



# Volunteer Newsletter

## A Message from Carol Hart

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Welcome to the Spring 2013 edition of the Volunteer Newsletter. As I was reading the newspaper this morning an article caught my eye. It was yet another survey result; this one was commissioned to mark the release of *Life of Pi* on DVD. The question asked was what people considered to be essential to living life to the full. At number 23 was “volunteer for a good cause”; this response came higher in the poll than getting a promotion, rescuing someone or passing your driving test. So I do hope that your volunteering experience with the AJR is a positive one for you. From AJR’s perspective we really could not offer the support or services to our members we are able to without your help. We hope to thank many of you personally at this year’s Celebration of Volunteering, which will take place on Wednesday 17 July at the Westminster Synagogue in Rutland Gardens, London SW7. We will shortly be sending you a formal invitation but see inside for more details.

As you can see from the picture the volunteers department has grown over the past few months. In addition to our current



**AJR Volunteer’s Department**  
from left to front: Jonathan Rose, Rim Irscheid, Lesley Woolfe, Carol Hart

services, we are now able to offer specialised support in two specific areas: computer help and supporting volunteers who visit clients with dementia. The computer help programme is coordinated by Jonathan Rose and though this project is still in its infancy, dozens of members have already benefitted from this service. As our membership ages, we have noticed an increase in the number of clients with dementia and we are now able to offer a specialised project offering bespoke training and support for

volunteers visiting clients with memory loss. We are very grateful to Six Point Foundation which is funding this position which we have appointed Lesley Woolfe, who is already making her mark. Rim, our intern from ARSP, continues to support the work of the department and this newsletter is in the most part written and coordinated by her.

Wishing you an enjoyable summer and thanks for all that you do for the AJR,

Best Wishes,

*Carol*

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# Kindertransport Event

We reproduce here the invitation that the Chairman of the AJR-Kindertransport committee has sent in connection with the series of events the AJR is organising to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kindertransport. Please do encourage anyone you know who came to Britain on a Kindertransport to attend these special gatherings.

*Dear Friend,*

*It gives me great pleasure to let you know that His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales has kindly offered to host a reception for the Kinder at St James's Palace on Monday 24 June from 12pm as part of our events to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kindertransport.*

*Although there are a limited number of spaces for the lunchtime reception and we want to ensure that those Kinder coming to the reunion on 23 June at JFS are given priority, it might now be possible to be accompanied to St James's by a close friend or relative should this be necessary. Enclosed please find the application forms to attend the reception at St James's Palace and the reunion at JFS. The Palace has asked us to provide them with a final guest list no later than **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2013**. Please ensure you reply to us before that date so that The Palace can send your official invite in good time.*

*We are also delighted to announce that the well-loved actress and comedienne Maureen Lipman and the Rt Hon David Miliband MP, the former Foreign Secretary, will be guest speakers at the reunion when JFS pupils will be performing a re-enactment of the debate in the House of Commons that precipitated our arrival. As previously announced, the JFS choir will be singing a selection of evocative songs and Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg will lead a service of remembrance. The day will start with registration at 1:30pm and will end after a light supper at 7pm.*

*Please also encourage the children and grandchildren and nieces and nephews of AJR members to come along to a special reception between 6:30pm-9:30pm on Monday 24 June for the Second and Third Generations. The focus of this event will be how their parents and grandparents got here, where they came from and the different ways they travelled and arrived. There will be notable guest speakers, time to socialise and network, eat, drink and to meet old and make new friends. The London venue is to be confirmed but anyone interested is asked to RSVP and direct any queries to [events@secondgeneration.org.uk](mailto:events@secondgeneration.org.uk) or visit the organisers' websites [www.secondgeneration.org.uk](http://www.secondgeneration.org.uk) and [www.kindertransport.org](http://www.kindertransport.org)*

*The symposium on the Kindertransport, being organised by the Leo Baeck Institute London (LBI) in cooperation with the German Historical Institute London (GHIL), the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies and with Aberystwyth University (School of European Languages), will be held on Tuesday 25 June at the GHIL. The provisional programme is enclosed and on the AJR website at [www.ajr.org.uk](http://www.ajr.org.uk) – information on how to book should be emailed to [info@leobaeck.co.uk](mailto:info@leobaeck.co.uk)*

*It is a great honour to be invited by His Royal Highness and a wonderful recognition of the high esteem in which he holds the Kinder. The reception at St James's Palace will be part of an historic three days of events for the Kinder and our families from around the world to socialise, renew acquaintances and share their experiences.*

*I look forward to seeing you at all these very special occasions as we commemorate one of the greatest rescue missions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, give thanks to the British government and help create the legacy of the Kindertransport.*

*With my very best wishes,*



*Erich Reich*



## New Office Help



Since January AJR Head Office is being supported by a group of volunteers from the Judith Trust and the Langdon Community.

