
Connect 2 Brings Companionship To Homebound Holocaust Survivors

Homebound Holocaust survivors, at the tip of southern Brooklyn, are building wonderful friendships with caring community volunteers thanks to Connect 2. "We are pleased to announce that the Shorefront Jewish Community Council and the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island have joined forces to develop this exciting new program," said Chanie Jacobowitz, Shorefront JCC's site director. "Thanks to Connect 2, we are now meeting a critical need for Holocaust survivors in Brighton Beach, Manhattan Beach, Sheepshead Bay and the surrounding areas."

The program's name, Connect 2, illustrates the goal of this unique visiting program, which brings caring neighborhood volunteers into the apartments of frail Holocaust survivors. Connect 2 connects these lonely seniors to the community by providing friendly visits and regular telephone contacts. In addition, Connect 2 volunteers assist their elderly friends with reading mail, shopping and other needs.

Connect 2 volunteers come from all walks of life. Many of them are teenagers who are excited by the chance to reach across the generations and establish a unique friendship with a lonely senior. Others are local community members, particularly retired individuals, who want to make a difference in the lives of their neighbors. All Connect 2 volunteers are screened and trained prior to beginning their home visits. In particular, the volunteers are trained to identify the Holocaust survivor's other social service needs, so that Shorefront Jewish Community Council can bring in an outreach caseworker to help the senior access additional benefits and services when necessary.

Volunteers communicate regularly with the Connect 2 program coordinator, Elisheva Frank, who works tirelessly to ensure that every senior, and every volunteer, is satisfied with and gaining from the relationship. Ms. Frank also makes an initial assessment visit to each seniors' home in order to assess the senior's needs and concerns. "Every senior who I visit is so excited to be a part of this program," Ms. Frank explains. "When I leave a house, I think about how many more people would volunteer, if they would only understand how happy they are making the loneliest and most vulnerable people in our community."

Connect 2's enthusiastic volunteers look forward to their visits almost as much as the seniors do. Sylvia, a Connect 2 volunteer, describes her feelings in detail, "It is so rewarding to be able to spend time with Holocaust survivors. These relationships often result in beautiful friendships. After I started volunteering, I spoke with my friends, who were so impressed with my experiences that they now want to volunteer their assistance as well."

If you know of a Holocaust survivor who would like to be a part of this program, or if you would like to volunteer for Connect 2, please contact Elisheva Frank at (718) 449-5000, Ext 216. Connect 2 is made possible by a grant from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany ■