

**TESTIMONY OF ELIHU KOVER
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BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
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Chairman Nelson, Ranking Member Collins, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to come here today to discuss the needs of aging Holocaust survivors and the services my organization, Selfhelp Community Services, provides for them.

We appreciate and support the attention to Holocaust survivors by the administration through the initiative announced by Vice President Biden, and by Congress, through S. 999. We thank Senator Nelson and Senator Kirk for their sponsorship of S. 999, which would amend the Older Americans Act to provide social service agencies with the resources to provide services to meet the urgent needs of Holocaust survivors to age in place with dignity, comfort, security, and quality of life.

Since its founding in 1936 by émigrés fleeing Nazi Germany, Selfhelp Community Services has grown into a large health and human services agency serving older adults of all backgrounds. Selfhelp is the largest provider of comprehensive social services to Holocaust survivors in North America. Over 75 years ago, Selfhelp's founders made a sacred promise: "to serve as the last surviving relative to victims of Nazi persecution." Today, through an array of services delivered with care and compassion, Selfhelp is fulfilling this pledge for over 5,300 survivors in New York City and Long Island.

Holocaust survivors are growing older and frailer. The twenty-year-old who survived Auschwitz is now eighty-eight. She may be coping with the loss of her spouse and have no family to speak of. In addition to the myriad problems associated with so-called "normal aging," many survivors have numerous physical and psychological problems directly attributable to their experiences during the Holocaust. Prolonged periods of starvation, exposure to severe weather conditions with inadequate clothing, and experiencing and witnessing unspeakable atrocities take a severe toll on body and mind. And many of these problems only surface in old age, having been hidden during their working years when the survivors struggled and made a new life for themselves as productive citizens of this country. Further exacerbating their situation, more than 50% of the survivors living in New York City can be classified as "very poor" or "near poor" under Federal guidelines.

Many people are incredulous when they discover that there are an estimated 120,000 Holocaust survivors in the United States. Selfhelp has recently issued a report, included with this testimony, which analyzes the most recent population data. In the New York City metropolitan area alone, there are 65,000 survivors. Of these, the youngest are in their late sixties – but the oldest are over one hundred years of age.

When refugees from Nazi persecution founded Selfhelp Community Services in 1936, they did so with the goal of helping their fellow émigrés to find housing and employment and adjust to life in their new American home. Today, 77 years later, Selfhelp has grown to serve 20,000 of New York City's most elderly, frail, and vulnerable residents, including survivors of the Holocaust. Indeed, Selfhelp is the largest provider of comprehensive services to Holocaust survivors in North America, serving nearly 5,400 survivors in the past year.

Selfhelp's mission reflects our programmatic growth and our continuing commitment to survivors of the Holocaust:

Selfhelp is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to maintaining the independence and dignity of seniors and at-risk populations through a spectrum of housing, home health care, and social services and will lead in applying new methods and technologies to address changing needs of its community. Selfhelp will continue to serve as the "last surviving relative" to its historic constituency, victims of Nazi persecution.

Our overall goal is to enable seniors, as well as frail, and disabled individuals, to live independently. In addition to our specialized programs for Holocaust survivors, Selfhelp provides:

- **Affordable senior housing** to over 1,270 residents in nine buildings, with extensive health, wellness, and case management services available on site at residents' request.
- Five **senior centers**, including one of the first to be designated by the City of New York as an Innovative Senior Center.
- Over two million hours per year of **home care**, including home health care, skilled nursing, chore and housekeeping assistance, and emergency home care. Selfhelp also offers high-caliber **training** to 350 home care aides each year, and specialized training in caring for Holocaust survivors.
- Groundbreaking **client-centered technology programs** – specialized technologies for the elderly that include Selfhelp's acclaimed **Virtual Senior Center**, remote safety monitors, and telehealth kiosks.
- Three **Court-Appointed Guardianship** programs, including one operated specifically for Holocaust survivors.
- Four **Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC)** programs.
- Four **case management** programs for low-income seniors, including one funded by UJA-Federation of New York, and one specifically for older refugees.
- The **Selfhelp Alzheimer's Resource Program**, which provides Social Adult Day Care services.
- **Emergency Financial Assistance.**
- **Selfhelp Senior Source**, a fee-for-service geriatric care management program.

