



B'nai B'rith
Senior Housing
Network

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SENIORITY REPORT

Inform

We want to do our best to stay in touch with you. Please remember to send pictures and updates on the events in your building!

Sign Up

Reading the Seniority Report is a great way to stay informed on what we are doing here at CSS as well as having a pulse on aging in general. To sign up for this resource simply [Click Here](#)

Contribute

Want to contribute to the next issue of Seniority Report? Email us your own story or suggestions at: seniorservices@bnaibrith.org

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Managing Mental Health After a Year of Living with a Pandemic

By Janel Doughten



The past year, the coronavirus pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to our world and all generations. I want to emphasize COVID-19 has hit older adults especially hard due to the fact that people over 65 had the highest rates of hospitalizations and deaths. Social isolation, already an issue for many older adults, became an even greater issue for most of the residents of our senior housing network. Local, state and federal guidance on lockdowns was issued to protect those most vulnerable to the virus. Limiting visitors and most in-person contact with building staff and each

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Managing Mental Health After a Year of Living with a Pandemic

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other as part of that guidance took a toll on the mental health of those same older adults.

As the COVID-19 vaccine has become available and society is beginning to open up, the mental health toll of the past year living with the pandemic restrictions and social isolation has become apparent. When B'nai B'rith on-site building staff were asked about the most pressing issues in their buildings at this time, most cited resident mental health issues as the number one issue.

Many of our residents experienced anger and frustration as lockdowns were lifted and then reinstated during the subsequent waves of the virus. As the nation and our buildings are again lifting mask mandates and physical distancing restrictions, many of our residents may continue to feel anxious, depressed and have trouble managing their anger and frustration. Recognizing when trauma may be affecting mental health, engaging in self-care and realizing when professional care is needed is a first step to managing mental health.

According to the [University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging](#) conducted in January 2021, a national sample of U.S. adults age 50–80 were asked about the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental health symptoms. According to the poll, “The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the well-being of many older adults. About one in five poll respondents said their overall mental health was worse since the pandemic started, consistent with the one in five who reported experiencing worse sleep, depression and anxiety since March 2020. Nearly half of adults age 50–80 reported



feeling regularly stressed and isolated from others. These symptoms were common and experienced more frequently by women, those with lower annual household incomes and those with worse physical health. Contributors to worse mental health during this time may have included pandemic-related challenges (isolation, concerns about illness) as well as stress from economic and political conditions.”

The good news is that the poll also noted that many older adults credited their wisdom, life experiences and resiliency with helping them to overcome the challenges posed by the isolation, as well as a sense of purpose helping others. Many B'nai B'rith residents volunteered to help distribute supplies and food deliveries for other residents and checked in with each other during the past year. Finding that sense of community even in the worst of times can help create that resiliency for everyone, including our residents, to move beyond the trauma of the past year.

Please stay well, everyone!

The following are mental health resources you may wish to look at for more information:

National Coalition for Mental Health and Aging

<http://www.ncmha.org/>

Mental Health America National 2021 Toolkit

<https://mhanational.org/mental-health-month-2021-toolkit-download>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency

<https://www.samhsa.gov/>



A Note From The Chair

By Marvin Siflinger

Hello Friends,

As we head into summer, the pandemic is finally looking like it's starting to end. Vaccinations are in full swing, businesses are returning to normal and families are able to connect in person. While we are not out of the woods yet, you get the sense that the worst is behind us. Everyone has adapted to the "new normal" over the past 15 months, with the Center for Senior Services (CSS) being no exception. As everyone is aware, all of the CSS network trainings have transitioned to Zoom and it feels like we haven't missed a beat.

Since I last wrote to you, I am thrilled to share the first Annual B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Virtual Training, which took place in March 2021, was a big success. This new, triannual conference will continue as a virtual training even after the pandemic is over. For those who were not able to attend, the format involved internal stakeholders, using the resident experts from the CSS staff to create interactive workshops, and included many opportunities for the network to share best practices with each other. The two-day training was open to all members of the board of directors, staff and service coordinators. This year, the training focused on emergency preparedness in light of the pandemic, the role of board members, ways to combat social isolation, resident and staff appreciation and other relevant topics. This year's meeting was well attended, with about sixty members. We are excited to see this training become a staple of our yearly programming.

