

## AJLI History

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**1901**  
The Junior League is Founded

### The Junior League Movement: A History of Growth and Community Service

In 1901, Mary Harriman, a 19-year-old New York City debutante with a social conscience, founded the first Junior League. Moved by the suffering she saw around her, Harriman mobilized a group of 80 other young women – hence the name "Junior" League – to work to improve the squalid conditions in which immigrants were living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Mary Harriman's vision for improving communities by using the energy and commitment of trained volunteers caught on. The second Junior League was started in Boston, MA in 1907 and was soon followed by the founding of the Brooklyn, NY Junior League in 1910. The rest is history...

During the 1910s, Junior Leagues shifted their focus from settlement house work to social, health and educational issues that affected the community at large. The Junior League of Brooklyn successfully petitioned the Board of Education to provide free lunches in city schools. During World War I, the Junior League of San Francisco formed a motor delivery service that served as a model for the nationwide Red Cross Motor Corps. The Junior League of Montreal became the first League in Canada.

**1920**  
27 Junior Leagues, including the first League outside the U.S.

In 1921, the Association was formed to provide professional support to the Leagues. During the 1920s, the Junior League of Chicago pioneered children's theater and the idea was taken up by more than 100 Leagues across the country.

**1930**  
108 Junior Leagues

Junior Leagues responded to the Depression during the 1930s by opening nutrition centers and milk stations. They operated baby clinics, day nurseries for working mothers, birth control clinics and training schools for nurses. Junior Leagues also established volunteer bureaus to recruit, train and place much-needed volunteers in the community.

**1940**  
144 Junior Leagues

During World War II, Junior League members played a major role in the war effort by chairing hundreds of war-related organizations in virtually every city where Junior Leagues operated. Canadian and American League members served overseas.

**1950**  
167 Junior Leagues

In the 1950s, nearly 150 Junior Leagues were involved in remedial reading centers, diagnostic testing programs and programs for gifted and challenged children. Leagues collaborated in the development of educational television and were among the first to promote quality programming for children. In 1952, the Mexico City League founded the Comité Internacional Pro Ciegos – a comprehensive, international center for the blind. By the end of the decade, Junior Leagues were involved in over 300 arts projects and multiple partnerships in many cities to establish children's museums.

**1960**  
189 Junior Leagues

During the 1960s, many Junior Leagues added environmental issues to their agendas. The Junior League of Toledo produced the educational film, *Fate of a River*, a report on the devastating effects of water pollution. Leagues also established programs addressing the education, housing, social services and employment needs of urban residents.

**1970**  
211 Junior Leagues

Throughout the 1970s, the Association expanded its participation in public affairs issues, especially in the areas of child health and juvenile justice. In 1973, almost 200 Leagues worked with the National Commission on Crime and Delinquency and the U.S. Justice Department on a 4-year program that sought to improve the criminal justice system. In Canada, the Canadian Federation was formed to promote public issues among the Canadian Leagues.

**1980**  
235 Junior  
Leagues

During the 1980s, Junior Leagues in the U.S. gained recognition for advocacy efforts to improve the child welfare system. U.S. Leagues also helped gain passage of the first federal legislation to address domestic violence. More than 100 Leagues developed the Woman to Woman campaign that actively and comprehensively tackled the impact of alcohol abuse on women. The Canadian Federation held its first national conference focusing on violence against women and the negative impact of pornography.

In 1989, the Association was presented with the prestigious U.S. President's Volunteer Action Award.

**1990**  
272 Junior  
Leagues

In the early 1990s, 230 Leagues participated in a public awareness campaign to encourage early childhood immunization called Don't Wait to Vaccinate. At the end of the decade, the Leagues prepared to launch a public awareness campaign on domestic violence.

**2000-  
Present**  
Over 290  
Junior Leagues

At the end of the Millennium, the Junior Leagues celebrated their Centennial by recognizing their achievements and building for the future. Leagues throughout California were recognized for their domestic violence initiatives by the California Association of Non-Profits Public Policy Excellence Partnership Award. AJLI co-chaired the U.S. Steering Committee for the United Nations' International Year of the Volunteer (IYV) with the Points of Light Foundation. As part of IYV activities, President Vicente Fox recognized the Junior League of Mexico City's members for their "high level of social leadership and human quality."

Throughout the early part of the 21st century, Junior Leagues continued to provide comprehensive programs designed to meet the needs of women, children and families in their communities. From Winston-Salem and Washington, D.C. to Oakland-East Bay, Junior Leagues forged partnerships to promote children's literacy. The Junior League of Tulsa, OK created a Life Skills program for the homeless and Leagues in L.A. and Chicago developed initiatives to prepare community members for board service.

To help Leagues become effective volunteer organizations of women who lead in the growth and development of their Leagues and their communities, the Association launched several programs, including the Healthy League Initiative, designed to help Leagues assess their strengths and weaknesses and the Junior League PR/Marketing Campaign, which featured a universal brand identity. To date, more than 92% of Leagues have adopted the "Women building better communities" tagline.

In 2006, over 225 Junior Leagues participated in the launch of Junior Leagues' *Kids in the Kitchen*, an initiative to address the problems associated with childhood obesity and poor nutrition. The initiative continued with over 240 Leagues participating in 2007-2008.

In 2008, The Association of Junior Leagues International won the Award of Excellence in the 2008 Associations Advance America Awards program, a national competition sponsored by the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) & The Center for Leadership, Washington, D.C. for its *Kids in the Kitchen* program.