

Volunteer Newsletter



December 2005

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I would like to welcome you all to the winter edition of the AJR Volunteer Newsletter. Once again we have included some brief biographies of people involved in the AJR. These include two of our volunteer befrienders, Robin Liston and Yael Stobezki, Eric Reich, a member of the AJR Management Committee and Barbara Dorrity, our Northern Social Worker. All these reports have been written and produced by my wonderful American intern Samara. She will be returning home just before Christmas and will be greatly missed by everyone in the office. She has been lovely to have around the office, always helpful and smiling.

There is also a report of our recent volunteer training session which was very well attended. Everyone present

found it a very useful morning. Our next session will take place on Thursday, 23 February at 10.30. This will be an open meeting. More details to follow in the New Year.

Since our last edition I have been to Israel. I was there with my family over Succot visiting my eldest daughter who is spending her Gap Year in Jerusalem. I was very privileged to deliver some 400 names and testimonies of AJR family members who perished in the Holocaust to the Director of the Hall of Names at Yad Vashem. As I am sure many of you know, Yad Vashem was given a "face lift" earlier this year and the museum area is brand new. When we visited the area was full to bursting with almost every language imaginable being spoken. There were also large num-

bers of Israeli soldiers being shown around. Visiting Yad Vashem is a compulsory part of army training. In the Hall of Names there are some 3.5 million testimonies already archived and the museum is very keen to find more as soon as possible. If you know any members of your family whose names have not been archived please contact the AJR office.

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you and your families a very Happy Chanukah/Christmas and a healthy New Year.

Finally, thank you all for all that you do to help us look after our AJR members,

Best Wishes

Carol Hart

**Next Volunteer
Training:
Thursday,
February 23 @
10.30
in the AJR
Office, Stanmore**

**Plenty of
Cheesecake!!**

Welcome to New Volunteers

We are delighted to welcome and thank the following new Volunteers to the AJR:

Yael Stobezki, Carlos Dela Huerta, Amanda Greenberg, Hannah Reichenstein, Simon Jachnowitz, Marcia Elton, Esther Freen, Eva Willman, Sara Fabian,

Barbara Fraser, Ernest Shelton, Barbara Morris, Lisl Bohea and Gail Reed.

I am also delighted to welcome five students, from Germany and Poland, who are here for a year on the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace Pro-

gramme (ARSP). Whilst undertaking other projects they will be volunteering for the AJR half a day each week. They are Maxi Bohm, Anne Linzbach, Christoph Mayr, Agnes Wrona and Isabella Koslowsky.



Interview with Eric Reich

Eric Reich understands the meaning of family, ancestors and involvement. In 1938, when only three years old, Erich's family was deported from Vienna, the city of his birth, to the Polish border. A year later, with the help of the Kindertransport, Erich and his two older brothers escaped to England. They never saw their parents again.

On arrival at London docks at the end of August 1939, Erich was separated from his brothers and sent to a refugee hostel in Dorking. There he was taken in by a non-Jewish family, themselves refugees. He only found out about his true background and Jewish identity some eight years later when his oldest brother discovered his whereabouts.

At the age of 14 Erich made Aliya to Israel where he eventually ended up in Kibbutz Merchavya, near Afula. There he finished his schooling, at

the end of which Erich did his army service.

After participating in the 1956 Sinai campaign as a paratrooper Erich returned to the U.K. One of his brothers was seriously ill and sadly died at the age of 27 leaving behind three very young boys. Erich joined the Thomson Organisation as a computer systems analyst before moving to Thomson Holidays where he became Operation Director. Later he served as Director of Thomas Cook Tour Operations.

In 1989 Erich set up his own company, Classic Tours. For the past 14 years Classic Tours has been organising and operating a wide variety of Overseas Charity Challenges, the very first of which was the combined bicycle Challenge for Ravenswood (Norwood) and the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society, from Dan to Beersheva. Between them they raised £600,000. Since its inaugura-

tion the company has sent some 30,000 participants all over the globe, thereby helping to raise around £35 million for numerous U.K. charities.

Erich feels that this concept has become a way of returning something to the society that provided him, a child refugee, with a safe haven.

As a 'Kind' Erich has tried to help the Kindertransport Association over the years. First by giving them space in his office, then becoming their treasurer as well as serving on the AJR Management Committee. He has also been heavily involved with raising funds for the Kinder Monument in Liverpool St Station. Part of this included organising and participating in a Bicycle Challenge from 'The Brandenburg Gate in Berlin to The Gates of Auschwitz', which raised some £70,000.

"...although volunteering time began as nothing more than an idea, it has certainly developed into a great friendship."

Interview with Yael Stobezki

Yael is one of the many exceptional individuals who volunteers her time each week visiting a lady. She originally became interested in volunteering with the AJR because her parents are both Jewish refugees from Germany. Yael was born in and lived in Israel until she moved to England in 1985.

In the past, Yael attended a group session which discussed issues for families whose parents lived through WWII. The forum sparked her interest in family history and issues regarding the Holocaust. Afterwards, as she was on the internet, she happened to come across the AJR website. Realising it was based nearby, Yael de-

cidated it would be nice to befriend and help someone in need.

