



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

common
threads

PROJECT

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Mission:

Common Threads Project helps women heal from the enduring psychological effects of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of war and displacement by building local capacity through training, launching scalable interventions, and furthering the field of trauma therapy.

Vision:

We see a world where all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have access to high-quality psychological care. Full recovery gives opportunity for post-traumatic growth, including becoming strong advocates for a more just society.



One of our Nepal circles completes an exercise

WHAT WE DO

The Problem

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a global human rights violation with a profound and enduring impact. Women and girls are subjected to sexual assault, intimate partner violence, human trafficking, child and forced marriage, rape as a weapon of war, and more. In addition to physical wounds, there are invisible mental health consequences, and deep wounds of stigma, shame and social isolation. Without a chance to recover, victims may suffer from severe depression, lasting trauma-related distress, and other long-term consequences.

Our Solution

- We **build local capacity** through training. Rather than placing cultural “outsiders” in our projects, we train local mental health providers to provide treatment following our methodology. This helps ensure treatment is culturally appropriate, and that the intervention will last beyond our organization’s involvement.
- We **launch scalable interventions**. Our projects provide a model of care that can be implemented on a larger scale. Over time, our partner organizations become centers of excellence, providing a model for new projects to follow.
- We **conduct careful program evaluation** and work to further the field of trauma therapy. It is our responsibility to ensure that the treatment we help provide is effective in both reducing psychological symptoms and improving mental health.



One of our Nepal circles completes an exercise

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of CTP,

We could not have imagined a year ago where 2020 would take us. It was a year that tested everyone's resilience. Because the pandemic made it unsafe for groups to meet in person, many of our field projects were stalled early in 2020. These were times of disappointment and deep frustration that had us all concerned about those who count on us for support.

While we are all facing the impact of COVID-19, the "Shadow Pandemic" of violence against women and girls has been raging alongside it. When women around the world are isolated in their homes – sometimes shut in with their perpetrators – domestic violence and the silence around it increase. As schools closed many girls were forced to abandon their education—some leaving them vulnerable to early and forced marriage and human trafficking. For Common Threads Project, this worldwide lockdown means that the need for transformative recovery work will be more urgent than ever in the months ahead.

It's crucial that the voices of the courageous women of Common Threads circles are heard loud and clear. In 2020, we kept the issue of gender-based violence front and center through the launch of a virtual exhibition of story cloths called: "The Fabric of Healing"[\(link\)](#) and in international online events with UN organizations. This has allowed the artwork of the women of our programs to be seen and understood on a scale we could not have imagined before.



We are eager to make a strong return to all our field projects as soon as it becomes safe to gather. In 2021, our projects in Seattle, New York, Bosnia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Nepal will be in full swing.

We have met the challenges of the past year with strength. We have begun 2021 with a sense of hope and possibility.

Stay safe and strong,



RACHEL COHEN, PHD
FOUNDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"I had many traumas. I was insecure in some personal decisions that I had to make. I didn't value myself. I couldn't control my anger. Today I feel happy, free, dynamic, with authority, confident, and with more health than before. This process has touched my life. It freed me from my traumas. I learned to put limits. I was able to do things that I couldn't do before. I know how to act when adversity comes. What I say— I do it, and I do it with strength and confidence."

-Circle participant from DRC

OUR IMPACT TO DATE

345 women served
26 healing circles facilitated
80 facilitators trained



2020: A YEAR OF RESILIENCE

The resilience of women and girls in our project sites in 2020 was more striking than ever before. When all activities at each of our partner organizations were halted by stay-at-home orders in order to slow the spread of COVID-19, our field staff realized that CTP circles could not continue to meet together. The quarantine also meant economic hardship, with families facing ever greater food insecurity. The need for psychosocial support to manage overwhelming levels of stress increased too. But as weeks became months, **women and girls began to insist that their circles convene once again.** And we heard them!

In Eastern Congo, where there is no running water, staff devised a handwashing station outside the small building where their circles meet. Resourceful participants sewed masks. In between the pandemic spikes in their region, **they managed to meet for support, camaraderie, and healing.** They will complete Phase 2 of the program in early 2021.

