

# REBUILDING WITH RESILIENCE

2020 sixth&i community report



Stacey Abrams



The Blast



Bill Gates



You in a Pew

# REFLECTIONS FROM OUR CEO



To the Sixth & I community,

When I look back on 2020, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the incredible community that has supported us through this unprecedented time.

The events of the past year have changed our personal and professional lives in innumerable and lasting ways. As a non-profit, we've been challenged to adapt how we sustain and approach our work to meet the needs of this moment for our community. Thanks to the creativity and tenacity of our hardworking staff alongside extraordinary support from our board, donors, and community, we have been able to pivot and serve an even wider audience than we ever imagined. **None of our work would have been possible without you by our side.**

The stories contained in this report are a testament to our shared resilience, perseverance, and continued connection. Over the past year, we have discovered new ways to build community and produce programs that entertain, educate, and inspire audiences, even during the most trying of times. Weekly online Shabbat services and our first-ever completely virtual High Holidays experience turned homes and apartments into sanctuaries for Jewish life. We have also continued to serve as a platform for diverse voices and perspectives, strengthened existing community partnerships, and built new relationships to spotlight local talent and support DC's creative economy.

As we continue our work in 2021, our need for community support remains unchanged. Your help is essential as we begin to rebuild our staff and re-open the doors of our historic building. I hope this review of our efforts and accomplishments over the past year inspires you to continue your investment in Sixth & I as we safeguard the future of our organization together.

With thanks,

Heather Moran  
CEO

# REMEMBERING 2020

“It makes me so happy that Sixth & I is continuing programming during this pandemic. We need you right now! Thank you for keeping your community inspired, educated, and connected.”

COLIN JOST EVENT ATTENDEE

In March 2020, Sixth & I, like so many other non-profits, faced an uncertain future. By embracing a can-do attitude and harnessing the spirit of experimentation at the core of our founding ethos, we quickly pivoted to become a preeminent national example of excellence in virtual programming, lauded by the likes of *The Washington Post* and The Aspen Institute. In offering affordable access to renowned speakers, unexpected conversations, and opportunities to forge community connections at a time of deep loneliness, we've remained steadfast in our mission to provide multi-faceted experiences that inspire more meaningful and fulfilling lives.



**356**  
events produced



**80,511**  
tickets sold



**\$17**  
average  
ticket price



viewers from  
**50**  
states and  
**25**  
countries

**1,532**  
tickets given  
to people with  
financial need



# REIMAGINING JEWISH LIFE

*We actually found the services more moving and more gratifying this year than in the past, either because we needed them more or because they spoke to us so directly.*

HIGH HOLIDAYS 5781 ATTENDEE

## THE “COACHELLA” OF THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

Faced with the challenge of being unable to gather at one of the most meaningful times of the Jewish year, we offered an ambitious slate of services and programs to spark spiritual inspiration and meaningful connection during this extraordinary time. Similar to a music festival model, we programmed concurrent tracks with activities on three virtual stages, ranging from prayer services and craft workshops to timely programs with renowned guests including a conversation on history and memory with *The Atlantic* staff writer **Adam Serwer**, guided meditation with celebrated mindfulness teacher **Tara Brach**, and a text study with *New York Times* journalist **Emily Bazelon**, among others.

As part of our **You in a Pew** fundraising campaign (as seen on the cover of this report), Sixth & I's delighted in seeing their photos fill our historic sanctuary next to cutouts of the iconic Jewish celebrities Sixth & I has hosted over the past 15 years, from Daveed Diggs to Amy Schumer to Matisyahu.

We also collaborated with over 25 local Jewish organizations to organize **The Blast**, a first-of-its-kind mass shofar blowing around the city. On the evening before Rosh Hashanah, the sound of the shofar could be heard in every corner of DC—from the rooftop of the MLK Memorial Library to the pitcher's mound at Nats Park—in an effort to preserve one of the most treasured moments of the High Holidays.



## STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

A perennial highlight of our calendar, our annual **MLK Shabbat** service is always a moving testament to what unites us and an uplifting reminder of our shared history with Turner Memorial AME Church, which worshipped in Sixth & I's building for five decades. In a year like no other, we produced an MLK Shabbat like no other, featuring illuminating conversations between Rabbi Shira Stutman and Reverend Dr. D.K. Kearney about the work of seeking justice, past and future, against the backdrop of places of historical significance to the Jewish and Black communities. Sixth & I's had the chance to jump into action by lending a hand at Turner's twice-monthly food distribution center, benefiting those in need in Prince George's County.



## BUILDING COMMUNITY

In 2020, we produced 70 virtual Jewish education courses serving 4,901 people, offering a Jewish lens on everything from dating in a pandemic to the Torah of Star Wars. Thanks to community support, we ensured that our offerings were available to those with financial need—14% of class participants attended free of charge.

