

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion a Priority for Shaarei Shamayim

By Kimberly Wilson

I'm honored to now be the social action chair for the Coordinating Committee of our synagogue. I've been interested in taking on more social justice work through CSS, especially in light of our current social issues.

There is so much social action work to be done. In fact, it can feel completely overwhelming as to where to start! Even though we want to get out in the world and make change happen, it's clear that we need to start *right here at home* in our own CSS community to strengthen and build our knowledge and practices in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

It's been my honor and privilege to work with CSS members Davey Shlasko, Shahanna Baldon, and Judith Heilizer, who are all social justice experts and have a wealth of experience in this area.

Davey, Shahanna, and Judith have been leading sessions on diversity, equity, and inclusion for members of our congregation, including one on microaggressions recently. In this session, titled "Spinning Straw Into Gold: Microaggressions as Opportunities for Learning and Connection," we explored some common, everyday acts that can, in spite of best intentions, be incredibly hurtful. We identified how microaggressions relate to the larger systems of oppression like racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. And we practiced skills for fostering an environment within our CSS community (and beyond!) where every person feels safe and respected.

We are also working to establish an accountability plan for diversity, equity, and inclusion within our community. We want to make sure the work is accountable to the people most impacted by it without the most impacted people having to do all the work.

Davey, Shahanna and Judith will be working with our Coordinating Committee to train the people who are making decisions for our congregation to see issues through a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In addition to this vital internal work, we as a congregation continue to contribute to social justice work in the broader community as well. CSS members are asking about ways to help the broader community during the COVID-19 crisis. We are currently recommending that people look directly for volunteer activities that suit them. The United Way's website offers a variety of volunteer opportunities for COVID-19 related community needs.

Additionally, CSS continues to help buy, prepare, and serve meals to approximately 150 to 200 people experiencing homelessness at The Beacon Day Shelter. Throughout the pandemic, the staff at The Beacon are serving the meals. Meals scheduled through the end of 2020 that we will prepare are May 16, July 18, September 5, and November 21, all on Saturdays at noon.

We're also planning house "parties" (currently online) for Voces de la Frontera, which is a Milwaukee-

based non-profit organization working to protect and expand Latino civil rights and workers' rights. Our initiatives are helping Get out the Latino Vote this fall.

Some of us took part in a live, online interfaith meditation and prayer on Earth Day.

We're looking further into partnering work with MOSES, a non-partisan interfaith organization that works to end mass incarceration.

Members of CSS are also involved with Jewish Congregations for Social Justice, a group that has formed with members of Temple Beth El, Beth Israel Center, and CSS to engage in social justice events together as a whole Madison Jewish community. It is a great initiative to have three Madison synagogues collaborating for social justice goals.

Finally, Jen Rubin puts out an amazing bi-weekly email. It details social action-oriented events, actions, and meetings in the community. Please email Joy in the office if you don't receive these emails and would like to.

Please contact me if you're interested in getting more involved in social justice issues inside and outside of CSS at kimberlyRwilson@gmail.com. The initiatives we're taking are really exciting to help move the work of diversity, equity and inclusion forward in our own community and beyond.