

# Our Legacy of Service

Neighborhood House was founded in 1905 by the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), Portland Section. Early members included Tilly Selling, wife of well-known state legislator, businessman and philanthropist, Ben Selling, and Jeanette Meier, widow of Meier & Frank founder, Aaron Meier. They were a visionary group committed to both changing lives and the community they lived in. Their efforts were grounded in the settlement house movement, which sought to bring community members together to address the social disintegration, poverty and other problems associated with the large waves of immigration and taking place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



Early Neighborhood House programs focused on vocational training aimed at enhancing new immigrants' ability to find employment, develop marketable skills, learn English and gain citizenship. Recreation programs and clubs were also key to building community and providing a safe place for youth. It wasn't long before Neighborhood House emerged as South Portland's most important community center—the place to go whether you needed a helping hand or had one to lend.

From the start, Neighborhood House went beyond offering programs to engaging in advocacy around critical issues impacting immigrants and other vulnerable people in the community. Our founding mothers from NCJW led local efforts to limit child labor and fought for years to convince the city to build a public park in largely immigrant South Portland.

In the 1920's, Neighborhood House established itself as a leader in providing ground-breaking programs in response to the needs of the community. It operated the city's first well-baby clinic and was among the first to offer a free kindergarten. Vocational training was no longer the primary focus. During this time NCJW members established a Scholarship Loan Fund which helped provide college opportunities for children of immigrants.

In 1925, a pool was added to the building. Neighborhood House became the place where, over the years, thousands of young Portlanders from all backgrounds learned to swim. Most of Neighborhood House's array of programs continued through the Depression and the Second World War. However, by the end of the 1940's, the new immigrant population of Portland had greatly declined and the recreational activities began to be the focal point of the agency. Seeing a need for a community center open to everyone, the NCJW decided in 1955 to incorporate under the name of Neighborhood House as a separate, non-sectarian community center. Members came from across the Portland community.

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In response to changing community demographics, Neighborhood House returned to its settlement house roots in the 1970's, focusing once again on social service programming. In the early 1980's, Neighborhood House expanded its service area beyond South Portland to include neighboring Southwest areas where there were virtually no services for people who needed them. To better serve this expanded community, the agency sought a location more at the center of its new service area and decided on Multnomah Village. Our Senior Center opened in the Multnomah Arts Center building in 1982, and the rest of the agency moved into our current home on Capitol Highway the following year. Our Emergency Food Box Program was established by a group of local churches soon thereafter, and has operated from this location since then.

The 1990's brought major growth in the agency's programs for children and families. In 1992, Neighborhood House's Head Start Prekindergarten, Parenting Program and Youth & Family Services were established at this time to serve preschool and school-aged children and their families. 1996 brought the opening of Turning Point, our transitional housing program for homeless families.

With its centennial on the horizon, Neighborhood House added three SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods) Community School Programs in Southwest and the Child Care Improvement Project, a county-wide program, to its array of services. Since celebrating our landmark 100th year in 2005, Neighborhood House has continued to grow, extending services to seniors in Downtown Portland and to families in Washington County.

In 2008, Neighborhood House became the Lead Agency in a broad collaboration providing SUN School and other anti-poverty services for Multnomah County's Region 1, which encompasses the west side and North Portland. With that responsibility, the Neighborhood House Board of Directors created a plan for expanding the agency's comprehensive integrated service delivery system to North Portland. Currently, Neighborhood House is operating SUN community school programs at four North Portland schools. In addition, Neighborhood House now offers parent education and support at three North Portland locations, along with rental and energy assistance and employment development.

*"There seems to be an all-prevailing spirit of progress, gentleness, and feeling of good to all in the air in Neighborhood House, which becomes contagious to all watching the work."*

**From The Jewish Tribune, April 8, 1912. (p.103/315)**