While it remains unclear when we will meet in person again, rest assured our training conferences will continue virtually in the meantime.

In addition, CSS staff continues to hold Zoom meetings with the staff of the housing network. The meetings were held weekly from March 2020 to March 2021 and are now being held every other week. CSS staff are able to work with the building staff to let them know the updated guidance from the various federal agencies and to share best practices during the pandemic.

Lastly, while I have said this before, a big thank you! to our housing network for their exemplary work during the pandemic. Your work has made the lives of our residents easier and safer during very challenging times.

Have a great summer!

Marvin

WHAT HAS STAFF BEEN UP TO?

By: Gracie Cohen

Janel attended the National Council on Aging's Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day (OAMHAD) symposium held virtually in May. She has also rejoined the board of directors of St. Mary's Court starting in September 2021. St. Mary's Court is a Section 202 senior housing building located in Washington, D.C. Janel has previously served as president of the board.

We are excited to share that Evan Carmen and his wife Jennifer are the proud parents of Bari Leora Carmen, who joined the B'nai B'rith family April 26, 2021. Congratulations, Evan!



A Note from the Co-Chair

By Abbie Stone

Greetings All,

As we continue the 50th Anniversary of the Center for Senior Services (CSS), we celebrate “an idea whose time has come.” The dedication, commitment and creativity of the staff over the years have been the driving force in creating 38 affordable housing communities across the United

States. Over the years, these communities have provided a supportive place to call home, enhancing independence and dignity for older adults.

We are privileged to have a strong network of volunteers who have been invaluable in the success of the housing program. Behind the scenes, they have supported the vision CSS established 50 years ago. These individuals have served as board members of the B'nai B'rith communities, ensuring that secure and affordable housing will continue to be available far into the future.

There is an expression in Hebrew, L' dor V' dor, which translates to: “from generation to generation.” I share this particular phrase with you because there are several B'nai B'rith communities that have adult children of the original board members or founders, who are currently serving on the boards (me included!). My father, Walter Wolff, was a member of B'nai B'rith Rainer Lodge in Baltimore when I was a young child. My kiddish cup was a gift from the lodge when I was born. This makes my affiliation with B'nai B'rith International so meaningful to me, to know that I am participating with an organization that my father was active with throughout his life.

In 2004 I was recruited by Michael Levy, then board president at Covenant House in Tucson, Arizona, to help open the Wellness Center. Years later when I left Covenant House to work with our Area Agency on Aging, I asked to serve on the board as not to lose the connections with the community. Being a board member the past 14 years has truly been an extraordinarily rewarding experience. It has been an honor to partner with the talented members of our board interacting with the residents living at Covenant House. I have also been incredibly lucky to join the CSS staff and residents from B'nai B'rith communities at the Residents Leadership Retreat at Camp Pearlman the past three sessions. Camp is the best! It's so special and dear to my heart. You will certainly hear more about camp later this summer as part of the 50th Anniversary campaign, too!

As we proudly celebrate our golden anniversary, we share the visions of all the creative individuals, whose forward thinking has provided more than a home for so many older adults. Join me in continuing to take a stand in setting the standards as leaders in offering this necessary commodity for one our greatest resources: older adults.



Abbie explaining Shabbat rituals and sharing challah with residents at the Resident Leadership Retreat.



Walter Wolff (second row, far right) and members of the B'nai B'rith Rainer Lodge, March 1957.



ON THE HILL



By *Evan Carmen*

Congress Begins Work on FY22 Budget

The Center for Senior Services (CSS) staff continues our advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill, focusing our efforts on FY22. We are advocating for continued funding for the following:

1. The Section 202 program, which funds the subsidies so the residents can continue to pay only 30% of their income in rent.
2. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Capital Advance program to build more Section 202 housing.
3. Money for Wi-Fi expansion so senior residents can access telehealth services and more.
4. The continuation and expansion of service coordination in Section 202 properties.