These programs operate through 26 locations in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Nassau County.

SERVING HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

To identify Jewish Holocaust survivors, Selfhelp adheres to the definition of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference), which, to summarize, says that a Nazi victim is considered to be any Jew who lived in Germany, Austria, or any of the countries occupied by the Nazis while that country was under the Nazi regime

Age: Based on Selfhelp's most recent community snapshot, the median age among Selfhelp's Holocaust survivor clients is 85. Fifty-three percent are between the ages of 80 and 89, 27 percent are between 90 and 99, 18 percent are between 70 and 79, one percent are under 70, and twenty-six individuals (1 percent) are over 100

Geographic Area of Service: Selfhelp serves Nazi victims through seven community-based program sites, with two locations in Brooklyn, two in Manhattan, and one each in the Bronx, Queens, and Nassau County. At our Kensington office in Brooklyn we have a separate program specifically to serve Russian-speaking Holocaust survivors residing throughout that borough.

Country of Origin: clients come from Poland (28%), the Former Soviet Union (FSU) (22%), Germany (11%), Hungary (11%), and the Czech Republic (11%). Other significant numbers of clients are from Rumania, Austria, France, and Belgium

Selfhelp continues to experience an increase in the number of Russian Holocaust survivors requesting service. In FY 2013 Selfhelp served over 1,600 Russian survivors, an approximately 30 percent increase over the previous fiscal year.

Special needs and other relevant identifying characteristics: Within its service population of Holocaust survivors Selfhelp has identified three distinct groups with their own special needs.

- (1) *Clients from the Former Soviet Union:* These clients tend to be in poor health and extremely destitute, with the vast majority receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Because they emigrated later in life, they also face the challenge of assimilating in a new country in which they do not speak the language or understand its customs.
- (2) *Elderly clients in their late eighties or beyond:* A majority of Selfhelp's Holocaust survivor clients fall into this category. These clients tend to have multiple acute needs that must be met by a full range of services.
- (3) *Younger clients:* Selfhelp serves a younger cohort of survivor clients (primarily in their late 60's to late-70's) who experienced the emotional and psychological traumas of the Holocaust in early childhood. This affected their development in unique ways, and for many it has led to difficulty functioning as mature adults. Members of each of these groups have multiple, specific needs that must be met by enhanced case management and by supportive services that address their unique situations.

Two case vignettes illustrate typical needs of Selfhelp clients and the services we provide to them:

Mr. M

Mr. M. is 91 years old, suffers from severe depression and anxiety, and is in declining health. His only sibling, a sister who lived in England, recently passed away. Aside from a second cousin living in New York, he has no other family.

Born in Germany in the early 1920s, Mr. M lost many loved ones during the Holocaust. His mother was killed at Auschwitz. His sister escaped through the Kindertransport, but in 1939, at age 17, Mr. M was too old for the Kindertransport. Instead, he managed to escape through a transport ship that took him to Swaziland. He later came to the United States, where he worked as a tool and die maker and later as a bike messenger.

In 2001, Mr. M was hit by a car and needed help. He was very anxious about paying his medical expenses and not being able to work. He was very depressed and attempted suicide within one year of the accident. As a resident of Queens, Mr. M became connected with Selfhelp's community-based office located in Forest Hills, Queens.

Selfhelp's initial work was focused on stabilizing Mr. M's financial situation by helping him to obtain various entitlements and benefits. His social worker successfully applied for and obtained a Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE), enrollment in a Medicare Savings Program, Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC), Food Stamps, a reduced phone bill, Access-A-Ride services, and tax credits, among others. In addition, the social worker provided supportive counseling for his depression and anxiety.

Not long after, Mr. M began participating in Selfhelp social programs. He worked as an office volunteer and was even interviewed about his experiences with Selfhelp for local media outlets. Mr. M established a "home" for himself at Selfhelp's Nazi Victim Services Program in Queens, and he flourished there for the following 12 years.

In March 2013, Mr. M sustained a fall, and since then, his health has been in decline. He has experienced multiple falls, several hospitalizations, and rehabilitative services. He now lives in an assisted living facility, which has been a hard adjustment, and once again he is battling depression and anxiety.

