

The Jewish Community – Faith and Older People

It is often said that Judaism is not just a religion but also a way of life. Jewish observance spans a wide range of religious expression: dietary laws; observance of the Sabbath; celebration of festivals as they occur throughout the year; blessings and prayer, both within the home and in the synagogue. While there is a wide range of level of observance, the majority of older Jews in Scotland share experiences of the same basic Jewish practices.

Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, which serves the greatest catchment of Jewish people in Scotland (those who live in the greater Glasgow area), recently carried out a Community Futures Strategy. In answering the question, what 'a Jewish setting and environment' would mean for them in a care situation, 93% of older respondents felt that it was important to be cared for in a Jewish environment. They felt that the most important elements were being in the company of other Jewish people, having kosher food, and celebrating Shabbat (Sabbath) and festivals. Clearly, being with other Jewish people gave them a feeling of community, and being with people with a shared history.

Jewish Care Scotland

Jewish Care, based in Giffnock, plays a central role in serving the needs of older people who live in their own home. They serve the whole Jewish community no matter their synagogue affiliation (or none). They run a number of weekly clubs catering for both frail elderly and more active older people. The professional staff are supported in their work by around 140 volunteers. Kosher meals are served at the clubs and also delivered to homes through the meals on wheels service. Members are given the opportunity to celebrate festivals with traditional festival foods. At the spring festival of Passover a Seder is held - this involves the retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the freeing of the Israelites from slavery, together with the partaking of a festive meal and symbolic foods. This is a popular event, particularly for older people whose families no longer live in Glasgow.

Barrland Court

Barrland Court in Giffnock offers very sheltered accommodation for older people who no longer feel they can live in their own homes. The two separate kitchens, meat and dairy, provide kosher food for the two meals that are served daily in the communal dining room. Ladies light the candles before the Sabbath on a Friday evening and a meal with traditional food is served (including the obligatory chicken soup!). Blessings are made over wine and bread. The Jewish festivals are marked throughout the year. At Passover two guests, a father and son, join the residents in order to conduct the Seder for them on the first two nights. On other festive occasions Rabbi Chaim Jacobs of Lubavitch (an outreach organisation), visits to help the residents experience some of the traditional practices.

Newark Care

Newark Care's two Care Homes, Westacres in Newton Mearns and Burnfield Care in Giffnock, each have an integral synagogue which the residents can attend. Rabbi Mendel Jacobs (also of Lubavitch) is Chaplain to both homes. He is available to speak to residents and to give them support.

Sick Visiting Association

Members of the Association make visits, but often find it difficult to know who the Jewish patients are because of data protection laws. A visit by a member of the community is appreciated by Jewish patients. Rev Soudry, chaplain to the Jewish Sick Visiting Association, visits Jewish patients in hospital, mainly older people. He usually introduces Jewish themes to the conversation, particularly around festival times, and recites the *Shema*, the central prayer of the Jewish Religion. He finds this gives much comfort. He liaises with families if he feels there are practical questions the Jewish patients want answered. He goes further afield in Scotland when the need arises.

Giffnock and Newlands Hebrew Congregation

Giffnock Synagogue runs a weekly Friendship Club for older members. There is usually some form of entertainment or discussion, followed by tea and cakes. They also have a 'Big Hearts' group of volunteers who visit older people who need some company and they help them in any way that they can. Rabbi Rubin visits older members in their homes or in hospital and also phones them from time to time. He often discusses end of life issues with families of older people and with the older person if requested.

Glasgow Reform Synagogue

Glasgow Reform Synagogue offers a monthly Lunch and Learn series which is open to all generations. Home visits are made by the student rabbi, Kate Briggs for those unable to come to the synagogue and requesting a visit, mainly in the two Jewish Care homes (Westacres and Burnfield Care). A recent addition to Glasgow Reform Synagogue is a live screen of the services for those elderly people with access to the internet and unable to come to the synagogue. This would only happen in a Progressive Synagogue.

Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation

Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation runs a twice weekly lunch club for older people. Not only do they have the meal, but they are also provided with 'carry-outs'. There is a rota to collect those with mobility problems. The Synagogue has a welfare convener who organises hospital visits and visits to those in care homes. The children who attend the Cheder (the Religion Classes) visit older members of the community with appropriate festival gifts at the Festival of Purim and Rosh Hashana (the Jewish New Year). Rabbi Rose, the Rabbi of the synagogue, visits older people in their homes and in hospital.

By keeping older people connected with their traditions and practices and giving them the choice to opt in to the wide range of services available in the Jewish community, families have peace of mind that their elderly relations have access to the best care available in a familiar Jewish setting.