

A COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO AGING IN PLACE

SALLY B. OKEN

Associate Executive Director, Levis Jewish Community Center, Boca Raton, Florida

The Levis Jewish Community Center (JCC) is located on an 85-acre Jewish campus in Boca Raton a quarter-mile from the local hospital and a short walk to a rehabilitation and nursing facility. When the JCC moved to its present location 14 years ago, the campus consisted of 25 acres surrounded by farmland. As land became available for development, the federation raised sufficient funds to purchase it. The visionary leaders knew that the area was growing and that an expansion of services by the Jewish community agencies would be inevitable.

In 2001 several buildings opened on the new acreage:

- a 100-unit HUD apartment building for seniors
- independent apartments and a learning center for developmentally delayed adults, under the auspices of the Jewish Association for Residential Care (JARC)
- the Sandler Center for Jewish Life Enhancement, a 13,000 square foot building for adult classes and programs, and the 10,500 square foot Levis Adult Day Center, both programs of the JCC and each with its own entrance and parking lot to preserve individual dignity and maintain confidentiality

The opening of these buildings so close to one another signified a recognition that along with community growth there would be an increasing need to provide for adults who wish to participate fully in life as they age in place. In addition, with the opening of the Adult Day Center (ADC) the community was now able to provide a true continuum of services to families, from serving infants to serving the frail and disabled elderly.

In May 2004, the JCC Association published a national report, *Hagshama: Inspiring Jewish Journeys*. Among its recommen-

dations were many that focused on how JCCs must reposition themselves to provide stimulating and quality programs and services to Jewish baby boomers and elders.

SANDLER CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE ENHANCEMENT

The Sandler Center for Jewish Life Enhancement, which houses the adult department of the Levis JCC, began implementing these recommendations from the day it opened. The building has a 200-seat state-of-the-art auditorium, dedicated computer lab, art studio, and large classrooms. It also houses a Judaic library that serves the campus with an extensive collection of traditional and contemporary works and is home to the Jewish Genealogical Society and the Jewish Ethical Will Society of South Palm Beach County.

The vision for this building was that it would be a place for adults of all ages to gather to pursue learning and social activities. Membership to the JCC is not required to participate in its activities, and since it opened in 2001 hundreds of people weekly have availed themselves of its programs. A small sampling of its offerings include Jewish Sacred Teachings; My Grandmother, Mother, and Me; The Rabbi Speaks; The Ladies Room; Stock Talk; Bridge, Canasta, and Mah Jongg; Memory Training; Stress Reduction program; Tai Chi; Meditation; and our annual community Synagogue Showcase. In addition, there are special monthly programs that include a lecture series with college professors and a Jazz Jam led by a former director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra who is also an accomplished jazz musician. Intergenerational programs are also offered annually, such as a Women's Seder attended by over 450 women and an In Celebration of Women tea held on Mother's Day.

To perpetuate Jewish continuity, there are a full array of singles programs for all ages. Singles in their twenties through their seventies attend age-specific dances, Quick Date, cocktail parties, and get-togethers. There is a group for single women in their forties and fifties, and the popular annual Blue Jeans Ball draws over 500 singles from their twenties to the fifties.

In 2002 the Center launched the Sandler Sage-ing™ Institute, based on the book *From Age-ing to Sage-ing* by Rabbi Zalman Schacter Shalomi. Its mission is to offer new approaches to aging through creative strategies, new thinking, essential tools, spiritual inquiry, and diverse programs oriented toward personal growth and spirituality. The following is a sample of its programs: Strategies for Successful Living (Perspectives on Aging, Putting Our Inner Wisdom into Action, Learn to View Yourself Positively), Legacy Writing Workshop, and Nourishing Mind Body and Soul. An annual Women's Health Symposium draws several hundred women of all ages to hear inspirational speakers and medical experts.

LEVIS ALZHEIMER'S AND ADULT DAY CARE CENTER (ADC)

Another recommendation of the *Hagshama* report is for JCCs to develop programs that provide for the inclusion of Jews with special needs and challenges. As a licensed, organized program of therapeutic, social, and health activities and services designed to restore or maintain the elderly's optimal capacity for self-care and to increase interaction with others, the Levis ADC speaks directly to this recommendation. Its mission is to help the frail elderly maintain independence and avoid institutional care while providing respite for the primary caregiver and support through weekly caregiver support groups. A social worker and registered nurse are on staff, as well as certified nursing assistants for those who require additional help.

The ADC has several unique features:

- It is the only Glatt kosher facility in the area, serving lunch and snacks daily.
- There are three rooms, which enables activities to be geared specifically to (1) those with moderate to severe cognitive impairments, (2) those who are only mildly impaired, and (3) those who may only have physical impairments. As individuals age in place and their degree of impairment increases, they move from one room to the next.
- There is a safe and secure wandering garden attached to the room for those with Alzheimer's and dementia. The ADC uses the Wanderguard system designed to maintain safety.
- The ADC and Sandler Center are wings of the same building and share an auditorium. This enables caregivers to pursue their own interests at the Sandler Center, knowing that their loved ones are safe next door. In addition, such programs as the Sandler Center's weekly Big Band and chamber orchestra rehearsals are attended by ADC participants, thereby enriching their experience in day care.
- As Sandler Center participants age in place, the transition into the ADC program is a comfortable one.
- On-site rehabilitation therapists provide speech, occupational, and physical therapy to participants and caregivers, relieving their caregivers of having to schedule an additional appointment.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Community cooperative efforts are extensive, thereby increasing the reach of both the Sandler Center and the ADC. Seniors from the two HUD residences on campus participate in programs at the Sandler Center and the ADC. The federation maintains a fleet of buses and has a state grant to provide transportation to the ADC and certain Sandler programs for older adults. JARC, as part of its food services training program, assists the ADC with serving lunch and provides mail delivery to the buildings. In addition, we are currently working with JARC to provide an

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

MICHELE WOLGEL ROSE

Para-Chaplain, Chicago

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,