Mr. M's social worker visits him weekly to provide supportive counseling and a link to his Selfhelp "family." She advocated for him at the assisted living facility so that he could meet with a psychiatrist and receive antidepressants. She accompanied him to the medical clinic when he was too anxious to go on his own. His social worker continues to work toward the goal of helping Mr. M manage his health, depression, and anxiety enough to be able to travel to the program office, where he can again volunteer and attend social programs, such as Coffee Houses.

Selfhelp truly became a second home for Mr. M, and he quite literally thinks of Selfhelp as his family.

Mrs. K

Mrs. K is an 88-year-old Holocaust survivor. During the war, she and her family were placed in a ghetto in Baranowo, Poland. She spent two years there before being transferred from one labor camp to another for the remainder of the war. Each time, she was forced to work in munitions factories, filling bullet cartridges with gunpowder. Following liberation, she lived in a camp for displaced persons, where she stayed until 1946.

After the war, Mrs. K immigrated to the United States, married, and had children. In recent years, her children have moved away, her husband has died, and Mrs. K has grown very lonely. Like many survivors, she tends to see seeking help as a sign of weakness, which has made her resist support despite her growing need for activity and socialization. After many visits from her Selfhelp social worker, who encouraged her to attend the Coffee Houses, Mrs. K began to do so. There, she enjoyed food and music, but most importantly, she enjoyed the company of her peers and other Holocaust survivors. She expressed great joy at being among people who could relate to her experiences.

The Coffee Houses prompted her to become more active – Mrs. K began going to the YMHA almost daily. Additionally, she began accepting other help, such as the assistance of a chore services provider who helped her with grocery shopping this past summer and currently assists with cleaning her house to prevent deterioration of her surroundings, which for many elderly can lead to depression and decline. Now, she can both accept help and retain her dignity and independence. She has expressed great gratitude and appreciation for Selfhelp’s services.

Caregiving: Due to physical or cognitive frailty, clients are often in need of and receive assistance from caregivers, including family members and/or professional caregivers such as home care nurses. These services are essential to helping them remain in their communities. Also, some Holocaust survivors are themselves caregivers who look after frail spouses and/or adult children that are physically or emotionally dependent.

THE NEEDS OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

The comprehensive set of services delivered by Selfhelp’s program for Holocaust survivors is designed to address a wide range of needs. Specific needs addressed include the following:

Need: Entitlements and Benefits Support – In order for aging survivors to continue living independently in their communities, they must be informed of and receive assistance in applying for the myriad entitlements, benefits, and programs available to support them. Because application and recertification for programs such as Medicaid, the Medicaid Savings Program, Managed Long Term Care Plans (MLTCPs), Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can be very complex, elderly people may find them frustrating or intimidating, which makes them less likely to take full advantage of all possible supports. Similarly, the benefits

specific to Holocaust survivors are difficult to navigate and may vary according to country of origin, type of persecution, etc.

Elderly Holocaust survivors can be even more intimidated by these application processes because of their fear of government agencies and authority figures, which stems from their experiences during the Holocaust. The need to fill out paperwork may be equated with the Holocaust-era fear of “not having one’s papers in order.” Moreover, survivors are often resistant to revealing their assets, savings, and amount of reparations awarded. For these reasons, professionals working with Holocaust survivors must have a thorough understanding of survivors’ psychology, and they must possess the skills needed to help them overcome their fears and receive help.

Need: Home Health Care – In addition to the cognitive and functional declines that commonly accompany advancing age, survivors are prone to certain Holocaust-related physical conditions – stemming from factors like malnutrition, physical abuse, stress, and exposure to severe weather conditions – that may only begin to manifest as they grow older. Heart conditions, bone issues, foot problems, and dental problems are all common. In addition, psychological issues stemming from the Holocaust, including depression, anxiety, and sleep disorders such as insomnia and night terrors are directly attributable to their experiences during the Holocaust.

Issues like these make in-home care a necessity. However, lack of insurance coverage for long-term home care, together with the high costs of obtaining private home care, can leave those who need ongoing home care services with no recourse for obtaining it. Selfhelp expects that these issues will significantly impact clients for the foreseeable future, as additional cuts to publicly-funded programs and the transition to managed long-term care plans will continue to hinder access to home care. This could result in an increase in nursing home placement, which has a significant affect on all elderly, but raises very specific issues for Holocaust survivors.

