

2016 AJFCA Kovod Award Submission

Jewish Family & Child Service

Portland, OR

Category: Holocaust Survivor Services

- Café Europa

Agency Name and Community: Jewish Family & Child Service (Portland, OR)

Agency Budget: \$1,632,000

Contact: Marty Michaels, Grants Manager

- martymichaels@jfcs-portland.org ; (503) 226-7079, ext. 117

Staff List:

- Brian Fallon, Lifeline Services Program Manager
- Rita Shmulevsky, Bilingual Case Manager
- Alla Piatski, Bilingual Case Manager
- Missy Fry, Lifeline Case Manager/Café Europa
- Kim VanKoten, Scheduling Coordinator
- Maria Rehbach, Emergency Aid Program Coordinator

Program Summary:

One of our programs benefits 115 local Holocaust survivors—most of whom live under the poverty line—by providing culturally competent specialized services. JFCS is the only social service agency in Oregon that is qualified to operate an array and volume of services geared toward Holocaust survivors. Most are Russian-speaking refugees who JFCS helped resettle over the past 40 years, and our bilingual case managers and other staff have an excellent rapport with these individuals and families.

As part of our services, JFCS holds monthly Café Europa gatherings. These are important to many aging survivors in the Portland area, as they not only provide educational and recreational opportunities, but also the chance to connect with others who share their collective experiences. This population often faces high rates of depression, anxiety, social isolation, and other negative outcomes associated with their Holocaust experiences. Some survivors feel genuinely comfortable only when they are among others who have shared similar histories and instinctively understand each other.

Popular and well-attended annual events include a trip to Cannon Beach, a Hanukkah party, and a springtime Sukkot lunch. Other activities include musical performances, films, and interactive workshops on healthy aging such as Tai Chi and yoga.

Total Program Cost and Funding Sources:

Annual program cost: \$4,500

Funding sources: The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (the Claims Conference); Oregon Jewish Community Youth Foundation

Major Outcomes and Evaluation Methods:

1. Engagement/Breaking Social Isolation

Café Europa offers a much-needed social outlet for our Holocaust survivors, many of whom are becoming increasingly frail and isolated. Most of the people we serve are Russian speakers from the former Soviet Union, and our two bilingual case managers and Russian-speaking Scheduling Coordinator typically attend, along with homemakers and volunteers who work with the survivors on a regular basis.

We know from Client Satisfaction Surveys that these gatherings help forge supportive relationships, remove social isolation, and present life-enrichment activities. In addition, our Café Europa Coordinator and other case managers work with these clients intensively, and speak with them often about their thoughts on the full range of culturally competent services they receive.

As one anecdote: In July 2015, nearly 50 survivors and their guests joined Café Europa for a beautiful day at world-famous Cannon Beach, on the Oregon coast. Everyone enjoyed a picnic lunch, followed by an afternoon of shopping, socialization, and relaxation.

One of the most memorable moments of the trip involved the introduction of two Hungarian survivors, who quickly became inseparable. These two gentlemen were from the same Ghetto in Poland, happened to sit next to each other on the bus, chatted the entire way home, and are now fast friends.

2. Wellness/Overall Quality of Life

Studies show that opportunities such as Café Europa are vital for socialization, which has a direct correlation to better health and wellness. Numerous studies have shown that socially isolated seniors have a shorter life expectancy and are at increased risk for dementia, falls, and hospitalization.

Experiences like Café Europa nourish the soul and are as important to the survivors' well-being as any of the other services JFCS offers. In fact, some clients tell us that these events are the sole time they leave their home each month. We always provide refreshments, whether simple *kuchen* and coffee or a lavish Hanukkah spread. And because transportation can be an obstacle, we arrange for volunteers or staff members to drive survivors to and from the events.

As one example, we received the following message after our May 2015 Café Europa event, which commemorated the 70th-year anniversary of Victory in Europe Day:

"Thank you so much for the wonderful event last week. I want to just tell you how much I admire you to dedicate your time and your energy for us elderly survivors and am grateful that you each time manage to have some volunteers to bring us and to take us [to the events]. May you be blessed with health, lots of mazel, and lots of happiness and joy."

3. Informational

Since its beginning, the Café Europa program has also served as a forum through which survivors can receive information and application assistance for reparations and compensation made available by the Claims Conference, the Polish and Austrian governments, and other sources. This brings Café Europa full circle, allowing us to tie these socialization activities into our umbrella program to serve the comprehensive needs of these seniors.

Attached:

Representative Café Europa flyers

Photo from Cannon Beach trip, July 16, 2015

Photo from Sukkot luncheon, 2015