

# Helping Holocaust Survivors Age in Place



**NYC Aging Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez speaking with Holocaust survivors at the YM & YWHA of Washington Heights & Inwood**

Being an age-inclusive city means creating the opportunities to recognize and honor the stories and cultures of every community that makes New York City vibrant, and local non-profits make this possible for the older adults that come through their doors.

As we recognize National Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27th it is incredible to hear the stories of survival. Even after all these years, living through their traumas does not become easier, but fortunately the supports tailored to their needs by Department for the Aging's local service providers have helped ease their distress.

Today, there are roughly 16,000 Holocaust survivors living within the five boroughs, and there are many who participate in older adult center activities. One provider that serves them is the YM & YWHA of Washington Heights & Inwood. I visited this center during their Channukah celebration and met several survivors who shared incredible stories as they lit the candles on the menorah. They considered themselves fortunate to be able to celebrate their religion freely, in the place where they came to escape the oppression they faced decades ago.

In 2020, the YM & YWHA found it necessary to expand services for these survivors, because as they were isolating from COVID-19, it reminded them of how they experienced hunger during the Holocaust. As a reaction, many of them began reverting back to their native language, Russian. This made it necessary for them hire a Russian speaking case worker to help them assess their needs. The case worker has continued to make home visits to ensure culturally appropriate meals are being delivered, while also spending time with these individuals to reduce social isolation, and connect them with any additional services they may need.

Other NYC Aging service providers, like Selfhelp Community Services, also implement services specifically for Holocaust survivors. They include geriatric mental health and high holiday dinners, to make sure their members can spend these special times with friends.

Supporting mental health is not just for Holocaust survivors though, because as people age many of them face new issues and require the support of

a trained professional. This became even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Mayor Eric Adams recently increased the number of older adult centers that offer NYC Aging's Geriatric Mental Health program from 48 to 88. This allows even more older adults to access these services, including screenings for depression and anxiety, and provide on-site counseling and referrals.

New York City's older adult population is expected to grow to 1.64 million by 2040, and even though we may not have as many Holocaust survivors with us then, there will still be people of the Jewish, Muslim, Christian and other faiths, who will require services that take into consideration their history and traditions. That is just one of the reasons why Mayor Eric Adams created the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers, to ensure City services are accessible to everyone, so they can continue to live in the communities they helped to build.

As the city continues to recover from the pandemic, our older adult centers are open so you can receive the services and resources you need. To find them, visit our website ([www.nyc.gov/aging](http://www.nyc.gov/aging)) and use the services finder.

This new year, I look forward to visiting more centers and take part in their culture and traditions.



**NYC Department for the Aging  
Commissioner Lorraine  
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