As always, we teamed with the American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC) to further our advocacy efforts. We met with staff members from the following offices:

Senate

Alex Padilla (D-Calif.)
Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.)
John Boozman (R-Ark.)
Diane Feinstein (D-Calif.)
Chris Coons (D-Del.)
Chris Murphy (D-Conn.)
Marco Rubio (R-Fla.)
Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.)
Rick Scott (R-Fla.)
Senate Appropriations

House

Katherine Clark (D-Mass.)
Norma Torres (D-Calif.)
Kay Granger (R-Texas)
John Rutherford (R-Fla.)
Adriano Espaillat (D-N.Y.)
Pete Aguilar (D-Calif.)
Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.)
House Appropriations
Mike Garcia (R-Calif.)
David Trone (D-Md.)
Grace Meng (D-N.Y.)
Ann Kirkpatrick (D-Ariz.)

Infrastructure Legislation

As Congress and the White House approach the summer, we expect legislation to be debated about infrastructure. We are encouraged that the White House's infrastructure plan encompasses affordable housing and hope that includes affordable senior housing. B'nai B'rith is eager to analyze the final legislation.

B'nai B'rith Meets with HUD

In April, we met with the Ethan Handelman, the new Deputy Assistant Secretary for Multifamily Housing at HUD, and advocated for our housing network. We are eager to work with new administration on strengthening and expanding affordable senior housing.

Special Edition: A Note from the Director

By Mark Olshan

As part of the Center for Senior Service's (CSS) golden anniversary, we're diving into our stories over the years and who we are at CSS. I'd like to share a bit about me—how I came to B'nai B'rith International and how I've seen CSS grow and evolve over the years.

For those of you who may not be aware, I have been working at B'nai B'rith since June 1983. I was the first full-time director of what was then referred to as the B'nai B'rith Senior Citizens Housing Program. Prior to my arrival at B'nai B'rith, the program had been operating under the auspices of the Community and Veterans Services (CVS) Department, but didn't have a person dedicated full-time to the seniors program. It was handled by three employees who were trying to manage a number of community-oriented programs, along with a variety of B'nai B'rith volunteers, in communities around the country.

When the founder of the program stepped down as volunteer chairman, it was decided that it was time to hire a full-time staff person to coordinate the various projects and operate the program as a more coordinated network. Harvey Gerstein, at the time president of the St. Louis Covenant House properties in St. Louis, was asked to serve as national volunteer chairman, and I was brought on to work as the professional liaison to his Volunteer Committee. My duties were to assist in the continuance of the program's on-going activities and to help grow the program in numbers and in scope.

And I must admit that we have been quite successful in both those areas.

When I arrived on the scene on June 1, 1983 the program had already been awarded 16 funding awards from HUD, which resulted in 16 buildings constructed in 13 communities. Quite an impressive achievement! Additionally, representatives of these properties were meeting yearly



Mark Olshan's headshot taken his first week working at B'nai B'rith International, June 1983

and sharing their best practices to strengthen their own operations. They also teamed together to try to grow the program as a whole for B'nai B'rith.

Now, with a dedicated staff person (me), the program was expected to expand and grow, and grow we did. We are now the largest national Jewish sponsor of HUD-assisted housing in the country, having received a total of 41 HUD funding awards and constructing properties in 38 communities across the country!

Of course, this was all in concert with the local B'nai B'rith volunteers helping to organize and submit applications to HUD for funding awards. Believe me, I have quite the stories to tell about each one of the properties. I've had the privilege of working with ALL of them!

We became involved with and served on numerous Industry/HUD task forces designed to strengthen the housing programs and make them operate more efficiently. I started a regular newsletter that was circulated throughout the network, which still exists today and is now deemed the Seniority Report. The newsletter is now created and edited by

Gracie Cohen, senior program associate here at CSS. We helped organize and were a founding member of the original Elderly Housing Coalition, pulled together to be an advocate for increasing the numbers of apartments funded and improving communication with HUD and Capitol Hill. We advocated strongly to include Service Coordination as an integral part of senior housing facilities, among other important issues over the years.

