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**New York City Council
Presentation to the Jewish Caucus
FY20 Budget
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My name is Katie Foley and I am the Director of Public Affairs at Selfhelp Community Services. Thank you to Jewish Caucus Chair, Councilmember Chaim Deutsch and the members of the caucus for the opportunity to present today on Selfhelp's mission and programs serving Holocaust survivors.

Selfhelp was founded in 1936 to help those fleeing Nazi Germany maintain their independence and dignity as they struggled to forge new lives in America. Today, Selfhelp has grown into one of the largest and most respected not-for-profit human service agencies in the New York metropolitan area, with 46 programs throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Nassau County. We provides a broad set of services to more than 20,000 elderly, frail, and vulnerable New Yorkers each year. Selfhelp offers a complete network of community-based home care, social service, and senior housing programs with the overarching goal of helping clients to live with dignity and independence and avoid institutional care.

Selfhelp remains committed to serving as the last surviving relative to Holocaust survivors in need of care, and in particular for the up to 40,000 survivors living in New York City. As the largest provider of services to Holocaust survivors in North America, Selfhelp's commitment extends to educating future generations to ensure that never again remains true, and that the lessons of the Holocaust are shared.

Our services are extensive and include: specialized programs for Holocaust Survivors; eleven affordable senior housing complexes; four Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) programs; three intensive case management programs; five senior centers including one of New York City's first Innovative Senior Centers; home health care; client centered technology programs including the Virtual Senior Center; court-appointed guardianship; the Selfhelp Alzheimer's Resource Program (SHARP); and New York Connects, which provides seniors and people with disabilities with the information and support they need to remain living independently in their own homes.

We're grateful to the City Council, and especially Council Members Chaim Deutsch and Rafael Espinal for the City's ongoing investment and leadership on behalf of this community. The Elie Wiesel Holocaust Survivor Initiative provides valuable supports to community-based organizations, like Selfhelp, who provide care for survivors.



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Today I will focus on how Selfhelp serves Holocaust survivors and the current needs of the survivors in our care.

Selfhelp Core Services

At seven community-based programs throughout New York, Selfhelp serves 4,500 survivors through enhanced case management, emergency financial assistance, social programs, financial management and guardianship, and our educational Witness Theater program. Our trauma-informed social workers provide individualized in-home assessments as well guardianship assistance for some of the most frail and financially needy survivors in the city.

Selfhelp's Holocaust survivor guardianship program assumes care for survivors who have no family to care for them. This is one of the ways we actualize our mission of serving as the last surviving relative to survivors in need. We have seen an increasing number of survivors having difficulty managing their finances. Our program assists clients using the least restrictive interventions, allowing them to live as independently as possible. Services range from a visiting bookkeeper who assists with bill paying and checkbook balancing to serving as court-appointed guardian in the most severe cases.

The Need for Additional Support

The needs of survivors are growing more intense and costly, despite the overall number of survivors declining. Half of the survivors served by Selfhelp live at or below the poverty line. Russian speaking survivors are the largest and fastest growing segment of the population of survivors and are often living in extreme poverty. 80% of the Russian-speaking clients we serve as living at or below the poverty line. About 40% of survivors in our care require help with daily tasks and over 70% describe their health as poor or fair. Social isolation is a growing concern, with 1,200 clients that reported living alone last year. This is why Selfhelp hosted 150 unique events for survivors last year.

We see that the need for services is growing. Selfhelp currently has a waitlist of over 300 individuals for our Russian-speaking Holocaust Survivor Program in Kensington, Brooklyn. As this population came to the United States later in life, they have very few assets or savings from their working years. They are living almost exclusively on reparations payments, benefits, entitlements, and emergency cash assistance. For some, their social isolation is made worst by limited English proficiency.

Education

Selfhelp's commitment to survivors extends to educating future generations to ensure that 'never again' remains true, and that the lessons of the Holocaust are shared. In 2012, Selfhelp brought Witness Theater to New York. This is an intergenerational program bringing together Holocaust survivors and high school students to elicit, expose and memorialize the moving stories of survival. Through a guided drama therapy process, group members explore issues of war, loss and trauma while at the same time forming deep and meaningful relationships that dissolve the barriers between generations. Students and survivors meet in weekly two-hour sessions over the course of the academic year with a trained drama therapist and other program staff. The project culminates in a staged production: the students portray the personal experiences of the group's survivors, while the survivors narrate their



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own stories. The program aims to involve Holocaust survivors in a therapeutic process designed to help them come to terms with their past, and at the same time to instill the memory of the Holocaust in the next generation. The public performances serve as a vehicle for the survivors' testimonies to be heard by many and to witness the special connections made between the generations. Public performances of the 2019 program will be held on and around Yom HaShoah this May and invite everyone to join us. Additionally, a film made about the Witness Theater program is now available through Menemsha Films to be available for schools and community-groups learning about the lessons of the Holocaust. You can learn more about the film and see the trailer at www.witnesstheaterthefilm.com.

Ms. J's Story

As an example of the holistic nature of Selfhelp's program serving Holocaust survivors, I'd like to share the story of Ms. J.

Ms. J is a 97 year old widow who was born in Austria and was sent to a concentration camp in 1942. She was liberated in July of 1945 and came to the United States in 1946. She has been a client of Selfhelp for over 15 years. Over the past few years, her Selfhelp social worker noticed a decline in her cognition, seen through short term memory loss, increasing difficulty managing her finances, and keeping track of appointments. Last year, Ms. J fell and ended up in the hospital and then living in a nursing facility. Working with her health care team, Ms. J's Selfhelp social worker discussed the possibility of guardianship with Ms. J and Ms. J agreed that she needed Selfhelp to act as her caregiver and advocate going forward. The Selfhelp team filed a petition and went to court. Ms. J attended the hearing and stated to the judge that because she had such deep trust in her social worker and in Selfhelp she wanted Selfhelp to become her legal guardian, even though she did not like the idea that she needed such an intense level of help. Guardianship was granted. Since guardianship was granted, Ms. J's social worker discussed types of living situations and what's best. Currently, we are finalizing arrangements for Ms. J to move where she will have her own apartment, meals, social programming, and medical care. Arrangements will also be made to help Ms. J bring her most treasured possessions to the residence with her, something she would not be able to do if she remained in the nursing home. These arrangements will also save Ms. J a significant amount of money, thousands of dollars each month, which can support ongoing healthcare needs, such as home care.

As you can see, Ms. J has an immense amount of trust in Selfhelp and her trauma-informed social workers to help her live with independence and dignity. Selfhelp has been there for Ms. J as she ages and offering increasing levels of support and care as it was needed.

The Elie Wiesel Holocaust Survivor Initiative

For FY20, Selfhelp requested funding from the Initiative to support direct social services to frail, isolated and financially needy Holocaust survivors. Services include case management to assist in assessing and developing a mutually agreed upon care plan that will be implemented to keep the client safe in the community with dignity and independence. The funding will also support clients in our



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Financial Management and Guardianship programs, pastoral counseling through the Jewish Theological seminary as well as outreach to find unserved and disconnected survivors in the NYC area.

Conclusion

I want to thank the City Council for their ongoing support of the Elie Weisel Holocaust Survivor Initiative. The Council's support and increased funding has enabled Selfhelp to continue our high quality of care for Holocaust survivors. Although the overall number of Holocaust survivors is declining, the needs of survivors grow in number and complexity as they age. Ongoing support is crucial to Selfhelp's ability to continue to serve this population. On behalf of all of the clients served by Selfhelp, thank you for the opportunity today.



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