofits. We are now determined to let everyone know about the important social services we provide in Israel, which include:

- 200 day care centers serving more than 16,000 children and their families
- 16 technological schools for teens, many of whom come from disadvantaged families
- 30 local legal aid bureaus, helping women address challenges such as domestic violence and workplace discrimination
- 4 Women and Legal Rights Centers, helping women with legal and vocational challenges
- 2 Women's Health Centers, in Carmiel and Sderot, offering

an array of education and counseling services vital to building awareness about female health issues.

In addition, we award more than 200 scholarships each year that help women earn bachelor's, master's, doctorate and post-doctorate degrees to achieve their career aspirations.

And to best describe who we are and what we do, we have adopted a new tagline: *Empowering Women in Israel Since 1925*.

In this coming year we hope to bring this message to our communities in the U.S. through public events. To name a few:

- Brooklyn and Boca Raton are hosting book author events
- Los Angeles is producing a three-part speaker series
- In June, we are planning public symposiums on anti-Semitism in Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Chicago featuring NA'AMAT Israel's President Hagit Pe'er and Shirli Shavit, Director of the International Department.

For more on these events please call our national office at 818-431-2200 or email us at naamat@naamat.org. If you or your club would like to host an event, we would love to hear from you.

Wishing you and your families a happy and sweet Passover. Stay safe and healthy.

NA'AMAT Reports



Seek to connect in troubled times

By Selma Roffman

Vice President, Membership

As I write these words, we are navigating the uncharted waters of a pandemic. As the new NA'AMAT membership vice president, I want to be writing about galvanizing our energy and collectively working to expand NA'AMAT clubs and councils. Normally, I would be writing about increasing your commitment to empowering women in Israel, expanding centers for the treatment of domestic violence or building day care centers. However, the news of the day compels me to encourage you to use your time now to help each other here and in Israel in different ways.

Since NA'AMAT is an organization that teaches us to stand up and be counted

and encourages us to be women of action, I urge you to be leaders in supporting your friends and families in the U.S. and Israel. Do those things in your control, while following the guidelines that will keep you healthy. At a time when we are not attending social events, stay connected and reach out if you need more support. Talk to your NA'AMAT trusted friends if you just want to chat or are feeling anxious. Reach out to family members and those who might be isolated and let them know you care. Digital communications can also help us stay connected; video calls give us a chance to socialize and discuss issues of concern.

The friendships and bonds that each of us created in our NA'AMAT groups should be stronger than ever. We share membership in a world family that serves as a source of strength and reminds us that we are in this together and help is available.

Hazak, hazak, v'nithazek – Be strong and be courageous!



Social media a powerful tool

By Susan Isaacs

Vice President, Publicity and Public Relations

It is said that publicity is critical for the success of any organization. A good story is infinitely more effective than a front-page ad.

As national VP of publicity and PR for my second three-year term, I've tried to acquaint myself with anything and everything to spread the word of the wonderful work of NA'AMAT USA. You would think that it would be easier now with social media and online possibilities, but the task remains very challenging. Although we send out press releases to about 150 Jewish media outlets around the country, very few get printed. Unless our news is lo-

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21515 Vanowen Street, Suite 102
Canoga Park, CA 91303

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<https://naamat.org>
<https://www.facebook.com/naamatusa>
naamat@naamat.org
(844) 777-5222

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Club activities



DEERFIELD BEACH, FL — Members attended a recent NA'AMAT Canada luncheon in Florida. Canada was represented by Heather Freed, Sandi Seigel, Rhona Blanshay, Anita Blanshay, Esther Rodzynek, Gerry Anklewicz, Susan Holtzman and Canada Executive Director Vivian Reisler. U.S. members included past board member Raena Zucker, First VP Debbie Kohn, President Jan Gurvitch and Southeast Area Director Elayne Cohen.



TARZANA, CA — Michael Reagan, eldest son of President Ronald Reagan, spoke to the San Fernando Valley Council recently on the need to repair the foster care system. The talk was one of a three-part series.



PHILADELPHIA — The Rimonim chapter from Philadelphia and the Cherry Hill, NJ Group together sponsored a trip to see the exhibit on Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg at the Philadelphia Jewish Museum. The event raised funds for the RBG scholarships that NA'AMAT USA sponsors.

NA'AMAT Reports

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cal to a specific area, and an editor deems it newsworthy, our news releases can end up on the editor's "cutting room floor."

Recently we started running banner ads on a Los Angeles/San Fernando Valley website called Suddenly65. The target audience is recently retired women, who may now have the time to join our organization. The campaign launched in December and we are getting some good results. That prompted us to broaden the campaign on a national basis using social media. We will be targeting major cities where we have clubs as well as cities with large Jewish populations with no clubs. Stay tuned...

We are also working on promoting some exciting events in Los Angeles, South Florida and New York. They include a three-part speaker series in the Los Angeles area and a two-city author tour in South Florida and New York.

We are pleased to announce that NA'AMAT USA has received a Platinum Seal of Transparency, Guidestar's highest level of recognition. Guidestar is an information service on U.S. nonprofit organizations.



For more photos, visit "News and Events" at <https://naamat.org>