CTP supporters helped women in DRC set up hand-washing stations



In Kathmandu, Nepal, COVID-19 struck fiercely. Our local staff and their families suffered illness and loss. Despite the dire situation, lead facilitator Jamuna Shrestha maintained contact with her circle by cellphone. They continued to sew at home and found comfort in the techniques they had learned in Sajha Dhago (Common Threads in Nepali). But they missed being together as a whole group. Thanks to a generous donor response to a call for help, **Common Threads Project was able to provide tablets and internet time** so that the participants could come together in remote sessions. They are grateful to be able to continue the process of healing and supporting one another.

Throughout this time of challenge, we continued to cultivate supportive relationships with our partner organizations on the ground as they dealt with crisis situations in each of their regions.

Participants report:

- Being reunited with their healing circle increased their sense of resilience, helped them feel less isolated, and felt less vulnerable to violence

Facilitators report:

- Increased sense of purpose
- Increased commitment to the project

COVID safety measures led to:

- Greater health safety in groups
- Improved health safety practices at home

Thanks to supporters, women in Nepal were able to meet and connect through new tablets



THE FABRIC OF HEALING



The story cloths women make are not only a central aspect of the trauma therapy process, but also become a way for the women to break their silence and be heard beyond their immediate circle of support.

In DRC, women who had suffered systematic abuse in the mines asked our director, Rachel, to take their collective story cloth home with her. They said, “Take this with you and tell our story. We need people to know what is happening here.” This is exactly what led us to develop the Fabric of Healing exhibit.

[CLICK HERE](#)
to view the exhibit

Hear from facilitators and trainers in our global programs by clicking on the video

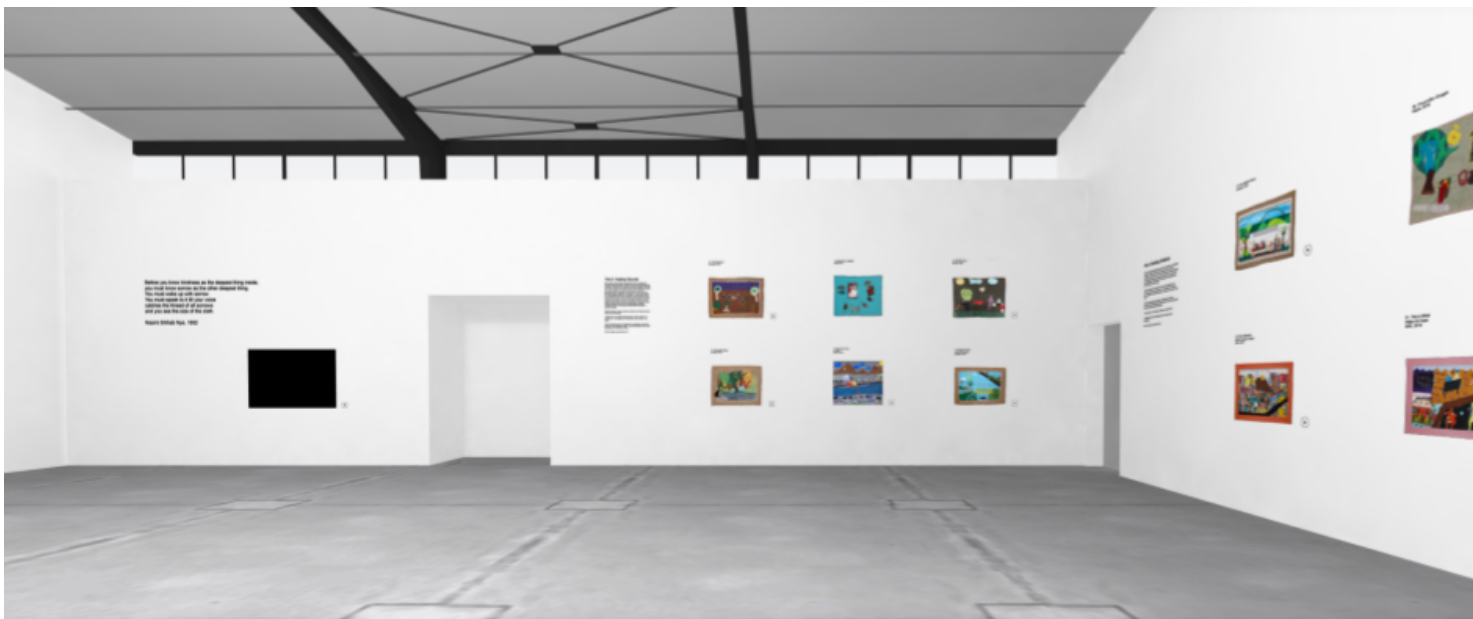


With a power greater than words, the intricate textiles speak eloquently of the women's experience and of their resilience. **The exhibition amplifies the voices of the women who have endured gender-based violence**, and allows others to bear witness to their suffering, their courage and their capacity for healing. The story cloths have become tools of advocacy to raise awareness about the injustices women face.