Additionally, we expanded the Annual Conference on Senior Housing to include a second meeting each year, specifically for the property management professionals. In 1987, I led the first Resident Leadership Retreat. Two residents from each B'nai B'rith sponsored building stayed at Camp Perlman, our B'nai B'rith International youth camp, in the Pennsylvania mountains. We provided the tools and knowledge on how to organize Resident Councils and how to be more involved resident leaders in their own communities. The residents also got a relaxing camp environment as a mini vacation and a thank you for all the work they did at their own facilities. Later this summer, expect to see a special highlight on the camp as part of our 50th Anniversary.

Obviously, as a one-man-band back in the early days, I could only do so much. Having the ability to hire competent staff to work with over the years has made my job so much easier and able to "service" the network so much better. Bringing on Janel, Gene Fogel (of blessed memory), Morgan Gable, Jayme Levy, Rachel Goldberg, Evan Carmen and, of course, Gracie Cohen has been my life's dream and a long way from first being told, "Here is your office, these are your files, organize them anyway you'd like. And, oh, GOOD LUCK!"

Wow, it's been a long ride!
Cheers to 50 years!
Mark

2021 Virtual Management and Services Coordinators Training Recap



By Gracie Cohen

Around 70 participants from the B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Network attended the Center for Senior Services' (CSS) annual Management and Service Coordinators Training June 8-10, 2021. For the second consecutive year, the training was held over Zoom due to the pandemic.

This year, sessions focused on mental health and the well-being of staff and residents.

Malika Moore—MSW, LICSW, LCSW-C and executive director of Aging & Amazing—highlighted that residents are carrying more than what meets the eye. Behind their physical appearance, residents may face several challenges including food insecurity, loneliness, domestic violence, health complications and more. Now at 17 months into the pandemic, many continue to deal with another invisible challenge: stress. Moore shared several ideas with the management professionals and service coordinators on how to help manage mental health. These included, but are not limited to, facilitating faith or spiritual groups, seeking therapy for an objective viewpoint, holding social classes to engage residents and offering respite for fellow caregivers (i.e. holding a caregivers support group in the building).

Other mental-health-related sessions included “How the Pandemic Changed the Staff and Residents/How to Stay Healthy and Balanced Moving Forward” from Abbie Stone, who is co-chair of CSS. Stone emphasized the importance of meditation and mindfulness, which were included in a list of resources she shared with the group.

This year's training featured an update from Robert Iber, senior advisor in the Office of Multifamily Housing Programs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, as well as “Fair Housing & Inclusion: How it Applies From Marketing to Current Resident,” from well-known B'nai B'rith speaker Amanda Atkins, president of Atkins Consulting Professionals. For the service coordinators, Melissa Harris, director of government affairs for the American Association of Service Coordinators, shared “The Role of the Service Coordinator in 2021.”

Special to the nature of this online training, CSS staff facilitated five breakout rooms for participants, where each group worked on a hypothetical resident and/or staff conflict (all of the studies were based on real incidents that occurred throughout the year in the buildings). Some of the dilemmas revolved around how to best prepare for and manage those who opted out of the COVID-19 vaccine. A snapshot of questions that were debated include:

- Since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued guidance that masks are no longer required for those that are vaccinated, how can staff safely hold activities knowing some residents may not be vaccinated due to medical reasons?
- A maintenance staff member has been open with other staff members that he did not receive a COVID-19 vaccination because he is afraid of long-term side effects. Can the board of directors and/or management require maintenance staff to be vaccinated since they may be in direct contact with residents?

Of course, the training would not be complete without our own in-house experts sharing their knowledge. Our own Evan Carmen, legislative director for aging policy, gave a federal update to participants. For those who did not attend certain days of the program, Janel Doughten, associate director, gave an overview of fair housing and mental health highlights from the previous days. And I, the Senior Program Associate, shared free online program resources with the group. As technology will continue to be an important tool for connection moving forward, the programs included activities such as yoga, meditation, how-to classes for using Zoom, and more.

Make sure you view the full program agenda, speaker bios and presentations on the Virtual Training page here. We look forward to having this training in person next year. Fingers crossed we make it to New Orleans in 2022!

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