



## **NCJW Helps Needy Children go Back to School with Confidence**

West Orange, N.J., July 31, 2011—They arrived by the busload, hundreds of children from Newark, East Orange, and other Essex County towns, to “shop” for brand-new clothes and school supplies in a “store” set up just for them – all courtesy of the Back 2 School Store, a project of the National Council of Jewish Women, Essex County Section.

Held on Sunday, July 31, the third annual event served nearly 500 children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

“I’ve never experienced such a project,” said Rabbi Robert Tobin of B’nai Shalom in West Orange, which provided the 4,000 square foot space that housed the one-day-only “store.” “*Tzedaka* is about equality, justice and dignity, and this project got it right.”

Elementary-school-aged children combed the racks for their favorite color pants and shirts and sifted through open bins of calculators, notebooks, and binders with the help of volunteer personal shoppers who work one-on-one with each child.

The Back 2 School Store is set up like a department store, and each child makes the rounds of the “departments” to select a complete new outfit (shirt, pants, winter jacket, and sneakers), underwear, socks, hat, gloves, and scarf. The children also receive new backpacks filled with school supplies and personal-care items. With more than 300 volunteers on hand, NCJW members also act as shoe fitters, staff private fitting rooms, and restock inventory. All merchandise is brand new, purchased at major retail stores by NCJW volunteers thanks to the financial contributions from local individuals, families, foundations, and businesses. All items are donated to the participating children.

“As a volunteer, it was an amazing experience,” said Nicole Lenner, a mother of four from Short Hills who made the rounds of the store three times, escorting eight-, six-, and five-year old girls. “The event was explained to me, and I thought I had an idea of what the day would be like, but you just can’t even imagine until you see it. I feel like I made more of an impact in these four hours than in hundreds of hours of other volunteering in the past.”

“Coming here today renews my faith in the generosity and goodness of people, especially right now,” said N.J. Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, who was on hand for the event.

Parents of the store's "customers" waited in an outer gallery for their children to complete their shopping. There, they could pick up health and social service information from exhibitors at the Gaelen Family Resource Center, or sit for blood pressure check and other health screenings at a UMDNJ mobile medical van outside.

One waiting parent of four children expressed gratitude for the store. "This has helped me a lot. I could barely afford most of this. "

As for next year's Back 2 School Store, Ms. Lenner, the volunteer, said, "I would definitely do it again and I already told a half dozen people, including my husband, who will join me."

For more information about NCJW, visit [NCJWessex.org](http://NCJWessex.org) or call 973.740.0588.

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