The Judith Trust's vision is that all people with learning disabilities and mental ill-health will be emotionally, socially and physically included into society. They work for all those with both learning disability and mental ill-health.

Lesley Woolfe, who recently joined AJR to manage a project for members with memory loss, tells more about the initiative:

*"We welcome four new volunteers to the AJR; William, Sebastian, along with their Support Worker, Aasaf Abbas, and Billie Brazil and Gregory who have been helping out in our administration department by offering essential help that keeps the office ticking over.*

*Their happy dispositions and outlook to life are a real "breath of fresh air" and we have enjoyed meeting them and including them within our Head Office in Stanmore.*

*They have gained the invaluable experience of working within an office environment and we have gained the invaluable experience of being able to include them within our working environment."*

## Ruth Sands

AJR member and Day Centre volunteer



**Ruth is one of the youngest refugees of the first generation, having fled from Austria to France**

She is a Jewish refugee from Vienna with a French citizenship, the background of a second generation child and is at the same time one of the youngest first generation refugees of the AJR. Ruth Sands' life was steeped in experiences of settling down in two different countries, commitment to honorary work in different organisations and in her great knowledge about world literature she was spreading amongst the AJR members.

Ruth sees herself as "totally French" as she was brought up in France and went to school in Paris. She moved to England when she met an Englishman whom she married when she was very young. Her roots are initially Austrian - being born in Vienna; her parents fled to France with her when she was six months of age. Every child of Jewish faith who was born in Austria after the *Anschluss* (the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany) was considered to be stateless, and this applies to Ruth. After the war ended she obtained her French citizenship, but she could actually have applied for three - Austrian, British and French. After having fled to France her parents continued to speak German to each other or French with a German accent whereas their daughter grew up with French as her mother tongue, which enabled Ruth to listen to their conversation whilst having difficulties in responding in German fluently. Ruth has lived in England for more than 50 years; learning English was no problem to her because she had been taught English in school.

After having settled down in England Ruth joined the AJR, nearly 25 years ago. She did that for two reasons: firstly as she was a first generation refugee from Austria and wanted to be associated with the AJR and secondly she saw the possibility in AJR support-

ing her father if he decided to follow her to England, but he finally stayed in Paris.

When the AJR Centre moved from Cleve Road to Belsize Square, just around the corner from where she lives, Ruth saw the opportunity for her to help. She initiated a French conversation group with other French speaking members and also established a book club, which meets up once a fortnight to discuss a book of Ruth's suggestion. With her background working in an antiquarian bookshop before she retired, Ruth is finding interesting short stories to, as she puts it, "stimulate the members, not physically, but mentally" and is always impressed how mentally fit most of the members are, no matter if they are over 90 or even 100 years old.

Although it is Ruth's first year of volunteering for the AJR, she has already established a couple of projects and has got plans for new ones, including a Bridge Club next year. She feels very welcome at AJR who give her a nice feeling of receiving at least as much as she is giving, for her it is "very rewarding". Volunteering was a most wonderful discovery for her so that she sensed to give something back to the society and to people who were always kind to her. She gains a lot from volunteering herself, even if she just started in January.

Her connection to AJR members at the Centre was good from the very beginning - even though it feels strange for her to be one of the (first generation) members who is much younger than the others, she can identify with them by having experiences of being brought up by parents who were traumatized as well. Some members, who are quite the same age as her parents were, often expect her to speak German and are surprised when she's telling them about her big gap of listening and understanding,

"like two different persons", Ruth said.

Ruth really likes and appreciates the idea of befriending Holocaust survivors, but especially because of her emotional involvement due to her parents. As a child of Jewish refugees she already had a lot of experiences with them and knows "too much" about the whole subject to have that replaced. But for that reason, the story that she can tell and her similarities to some of the members, the older people like her so much and get really talkative when Ruth is around, the very few French members of AJR in particular. Her involvement in charities and voluntary work initially started after her retirement with a voluntary job at the Wiener Library in London a couple of years ago, but even prior to this Ruth worked, among her job, for an organisation called "2<sup>nd</sup> generation trust" in the 1990s. There she was in charge of organising conferences in Germany and Austria with the aim of bringing the second generation of both countries together. Besides she is also working for the U3A (University of the Third Age) once a week.

Ruth is mother of two sons and has five grandchildren who are all aware of her past. Now that her children and grandchildren are grown up she tries to keep up busy with her involvement and her active social life. She's still very much into books and enjoys the theatre, the cinema and concerts, she is playing Bridge once a week and very grateful to her genes that enable her to "live the same way and do the same things" she did before she got retired. Just two years ago Ruth wrote her memoirs together with her work partner about their experiences and adventures in the bookshop.

