

Focus on People

Sandy Eller

An Inside Look at the JCCRP JCCRP Hurricane Team: Elisheva Trachtenberg, Naamah Adelman, and Hadassa Jacobowitz



For the vast majority of the metropolitan area, Hurricane Sandy is but a distant memory but for many local residents, the October mega-storm that left a deluge of water in its wake is the gift that just keeps on giving as they continue to face a host of difficulties that have yet to be resolved. Thankfully, among the many dedicated employees at the Jewish

sources to help clients in need, but even more so, for providing me with this exceptional team.”

The JCCRP’s hurricane relief team swung into action with great intensity immediately following the storm as staff members helped clients apply for FEMA benefits and replacement food stamps. Meals were sponsored and overseen at local synagogues and schools, giving those who had not evacuated the area an opportunity to leave their frigid, damp homes and enjoy hot food and solidarity with other storm victims. Working around the clock, JCCRP board members raised funds to pay for essential community services including security guards and a walkie-talkie system to safeguard vacant homes from looters. JCCRP social workers and

the mother of three young children. “It was heartbreaking and affected me very personally. So many people have really lost everything and only now are they starting to comprehend how much work has to be done on their homes.”

Elisheva is continually on the lookout for programs that benefit residents in need and she reports that almost \$500,000 has been distributed to local families from a grant through the UJA Connect to Recovery Program and Met Council, helping people buy furniture, appliances and other much needed items. Store gift cards from retailers such as CVS, Bed Bath & Beyond and others, provided by the Met Council and Samuel Field Y in Little Neck, have also helped many replace destroyed items.

Another potential source of funds is the Neighborhood Recovery Fund offering grants and interest-free loans to hurricane victims based on income eligibility, and Elisheva reports that she has given out over forty applications for this program. While some families who applied through the JCCRP did receive funding from the NRF, response to the fund was so overwhelming that it is currently depleted and it is not yet known if more funds will be secured in order to help additional families. The Met Council’s MetroPair program is another source for lower income families, with representatives taking care of basic repairs including replacing dry-wall, studs and doors.

With Pesach rapidly approaching, Elisheva has received an influx of requests for assistance as

many are only noticing now that their Pesach supplies were destroyed. Haggadahs and disposable cutlery and plates are high on Elisheva’s list of priorities for Pesach, and she is hoping to receive donations of Seder plates and cookware as well.

“Having personally witnessed the effects of the storm, I am really inspired to work very hard,” explained Elisheva. “I wish there wasn’t a need for me to be doing what I am doing right now, but it is what it is and I am happy to be helping people get back on their feet.”

Bayswater resident Naamah Adelman is a Met Council employee who currently works at the JCCRP guiding clients to the many resources being offered by the Red Cross and other agencies including NYLAG, the New York Legal Assistance Group.

“They send an attorney on site every Monday and we make appointments for our clients to meet with them,” reported Naamah. “They do a free intake and advocate for our clients at no charge. NYLAG offers assistance with applications to FEMA and other agencies offering disaster relief and they help our clients



NYS Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. with Nathan Krasnovsky at JASA distributing flashlights to the seniors.

Community Council of the Rockaway Peninsula, a beneficiary agency of the UJA Federation and an affiliate of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, are three women who spend their days helping hurricane victims cope with the post-Sandy fallout as well as take advantage of the many programs that were created to help locals through the after-effects of this unprecedented meteorological event.

“We would not be able to accomplish anything without my dedicated Hurricane Sandy team, funded by the UJA’s Connect to Recovery program,” said JCCRP executive director Nathan Krasnovsky. “They have literally been a godsend: so talented, so kind hearted and a pleasure to work with. I owe the UJA Federation a lifetime of gratitude for not only supplying us with the re-

volunteers traveled to devastated areas to meet with residents and offer them emergency supplies including MRE meals, heaters, blankets and most of all, a healthy dose of hope and optimism. Synagogues, yeshivas and schools received both generators to restore services and grants to facilitate their restoration efforts, and OHEL’s Project Hope team continues to remain on site at the JCCRP to provide additional mental health counseling.