The German government has recognized the growing need for home health care for Holocaust survivors. Through successful negotiations by the Claims Conference, they have provided significant financial support, which has helped Selfhelp to expand its home health care services. Selfhelp is grateful for this critical support and hopes that it will continue.

Need: Isolation and Socialization – Holocaust survivors are more prone to isolation and loneliness than other elderly people because they generally have smaller networks of family and friends. Typically, survivors living in the United States lost family members in the Holocaust, were forced to immigrate quickly, and did so either alone or with few friends and family members. Thus, as they begin to lose spouses and the few friends and loved ones they do have, and as they deteriorate physically and travel becomes difficult, they can quickly become isolated and lonely. In addition, reminiscence and life review, activities which are normally appropriate for the elderly, are problematic for Holocaust survivors. It reminds them of their losses and may in fact make them feel even more isolated.

Need: Cleaning and Errands – Household chores and basic errands become increasingly difficult as people age, which can lead to unsanitary and sometimes dangerous living conditions, and a negative emotional outlook. In many cases, regular chore service keeps

survivors in their homes by preventing the kind of deterioration that would eventually lead to institutionalization.

Need: Managing Finances – As older survivors experience serious cognitive issues, including Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias, finances become more difficult to manage, and they become vulnerable to scams and misleading advice. In addition, physical problems like poor eyesight, arthritic hands, and general frailty have an effect on their ability to manage day-to-day finances. As a result, attention to bills, rent payments, and balancing of checkbooks can suffer, leading to more serious financial problems. Often, assistance with financial management is a necessity for aging survivors who wish to remain in their homes and live independently.

Need: Psychological and Emotional Support – Many older people face threats like the onset of dementia or depression, the gradual loss of family members and of independence, and the looming possibility of being placed in a nursing home. These common threats are compounded for Holocaust survivors, who also experience the lingering effects of past emotional trauma, physical deprivation, and confinement. In addition, many survivors experienced stressors following the Holocaust that affect their mental health in old age, such as those of immigration, social isolation or marginalization, assimilation, and poverty. Most Holocaust survivors have never had the chance to heal the severe emotional wounds they have suffered as a result of these factors. When they lost loved ones during the war, they did not have the chance to attend proper funerals, or visit gravesites. Instead, they had to focus on escaping persecution, and after they did most of them were forced to “pull themselves up by their boot straps” in their new American homes. They had neither the time nor the finances to allow themselves a normal, healthy grieving process. So, these wounds continue to operate on their psyches even late in life. And, as their generation ages and their peers pass away, each new loss stirs dormant grief and traumatic memories.

In addition to the need for psychological and emotional support described previously, Selfhelp serves a cohort of survivors who exhibit mental health needs too serious to be met in the social work sphere and who are in need of ongoing psychiatric treatment and/or medication. However, there are several significant barriers in place between these survivors and the mental health care they need. First of all, they are not likely to seek out mental health services independently, as fears of being stigmatized for receiving mental health services, or of being forced into an institutional setting, can make them hesitant to accept help. In addition, many survivors are more receptive to services if they can be provided in their home. However, most mental health professionals hesitate to provide in-home service because the Medicare reimbursement rate for such treatment is minimal. Thus, it can be difficult to find a psychiatrist willing to perform home visits with any regularity. These factors can make it difficult for survivors and the organizations that help them to gain access to needed mental health services.

Current unmet needs: There are several service areas for which clients currently have a great need, and for which additional support is needed.

One is **mental health**. Through a long-term collaboration with Montefiore Hospital’s Division of Geriatric Psychiatry, Selfhelp’s Bronx office has provided survivors with consultation and

direct services by a visiting psychiatrist. In July 2010 this program was expanded to Brooklyn via collaboration with Maimonides Hospital. These pilot projects, funded through time-limited grants from UJA-Federation of New York, have proven to be critical components of comprehensive service provision. They fill a major gap in the service network. Yet, because these services are only being provided in the Bronx and Brooklyn and Selfhelp serves Holocaust survivors in other areas of New York City, there is an unmet need for mental health services in other locations. Changing Medicare policy to allow greater reimbursement for mental health services is crucial for this population and the broader community.

