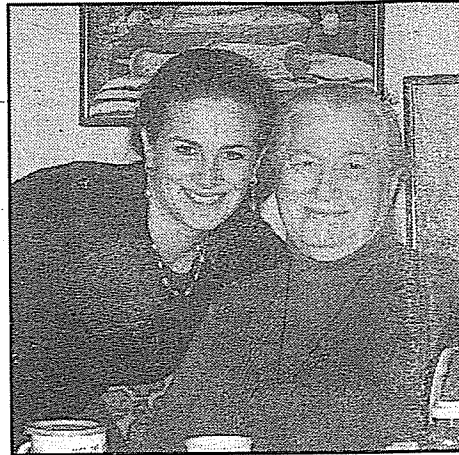


# Connect 2 Program Brings Hope And Happiness To Holocaust Survivors

BY BORUCH SHUBERT

For someone who survived the Holocaust, life is inevitably weighted with the burden of memories too horrific to recount. But when that person becomes elderly - and as too often happens - is left alone without daily emotional support, their ability to continue thriving as they once did becomes severely compromised. The survivor must now face a new sense of loneliness along with the infirmities of advanced age. For many Holocaust survivors living in Brooklyn and Manhattan, however, this plight has been significantly alleviated by Connect2, a friendly visiting program initiated in 2001 by the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island and funded under a special grant from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

Connect2, which has provided over 5,000 friendly visits since its inception, makes contact with its senior clients through referrals by various communal organizations, and recruits its approximately one hundred volunteers through such methods as announcements in schools, newspaper articles, and recommendations from Jewish organizations. Each volunteer, who can range in age from students to retired adult, is matched with a



*Leah Davidowitz, director of Connect2, visiting a holocaust survivor client*

survivor based on mutual compatibility in terms of personalities and interests. Visiting their new "friend" at home on a regular basis, the volunteer typically engages in meaningful conversation with the Holocaust survivor. These talks can span such topics as current personal events or issues in the senior's life, lifelong recollections, or - most sensitively - the client's experiences during the Holocaust, an area of discussion that often generates painful yet therapeutic emotions for the survivor. Seeking to enhance the life of the frail client as much as possible, the volunteer is

also likely to spend time reading to them, or helping them take care of such simple yet potentially daunting tasks as making new arrangements with a utility company or scheduling a doctor's appointment.

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According to the Director of Connect2, Leah Davidowitz, the volunteers are trained to be acutely aware of their clients' specific needs, and are advised prior to beginning their visits on how to be as respectful and courteous as possible. "When a volunteer asks their client 'Where can I sit?' or 'How would you like me to address you?'" she points out, "it gives the elderly survivor a sense of control. These little gestures can do wonders for someone whose anguished past and isolated present have diminished their pride and self-esteem." Davidowitz emphasizes that, for the volunteer, the most important rule is "Remember - it's not about you; be ready to listen as well as talk."

Keeping its elderly clientele in

mind between home visits, as well, Connect2 sends out special mailings to them in conjunction with Jewish holidays, generally a greeting card and a timely gift such as a bottle of honey for Rosh Hashanah or chocolates for Chanukah. The responses are always gratifying. One survivor recently called the program's office, telling its director, "This is the only gift I received for Chanukah and I'm very grateful that somebody remembered me."

Faced with a constant increase in clients, Davidowitz says that she is looking for more volunteers to meet the demand. "People don't realize the difference they can make in someone's life when they give of themselves in this manner," she says. "In fact, the selflessness and wholehearted devotion of time that my volunteers offer serve as real inspiration to me to do even more to relieve the pain and loneliness of the many aging survivors in our midst."

"Thanks to the tireless direction of Leah Davidowitz, Connect2 continues to grow as a model program of its kind," states Rabbi Moshe Wiener, Executive Director, Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island. "We will remain committed to improving the lives of elderly Holocaust survivors who most especially deserve dignity and comfort in their later years."