We invite visitors to leave messages of encouragement and compassion for the women in our circles before they leave the gallery. We have translated messages left by visitors and sent them back to the women who treasure the feeling of having been heard and understood.

“I am so deeply moved by your courage to survive and to share your story. I feel your pain and I also feel your beauty. I am learning from you to be brave myself, and thank you so much for that.”
-message from a visitor to The Fabric of Healing

Click on the below image to visit the gallery



ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS-RAISING

Common Threads Project took advantage of the 2020 virtual pivot to gain visibility on a global level. As part of the observance of International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, **Common Threads Project cosponsored an advocacy event with the UN Refugee Agency.** We were able to raise awareness about the psychological consequences of sexual violence, and the urgent need for effective trauma treatment for survivors. More than 350 people registered for the event, which included the launch of The Fabric of Healing exhibit, a program of distinguished speakers, a guided tour of the exhibit, and a roundtable discussion with experts on trauma treatment. We were honored that Pramila Patten, United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, gave the keynote address. She underlined the need for programs like Common Threads Project. UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications Melissa Fleming moderated the event, and Gillian Triggs, UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, introduced the program. Survivor activist Mariama Sow also gave a stirring address.

"During my field missions I have noticed a significant gap in the provision of mental health services. Unfortunately, many humanitarian settings have grossly insufficient capacities and resources to assist survivors with trauma-informed mental health interventions. The alarmingly high rate of PTSD amongst survivors of sexual violence is a strong indication that the current therapy is inadequate and in need of improvement."

-Pramila Patten, "The Fabric of Healing" launch event



Pramila Patten, UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Under-Secretary-General of the UN

We participated in 2020's New York Textile Month in September to spread our message about pervasive gender-based violence and the healing potential of textiles in our work. Executive Director Dr. Rachel Cohen gave a digital presentation and guided tour of "The Fabric of Healing". Strong engagement from the audience indicates that the women of Common Threads circles were heard and recognized.

Each November, we observe the global 16 Days of Advocacy Against Gender-Based

Violence. In 2020, this became another opportunity to feature the work of survivors whose voices have too often been silenced. Building on the success of the June event, we co-hosted an online event with the UN Expatriate Spouses organization (NYLESA). Dubravka Šimonović UN Special Rapporteur on gender-based violence gave a keynote address. **These special gatherings build solidarity and mobilize action on behalf of the girls and women we serve.**

"What I heard and saw today reminded me of all the women and girls who have shared their stories with me over the years. For me, in addition to the information I heard, this was also a kind of my own way to face all the challenges I have today in my work with socially excluded people who experienced various types of gender-based violence."
—Nedeljka Neda Sindik, an aid worker in Montenegro, after attending our 16 Days of Activism event



A stitching project created by a participant in Nepal

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters and the vision of our leadership team, **Common Threads Project stands poised for success in the coming year.**

Adolescent and adult circles are meeting now in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and will complete Phase II of the program in late Spring. The participants determine how each circle will shape Phase III, so we will be kept in suspense until they make collective decisions about how their groups will continue.

CTP faculty Cynthia Uccello and Catherine Butterly plan to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina this summer to continue the training where they had to leave off a year ago. Partners Vive Žene and Žene sa Une will then launch a new set of healing circles after recruiting and screening clients for the program.

2021 will see significant expansion at our Nepal program, which is a shining example of successful capacity building and local empowerment. Together with our local partner, TPO Nepal, we planted seeds in 2014. Only a few years later, the exceptional local team, led by Jamuna Shrestha, began to train and supervise new staff. **There is now a “Center of Excellence for CTP” in Kathmandu** that will focus on additional local partnerships, expansion of services in more communities, and training additional clinicians in the region in the year ahead.