It is estimated that more than 50 percent of Holocaust survivors live below 150 percent of federal poverty guidelines. Selfhelp's clients tend to have very low incomes, and for those from the former Soviet Union, this is especially true. Although Selfhelp is able to provide financial management services and some financial assistance, a great need remains.

Similar to all elderly living in the New York City metropolitan area, the need for **affordable housing** for Selfhelp's Holocaust survivor clients continues to grow. To help meet this need, Selfhelp received permission from the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) of New York City to give a preference to Holocaust survivors in the marketing of our newest affordable senior building, "K-VII." Ten percent of the units (i.e. 10 units) were preferentially available during the initial lease-up of the project for persons who were persecuted during the Nazi era. This set a great precedent going forward as Selfhelp continues to develop new housing opportunities. However, this housing preference alone cannot meet the affordable housing needs of our survivor clients. The Section 8 voucher program had a significant impact on this problem in the past, and we urge that this program be re-funded to meet this critical need.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Through its seven community-based sites for Holocaust survivors, Selfhelp delivers a wide spectrum of services which enables the agency to fulfill its mission to serve as "the last surviving relative" to victims of Nazi persecution. The staff employed by these programs work exclusively with Nazi victims and spend 100 percent of their time on the program. Selfhelp's central unit, located in midtown Manhattan, coordinates all programs.

Ongoing core services include:

Enhanced Case Management: This service is the cornerstone of Selfhelp's Nazi Victim Services Program. Selfhelp's social workers develop care plans tailored to meet the needs of individual Holocaust survivors, and provide ongoing contact and monitoring as they act as personal advocates for the interests of their clients.

Social workers provide advocacy, supportive counseling, information, and referrals, along with screening and advice for a complete range of available entitlements and benefits. These workers are well versed not only in what benefits and entitlements are available to older people generally, but also to Holocaust survivors specifically.

Social workers also arrange for housekeeping and homecare services, perform periodic re-evaluation of benefits and entitlement eligibility, and keep clients abreast of new community

services and resources geared toward the elderly population. Selfhelp provides regular in-service training to its staff to ensure social workers have a deep understanding of the psychological impact of the Holocaust, and are qualified to provide sensitive counseling and care. Selfhelp has also actively worked with UJA-Federation of New York to provide similar training to the service providers and organizations throughout the New York City metropolitan area.

Given the frailty of most Selfhelp Nazi victim clients, most direct work with them is done in their homes, though some do visit Selfhelp offices for service.

From January 1 through October 31, 2013, Selfhelp provided 40,166 hours of individualized case management and counseling services to 4,105 survivors, through 9,684 in-home visits with clients.

Subsidized Home Health Care: Many clients require more intensive home care services, such as personal and medical-related care, in order for them to remain safely at home. Selfhelp's licensed home care services agency (LHCSA) and Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) provide a full array of home health services, including personal care and skilled nursing. Depending on client needs, services may be provided on a long-term, short-term, or interim basis. Services are subsidized for those who cannot afford to pay for private care.

From January 1 – October 31, 2013, Selfhelp provided 147,220 hours of subsidized home care to Nazi victims.

Social Programs: Selfhelp provides an array of ongoing social programs for Nazi victims. "Coffee Houses" bring survivors together to socialize, share memories, enjoy a full meal or some cake and coffee, and have the pleasure of listening to music and entertainment.

Selfhelp marks important Jewish holidays throughout the year with special events that resonate deeply for clients, such as Passover seders and Chanukah and Purim parties. Group trips to museums and other sites also occur during the year.

Selfhelp's Bronx, Washington Heights, and Nassau County offices also offer many additional small group activities for survivors. These groups meet regularly in our offices and in other Jewish community centers or senior centers, and offer opportunities for additional socialization, connection, and support to survivors. The groups range in topics from general discussion and support to a movie and book group.

From January 1 – October 31, 2013, aggregate attendance at Selfhelp social programs totaled 5,735.

Housekeeping and Chore Services: Household chores and basic errands become increasingly difficult as people age, which can lead to unsanitary and sometimes dangerous living conditions, and a negative emotional outlook. Housekeeping service helps to keep survivors in their homes by providing clients with an average of three hours per week of light housework, shopping assistance, laundry, and chore service. In many cases, regular chore service keeps survivors in their homes by preventing the kind of deterioration that may eventually lead to institutionalization.