Yael currently spends her time with a wonderful lady. They often go shopping together and talk on the phone. With a smile, she explained that her lady is an exceptional woman, very interesting, and extremely independent. She continued to say that although volunteering her time began as nothing more than an idea, it has certainly developed into a great friendship.

Yael has a diploma in psychotherapy and spent seven years working in a therapeutic community for ex-substance users.

Currently, Yael sees individuals and facilitates an art therapy group for women recovering from drug and alcohol misuse every fortnight. Additionally, Yael runs a weekly art therapy group for individuals with mental health issues. She believes that her knowledge and experience with psychotherapy has been useful with her volunteer work.

Interview with Barbara Dresner-Dorrity

Barbara Dresner-Dorrity is a wonderful member of the AJR social work team. In the past Barbara spent several years volunteering as a befriender and working at Jewish Care in London as a Senior Social Worker. Upon moving to Manchester, Barbara found herself searching for a job. At that time the AJR had no social worker in the north and chose Barbara for the position! Currently, Barbara visits AJR members north of Birmingham.

Barbara is the daughter of a refugee from Leipzig; her father was one of the lucky children to escape the Na-

zis aboard the Kindertransport. However, apart from her personal connection with Jewish refugees, Barbara absolutely loves her job as she enjoys meeting people from different countries.

Working with the refugees has taught her much about life, including the importance of having strength of character, courage, and fortitude as well as geography and history. Barbara finds it fantastic that she is able to learn from her work on a daily basis.

Working for the AJR has proved to be extremely

rewarding for Barbara as the organisation has given her the ability to aid those who need it the most. Sometimes she visits people only as a friendly call while at other times she sees those who need help dealing with specific problems, whether it be financial or personal issues. She always has enough time to visit clients, assess their needs, and put them in touch with helpful resources.

As a social worker, Barbara enjoys helping people and the AJR has given her the wonderful ability to do so in many ways.

"When speaking of his friend, Robin exclaimed that he was constantly overwhelmed by her amazing spirit and her willingness to help other people."

Interview with Robin Liston

Robin Liston has been an active AJR volunteer for the past five years. He is a semi-retired journalist and public relations consultant, and lives in East Finchley. His mother, along with her parents, left Berlin for England in order to escape the Nazis in 1935. Robin has been involved with various volunteer work throughout his life, and after seeing an advertisement for volunteers for the AJR, he remembered that his grandmother was a member and decided to find out what he could do to help.

Robin currently visits an Auschwitz survivor who remains remarkably positive despite a number of misfortunes throughout her life. When speaking of his friend, Robin exclaimed that he was constantly overwhelmed by

her amazing spirit and her willingness to help other people.

Robin finds the one-to-one nature of his volunteer work challenging but extremely interesting. He views helping those with a variety of needs as a small contribution he can make personally and he is happy to play his part in the AJR's work. He, like most non-refugees, simply cannot imagine what it would be like to have witnessed and survived the atrocities that occurred during the Holocaust, particularly as, fortunately, his family largely escaped alive.

Robin feels that he is able to give some moral and practical support, particularly where members of the refugee's family are not always able to provide

this support themselves.

Robin takes great pleasure in his involvement with the AJR because it is his way of expressing his commitment to the Jewish community, even though he is not observant himself. Considering the relatively small size of world Jewry, he is continually astonished at the phenomenal impact that they have had on the world of art, science, music, medicine, and business.

Robin is very proud of his Jewish roots and even though he is not connected to the North London Jewish community, where he lives, his work with the AJR gives him a sense of identity and purpose which he sometimes found lacking in the past.

Volunteer Forum with Margi Abeles

Margi Abeles, a specialist in family therapy, held an extremely interesting volunteer session on the 17th of November regarding family issues that volunteers may experience with their clients. Margi has worked at the Holocaust Survivors Centre and with the Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service, along with other institutions that offer therapeutic aid.

Margi began the session discussing ones' ideas of a "normal family" versus an "abnormal family," or one that has been effected by extreme trauma. A normal family is viewed as more than one generation of people who live in relation to one another; they are individuals with beliefs who take roles and form alliances with one another; and they are people with stories and tend to evolve over the years. This can be com-

pared to the type of family that a refugee knows—a family of loss and dislocation. The members of such a family have lost their support, their adolescence, and older generations to observe and regard. Refugees have had to learn how to deal with fear, loneliness, and the troubles that accompany being accepted into a new and foreign culture on their own.

Margi explained that after the war, refugees often did not want to discuss the horrific events they had witnessed. Upon liberation, survivors were not encouraged to speak and lacked an audience that was ready and willing to listen. Unfortunately, people found it much too difficult to cope with the realities of the war and could not bear to hear of it.

Volunteers may now find themselves in a unique position with

the decision on whether or not it is their duty to become involved with their befriend's family issues. Margi, along with the volunteers attending the forum, agreed that such a decision can only be made by the individual in the situation.

The volunteer session ended on a high note as the attendees spoke about the importance of the volunteer. Each volunteer has the interesting task of listening. By hearing their befriend's story, accepting that it happened, and valuing their life, the refugee is often helped in the most significant of ways.

We're on the web!

www.ajr.org.uk/volunteers.htm

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