Elisheva Trachtenberg, who coordinates services for families and individuals affected by Hurricane Sandy, can empathize strongly with hurricane victims, having spent two weeks displaced from her Far Rockaway home.

“We drove around the area after the storm and saw so many houses with all their possessions out on the curb,” said



Richard Altabe, chairman of the JCCRP board, providing a check to Rabbi Boaz Tomskey of Yeshiva of Belle Harbor whose school was totally decimated.

with claims that are denied or not paid at the full amount. They also have helped our clients with foreclosure prevention and other mortgage related issues.”

Naamah also coordinates volunteer efforts, pairing those who want to give their time with those who are in need of an extra pair of hands.

“We have volunteers to help people move back into their homes and clean for Pesach but there is so much more that still needs to be done,” said Naamah. “People

call up, they have lost their whole basements and all their Passover stuff is gone as well. They have nothing. No dishes, no pots, no pans, not even money to buy food for Pesach. It is really sad and we are doing our best to get resources to help them with this as well.”

A relatively new hire, Naamah enjoys the warmth that pervades the air at the JCCRP, something she considers



NYC Public Advocate and Mayoral candidate Bill de Blasio with Nathan Krasnovsky, Executive Director of the JCCRP, touring the JCCRP's operation at the Young Israel of Bayswater.

Hadassa. “They didn’t even know where to start. With everyone I spoke to, it was a mini counseling session on the phone: hearing them, empathizing with them, bringing them a sense of calm and security during this chaotic time, and trying to guide them towards the resources that were available.”

A part-time employee who balances her responsibilities as the mother of four with her desire to give back to the community, Hadassa arranged the distribution of gift cards to families who needed emergency supplies and also coordinated the many donations that flooded the area in the days following the storm.

“Many people from all around the tri-state area donated supplies,” recalled Hadassa. “We had cleaning supplies, water, medicine, dry goods, clothing, blankets, and even beds. We set up a distribution center, and with the help of 20 volunteers, we did an entire day of distribution to Far Rockaway residents. After that, we had people calling every day, looking to volunteer with the Hurricane Sandy relief efforts. We paired up the volunteers with families who needed help. We had young single boys, girls, and even parents with their children coming to help in the homes of Sandy victims.”

A resident of Lawrence, Hadassa does both Hurricane Sandy relief and supportive counseling and spends much of her time advocating on behalf of her clients, getting them the help they need. Hadassa feels fulfilled spending her days helping her clients get through difficult situations, particularly when she is working with local residents.

“It is nice to work in the community and to make a difference in the place where you live,” said Hadassa.

To contact the JCCRP call 718-327-7755 or visit them at 1525 Central Avenue in Far Rockaway or online at www.jccrp.org where you can join the email list to be notified of all grant and volunteer opportunities as well as giveaways. Paypal donations to the JCCRP can be done directly through the JCCRP website with 100% of all donations going directly to hurricane victims.



At the Young Israel of Bayswater, where the JCCRP set up a food distribution and contributed to the hot meals being served. Pictured are Pesach Osina, Yoni Dembitzer, Richard Altabe, Esther Schenker, and Kathy Rosenberg.

crucial for clients who come in seeking assistance.

“It feels so good to be doing what I am doing,” said Naamah. “During the hurricane, I went to the Young Israel of Bayswater to get food and it is good to be on the other side and be the one giving. The sad part is the funds are running out and people don’t realize how much local residents are still suffering. The money may be running out, but the need isn’t.”

A social worker who was hired by the JCCRP to do supportive counseling, outreach and crisis intervention, Hadassa Jacobowitz found herself in the right place at just the right time.

“Things kind of exploded here after the hurricane and people were desperately in need of guidance,” explained

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