Trainee facilitators
in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Two new domestic programs will launch in 2021:

In Seattle, a partnership with four refugee-led community organizations will bring Common Threads Project to life in the Pacific Northwest. We will train a strong cohort of therapists from Refugee Women’s Alliance, Mother Africa!, Asian Counseling and Referral Services and Somali Family Task Force who will adapt our model and facilitate women’s several healing circles immigrant and refugee communities. Thanks to generous support from Rotary Clubs in the Seattle area and individual donors, Common Threads will begin to plant seeds in US soil.

In New York, our long-awaited collaboration with Program for Survivors of Torture to conduct a healing circles and train PSOT therapists will begin when their clients can safely return to in-person groups.



Circle participants
in Nepal

Circle participants in Nepal

In 2021, a new program will also be established at City University of New York Psychological Center. We have been invited to train and supervise a team of doctoral psychology students and faculty in the use of CTP methodology. Together the trainee team will facilitate a CTP healing circle for clients at the Counseling Center. This is the first step in what we hope will become an expanding program of collaboration.



A major priority for Common Threads Project in 2021 is to develop and implement a comprehensive training program to provide staff for expanded programs. This will include recruiting and providing advanced training for an expanded “core” faculty that can be deployed to international settings to “train the trainers”. These senior clinicians will also facilitate some circles at our domestic sites. In response to feedback from trainees, **we will be creating enhanced and comprehensive training materials** in both written and video form that will provide a more lasting learning experience for our teams.

GROWING OUR ORGANIZATION

Common Threads Project moves to a new level of excellence with the expertise and commitment of **Vesna Golic**. Vesna has joined our team to lead the way on advocacy, awareness-raising, and strategy. Her vision comes from many years of experience in NGO leadership in organizations working with displaced populations, community and capacity development. Vesna specializes in implementation of community approaches in assisting refugees, from the grass-roots level to international programs. Vesna now lives in New York and has offered her many talents to help strengthen our Common Threads Project. She has already proven herself invaluable by organizing global online events and helping to launch the Fabric of Healing exhibit. We couldn't be more fortunate!



We are thrilled that **Patricia Bresky**, PhD, joined our Executive Board in 2020. As a clinical psychologist who has been in practice for over 20 years, she brings a deep understanding of trauma treatment to our leadership team. Patricia's professional focus on the silencing of abused women is in perfect alignment with the mission of the Common Threads Project.



"If healing alone were the treatment goal of CTP, it would be more than enough, but there is a post-recovery component as well. Survivors learn life skills and solidify their bonds. With new-found solidarity and confidence, they become lifelong friends, advocates for other survivors, and activists for pro-survivor, cultural change. Out of devastating trauma comes growth and empowerment."

—Patricia Bresky, PhD

In 2020, we invested our efforts in building a stronger and better-resourced organization, ready to provide support to more women and girls when the pandemic abates. We undertook careful planning regarding organizational strategy and development that will help us build a stronger future. Our leadership team worked intensively to improve strategies for growth and sustainability. [Here's a summary](#) of our strategic goals for your interest.

With the guidance of Charles Molloy and Martin Smith, a skilled consultancy team deployed by Programme Emerge, we have worked to improve communication, outreach, visibility, and resource mobilization.

As a result, **we were able to accomplish ambitious fundraising goals that will sustain our projects as they reopen.** By organizing online events, we significantly expanded our circle of support and solidarity for women in Common Threads Project programs. Hundreds of people new to our work visited our exhibition of story cloths and participated in public discussions hosted by Common Threads Project.



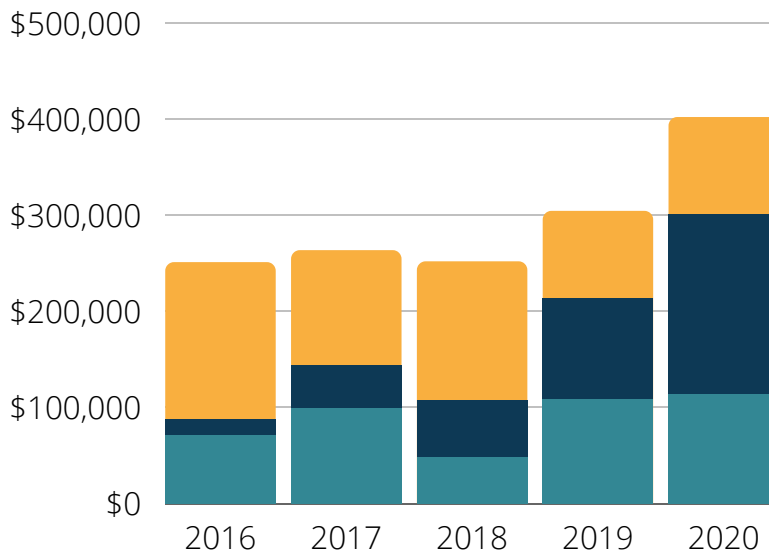
A circle participant in DRC shares her story cloth

