

Italian Welfare League's "I Nostri Bambini"

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A group of women is working together to fulfill a great mission. Learn about the Italian Welfare League and their program I Nostri Bambini, which has collected \$1.5 million in favor of children with disabilities and their families.

The Italian Welfare League's roots stretch all the way back to 1916; however, we will briefly summarize the League's history from its beginnings to the present. Today the association is comprised of an extraordinary group of women who contribute to changing the future for many children with disabilities. The association has been around for almost a century during which it evolved through three distinct chapters.

The back story

It was 1916. Mutual aid societies and religious organizations were preparing to establish funds to help soldiers on the front lines in Italy. They had an unforgettable fundraiser in which Enrico Caruso had participated. When the war was over, women took control of the organization and prepared to help the families of emigrants. During the Great Depression, work was scarce and environmental conditions difficult, but the Italian-American women never gave up. They knew that there was always something more to be done.



Humble beginnings

In 1920 it was official: the Italian Welfare League was born. It opened first in Manhattan, then in Brooklyn, and later in Washington, D.C. In 1924 it also opened an office on Ellis Island. It took a lot of work over the years to continue its mission and coordinate aid efforts from both the public and private sectors.

Change

It was September 11, 2001. Many Italian- American families had babies who were born after the attacks, some of whom remained either orphaned or sick. The families called the association for help. As a result, "I Nostri Bambini" was born, program created to support the children of Italian-American families. Since then they have collected and donated 1.5 million dollars and they want to do much more according to Chairwoman Linda Carlozzi. Funds are collected during the year by way of various initiatives, but the most prominent annual event is a gala luncheon called "Autunno a New York." That's where we met the leadership of the IWL with our TV team. You can watch the video online on our WebTV (i-ItalyTV.com) or scan the QR code to the left. Here are a few excerpts.

Joan Prezioso, President of the Italian Welfare League, was able to sum up the status of the league's mission: "We've been able to help about 1,200 children this time, so we've really made great strides in the last 15 years. We hope we can reach our next milestone of 2 million. Helping children in need is so important; it's such a satisfying feeling to help, because you're not only helping these children, you're helping their families too."

Bea Tusiani, Founder of IWL's program "I Nostri Bambini" shared a sad personal story that continues to drive her work today: "I lost a child in 2001, and that's just when 9/11 occurred, and I read about all these pregnant women of Italian descent who didn't have husbands, and I said, 'Why don't we adopt these children and make them 'I Nostri Bambini?' And that's what we did. With our success, we were getting more and more money and so we decided to give out grants."

There are so many different children who saw their lives change for the better thanks to the IWL. One is Laura. Her mother shared a story with us about her: "Laura was born with a condition called cerebral palsy. In order to allow her to live with us in our home we had to make several modifications to the home, so we needed to put in an elevator and redo our bathroom and the Italian Welfare League has helped us with part of the cost of the elevator, so she's able to drive her power wheelchair into the elevator and have access to the floors of the house. The Italian Welfare League has also been wonderful; they have given us pictures and little gifts at holidays just to make her life happy."

The Italian Welfare League has an extensive history, and its members have a lot to say, including **John F. Calvelli**, EVP, Public Affairs of WCS: "My mother was involved with the Italian Welfare League back in the 1950s. When the Andrea Doria went down, they asked people to come, and the Italian Welfare League organized it to help people get off of the boats as they were being rescued. So there's a personal connection here on top of the incredible work that the organization has done."

Linda Carlozzi, Chairwoman of the Italian Welfare League tells us even more about the IWL's endeavors: "Since we started 'I Nostri Bambini' we have donated 1.5 million dollars. We have so many bambini who have been assisted and grant organizations. We are helping one child at a time. A few years ago, Jodi, a non-communicative autistic child, was able to begin music lessons and performed here beautifully. The following year she actually performed with Katy Perry. It is so heartwarming for us when we see these children making such tremendous progress!"

We'll close with an appeal that we trust to [Patricia deStacy Harrison](#) [2], President and CEO of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB): "If you donate to this charity, to the welfare of children, the money goes directly to help them. They have the best track record that I can vouch for personally. The money goes to these kids, these young kids. All they need is a little help. Some of them have life threatening illnesses, some of them just need a little boost, but they and their parents will grow up and believe me: we're Italians, we give back. The minute someone gives us something



you know that we give it back."

Click [here](#) [3] to see the interview made by Letizia Airos during IWL Luncheon 2016!

Interested in becoming a member of the League? Please visit The Italian Welfare League, 8 East 69th Street, New York, NY 10021 (www.italianwelfareleague.org [4])

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