We are especially proud of how we adapted some of our signature programs to meet the needs of the past year, like our annual Dancin' in the Streets celebration of **Simchat Torah** that usually brings hundreds of people to I Street. Instead, we brought the Torah to our community, visiting neighborhoods around DC for smaller, socially distanced gatherings. Our twice-weekly **morning intention-setting and prayer sessions** began as a way to combat isolation and process the rapidly unfolding changes of 2020, but soon became a beloved touchstone for the over 1,000 Sixth & I's who have and continue to participate. We also offered several classes to provide a safe space for discussion and reflection around the 2020 election and issues including racial injustice, sexual harassment, and the peaceful transfer of power.

## HIGH HOLIDAYS BY THE NUMBERS

25

hours of original content produced



4,500

tickets sold



273

pages in our custom-made prayerbook



## JEWISH LIFE BY THE NUMBERS

290

total programs produced



15,205

viewers tuned in for online Shabbat services



41,824

program registrations including 700 free class registrations for those with financial need

# REINVENTING TALKS AND ENTERTAINMENT



Chasten Buttigieg



Jonathan Capehart

*“Extraordinary interview. Poignant, rich, uplifting, so full of humanity.”*

ESTHER SAFRAN FOER EVENT ATTENDEE

## MEMORABLE CONVERSATIONS

Just two weeks after our building closed—and well before Zoom would become a staple in our lives—we produced our first virtual talk. Fittingly, the program featured Sixth & I's former Executive Director Esther Safran Foer discussing her debut memoir with her son, journalist Franklin Foer.

Since transitioning to virtual programming, we've remained committed to our goal of producing programs of the highest caliber with preeminent thought leaders and pop culture influencers. From conversations on LGBTQIA advocacy with **Chasten Buttigieg** and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist **Jonathan Capehart** to comfort food with bestselling cookbook author **Ina Garten** to voting rights with **Stacey Abrams**, our robust roster of virtual talks embraced a wide range of perspectives reflecting the diversity of our community while keeping people engaged, curious, inspired, and entertained during an exceedingly difficult year. Without geographic barriers to access and thanks to word-of-mouth advertising from supporters like you, our audience has grown far and wide.

*“This was a perfect pairing—Ina Garten and Helene Cooper were wonderful together! My daughter in DC and I (in PA) watched together and this was a highlight. The best Zoom event I've attended.”*

INA GARTEN EVENT ATTENDEE



Oh He Dead

## PLAYING ON

Missing the music that used to fill our sanctuary, and in response to the number of local bands and artists losing income from cancelled performances, we initiated a partnership with local news outlet DCist to spotlight DC-area artists performing from their homes. Our **Living Room Sessions** summer concert series, broadcast live on social media, offered free concerts on Friday afternoons with popular artists including Oh He Dead, Yasmin Williams, The North Country, and Mystery Friends. We served over 14,000 music lovers and encouraged donations to support our local creative economy at a time of great need for artists.

*“Oh He Dead, you're bringing me back to life in this quarantine.”*

LIVING ROOM SESSIONS ATTENDEE

## SUPPORTING OUR CITY

Sixth & I also leveraged its platform to lift up some of the local businesses that make our city such a vibrant place to live. Amateur bakers honed their bagel and babka-making skills in our series of baking classes held in partnership with popular Park View restaurant **Sonny's Pizza**. Our **Sixth & I Need A Drink** happy hour and conversation series featured one-on-one interviews with local restaurant owners and bartenders reflecting on how their businesses have been impacted during such a challenging time for the service industry and what spirits have kept them in good spirits.

## TALKS AND ENTERTAINMENT BY THE NUMBERS

**66**  
events  
produced



**38,687**  
tickets sold



**\$13**  
average  
ticket price



**22**  
episodes produced  
of our podcast,  
“Sixth & I LIVE,”  
garnering 20,062  
downloads

# READY FOR WHAT'S NEXT

“*Rabbi Aaron is one part extraordinary Torah scholar and teacher, one part compassionate counselor, one part comedic genius. He is going to help bring Sixth & I to places we never could have imagined. I look forward to being his cheerleader and fan club president for many years to come.*”

RABBI SHIRA STUTMAN



## EMBRACING TRANSITIONS

In 2020, Rabbi Shira announced her planned departure for June 2021 after a decade of incomparable service to the Sixth & I community. Our Jewish Life team is well positioned to continue serving a growing audience under the leadership of Rabbi Aaron Potek as he takes on the role of Executive Director of Jewish Life. We're also in the process of conducting a nation-wide search for a new rabbi to join our team.

Since joining our staff in 2019, Rabbi Aaron has enhanced every aspect of our Jewish and community-building efforts, from timely and irreverent classes to sermons that strike a chord to being a compassionate ear for those needing support.

