



American Ethical Union

Inspiring Ethical Communities

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ANNUAL SOCIETY REPORT

Leader(s): Jone Johnson Lewis

President(s): Executive Team: Kay Dundorf, John Benfatti, Diane Vigliarolo

Administrative Director/Office Contact: Grace Cobbinah

Please provide brief updates on the following areas of your Society that occurred or developed in 2018:

Ethical Action:

- Climate:
 - We continue to host joint events with Bronx Climate Justice North, our local climate justice group. RYSEC was integral to the founding of BCJN in 2014.

- Racial Justice:
 - Our Leader and some of our members continue to be involved with North Bronx Racial Justice (NBxRJ). We supported NBxRJ to plan an event on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
 - Offered Platforms related to Black History Month.

- Economic Justice:
 - Our Leader and some of our members continue to be involved with Welcoming Neighbors, a group of members in the Riverdale/Marble Hill/Kingsbridge community who support the homeless families in a transitional housing building, Broadway Family Plaza. Our members have helped with toys donations around the holidays and volunteering to lead activities with the kids at Broadway Family Plaza.
 - Offered a Platform on Fair Trade economic model; one of our Members started taking monthly orders for Fair Trade coffee from Dean's Beans. For every order we place, a few dollars goes to the Society as a fundraiser.

- Development and Peace:
 - Observed the International Day of Peace

- Other:
 - Emergency Overnight Shelter, written by John Benfatti, founder and lead coordinator of our shelter: As an expression of Humanism, we at the Riverdale-Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture have opened our door almost every Monday evening to provide a meal and a bed in a warm environment for almost 900 homeless men. The shelter was founded in 2003. We have been partnering with Congregation Tehillah and the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, who provide volunteers to prepare meals, set up beds and sleep over. We also

have volunteers from the Church of the Mediator, Manhattan College, and other members of the wider community.

We have provided care to homeless men since we opened in March 2003. In early December, for the first time ever, we had no men come to the shelter. Bronxworks, the agency that sends men to us could not provide a reason why this happened. Bronxworks asked us if we would like to serve women instead of men. We agreed to do so, and that started in late December 2018.

We were successful in supporting the efforts of another organization, the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, to open an emergency overnight shelter at their facility on Tuesday nights.

- Human Rights and Refugees: Platform on Migrants and Refugees in October 2018; Observed Human Rights Day during Platform.
- Northwest Bronx Indivisible: This group used our space for several of their meetings throughout 2018. We support their work on ethical issues related to human rights and human worth.

Ethical Education (children ages 2-13)

Youth of Ethical Societies (teens ages 14-18)

Future of Ethical Societies (young adults ages 18-35):

- In 2018, we had parent volunteers as our teachers. We also had a babysitter who cared for our little ones. We welcomed a few babies into our community this year, and our children's attendance on Sundays grew to 6-10 children. Our parents helped reorganize and renovate our downstairs space where Ethics for Children meets. The renovation helped improve the children's attention and connection to the space when they are having Ethics for Children.
- One of our parents, Jackie Davis, created a program called "Earth Avengers" wherein children learn about environmental issues. The children have learned about protecting urban birds and water conservation. Once the unit is finished a set of requirements, children can earn a badge to put on their cape.
- Children also learned about representation in children's books, good sports-personship, and completed several art projects after learning about environmental themes and about major figures in black history.
- Children participated in the Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF program for the second year
- In December, we had a Platform with Humanist children's book author J.R. Becker. He read one of his books and then gave a Platform talk about teaching children wonder and awe through science and the Humanist philosophy.
- We hosted the second year of our one-week Growing Ethics Day Camp during the last week of August. One of our parent educators, Jackie Davis wrote and facilitated the curriculum for 20 children, ages 4-9.

Communications:

- We continue to send mass emails on Mondays with our events for the upcoming week. We also send a Platform/weekend reminder email on Fridays.
- We continue to update our website and Facebook page.
- We starting using the Elvanto database to keep track of our Members, friends, community contacts, etc. We also use the database to track attendance on Sundays.

- We attended RiverFest, Riverdale's largest community outdoor festival, as we have been doing each year. We were able to meet quite a few people in our community and added many people to our email list.
- We were featured in many articles by the Riverdale Press. The topics of the articles included our Homeless Shelter, our 70th Anniversary Celebration, and our participation in the Riverfest outdoor festival.

Finances:

- With our very small membership, we are dependent on our endowment fund. We are well aware that we cannot rely on our endowment forever, but we are currently investing extra funds in our staff and programs in an effort to grow our Society.
- We increased our space sharing income in 2018, with more parties and a new music class for children.

Membership:

- Attendance on Sundays has been steadily increasing. In 2018 we had approximately 25-35 people each week. Beginning in October 2018 we had a minimum of 35 children and adults in attendance on Sundays. We added three families to membership in 2018. Starting in the fall of 2018, we have seen a lot of active people deciding to become members. In our 2018 Statistical report to the AEU, we reported 28 Members and 41 Friends of the Society.

New Developments:

- The Society celebrated its 70th Anniversary at a celebration in April 2018. We had volunteer help to sell ads from community organizations and businesses for the program book, and to set up for the event. We honored Barbara and Roger Michaels as Founding Members of the Society, Grace Cobbinah for over twenty years of service on staff, and John Benfatti and Kay Dundorf for their long-term service on the Board. We also celebrated the Society's long history of helping to found community organizations in the Riverdale area. Our program book detailed the organizations and we had invited guests from these groups.
- Lindsey Wilson, our Sunday musician, launched the Coffee House @ Ethical in June 2018. The Coffee House happens monthly, on the second Sunday of the month at 3pm. Lindsey hosts and often performs, along with the musicians she hires each month. We have had small and enthusiastic audiences so far, and we look forward to growing our audience as we do more PR for the Coffee House.
- In November 2018, we renovated our downstairs space, which is our Ethics for Children space and one of our main spaces for meetings. The staff did research and put plans into place for new flooring, new paint on the walls, and new furniture. We had an outpouring of support from members and friends of the Society, who came together to make this project successful. Volunteers helped the staff to clean out and throw away or donate office supplies and old toys, put together and install new cabinets, and much more. It was a community building experience as well as a major building improvement.

- Our Leader experimented with webinar sessions for our Society and others in the Ethical Culture movement. The topics were on Felix Adler and the core principals of Ethical Culture. The sessions were not well attended because the scheduling wasn't optimal for most people. Jone may return to the webinar model in the future as a way of holding small group Adult Education sessions.
- Platforms: Our Soul Matters themes of the month (which we subscribe to through the UUA) were very successful in 2018. The themes help with programming and give us ideas for topics to explore. We were successful at planning Platform music selections in advance. In July and August, we called on a number of our Members to lead Platforms and Colloquies, and that was also very successful.

Goals for 2019:

- Continue to increase attendance on Sundays.
- More programs outside of the Platform to engage members of our community.
- Move from more staff-centered projects to activities that are led by volunteers.
- Expand our Board from 3 to 5 members.
- Explore ways of using our space for the community, such as a co-working co-operative.
- Grow the Coffee House @ Ethical audience through more PR.
- Create a new paper newsletter as a promotional tool to the outside world as well as our members. Write and print a new general brochure about the Society.
- Expand the use of our Elvanto database so that Members can log in and find contact info for each other and see their own pledge information.
- Offer high-quality workshops that will be open to Ethical Culture members throughout the NYC area.