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**New York City Council  
Presentation to the Jewish Caucus  
FY22 Budget  
March 24, 2021**

My name is Katie Foley and I am the Managing Director, External Affairs and Communications at Selfhelp Community Services. Thank you to Jewish Caucus Chair, Councilmember Chaim Deutsch, and the members of the caucus for the opportunity to present today on Selfhelp's mission and programs serving Holocaust survivors.

Selfhelp remains committed to serving as the last surviving relative to Holocaust survivors in need of care, and in particular for the up to 35,000 survivors living in New York City. As the largest provider of services to Holocaust survivors in North America, Selfhelp's commitment extends to educating future generations to ensure that never again remains true, and that the lessons of the Holocaust are shared.

Selfhelp was founded in 1936 to help those fleeing Nazi Germany maintain their independence and dignity as they struggled to forge new lives in America. Today, Selfhelp has grown into one of the largest and most respected not-for-profit human service agencies in the New York metropolitan area, with 46 programs throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Nassau County. We provide a broad set of services to more than 20,000 elderly, frail, and vulnerable New Yorkers each year. Selfhelp offers a complete network of community-based home care, social service, and senior housing programs with the overarching goal of helping clients to live with dignity and independence and avoid institutional care.

Our services are extensive and include: specialized programs for Holocaust Survivors; twelve affordable senior housing complexes; four Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) programs; three intensive case management programs; five senior centers including one of New York City's first Innovative Senior Centers; home health care; Virtual Senior Center; court-appointed guardianship; the Selfhelp Alzheimer's Resource Program (SHARP); and the New York Connects Queens provider.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Selfhelp social workers have been providing the specialized care that survivors deserve due to the trauma they experienced. There are many unique struggles survivors face today: the isolation, the return of memories of hiding, rationing food, being away from family, as well as sickness and death. They are also among the most vulnerable and susceptible to this disease. This funding supports Selfhelp social workers who are reducing social isolation through frequent phone



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calls and assisting with needs such as access to food, safe shelter, medical care including vaccinations, and more.

The need is immense. Half of the approximately 5,300 survivors served by Selfhelp live at or below the poverty line. And though the number of survivors is declining, the needs of the remaining population are more intense and costly.

Social isolation is also a growing concern. This is why Selfhelp has invested in a unique platform on our Virtual Senior Center that only serves survivors. We are committed to helping our clients stay connected to their support systems – their family, friends, and social workers. Our services are currently provided virtually and we will resume in-person services once it is considered safe to do so. Our team is working every day to ensure our clients continue to live with dignity through this challenging time.

#### The Elie Wiesel Holocaust Survivor Initiative

We're grateful to the City Council for the City's ongoing investment and leadership on behalf of this community. The Elie Wiesel Holocaust Survivor Initiative provides valuable supports to community-based organizations, like Selfhelp, who provide care for survivors.

This year, we are urging the City Council to renew this initiative, with continued support for Selfhelp and our Holocaust Survivor Program. As the largest provider of comprehensive services to survivors in North America, Selfhelp Community Services is uniquely positioned to assist this last generation of survivors. This funding supports Selfhelp's direct social services to frail, isolated, and financially needy Holocaust Survivors.

This commitment allows us to turn the words "never forget" into action, and the City's investment helps us serve this population so they can continue to age with independence and dignity.

For FY22, Selfhelp requested funding from the Initiative to support direct social services to frail, isolated and financially needy Holocaust survivors. \$275,000 of the funding will supports enhanced case management services to provide individualized assessments by our trauma-informed social workers with the goal of helping to keep clients living safely in the community as well as support for clients in the Holocaust Financial Management and Guardianship programs.

The guardianship program assumes care for survivors who have no family to care for them. This is one of the ways we actualize our mission of serving as the last surviving relative. Our program assists clients using the least restrictive interventions, allowing them to live as independently as possible.

An additional \$125,000 of funding provides support for Witness Theater, an innovative inter-generational education program that brings together Holocaust survivors and high school students to elicit, expose, and memorialize survivors' moving stories of survival. New and innovative educational programs, such as Witness Theater, are especially important now since New York City is seeing a rise



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in anti-Semitic hate crimes. Witness Theater involves Holocaust survivors in a therapeutic process designed to help them come to terms with their past and instill their memories of the Holocaust in the next generation. The program culminates in free public performances that serve as a vehicle for the survivors' testimonies to be heard by many and to witness the special connections made between the generations. Council funding helps us bring Witness Theater to broad and diverse audiences who can bear witness to the survivors' stories of resilience and strength. We look forward to sharing this unique program with the public this spring with our first virtual performance on April 7<sup>th</sup> in honor of Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day.

### Selfhelp's Core Services for Holocaust Survivors

At seven community-based programs throughout New York, Selfhelp serves 5,300 survivors through enhanced case management, emergency financial assistance, social programs, financial management and guardianship, and our educational Witness Theater program. Our trauma-informed social workers provide individualized assessments as well guardianship assistance for some of the frailest and financially needy survivors in the city.

Half of the survivors served by Selfhelp live at or below the poverty line. Russian speaking survivors are the largest and fastest growing segment of the population of survivors and are often living in extreme poverty. 80% of the Russian-speaking clients we serve as living at or below the poverty line. About 40% of survivors in our care require help with daily tasks and over 70% describe their health as poor or fair. As this population came to the United States later in life, they have very few assets or savings from their working years. They are living almost exclusively on reparations payments, benefits, entitlements, and emergency cash assistance. For some, their social isolation is made worst by limited English proficiency.

Selfhelp's commitment to survivors extends to educating future generations to ensure that 'never again' remains true with the innovative Witness Theater program. A film made about the Witness Theater program is now available through Menemsha Films to be available for schools and community-groups learning about the lessons of the Holocaust. You can learn more about the film and see the trailer at [www.witnesstheaterthefilm.com](http://www.witnesstheaterthefilm.com).

### Conclusion

I want to thank the City Council for their ongoing support of the Elie Weisel Holocaust Survivor Initiative. The Council's support and increased funding has enabled Selfhelp to continue our high quality of care for Holocaust survivors. Ongoing support is crucial to Selfhelp's ability to continue to serve this population. On behalf of all of the clients served by Selfhelp, thank you for the opportunity today.



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