

Aging Holocaust survivors have growing need for care

BY JOYCE SHELBY

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Always remember. Never forget.

On Thursday and Sunday, many Jews in [Brooklyn](#) will take part in an international remembrance of one of the most tragic periods in 20th century history — the Holocaust, when an estimated six million Jews perished.

There will be moments of silence in [Israel](#). In [Manhattan](#), special programming is planned at the [Museum of Jewish Heritage](#) on Thursday, followed by a citywide memorial at Congregation Emanu-El on Sunday.

In Brooklyn, about 400 survivors are expected to attend a program Thursday in a catering hall at the [Manhattan Beach Jewish Center](#).

"Brooklyn has the largest number of Holocaust survivors in [America](#)," said [Gideon Taylor](#), executive vice president of the [Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany](#).

About 22,500 survivors live in the borough. They account for about 25% of the U.S. survivors, and 54% of the survivors in the eight-county [New York](#) metropolitan area, according to estimates derived from a 2002 study by the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York.

The survivors' average age is now 78. Their numbers have dwindled from 27,900 in 2002, but their need for services is rapidly increasing.

"Many of the very elderly came here without skills or a profession," said Leo Rechter, president of the [National Association of Jewish Child Holocaust Survivors](#).

"They worked in the garment industry or catering or other industries that don't pay significant pensions. And people didn't realize the effects of inflation," said Rechter, himself a Holocaust survivor who is on the advisory board of Selfhelp Community Services.

[Elihu Kover](#), vice president for Nazi Victim Services at Selfhelp Community Services, said, "We're getting new clients in their 90s. Until at least 2015, we will see an increase in the number of survivors needing care."

Previously, Kover said, some clients declined what they viewed as charity; others were highly suspicious of anything government-related.

[Lyubov Mikityansky](#) of the Marks Jewish Community House of [Bensonhurst](#), said, "The survivors have a lot of psychological problems because of all the traumas they went through."

Selfhelp and other groups receiving funds from the Claims Conference and the [UJA-Federation](#) offer survivors help in applying for government assistance.

Many groups also give emergency medical aid and help with housing, food and clothing. They sponsor group outings and regular social gatherings.

But workers say they've also learned to be creative in reaching an isolated, aging population. For example:

The [Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island](#) is among the groups sending volunteers to visit survivors, many of whom lost their families during the Holocaust.

So survivors may remain in their homes as long as possible, the [Sheepshead Bay](#) and [Kensington](#) offices of Selfhelp provide assistance with shopping and light housekeeping. The [Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty](#) offers handyman services.

Guardians for the Sick offers a range of programs in [Flatbush](#) and [Borough Park](#). The group has developed special services for men and women losing their vision.

There's a friendship club to help elderly women learn how to manage diabetes, and plans for a men's group.

At the Jewish Community Center of [Canarsie](#), Holocaust survivors meet regularly with Brooklynites who lost family members in the Sept. 11 attacks.

"They have lots of feelings in common," said [Inna Gekelman](#), who oversees the program. "They talk about fighting stress and releasing negative feelings. It helps both groups feel better emotionally."

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