

# Caring for Shoah Survivors: Lessons Learned Supporting Holocaust Survivors During COVID

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**NETWORK**  
of Jewish Human  
Service Agencies



ועידת התביעות  
**Claims Conference**  
Conference on Jewish Material Claims  
Against Germany



**Jewish United Fund**  
TOGETHER for GOOD



# Holocaust Community Services (HCS)

- Founded in 1999 as an inter-agency program of the **Jewish United Fund (JUF) of Metropolitan Chicago**
  - JUF oversees grant administration and fundraising
- Administered by **CJE SeniorLife**
- **HCS** provides services for Holocaust survivors including:
  - Financial Assistance for home care, medication, food, emergencies
  - Case management & counseling
  - Socialization & events
  - Support groups & wellness classes
  - Reparations assistance
  - Education & advocacy

## HCS Demographics (2019 Data)



### Snapshot: Jan-Sept 2020

Current: 1,818

Attrition: 98 (70 died)

New: 231 (153 since April)

Known COVID-19 cases:  
13 diagnosed (4 died)

*In 2019...*

HCS SERVED

**2,300 survivors**

who received financial aid, reparations assistance,  
socialization and educational events, support groups,  
counseling, wellness classes, and resource help

INCLUDING

**1,865 clients**

who received financial assistance to pay for food, medicine,  
personal care, or one-time emergency needs,

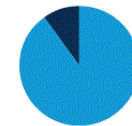
**364 of whom were new clients**



**18%**

of HCS clients are  
**age 90 and older**

*Clients ranged in age from  
74 to 104 years old*



**More than 90%**

of survivors served by HCS  
with financial and/or psychosocial  
support are from Nazi-occupied  
territory in the former Soviet Union

# Person-Centered Trauma-Informed

## 5 PRINCIPLES OF PCTI

You can create a  
trauma-informed environment  
using these five principles:



### Safety

Creating areas that are calm and  
comfortable



### Choice

Providing an individual  
options in their treatment or  
service.



### Empowerment

Noticing capabilities in an  
individual



### Cooperation

Making decisions together.



### Trustworthiness

Providing clear and consistent  
information.



# Survivor Trauma Triggers:

## COVID-19 & Political, Economic, Environmental Turmoil

<b>Lack of resources or safety</b> [shortages, access, unemployment of families, natural disasters]	<b>Food access</b> [limits and lines, no communal meals, no tech for online purchasing]
<b>Illness</b> [underlying conditions, infection, death]	<b>Confinement or crowds</b> [shelter in place orders, protests]
<b>Triggering words/tones of voice</b> [media, political rhetoric, protests]	<b>Transitions, goodbyes</b> [lockdown, quarantine, WFH]
<b>Medical visits or procedures</b> [lack of access, strict protocols]	<b>Lack of control/autonomy</b> [the unknown, mandates – gov/fam/us]
<b>Uniforms</b> [PPE, police & military images]	<b>Lining up for services/“registering”</b> [stores, voter lines, census]
<b>Strangers/trust</b> [masks, can’t see expressions, fear of exposure; even from helpers]	<b>Loud or sudden noises</b> [looting, damage to buildings, storms]
<b>Harsh or unpleasant smells</b> [sanitizer, fires]	<b>Holidays, birthdays, anniversaries</b> [all still happen, but now isolated]

- Significant **changes** may suggest traumatic memories have been **reactivated**. **Manifestations during pandemic:**

Less able to trust and cooperate	Fear of exposure from helpers OR pushback
Mood changes; sudden or fluctuating	Pandemic “arc” of affect
New/increased physical complaints	Is it COVID, existing condition, or somaticizing
Hyper-arousal and vigilance	Not “turning off” TV, media
Sleep difficulties	Insomnia, nightmares, sleep as avoidance
Memory disturbances	Flashbacks, stress-related cognitive decline
Hoarding as if preparing for emergency	Worry about food, meds, cleaning supplies
Increased difficulty communicating	Worse with phone/zoom, distance, masks

