

Michael Newman - Panel VI

1) What techniques do you employ to reach out to and engage with Holocaust survivors and refugees?

Thank you Mr Chairman. Allow me just a few words at the outset and let me start by picking up on discussion mentioned yesterday about the definition of survivors. In the UK the majority of the Nazi victims in 1945 were the refugees who came prior to the outbreak of war. Although some had come in the mid 1930s, the majority arrived in the 18 months between the Anschluss in March 1938 and the outbreak of war in September 1939. It is estimated that some 70,000 found refuge in Britain while post-war, in comparison, only a few hundred survivors settled in the UK.

The AJR was formed in 1941 following the reversal of the British government's disastrous policy of internment and just like today it can seem like there are more Jewish NGOs in a community than there are Jews, there were at that time a number of organisations representing and supporting the émigrés – separate groups for German and Austria, Zionists, and Czechs and Communists – but the AJR has outlived them and it is today the only UK national charity delivering social, welfare and care services exclusively to Jewish victims of Nazi oppression. Today membership stands at around 2,200 and includes a growing number of second generation but our mission supports the dependants and descendants. Someone yesterday mentioned that the average age of survivors is 87 or 88, for the AJR it is 89/90 and we have some 35 members over 100, including one of 110!

AJR Special interest groups represent the children of former refugees and the child refugees who arrived on the Kindertransport. Mr Marom mentioned he came to the UK with Sir Nicholas Winton but there were other individuals and groups that deserve credit, including the Quakers.

Also by way of background, today's conference can trace its roots to the 1997 London Nazi Gold Conference convened by then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, which used the momentum of the collapse of communism, the access to archives and the multi-billion restitution and compensation lawsuits as well as the popularisation of the Holocaust through films and documentaries. The meeting in London led to the following up Washington Conference.



Without doubt our single most effective way of reaching out and identifying new members is through our membership itself, through word of mouth; I am clearly biased but it is precisely because we strongly support our members that they talk about services to their relatives and friends. We are an effective advocate and are proud that we have successfully represented our members and guided them through a range of social, welfare and care issues.

Although we recently reprovided our day centre services, we have since our founding continuously operated local social groups for members to meet to enjoy each other's company. Through this equivalent of the Café Europa programme these nationwide regional groups help break isolation and give members a unique opportunity to meet, hear from guest speakers and go on outings and holidays. Just earlier this month we organised a four day visit to Scotland, which is just about still part of the UK, attended by some 40 members. And it is through these groups, survivors and refugees have been able to connect to our work and our services. Just to give you a scale of the operation, there are some 8000 attendances at more than 500 meetings per year.

We produce a monthly Journal (published every month since January 1946) which combines news and topical analysis with historical overviews and regular carries the testimony of our members, sometimes reflecting on their lives and their family, and often following a visit back to a country of birth.

As well as colleagues at other communal organisations working in the field of social welfare, we cooperate with medical practitioners, local authorities and residential homes. This multi-disciplinary approach enables us to ensure we are best representing the interests of our members.

We are a member of several communal networks, including the Forum for Yom HaShoah and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust through which survivors and refugees and their families as well as communal organisations, including Synagogues, learn about the services we deliver.

In recent years – especially to commemorate significant anniversaries – we have organised a number high-profile events which attract publicity. In our experience it is great help if a member of the Royal Family is your guest of honour as, for example, Prince Charles was when he attended the commemorative concert we organised last November on the anniversary of Kristallnacht.

There are also opportunities to raise awareness through the media. Topically for this conference, the Jewish Chronicle, probably the best known Jewish community publication, recently ran a story about a number of survivors in the UK living in squalor. While for all the reasons that we sadly know all too well some former



victims live in challenging situations we nonetheless refuted that this misleading and irresponsible article as it did not truly represent the lives of the community we support but also ignores the life changing assistance that we deliver.

Lastly, we raise awareness of our services through partner organisations carrying out archival research. As some of you may know it is possible for the countries that governed the records of the international Tracing Service to have a copy of the archive. In the UK the documents are held at the Wiener Library while the UK charity World Jewish Relief has recently digitised the records pertaining to the émigrés who found refuge in the UK.

2) How do we represent and support survivors and refugees in the UK?

Chiefly, we are the lead and principal organisation among an Umbrella Group of UK agencies delivering social welfare services. The Group was formed to consolidate the skills across a number of agencies supporting and representing UK survivors and refugees. Within this our most important role is to administer, disburse and account for the Euro 3.6m.

The Umbrella Group is an-hoc forum of not for profit organisations with similar objectives to spread knowledge, broaden the database and promote a coordinated approach to govt and other UK NGOs.

This critical social and welfare assistance – combined with the AJR’s additional and bespoke support – forms our core activity. Our social workers carry out hundreds of home visits and make applications for the series of financial help as well as Homecare that can have a transformative and life-enhancing effect and the way they advocate for our members includes liaison with local authorities, coordination with healthcare professionals and where necessary making plans to reprovide in residential and nursing homes.

Through our altruistic volunteers we are able to deliver a range of services but without doubt the difference our befrienders make has the greatest impact. In the last 18 months we have also introduced two programmes to provide specialist services dementia and, separately, computer help.

We are fortunate to benefit from the services of an intern from the ARSP while other ARSP volunteers give some of their time from other UK projects specifically to visit AJR members.

We support our members by supporting our staff and volunteers. As well as offer training opportunities for volunteers and social workers, for example on topics including dementia, social welfare benefits and residential care, we arrange for guest speakers to talk on subjects such as welfare and compensation payments as well as



on awareness on Holocaust and Jewish issues. Similarly, we provide supervision for qualified social workers; guidance with completing qualification for support workers; CPD opportunities.

Yesterday colleagues mentioned the Polish War Veterans pension, the ghetto pension and the one-time payment for child survivors. We offer specialist advice and guidance on restitution and compensation matters, and assistance with pensions. We produce guidelines and hold surgeries for completion of application forms.

Just to add to what was mentioned yesterday and in the literature for this event, survivors in the UK also benefit from a series of tax exemptions on Holocaust restitution and reparations. Specifically, they do not pay income tax on pensions and there is no tax to pay on lump sum awards or inheritance tax on restitution awards.

Additionally, the AJR negotiated a set of guidelines for British banks to repay any commissions or charges made on transactions involving Holocaust monies.

Coming back to the services we provide, through the letters monthly Journal page in itself presents members with a chance to empower themselves by writing or speaking out on a subject of importance to them.

As well as being represented on the communal and government initiatives I mentioned earlier we are also a member of the UK delegation to the IHRA. Last week we co-organised an event focussing on the Hungarian chairmanship of IHRA to which many of our members came and were able to contribute to the discussion.

We further represent our members by organising commemorative events; for Kristallnacht, Holocaust Memorial Day and Yom HaShoah and alongside our support for major educational and memorial projects throughout the country, the AJR has developed its own testimony and research projects. Through our Refugee Voices archive we have captured for both the individual interviewee and for scholars the lives of the refugees.