cje SeniorLife

Holocaust Community Services

Help at the Hardest Times: Maximizing Client Acceptance with PCTI Programs
JFNA Training Workshop: Compassion in Action
June 24, 2025, 1:30 -2:45pm

Which ideas from today's presentation might you bring to your community?

- Hands-on projects, Memory Café – these programs can be great fit for my community. End of Life Conversation – I would like to implement but after special discussion with colleagues and clients. It is really useful but needs adaptation for my clients who really avoid speaking about this important topic.
- Memory Café & book
- Mitzvah & Mingle Program – giving clients a sense of giving back while also helping them with social isolation. Get one/give one model.
- Russian Tea grief support group, Guide for the Grieving Toolkit in English and Russian to the community we serve, hand exercises, mitzvah to go, chavruta, Mitzvah & Mingle, online handouts from the JFNA library
- Memory Café in Russian, helping by helping projects, DPOH assistance
- Incorporating mitzvah project into Russian Language Club
- Resource fair for FSU clients. Such a great idea, thank you!
- Perhaps Mitzvah & Mingle – will suggest and see if people are interested
- Chavruta for older adults, ongoing partnership
- Mitzvah & Mingle – synagogue based
- I loved the idea of doing music therapy and arts and crafts programs, and I really love the volunteering the survivors do. Unfortunately, my organization doesn't work on the ground with our survivor clients and we are national, but I want to see what we could do with this.
- Grief Toolkit, 5 Wishes in Russian, Mitzvah & Mingle, bilingual language cards
- Provide more printable resources to inform our agencies' clients about what we do (translated into Russian, of course!)
- Memory Café (book with homework)
- Maybe a printed calendar with our events – not a list but an actual calendar, photographs on invitations, bringing programs to their residences, book of testimonials
- Survivors as volunteers who can give back to the community

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What programs or new ideas can you share from your own organization or community to "help the hardest times"?

- We have in-person, virtual and hybrid programs which help avoid clients' isolation. Additionally, we celebrate clients' anniversaries. And as a response to rising antisemitism on American campuses, we created a letter of support from Holocaust survivors to American Jewish students.
- Women's group that focuses on current positive experiences in their lives. Participants don't speak about persecution stories.
- Balance & Breath – movement and socialization program for older adults
- Digital Literacy – Teaching older adults basic computer skills and giving them tech support for any of their digital literacy needs
- We have students from the community design birthday cards for our older adults. Students also design holiday cards and put together care bags (kosher snacks).
- Tea time with psychologist – we call it "Tea Time with Dr. …"
- Pairing a volunteer who knows tech with a client who can use tech assistance at home
- We have a support group for family caregivers of Holocaust Survivors, particularly child caregivers. We continue their participation past the time their parents pass as grief support. (More than half have FSU parents).
- Aging Alone Together workshops – 6 weeks, virtual program covering finances, aging in place, social circles, end of life documents
- Synagogue partnership program – I oversee a program where we partner with 9 Manhattan synagogues
- Russian University Without Walls (RUWW) program
- We have a robotic pet companion program that helps stimulate cognitive ability
- We have a partnership with Better Help, the online therapy platform, to help with feelings of depression/trauma.
- We coordinate a summer retreat for our NY survivors to help them get out of the house and bond with each other.
- Friday Zoom program with light topics – get to bridge gaps between FSU survivors and other survivors
- Some communities that I work with partner with local funeral homes to make concrete plans with survivors so they don't have to worry about leaving this to their children
- Our group loves "Name That Tune" musical program and sing along
- Activities in the form of lectures and discussions
- Intergenerational chess

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What are the primary challenges or opportunities when "helping at the hardest times"?

- Some people are really accustomed to staying at home and not communicating with others since the coronavirus period.
- Russian-speaking clients often feel uncomfortable to share their feelings with others.
- Attending events when this population can be frail. Attending over Zoom does not provide full experience of the program.
- Helping people feel comfortable in attending, especially in Memory Café.
- A stigma not to talk about these topics that many of our clients still follow.
- Getting people to acknowledge their vulnerability/need for help.
- Overcoming fear of death in order to get people to attend workshops.
- Staffing resources allocated to this population and funding availability.
- Funding is always something to consider, but also creating programs that are beneficial to all of our survivor clients nationwide since we can't be on the ground with them all.
- Resistance to participating in something new if they don't feel they have any friends attending.
- In-person poses challenges of physical frailties, transportation and venue availability.
- Getting people to ask for help when they need it.
- Aging issues and health problems prevent clients from attending