## ➤ **In-person client contact ceased**

- Wellbeing Checks by phone (triage)
- Shifted assessments, case management & counseling to calls or zoom
- Support groups moved to conference calls and Zoom
- Planning of virtual events & classes

## ➤ **Staff began WFH**

- Transition from “in-person and on paper” to “remote and electronic”
- Flexibility from Claims Conference on documentation

## ➤ **To date, still primarily WFH/remote contact**, with some exceptions when risk outweighs benefit & safety protocols possible



# COVID-19: Emergency Initiatives

- Increased food and medication assistance
- Care Packages
- Uniper
- Addressing the waitlist
- Partnerships & community resources
- New outreach systems (“Call-Em-All”)
- Consultation & Advocacy
  - Nursing homes, residential, 2Gs
- Volunteers

FILE OF LIFE	
KEEP INFORMATION UP TO DATE !! <i>Review At Least Every Six Months !</i>	
MEDICAL DATA REVIEWED AS OF MO. YR.	
Name:	Sex: M F
Address:	
Doctor:	Phone #:
Doctor:	Phone #:
EMERGENCY CONTACTS	
Name:	Phone #:
Address:	
Name:	Phone #:
Address:	





# Volunteer Assistance



Hello!

I wanted to personally send a note and say that I am thinking of you and others during these strange times that many people are facing. Though we don't know what to expect, we must remain positive. I have 3 girls who are young adults - and this is who I really feel for. I want them to have a young adult life that is not filled with worry and anxiety. I am sure you can imagine - and while I am not being insensitive to historical events, I am only focusing on the present. I hope you can think of love, or peace or something happy that will make you smile or laugh. I know I do. Please stay healthy & safe. Sincerely, Ruthie

Hello!

I hope you enjoyed your Pesach/Passover - Chag Sameach - and are enjoying springtime. I want you to know that I am thinking of you and wishing you health and happiness during these difficult times. I am sending good thoughts to you and your family.





Wishing you all the best,

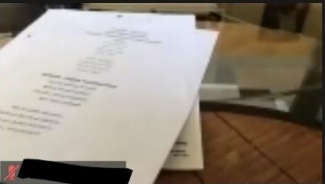




Annie + the rest  
of the Northwestern  
community ♥♥






Zoom Meeting






Recording




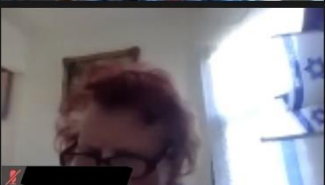

Speaker View











Unmute

Stop Video

Participants 82

Chat

Share Screen

Record

Reactions

Leave

Type here to search

Windows taskbar icons

2:02 PM 8/20/2020

# COVID-19: Challenges for Survivors

- **Technology challenges**
  - Unfamiliar or no access
  - Hearing and visually impaired
- **Functional and physical challenges**
  - Self-care (ADLs & IADLs)
  - Lack of physical activity
  - Existing conditions – exacerbated & undertreated
- **Prolonged social isolation**
  - Increase in depression, anxiety, PTSD symptoms
  - Cognitive declines; lack of interaction & activities
  - Family relationships strained
- **Economic**
  - Support systems stretched
  - Sustainability of emergency funds and benefits
- **Stigma, shame, confusion**
  - Under-reporting



# COVID-19: Challenges for Staff

- **Technology challenges**
  - Shifting to new workflows
  - Stretched support resources and infrastructure
- **Client-related challenges**
  - Working with new clients
  - Assessing physical functioning and affect
  - Responding to wishes for in-person contact
- **Personal challenges**
  - Work-life balance
  - Changes to caregiving or childcare routines
  - Personal health and safety, underlying conditions
  - Economic changes in family

- **Basic safety needs always come first: Maslow wins again!**
  - Food, medication assistance, PPE
  - Check caregiver attendance
- **Survivors need clear information & transparency**
  - Bilingual Covid info / Zoom instructions
  - Message what we can or can't do
- **More frequent, shorter, and creative touchpoints**
  - Choice and predictability
  - Creative outreach & “transitional objects”
- **Don't forget about the village**
  - Family, friends, neighbors can help AND need support
  - 2Gs may be dealing with secondary trauma