“*As usual, I am impressed with Rabbi Aaron's ease at conveying detailed, complicated, and important information in a way that is approachable and relevant.*”

BASICALLY JEWISH CLASS ATTENDEE

The Washington Post

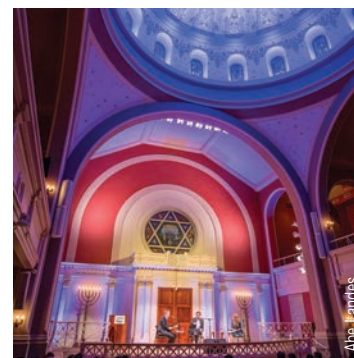
Road to Recovery



**The pandemic forced live events to go virtual. It may change access to entertainment forever.**

“*Sixth & I, the historic synagogue and arts and entertainment center in Washington, DC, started airing their programs online and uploading subsequent recordings to a podcast. Now, the local event space has seen 35 percent of its audience originate from outside the Washington area. While the building holds about 800 people, some of the recent virtual events, such as interviews with Georgia politician Stacey Abrams and 'Barefoot Contessa' Ina Garten, saw well over that number.*”

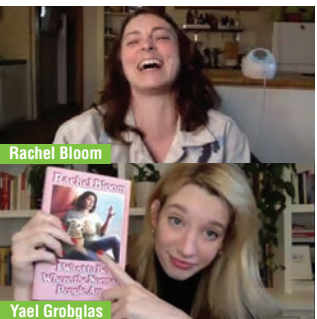
THE WASHINGTON POST



## WELCOMING YOU BACK

We know you can't wait to be back in our sanctuary once again, and neither can we. With the understanding that there is a sustained interest in our virtual programming, our goal upon re-opening is to adapt our production efforts to offer a hybrid model of in-person events with a virtual attendance option to best serve our local community as well as our growing national and international audience.

In the months ahead, our staff will be working to onboard new team members and implement the technology upgrades needed to accommodate this dual approach, as well as ensuring the user experience both in person and virtually will reflect the quality and hospitality you have come to expect from us.



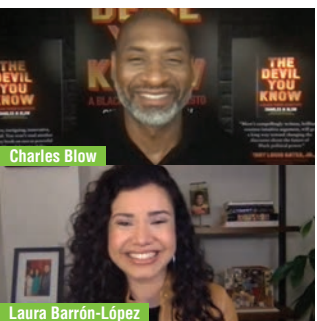
## INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY

From the time of our founding, Sixth & I has been committed to hosting programs that are welcoming and accessible to the widest possible audience. With an average ticket price of \$17 and much of our online programming provided at no cost, Sixth & I continues to ensure that high-quality cultural and spiritual experiences are affordable and accessible. This is only made possible by the thoughtful generosity of supporters like you.

We are also dedicated to ensuring that those with limited mobility, hearing, or vision can experience the full breadth of our offerings and navigate throughout our space comfortably. As we plan for reopening our sanctuary, we are excited to share that in January 2021, we completed a capital project to create an ADA-compliant restroom on our lower level and upgraded another existing restroom on our first floor to bring it up to modern ADA standards.

“I can’t wait for the worst of the pandemic to end, but I also find myself hoping that you’ll be able to maintain some way for people to join events remotely even when we can also attend in person. Thanks for keeping these events going.”

RACHEL BLOOM EVENT ATTENDEE



## RECOMMITTING TO JUSTICE

In 2020, Sixth & I joined the Racial Justice Launch Pad DC Cohort, a six-month anti-racism leadership intensive designed to build the capacity of Jewish organizational leaders and staff to take ownership of advancing racial justice in our community. This experience focuses on institutional change and intention-setting for incorporating racial justice commitments into our internal and external organizational practices.

Sixth & I is creating a Racial Equity Working Group that will establish policies and protocol around Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ), develop an organization accountability statement, and hold Sixth & I accountable for this work. We are working to better represent people of color and issues impacting communities of color across all of our programs. We are also committed to creating an inclusive community for Jews of color and people of color in our community and educating white Jews about diversity within the Jewish community, as well as promoting effective white allyship to combat racism.

We know that an important aspect of this work is continually learning and improving as we go. Please contact Heather Moran ([h Moran@sixthandi.org](mailto:h Moran@sixthandi.org)) if you would like to discuss further.

# RENEWING YOUR SUPPORT

Through your investment, we’ve not only survived 2020 but have developed a new, sustainable virtual programming model. In navigating significant financial, emotional, and logistical challenges, we have found solace in community, a shared sense of resilience, and a commitment to meaningful dialogue.

As we look ahead, we are poised to serve our rapidly growing community with even more innovative and inspiring programs, but we’re counting on you to help make our vision a reality. We need community support to continue to build the quality of our virtual productions, invest in the best technology, ensure the safety of our audience, and rebuild our staff. And we need your support to continue to offer the accessibly-priced, entertaining, and community-building experiences you have come to rely on.

Sixth & I has served as a sanctuary for spiritual renewal and intellectual inspiration over the years and that was needed more than ever in 2020. We ask for your generous support to help us sustain this important institution.

Thank you.

sixth&i

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