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A Transformational Difference in Lives of Seniors



The relationship between the Brooklyn Community Foundation and the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island began years ago, before the Community Foundation even had its name.

Back then, the Brooklyn Community Foundation was still the private Independence Community Foundation. In the early years, much of the Community Foundation's support to JCCGCI's went to The NonProfit HelpDesk. The project helps small non-profits do their work better, offering everything from assistance taxes to advice setting up more efficient management.

"They're part of who we are today," says Chaya Abelsky, director of The NonProfit HelpDesk. "They are like our parents. They impact everything—the passion, the quality of what we do."



More than 333,000 Brooklynites are enrolled in Medicare.

The Brooklyn Community Foundation's grants enabled the HelpDesk to strengthen service to thousands of clients of non-profits around the city. But when the Community Foundation shifted its focus to concentrate solely in Brooklyn, it wanted to deepen its connection to JCCGCI.

"The Community Foundation began viewing organizations in a much more holistic manner," says Rabbi Moshe Wiener, executive director of JCCGCI. "They began to concentrate on what does the organization do as a whole? What does it do to improve the borough?"

This year, one of JCCGCI's key programs—the Coney Island Medicare Part D Center—was in peril. With **\$25,000** from the Brooklyn Community Foundation in 2011, the Center was able to continue its crucial work helping seniors gain access to health care and remain independent.

The Center began in 2005 with funding from the city meant to help seniors and those on Medicaid navigate the maze of government regulation.

"Medicare Part D became an issue or rather a crisis as soon as the legislation was enacted," remembers Rabbi Wiener. "People suddenly couldn't get any drugs unless they're enrolled in one of the providers. They were told, 'I'm sorry, we can't fill your prescription.'"

The city provided funding to address what seemed like a short-term problem. "They anticipated that the situation would stabilize—but that did not happen," says Rabbi Wiener. "Years later, there are still constant changes being made. The need, confusion, fears is just as serious as it was before."

That is particularly true in Coney Island, which has the highest concentration of seniors in the city. Older people seeking help have few places to turn when trying to navigate the opaque process of enrolling in Medicare programs. Many get mailing and advertising from dozens of different health providers.



“It is very difficult to separate right and wrong correspondence even for people who were born in the United States and especially for senior people for whom English is a second language,” says Medicare Part D Facilitator Veronica Beres. Even those fluent are perplexed. Beres often says people come to the health center to have her “translate English into English.”

She also translates English into Russian. Coney Island has one of the city’s largest concentrations of Russian refugees, many of whom use the Center’s Russian-language assistance to help assure that they receive crucial care. People come even from outside the city for help.

The Center serves between 20 and 30 people a week by appointment, including visiting clients who are home-bound. The Center has doubled the number of people that they help since 2006, the program’s first full year in operation. The need continues to grow. “We’re booked sometimes weeks in advance,” Rabbi Wiener says.

Neither the Brooklyn Community Foundation nor the Center can address the full scope of the need, but together their work ripples out into Brooklyn and beyond.

“We have frail elderly who are mostly of low income, who can barely afford their rent, clothing and medical care,” says Rabbi Wiener. **“The Brooklyn Community Foundation is making a transformational difference in the health and welfare of hundreds of seniors.”**

Caring Neighbors Fund Coney Island

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