➤ **More now than ever .... listen and learn**

- Renewed urgency and opportunity to tell their stories
- Photos and objects help when words can't
- Appreciate need for silences
- Recognize that there may be no "fix"
- Be aware of changed boundaries & use of self
- Be careful with politics & humor
- Learn and acknowledge who the survivor was before
- Bolster their resilience and coping



# COVID-19: Lessons Learned for Staff

- **Self Care is essential!**
- WFH support & tools
- Mental health time
- Showing appreciation
- Staff retreat
- Weekly movement class
- **We are not alone – YOU are all here!**



## COVID-19: Silver Linings Programmatic

- Additional resources from Claims Conference and funders
- Shrinking our waitlist to address unmet needs
- Transitioning our files to electronic platforms
- Saving time otherwise spent commuting
- Flexibility with WFH
- New tech skills, interventions, clinical approaches
- Improving virtual infrastructure for future

# COVID-19: Silver Linings Survivors

- Learning to listen more actively
- For some, easier to ask or answer difficult questions when not face-to-face
- Openness to other intervention approaches
  - Activity-based or cognitive behavioral tools
  - Survivors helping others: buddy matches
- **Resilience is alive and kicking!**
  - Survivors are eager to learn new skills, advocate for themselves & reassure *us*!
  - Believe in post-traumatic growth – survive & thrive

# COVID-19: Resilience Vignettes

- A survivor who was in hiding wrote: “Anne Frank survived being in hiding in a small room, with 7 people, for 721 days, while being absolutely silent – so **we can handle this and should be grateful for all that we do have!**”
- A survivor told us that he and his wife were lamenting not being able to go out and had the idea to walk by the open window to get a little fresh air. Though they have only 4-5 steps worth of space by the window, he said he **“I will take my wife for a walk...and that could lead to a dance!”**
- Another survivor who had lived much of her life hiding her Jewish identity, joined a Uniper support group, and said “this is the first time in my life I shared this with others.” She tearfully recounted that one of the survivors in the group said, **“welcome back” which “felt like a warm embrace”**

# Discussion & Questions

- Your experiences:
  - Challenges, lessons learned, silver linings?
- What is next?
  - Ideas & directions



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European  
Council  
of Jewish  
Communities  
50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY



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## Holocaust Community Services

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# The Holocaust Survivors' Centre

- Finding their voice.
- Controlling the narrative?
- Learning Harmonies'
- קול



# Finding their voice

- Why?
  - Judith Hassan
- Survivors versus Refugees
  - The HSC and Shalvata
  - Mutual learning

# Controlling the narrative

- Opening the Doors
- Educational partners
  - Yom HaShoah

# Learning Harmonies'

- Centre and Independent Living
- Changing needs of the Survivors and Adapting our service
  - The Survivor Community
  - Do we end where we started?

# קול

- Closure of the Centre
  - Virtual Programme
    - Technology
    - End of Life
    - Legacy

DAD, I'M NOT FEELING  
VERY WELL TODAY...

MOSHE TELLER



# THE INHERITED LEGACY

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- ❖ WHAT ARE WE INHERITING?
- ❖ THE 'SUITCASE' STORY
- ❖ 'I AM A DESCENDANT OF THE PERSECUTED...'
- ❖ INHERITED TRAUMA

# RELATIONSHIP

HIERARCHY OF SUFFERING;

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‘have I got the right to suffer’?

GUILT

LOSS

FEAR

STRESS; am I allowed to be stressed?

ANXIETY

ANGER

SADNESS

CARING FOR MY ELDERLY PARENTS;

‘you should be grateful...’

# CASE STUDIES

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- ❖ Subgroups discussion of inherited trauma:
- ❖ My mother came in the Kindertransport... my greatest fear is to be rejected.
- ❖ In a national questionnaire in the 'RELIGION' section my husband declare them as Jewish, how could he?!

# CONCLUSION

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- ❖ What have we learnt?
- ❖ Participants concluding notes.
- ❖ Concluding notes.



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