FINANCIAL REPORT

In 2020, Common Threads Project saw an increase in both grant funds and donated funds. Total resources increased from \$304,132 to \$424,722. Resources in 2020 included a Payroll Protection Program loan of \$22,922, which was used in its entirety to pay employees of the organization. **This allowed us to set aside additional resources for direct program costs**, which we expect to increase significantly within the next year and beyond as projects resume. We expect our Payroll Protection Program loan to be forgiven in 2021.

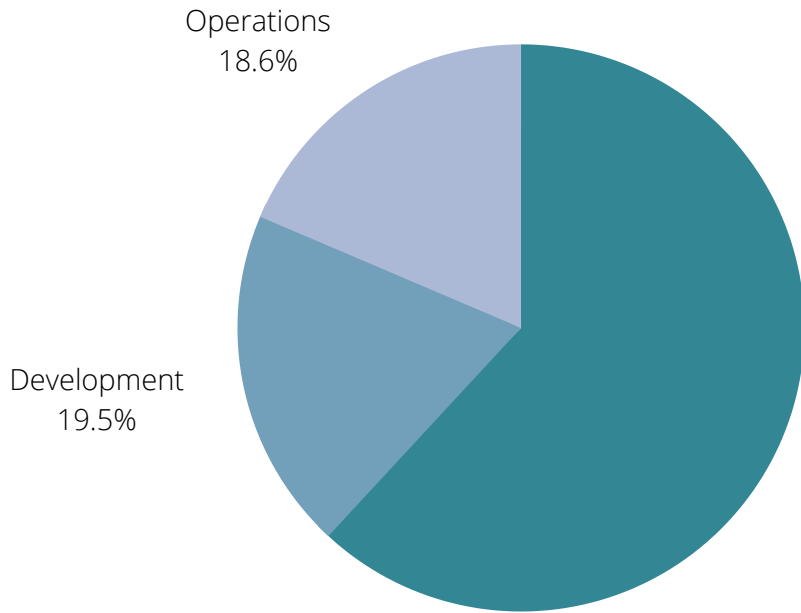
Expenses in 2020 totaled \$279,598, including \$173,031 in direct program costs. This included donations made to our partner organization to assist them with COVID-related expenses such as masks and hand-washing stations. Additional funds have been set aside for increased program costs expected once it is safe for groups to meet again.

Year-to-Year Comparison of Resources



	Grants	Donations	In-Kind Services
2016	\$71,000	\$17,100	\$162,673
2017	\$98,726	\$45,455	\$119,057
2018	\$48,000	\$59,799	\$143,815
2019	\$108,188	\$104,894	\$91,050
2020	\$113,587	\$187,227	\$100,986