# Richard Estrin

## Befriending Volunteer

Richard Estrin was born in England and worked as a hairdresser before starting to volunteer for AJR. He is used to being with and talking to elderly people as many of his hairdressing clients were seniors. Once Richard retired he was looking for a worthwhile way to fill his time and a cousin recommended that he contact the Jewish Volunteer Network (JVN) who would be able to “sign post” him to an appropriate charity. JVN suggested AJR and Richard then got in touch with Carol Hart to apply for a befriender role.

Richard is currently visiting two ladies and a gentleman, each of them weekly and he really enjoys the time he spends with them. This is the first time that Richard had had any contact with survivors and refugees. Since he started to volunteer learnt a lot about the background of the people he visits, especially about German culture and history.

The time Richard spends with the gentleman he visits are very special for him. He has been blind for many years, but he still lives a very active life. They meet every Sunday morning and go for a walk that lasts anything up to an hour and a half. They always find something to talk about, whether it’s their shared interest in football or simply discussing family stories. Richard is always impressed that gentleman is able to enjoy everything he does, that he still goes on a skiing holiday once a year, even though he is blind, and Richard finds him one of the most cheerful people he knows.

Richard has been volunteering for AJR for a couple of years and see’s that befriending Jewish refugees as a great way to help and support them, especially when they’re lonely and living on their own - “It’s helping them to face life everyday”.

The part Richard enjoys most about volunteering is talking to people and listening to their interesting stories. Even though they often tell him the same story many times, there’s always a new detail they haven’t told him before, these visits to the people he befriends are always the highlight of his week.



With his former profession Richard was already familiar with dealing with elderly people

**Keep the Date:**

## Celebration of Volunteering 2013

**This year the event will take place at Kent House, Westminster Synagogue.**

**Giving everyone the opportunity to see the Czech Scroll exhibition.**

**Wednesday July 17 at 7pm - light supper**

**Invitations to follow.**

## Ros Collin

AJR Centre Manager



Ros worked as a Director in the Jewish AIDS Trust and other Jewish charities in London

Rosalind has been the AJR Centre Manager since August 2012, having previously been involved in Jewish organisations before she joined the AJR.

Ros's family history goes back to Lodz in Poland where her grandparents on her father's side were born. Both their families were in the lingerie business, something her grandfather was able to set up in the UK after their arrival in 1912.

Her great grandparents on her mother's side were founder members of Golders Green Synagogue. Ros's grandmother came to London when she was six months old, leaving with her parents from a Lithuanian village near Vilna (as in the "Fiddler on the roof" story) whereas Ros's grandfather was born in England; he served in the British cavalry during WWI.

In 1938 Ros's grandfather and his brother went back through Nazi Berlin by train to Lodz to beg the whole family to come to the UK. Unfortunately they refused to return with them and they were later murdered in Auschwitz.

It was at Dunston Road Synagogue Youth Club that Ros's parents met and married. With Ros's roots and her family's involvement in the Jewish community, she has always enjoyed working within a Jewish environment.

Ros's first job was at the Head Office of Marks & Spencer. She gained a degree in Business Studies, and used the skills she had acquired to train as a merchandiser. Her first department was men's underwear, then men's trousers, followed by home furnishings. Ros left M&S when she had her children.

For the following 10 years, Ros was involved in the Reform Synagogues Soviet Jewry Campaign. EXODUS, on a fulltime voluntary base becoming national Chairman. During that time she worked with others setting up 30 campaign groups throughout the UK,

working with MPs and MEPs, as well as sending visitors to the USSR to, meet with "refuseniks".

During this time Ros visited the former Soviet Union and particularly recalls on one trip in 1983 she was with one of the leading refuseniks who had not had any visitors for three years, because the authorities had threatened to kill his son. The conversation between Ros and the refusenik went as follows. He was asking:

*"How do you go to Israel?"*

*"We buy a ticket."*

*"No - What permission do you need?"*

*"Nothing, just buy a ticket."*

*"No, No - what permissions?!"*

*"Just the ability to pay. The British Government has no say where we travel."*

Here was a brilliant man who was one of the leaders of the refusenik movement in USSR - who could not comprehend freedom. From then on Ros realised her prize possession was her passport and her great fortune that her grandparents had decided to live in Britain.

When her two sons started senior school, Ros returned to work. She ran a Jewish singles club for two years and then joined the Jewish AIDS Trust where she spent 16 years as Director. It was her responsibility to support Jewish people with HIV and provide sexual health education to children and students.

Deciding then to work part-time, Ros was appointed the Centre Coordinator for the Eversfield Community Centre in Mill Hill. With the centre's trustees she was able to start up the Centre and brought in members of the local community for numerous activities. Unfortunately the Centre eventually closed due to lack of funds. It was at this time that Ros became aware of a position at the AJR.