From January 1 – October 31, 2013, Selfhelp provided 13,694 hours of chore services and

housekeeping to victims of Nazi persecution.

Financial Management: Survivors who are no longer able to properly manage their finances due to declining cognitive and physical functioning are provided with an appropriate level of assistance during in-home visits with a Selfhelp Financial Specialist. Interventions range from monthly visits for checkbook balancing, bill payment, and sorting of mail, to serving as court-appointed guardian.

From January 1 – October 31, 2013, Selfhelp provided financial management services to 64 Holocaust survivors.

Volunteer Programs: Volunteers make scheduled friendly visits to homebound clients to provide socialization, communication, and community involvement. Volunteers also assist at Coffee Houses and other social events, make telephone reassurance calls, or assist in the office.

In addition to individual volunteers, we have established relationship with schools and organizations to provide volunteers to assist us. For the past several years, we have partnered with NYU's Silver School of Social Work to offer volunteer opportunities to undergraduate students in the *Service Learning Through Visits with Holocaust Survivors* course. Students are trained by Selfhelp staff, and then are assigned as friendly visitors for Holocaust survivors, who they visit regularly throughout the semester.

Each year for almost 20 years, Selfhelp's NVSP has hosted a volunteer from Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ARSP), an organization that sends young Germans to assist communities and individuals who were affected by the Holocaust. Each volunteer serves for a 12-month period, and is assigned to the Brooklyn and Manhattan program sites, where he or she acts as a friendly visitor.

We have also maintained a relationship with New York Cares, which provides us with many volunteers at our Coffee Houses. We initiated this relationship in one office several years ago and in recent years have expanded it to two additional programs. We have also had annual volunteer events with Goldman Sachs Community Team Works project and at the offices of PIMCO.

From January 1 – October 31, 2013, 481 volunteers provided our clients with 2,787 hours of invaluable services.

Emergency Financial Assistance Program: Through this program, clients in need receive grants for medical and dental procedures, Medigap insurance, rent, utility bills, citizenship fees, air conditioners, home appliances, and other needed items and services.

From January 1 – October 31, 2013, Selfhelp distributed \$894,245 in emergency financial assistance.

OTHER HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR SERVICES

We continue striving to expand our capacity to understand and address the spiritual needs of our NVSP clients during the critical last years of their lives. For the past three summers we have served as a training site for interns from the Clinical Pastoral Education Program at the Jewish Theological Seminary. These rabbinic interns have visited Holocaust survivors in their

homes to assist them in their spiritual struggles.

Selfhelp's Young Leadership Committee, NextGen, has continued to focus many of its efforts on the needs of Holocaust survivors. They have organized holiday celebrations for our clients, at which as many as 30 NextGen volunteers assisted, along with their families, including young children, and Selfhelp Board members. Volunteers assisted with setting up, serving lunch, dancing, and socializing with clients. These have been very uplifting and enjoyable afternoons.

NextGen also continues to support the Memoirs Project, which is currently in its fourth year. This initiative assists Holocaust survivors in creating a written memoir of their previously untold Holocaust histories. Young, professional volunteers meet in pairs with the survivors in their homes, and then transcribe their life stories. To date, we have trained over 100 volunteers, and 50 Holocaust survivors have benefitted from this program.

Developed in Israel, Witness Theater is an intergenerational program in which a group of Holocaust survivors and teenagers meet weekly over a year for the purpose of writing and publicly performing a dramatic presentation of the survivors' Holocaust experiences. Selfhelp brought this deeply moving event to New York City in 2012. Following the successful debut of Witness Theater during the 2012-13 program year, Selfhelp is again partnering with the Yeshivah of Flatbush for a second year. Thirteen high school seniors and 10 survivors from our Brooklyn programs are participating in the 2013-14 program year. In 2014-15, Selfhelp hopes to expand the program to include additional schools or community partners.

