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JFNA Funding Provides Local Holocaust Survivors with new CHAI Program

Nearly one in four of more than 80,000 Holocaust survivors who live in the United States is aged 85 or older and lives in poverty. Many survivors live alone and are at risk for social isolation, depression, and other physical and mental health conditions stemming from earlier periods of starvation, disease, and torture.

Gulf Coast JFCS has been awarded funding from the Jewish Federations of North America's Center for Advancing Holocaust Survivor Care (JFNA) for the CHAI Program, which aims to decrease isolation and depression, and to enhance the quality of life among Holocaust Survivors. The CHAI program promotes relationship building through community activities like senior yoga and music therapy. CHAI also offers Survivors access to senior-friendly technology via "GrandPads," a simple and secure tablet that digitally connects a senior to family and friends. The large button feature of GrandPads provides an intuitive interface that is simple to use for video chatting and sharing memories with loved ones around the world. Survivors can also access trauma-informed wellness care.

The program also offers "friendly visitors," volunteers who regularly connect with Survivors to reduce isolation. With support from JFNA, CHAI employs client navigators who provide direct support to Survivors in Pinellas, Hillsborough, Sarasota and Manatee Counties.

One Holocaust Survivor from the former Soviet Union, Ekaterina Ostrovskaya, is already benefitting from the CHAI program. As she only speaks Russian, the language barrier often contributed to her isolation, and she rarely left her home. Sunny Hirschberg, Holocaust Survivor Program Case Manager, and Marina Berdnik, a CHAI Program Client Navigator, programmed Ekaterina's contacts into her phone, and she is now enjoying regular video chats with family. Ekaterina also attends the Holocaust Chavurah groups and efforts are underway to connect her with another local resident who speaks Russian.

The CHAI program enhances Gulf Coast JFCS' existing services to Holocaust Survivors, which include home care, socialization, financial assistance, and help with obtaining restitution. The program supports 260 Survivors throughout Tampa Bay.

Volunteer support for Gulf Coast JFCS' Holocaust Survivor Program is critical in helping meet the needs of Survivors, and volunteer hours help the agency to meet funders' in-kind match requirements. The Program also relies on direct financial support from generous donors. For additional information on opportunities to volunteer and support Holocaust Survivors, contact marketing@gcifcs.org or call 727-479-1805.

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