As the manager of the AJR Centre, Ros is responsible for volunteers, staff members, the booking of entertainment and the overall efficient operation of the AJR Centre. Having close contact to the members is important for Ros; she enjoys the "hands-on" side of her role.

The AJR Centre, which is now located in Belsize Square Synagogue, is a gathering place open to all AJR members. It offers them great opportunities to socialise with each other and it is *their* club and *their* social place.

"We have to be where each member is, at that moment, on that day" is Ros' approach. If the members want to speak about current news, the weather or their holiday one needs to be comfortable at being ready to talk. As they get to know the volunteers better, they *may* decide to talk about their history, but "it is never for us to push them", Ros says.

The most important skills required by Centre volunteers is the ability to feel comfortable with all kinds of people, to work as part of a team, as well as being patient, especially when members are hard of hearing or when they suffer from memory loss, and "if you shout, shout with kindness, not anger".

One of Ros' favourite times is when the two-year-old children from the synagogue nursery school sing to our members. Ros finds this magical, as one can see how much the children and our members enjoy the experience.

# Jonathan Rose

## AJR Computer Help Coordinator

Jonathan joined the volunteers department of AJR last November; he manages the computer help service of the organisation. Jonathan is also responsible for updating the AJR's Facebook page and the e-newsletter.

Jonathan has previously worked in the media sector in Israel where he grew up. His mother escaped from Egypt to the UK in 1957, and met his father whose grandparents escaped the pogroms in Russia. Together they moved from Birmingham to Tel Aviv when Jonathan was 10 years old. Jonathan attended university, where he took a course in "Jews in film" as part of his master's degree in script writing. After finishing university he worked in television.

Jonathan decided to leave Israel and when he came to London he taught video marketing and production at a college. He was looking for some additional part time work and saw the advert for the new role of Computer Help Coordinator at the AJR.

An interesting coincidence, just before Jonathan joined the AJR, he translated a script of an Israeli feature film on the subject of Holocaust which followed several survivors as they completed everyday tasks and spoke about their experiences. Learning about their histories through that project, Jonathan was very excited to have the opportunity to get involved with a Jewish charity such as AJR.

Jonathan has had experience of working in the not for profit sector as he previously worked for Crisis a national charity for single homeless people offering

them education, employment and housing from centers across the UK. Jonathan taught TV courses in a community centre which included many elderly participants. This gave Jonathan valuable experience on how to teach the older generation.

Since starting the Computer help project for the AJR, Jonathan has discovered that many elderly members are sceptical or even embarrassed to ask for assistance, others feel that they are too old to learn something new. This is obviously not the case. Jonathan's first task is to meet all potential volunteers as well as members who need support. He then matches volunteers and members depending on their level of knowledge. Some members might be already familiar with computers and want to discover how to use an iPad or more complex software; others might want to look up their family trees or previous residences on Google.

One of the great success stories of this project is of an AJR member who initially could not even turn on the computer or use the mouse.

He was a very dignified gentleman and embarrassed not knowing anything about computers; but once the volunteer started to show him he was able to use Google maps to see his house in Germany where he grew up - the whole world of the internet is now accessible for him. He is now able to access daily issues including the news, weather or traffic reports.



Jonathan has worked in television in Israel before he came the UK

When interviewing potential volunteers, Jonathan found some were concerned that their background may not be accepted by AJR members. In fact, Jonathan has discovered that most members have no prejudice against having a volunteer from former Nazi countries. When Jonathan accompanies volunteers helping members, he finds it amazing, how pluralistic and open-minded the refugees are. In many cases the AJR member is very happy to meet someone who speaks in their mother tongue. Jonathan feels that the Computer help programme is not only about the teaching, but also about the cultural dialogue.

Jonathan is now working on a project that will give our members the opportunity to visit and use the computer suites and some of the Jewish secondary schools.

# AJR Student Fairs

AJR is recruiting volunteers from Jewish schools and universities in London, offering volunteering opportunities for the Computer Help Programme or the AJR Centre.

The AJR Centre, located in Belsize Square Synagogue, is a gathering place open to all AJR members. Volunteers can play games of Rummikub and Cards with the members or simply chat with them as they love to meet younger people; volunteers can also help the staff during the lunch and tea breaks.

In addition, AJR helps members who are not familiar with computers and who would like to stay in touch with family and friends abroad using email or Skype. Volunteers can teach basic computer skills such as accessing the internet or writing emails or sometimes starting from the very basics, teaching beginners how to work with a computer.

In January AJR set up a new concept for promoting the organisation at student fairs - 50 year old retro suitcases, gift give-aways and posters that explain the programme to the students.