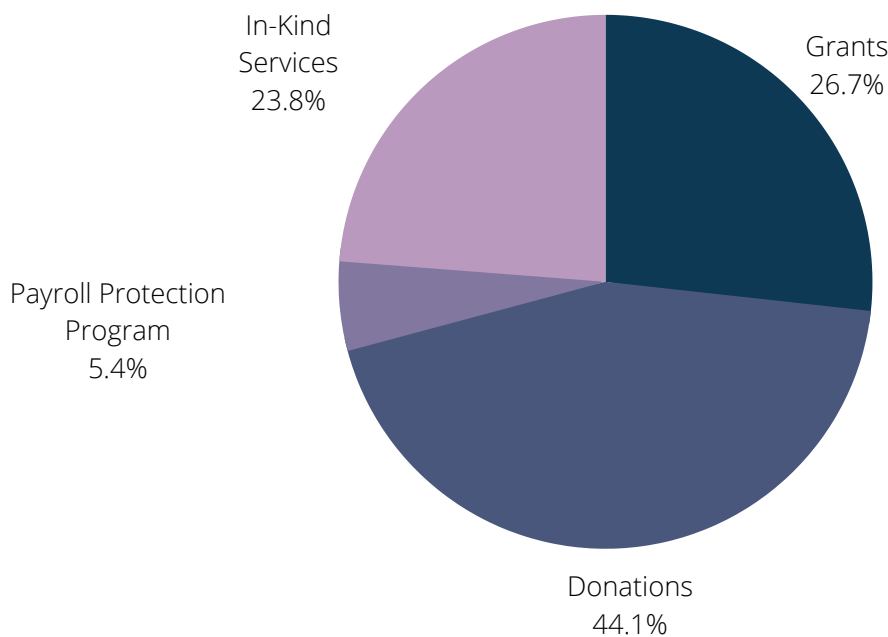
2020 Expenses



Direct program costs	\$173,031
Development	\$54,591
Operations	\$51,976
Total expenses	\$279,598

Direct program costs
61.9%

2020 Resources



Grants	\$113,587
Donations	\$187,227
Payroll Protection Program	\$22,922
In-Kind services	\$100,986
Total resources	\$424,722

THANK YOU!

Common Threads Project would like to thank each and every donor who makes the work we do possible. Your support allows us to implement projects around the globe that provide services to women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Thanks to these donations, new projects will be launched in the coming years to provide extra support in the wake of the "Shadow Pandemic" of violence that has accompanied the COVID-19 crisis.

This year's donors include:

Adeyinka Akinsulure-Smith	Hope Gleicher and Andy Burness	Ninette Kelley and David Beatty
Alex Aleinikoff	Isabel Rachlin	Norm and Nancy Silber
Amanda Haran	Jaime Banks	Norman Schneider
Amy Shevrin	James Walker	and Linda Kanefield
Ann Blume	Jane and David Shapiro	Patricia Bresky
Annie Collier	Jane Pfefferle Mansager	Patricia Friedman
Barbara Garlock	Jean Barbato	Patricia Sleeman
Beth Krug	Jessica Bauman	Patty Fleischmann
Betsy and David Teutsch	Jori Swartz	Peter Haas
Betty Briese-Ludwig	Joyce Migdal	Phyllis Lerner
Carol Oviros	Judith and Marc Kornblatt	Priscilla McEnroe
Carol Wilner	Jule Monnens	Rachel Cohen
Caroline Johnson	Julia Fortier	Ruth Epstein
Catalina Woldarsky	Karen Hofman and Danny Bradlow	Ruth Lammert-Reeves
Champlain Valley Unitarian	Kelcey Stratton	and Roger Reeves
Universalist Church	Lauren Leone	Sam Aleinikoff
Charles Molloy	Leesa Tabrizi	Sandra Perlstein
Cynthia Wilson	Leslie Montroll	Sara and Carey Sennett
David Harrell	Leslye Heilig	Sarah Grosso
David Scobey and Denise Thal	Lori Kenepf	Shelley Rudick
Deborah Shulman	Luana Rubin	Shelli Bank
Donna And Randy Cooper	Lucy Christopher Lichtig	Shoshana Aleinikoff
Doris Meissner	Lynn Hiestand	and Nathan Kittle
Eileen Coen	Lyssandra Sears	Sophie Cohen
Eileen McGinn	Margaret Harris	Steve and Jessie Galson
Elisabeth Sears	Margaret Shapiro and Fred Hiatt	Susan Baron
Elizabeth and Jonathan Roberts	Marilyn Anderson	Susan Greene
Elizabeth Briese-Ludwig	Marla and Phil Zipin	Susan Plum
Elizabeth Trosman	Mary Matheron	Susan Whitman
Elizabeth Weiner	Mary Phelan	Susana Isaacson
Emily Homer	Maureen Brotherton	Susanne Muntzing
Erika Maizi	Michael Rosenzweig	Tally Tripp
Eva Young	Michele Lowy	Theresa Gillis
Gayla Jamison	Miriam Steele	Thomas Gearen
Griffen Samples	Myrtis Meyer	Thomas Smith
Gry Kristiansen	Nancy Raphael	Todd Anderson
Heidi Knoll	Neg Mahmoodzadegan	Wendy Belcher
Helen Weld	Nils and Karen Tcheyen	William Kearney

