

Following Hurricane Sandy, Holocaust survivors in areas of New York and New Jersey were left without homes, power, transportation, or caregivers. These vulnerable elderly often have difficulties applying for immediate government assistance, as their health and mobility can be limited. Many could not leave their homes following the storm, or could not get back to them. In addition, the local agencies and organizations on which they rely in normal times to assist them with daily living were heavily affected by the hurricane, with offices damaged or destroyed and staff unable to travel.

After hearing from its partner agencies about the difficulties they were encountering in assisting Holocaust victims, the Claims Conference acted on a number of fronts to provide support. The Claims Conference has allocated \$750,000 in emergency funds to assist Holocaust survivors who were affected by Sandy. These funds will be disbursed to agencies requesting assistance for Nazi victims.

As well, as a result of ongoing contact with various German entities, the Claims Conference was able to brief German government officials and business leaders about survivors' need for help. When the German Consul General in New York, Busso von Alvensleben, heard that the hurricane's devastation reminded survivors of what they had experienced during the war, he decided to use a concert at his residence as a fundraiser and attendees donated a total of \$4,000 to help alleviate the situation of Nazi victims.

In addition, Claims Conference efforts resulted in donations as well from the German business sector. The German Insurance Association (GDV), based in Berlin, has donated €20,000 (\$27,000) for the Claims Conference to allocate to partner agencies. Allianz of America, the American subsidiary of the German insurance company, has committed \$50,000 for infrastructure improvements for the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island (JCCGCI), where the office was completely destroyed. In addition, Allianz's New York-based staff will volunteer in the facility.

Despite the difficulties posed by lack of power, heat and phones, social service agencies in the area developed ways to keep in contact with their clients, to ensure that the survivors they serve had food and water, and were safe and cared for. The Claims Conference remains in close contact with these agencies and continues to hear stories of extraordinary acts of kindness from staff, social workers and volunteers, including some who slept on the floor of apartments during and after the hurricane to provide reassurance to isolated and disabled survivors.

In mid-January, Claims Conference staff accompanied German Consul Ellen Gözl to visit the destroyed offices of the JCCGCI. Consul General von Alvensleben could not attend as planned due to illness. Rabbi Moshe Wiener, JCCGCI executive director, gave a tour of the Haber House senior center. The water rose to about 4 feet high within the building, he said. In the hallways, electrical panels, with their wires hanging out, look like bowls of spaghetti. The hallway and some of the rooms have already been re-painted, but there is so much more work to be done.

Nearly 200 Nazi victims were gathered, ostensibly to thank the Claims Conference and Consul Gözl for providing aid in restoring their lives post-Sandy. In fact, the opposite happened as they showed warmth, spirit and determination. Smiling and laughing, they shared stories, a few jokes, and their inspirational anecdotes. For sure, there were dark moments in describing the horrors they endured during the Shoah and the travails over the past three months. But, ultimately, theirs is a story of the triumph of will and spirit.

Rabbi Wiener praised his social workers, who “continued going to their clients” even with no electricity, no telephone service and no elevators during the storm’s aftermath. Some social workers had to climb many flights of stairs to check on their clients, the rabbi told us.

“I’m really amazed to see so many of you today, and when I went through the center and heard how high the water was, and how much damage there was, I commend all your work,” said Consul Gözl.

Barbara Schubak, a survivor, leaned close to Consul Gözl across a table and said how grateful she is to the JCCGCI staff. “If it wasn’t for those people here, I don’t think I would be alive,” she said. Barbara was alone in her 20th-floor apartment during the storm. “I bless those people day and night,” Barbara, a survivor of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, told the consul. “Those are the people you should help, because they are helping us a lot.”

The Claims Conference was able to translate its ongoing dialogue with German entities into tangible and immediate assistance for Holocaust victims. Assistance will help survivors like these gain access to cash assistance, home repairs and replacement, and other vital services needed in the aftermath of this horrific storm.

[Read about the visit to Coney Island in the New York Jewish Week.](#)

<http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/breaking-news/holocaust-survivors-affected-sandy-get-aid-germans-and-claims-conference>