

ADC program for their developmentally delayed seniors who would like to "retire" and need a specialized day care program. The hospital provides corporate sponsorship for several programs and speakers for health-related programs, and we are currently working on a partnership with them for our ADC program. Several of our ADC participants have needed additional care and are now living in the nursing home on campus; they continue to come to the ADC for additional daily stimulation and socialization. In addition, there are several Hebrew day schools located on campus, as well as the JCC preschool. Each of the schools sends their students to the ADC as part of their intergenerational community service projects.

It is a vast undertaking to meet the needs of our aging communities, and collaboration among a variety of agencies is essential. As the programming arm of the Jewish community, JCCs are in a unique position to take the lead in this effort. The fact that the Sandler Center and the ADC are separate wings of the same building, with each having a separate entrance, enables continuity and collaboration. The shared auditorium facilitates sharing of diverse programs. In addition, caregivers are comfortable taking classes at the Sandler Center, and participants at the Sandler Center who are growing older are comfortable making the transition into adult day care.

PARA-CHAPLAINS AND JEWISH ELDERS

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They may not remember what you said, they may not remember what you did, but they **will** remember how you made them feel. This philosophy is a cornerstone of the para-chaplain work with Jewish elders described in this article.

A para-chaplain is a volunteer layperson providing spiritual support to Jewish elders, usually residents of either nonprofit or for-profit senior living facilities or nursing homes. In many cases, these residents may have no family who visit or advocate on their behalf. In addition, many synagogues may lack the resources to serve these often unfiliated residents. Services provided by para-chaplains to this population include making one-on-one resident visits, conducting religious services and/or programs, facilitating discussions, or assisting the activities staff. However, even with caring para-chaplains attempting to bring a Jewish connection to elders, there are still many who remain ignored.

The Jewish Healing Network of Chicago conducts six-week para-chaplain training classes in the Chicago area. These classes emphasize understanding and communicat-

ing with nursing home residents within the context of various aspects of geriatric care (e.g., spiritual, physical, religious, legal, emotional, etc). Upon completion of the course, para-chaplains are assigned to nursing homes. Once experience and confidence are acquired, a para-chaplain may find other locations to visit through personal or professional contacts or based on geographical preferences. Several para-chaplains in the Chicago area are also affiliated with a Council for Jewish Elderly assisted living facility, where their responsibilities include conducting Shabbat and holiday services, making hospital visits, and conducting memorial and shiva services.

Many of the residents (especially in assisted living facilities) have maternal (and paternal) instincts toward para-chaplains: "Have you eaten yet? - Come eat with us!" "Listen, would you do me a favor?" Para-chaplain work can be an increasingly emotional, rewarding, and meaningful experience for the committed para-chaplain, who may seemingly benefit as much as the residents.

In all the programs and services I lead,

music plays a major role for several reasons. Singing the prayers seems to elevate the spiritual level. The gematria (numerical value of the letters) of the word *tefillah* (prayer) is equal to the gematria of the word *shira* (song), symbolizing that song equals prayer and prayer equals song. By triggering long-term memories, playing familiar Jewish music can transform the mental state of a person with Alzheimer's disease from uninvolved and unenthusiastic to a state of alert recognition and participation. Thus, a visit to an Alzheimer's residential facility or unit in a nursing home should be part of the parochial's regular schedule.

For most prayers, using traditional melodies connects the residents with their heritage and their Jewish memories. In addition, they enjoy learning contemporary melodies, such as Debbie Friedman's "Mi Shebeirach (A Prayer/Song for Healing)" and "T'filat Haderech (A Prayer/Song for Our Journey)."

I have written prayer books for Shabbat and all the holidays, including High Holidays, Selichot, and the Seders, as well as handouts for each program containing relevant readings, poems, prayers, and songs. All are illustrated and printed in large print. Because many residents want to pray in Hebrew, but are unable to read it, English translations, Hebrew text, and transliteration are provided for each prayer.

When I conduct a service or program, I briefly describe the content or meaning of each prayer. The participants first read the prayer in English, so as to better understand the meaning, followed by reading or singing it in Hebrew. Musical CDs are played in accompaniment, and they are encouraged to sing along. Custom CD collections can be created for each program, service, or holiday.

A monthly Rosh Chodesh program incorporates a theme based on the upcoming month's holidays. It can also focus on secular holidays, stressing their Jewish components (other than eating and celebrating with family). Once again, music plays a role in triggering family holiday memories and in-

spiring interesting discussions. For example, on Tu B'Shevat, playing Craig Taubman's "Family Tree Song" leads residents to talking about their families.

Torah Talk, a monthly program focusing on the week's Torah portion, has been given at a Council for Jewish Elderly (CJE) assisted living facility. In addition to the music and relevant readings, the residents enjoy play-acting short humorous skits about each *parshah* from Beiner's *Sedra Scenes: Skits for Every Torah Portion*. The residents are encouraged to relate each *parshah* to their everyday lives.

Lively discussions follow, stimulated by questions posed to the residents. On occasion, the results can be overwhelming or surprising. Some of the topics elicit relevant discussions, and some are off topic, with the animated discussions taking a totally unpredicted turn. For example, the concept of honoring one's parents triggered a heated debate as to whether the children were really taking care of the parents by having them or allowing them to (depending on the resident's point of view) live at the assisted living facility.

Another program, originally called a "Healing Circle," is sponsored by the Jewish Healing Network of Chicago, a joint project of the Council for Jewish Elderly, Jewish Family and Community Services, Chicago Board of Rabbis, and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. The residents of the previously mentioned CJE assisted living facility were rather uncomfortable with the word "healing," so the name and format were revamped while still maintaining the focus on providing a safe and comfortable environment to share feelings on relevant spiritual and emotional issues. Topics that elicited lively discussion include the following:

- Eliciting and expressing feelings of thanks (on the night before Thanksgiving)
- Year in review in terms of Torah (learning), *avodah* (worship), and *g'milut Chasidim* (deeds of lovingkindness): what was achieved in the past year, and what is planned for the coming year

- Remembering mothers on Mother's Day and fathers on Father's Day
- Writing an ethical will

As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "The test of a people is how it behaves toward the old." How are Jewish communal workers behaving toward our elders? Are they passing the test? Are appropriate examples for future generations being modeled? Are future Jewish spiritual needs being planned for?

RESOURCES

- Beiner, Stan J. *Sedra Scenes: Skits for Every Torah Portion*
- Brin, Ruth F. *Harvest: Collected Poems and Prayers*
- Fields, Harvey J. *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*
- Weisblum, Moshe Pinchas. *Table Talk: Biblical Questions and Answers*
- <http://www.Aish.com>
- <http://myjewishlearning.com>