Other educational program partners include:

- *Facing History and Ourselves* – We recently established a connection with Facing History and Ourselves, an educational organization dedicated to combating prejudice, indifference, and misinformation. At the heart of the organization is the study of the Holocaust. We are hopeful that we can use this connection to bring Witness Theater to some of the public schools in the New York City area that participate in Facing History's curriculum. We are also reaching out to some of our Holocaust survivor clients who are interested in speaking about their experiences to local middle and high school students in the Facing History and Ourselves network.
- The *Hannah Senesh Community Day School* –the 8th grade class from the Hannah Senesh Community Day School, a progressive Jewish school in Brooklyn, committed to volunteering at one of the Brooklyn Coffee House events each month during the academic year. Over the course of the year, the Holocaust survivors and the students develop meaningful relationships.
- *Manhattan College* – In the summer of 2013, the Program Directors of the Bronx and Washington Heights program locations accompanied 10 clients for a meeting with Dr. Mehnaz Afridi, Director of the Holocaust, Genocide and Interfaith Program at Manhattan College. The meeting marked the beginning of Selfhelp's collaboration with Manhattan College for the 2013-2014 program year. Clients were excited to begin participating in joint activities with Manhattan College students and are planning an interfaith seder to take place in April 2014. Students are also serving as friendly visitors.

- The *Spryer Legacy School* – We recently began a new project with the Spryer Legacy School, a private school for gifted children on the Upper West Side. Clients met with the 4th grade class and participated in an art project regarding the Holocaust.

COLLABORATION

Through its many years of work as the largest provider of services to Holocaust survivors in North America, Selfhelp has developed solid working relationships with organizations serving similar populations, as well as a clear understanding that our mutual efforts should be focused on the best interest of the clients.

Some of these organizations also provide very specific services that Selfhelp utilizes on behalf of survivors. As a result, Selfhelp maintains cross referral relationships and provides information and support to numerous organizations throughout the New York City Metropolitan Area.

Collaboration with UJA-Federation of New York: Selfhelp worked with UJA-Federation to establish a task force of all the agencies funded by UJA-Federation through its Community Initiative for Nazi Victims (now known as the Community Initiative for Holocaust Survivors – CIHS). Since then, together with UJA-Federation, Selfhelp has also regularly provided professional training opportunities to the CIHS network for the past few years. Topics have included: *Patterns of Communication and Transmission of Trauma and Resilience, Rage Reenactment in the Second Generation, Mental Health Issues and Challenges, Special Issues in Working with Child Holocaust Survivors, Spiritual Care Issues, and Survivor Benefits and Compensation.*

International Conferences: Selfhelp has organized four international conferences for professionals working with Holocaust survivors during the past years. The most recent, in honor of our 75th anniversary, was held in March, 2011, at UJA-Federation's conference center. Three hundred participants, from the USA, Canada, Israel, Germany and Brazil attended the two-day conference which included two plenary sessions and over twenty workshops and panel sessions.

Collaboration with other Agencies: We often work together with other New York agencies to obtain services for our clients that we may not be able to provide directly. Some examples include: client transportation (the Jewish Community Council of Coney Island); volunteer services (Dorot); provision of geriatric mental health services (Montefiore Medical Center and Maimonides Medical Center); and mutual referral (the Jewish Community Council of Washington Heights, JASA, and the Bronx Jewish Community Council, among many others).

Collaboration with Community Partners: Many of our social programs are held in synagogues and Jewish Community Centers throughout the New York Metropolitan Area. Our Bronx Holocaust survivor program is located in the Bronx House (a local community center), and our social programs are held in that facility.

We have worked closely with the Museum of Jewish Heritage, which sponsors an annual summer intergenerational event for our clients and has provided educational tours for our staff. We also maintain relationships with many synagogues for other activities and events. For example, in the past year, local congregations have provided special packages for our clients for

Rosh HaShanah, Chanukah, and Passover.

Referrals: Client referrals come via the multiple survivor groups with which Selfhelp is connected – including the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, the National Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors (NAHOS), Hidden Child Foundation, KinderTransport Association, and other groups. Additionally, Selfhelp is well known to hospital discharge planners, case management agencies, and organizations throughout the New York City area. Among other efforts, Selfhelp staff members attend monthly meetings of the Queens Chapter for Holocaust Survivors, and have made presentations at NAHOS. Members of survivor groups serve on Selfhelp's Holocaust Survivor Advisory Committee, which reviews all requests for financial assistance and meets periodically to obtain information and updates on Selfhelp's programs, and to provide input and support.

Collaboration to Serve Russian-Speaking Nazi Victims: Selfhelp's Russian Nazi Victim Services Program works in collaboration with other community groups serving Russian Nazi victims, including the Association of Holocaust survivors from the FSU and the New York Association of Holocaust Survivors. The Program Supervisor has made presentations to these organizations on helping clients to access the German Social Security ghetto pension, ZRBG, as well as on other subjects. Selfhelp's program keeps in regular contact with these community groups, including face-to-face meetings with their leadership, and they frequently refer Russian-speaking Nazi victims to Selfhelp for service.

FUTURE PROGRAM PLANS

The 2012 Claims Conference Worldbook estimates that there are nearly 120,000 Nazi victims currently living in the United States. UJA-Federation of New York's 2011 *Jewish Community Study of New York* identified 73,000 survivors of the Holocaust still living in the New York City area. Based on UJA-Federation's recent findings, Selfhelp updated its demographic analysis, "Holocaust Survivors in New York: Today Through 2025." There are many more Nazi victims still living in New York City than formerly known, and we project that the number will remain in the tens of thousands throughout the next decade and beyond the year 2025.

Selfhelp's experience has shown that survivors often begin seeking services as they age and as they begin to develop health conditions or need financial assistance. Similarly, we can project that the clients who require care will continue to do so for the duration of their lifetimes.

Based on our analysis, we expect a year from now, in 2015 :

- The number of Holocaust survivors living in NYC to be approximately **56,750**,
- The number of Holocaust survivors aged 75 or above to be more than **46,000**,
- The number of Holocaust survivors reporting their health as poor or fair to approach **34,000**, and
- The number of Holocaust survivors living below 150% of federal poverty guidelines to exceed **29,500**.

We , like many organizations throughout the United States and the world, are fortunate to receive substantial funding from the **Claims Conference**, which has enabled us to expand our services significantly over the past years. With their funding we have opened new service sites which have made our services more accessible, and we have been able to provide increased critical home care services. Their support is unprecedented, and provides a literal lifeline for thousands of survivors. We also receive crucial funding from **UJA-Federation of New York**, which plays a central role in advancing awareness and support for survivors in the New York community. The need, however, is far greater. The numbers who require care exceed the capacity of the service providers.

CONCLUSION

To fulfill Selfhelp’s mission to serve as “the last surviving relative” of victims of Nazi persecution, the services that clients so desperately need must be sustained. The need for Nazi victim services is still great and will remain high for many years to come.

Through the comprehensive service program that Selfhelp has developed we are able to meet many of the special needs of Holocaust survivors. In addition to the major support of the Claims Conference and UJA-Federation of New York, we have made creative use of private funding, volunteers and collaboration with other faith-based and social service organizations.

However, public programs also play an especially vital role for Holocaust survivors. Supplemental Security Income, Social Security, SNAP (Food Stamps) Medicare and Medicaid are bedrocks of assistance to a population of frail elders whose incomes are low and who have few family resources. We urge Congress to strengthen and not weaken these important sources of basic income and health care for elders who have few other resources due to the persecution and deprivation suffered in their early years.

Despite our best efforts, affordable housing and mental health services continue to be among the most difficult needs for us to meet among the Holocaust survivors we serve. Public policies need to be implemented to ensure that frail seniors’ basic needs for shelter and mental health services can be fulfilled.

We hope that in reauthorizing the Older Americans Act, Congress will include the provisions of S. 999, to provide social service agencies with the resources to meet the urgent needs of Holocaust survivors to age in place with dignity, comfort, security, and improved quality of life.

We also urge support for the White House initiative recently announced by Vice President Biden, which proposes a four-point plan to help Holocaust survivors. And, the United States should continue to be a leader in the arena of pressing for survivor compensation, continuing diplomatic efforts such as the Terezin Declaration, resolving property claims of survivors from Central and Eastern Europe, and negotiating with France on behalf of deportees on the SNCF (French railway).

In closing, we thank you again for this opportunity to discuss the needs of aging Holocaust survivors and the services that Selfhelp provides for them. And, on behalf of Holocaust survivors, we thank the Obama Administration, the Congress, and this Senate Special Committee on Aging hearing for your attention to this unique population that we serve.