

# CONNECTIONS

Jewish Social Services of Madison

Newsletter Sponsored by the Anna & Oscar Bentley Fund

Fall 2003, Vol. 3, No. 2

**Refugees Joseph and Nejay Redd, together with their children and grandchildren, escaped war torn Liberia and are safely settled in Madison.**

## The Redd Family "So Happy to Be Here"

BY JANICE FIKSEL, M.A., JSS RESETTLEMENT COORDINATOR



**W**hen I was hired by Jewish Social Services ten years ago, it was because I spoke Russian. I never expected the day would come when I'd be assisting Liberian refugees. However, under an expanded contract with the State of Wisconsin, Jewish Social

Services serves refugees from certain countries other than the Former Soviet Union. Refugees like the Redds are settled initially by Lutheran Social Services or Catholic Charities. Then, after ninety days, JSS takes over.

Now I was on my way to meet this family of eight who came to Madison to reunite with their relative, Alex Redd. Alex, a journalist, had fled from the West African country in 1998 after government forces kidnapped and beat him for reporting on the murder of one of then-president Charles Taylor's political enemies. As I drove to their apartment, I wondered what it would be like to be forced to flee over the border and live in a refugee camp in Ghana for two years, with no running water or electricity and little food, and today be sitting in a carpeted apartment in Madison? Even though I'd boned up on the geography and political history of Liberia, I was anxious.

But when I walked up the entryway and was greeted with open arms and sparkling smiles by 4-year-old Satarus and 5-year-old Victoria, my worries disappeared. Then everyone else – Alex and his three brothers, sister and parents – warmly joined in.

The Redds had arrived in May and were now living in two townhouses furnished with donations from both JSS and a local Lutheran church. When I

asked sister Mamie, 21, about her new home, she described Madison as a "cool city." "I am so happy to be living in this country," she said.

While living in the refugee camp in Accra, Mamie spent much of her day assisting elderly people. She hopes to work in this country as a Certified Nursing Assistant. But, although she speaks English fluently, Mamie cannot read nor write. She and her twin brother Zack attend classes at the Madison Literacy Council. "The classes are good," says Zack, "but we could use more help and would appreciate having volunteers to help us learn."

Mamie's daughter Victoria is quickly adapting. I helped her register for Camp Shalom this summer. "She loved camp," Mamie says, "especially the songs. Each day she came home and sang, 'Pharoah, Pharoah...'"

It's been more difficult for Alex's parents Joseph and Nejay, both in their fifties. The patriarch of the family smiled as he told me how he started running each morning for exercise. He hopes to get a part-time job as a janitor. His wife, who speaks only her tribal language of Bassa, wants to learn English. She said the most difficult part of her new life is that it's "hard to get used to this cold weather." It was in the 60's that day!



I was touched by the warmth of this family and feel honored that I, a part of the Jewish community, have the opportunity to return their embrace by helping them. Although they're in good spirits, the Redd family need jobs, a literacy volunteer and an ESL teacher for Nejay. I would so appreciate any assistance you can offer. Please call me at 278-1808, ext. 17.

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# Financial Exploitation – It's a Crime What Some People Do Elders at Risk: Part II

**F**inancial (or material) abuse is the misuse or exploitation of money or property. While financial abuse may not be as visible as a bruise or broken bone, its impact can be as traumatic and devastating, wiping out a lifetime of savings and wise investments.

*Anne's children lived out of state. They discovered she wasn't taking care of herself, but she refused to leave her home. So on one weekend visit her daughter met a friendly neighbor who said she had home care experience, and hired her to clean, run errands, shop and cook. Only later, when another relative visited, did it come to light that the neighbor had Anne write out large checks for "advance pay."*

*Cora had signed a power of attorney so her son could manage her financial affairs, since she lived in a nursing home. Using this document, he withdrew money from her investment account and took off for an extended trip to the Far East.*

*Ed had been living with his daughter. When he was admitted to a nursing home, his VA pension went to pay for his care. Then his daughter couldn't make ends meet on her SSI income, so she moved him from the nursing home and said she would care for him at home.*

Theft, extortion, forgery, insurance and welfare fraud and home repair scams are well-publicized forms of this phenomenon. Perpetrators include hired caregivers and professional swindlers.

But, sadly, elders are particularly susceptible when trusted friends and family members quietly steal their money by mismanaging funds against their will or diverting income. This is different from a

stressed caregiver with good intentions using poor judgment.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ), reported incidents of financial abuse are on a shocking, rapid increase. To combat these crimes and bring them swiftly to an end, the DOJ in October announced an unprecedented initiative which will bring together law enforcement, prosecutors, social workers and the financial/banking community. The goal: speedy detection, apprehension and prosecution.

*Elders are particularly susceptible when trusted friends and family members...steal their money.*



Locally, JSS has already been working closely with Dane County's multi-disciplinary M-Team and with Elder Victim Counselor Lisa Raider to help older persons at risk. After an investigation, we

and other agencies may get involved with counseling, monitoring, helping revise financial documents and reassigning responsibilities. Sometimes the perpetrator is prosecuted.

JSS can also be a deterrent. In the case where there is no appropriate family member to assume responsibility, our Financial Management Program can attend to an elder's money matters. Says JSS geriatric social worker Nancy Dodge, "When JSS serves as power of attorney or representative payee, all financial issues come through us. The client is not vulnerable to schemes and emotional pressure to use financial resources unwisely."

Caregivers are welcome to bring their questions about managing financial matters for a loved one to Senior Services at JSS. Or, if you suspect abuse, please let us know. Your phone call will be held in confidence.

## Is it Financial Abuse?

*Some warning signs, compiled from the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse:*

- Unpaid bills, eviction notices or notices to disconnect telephone or utilities
- Withdrawals from bank accounts or transfers between accounts that cannot be explained
- Bank statements and cancelled checks no longer coming to the elder's home
- New "best friends"
- Drafting of legal documents such as power of attorney
- Unusual activity in the older person's bank account such as large, unexplained withdrawals, frequent transfers between accounts or ATM withdrawals
- Missing belongings or property
- Suspicious signatures on checks or other financial documents
- Implausible explanations about finances given by the elder or caregiver

Statistics of elder abuse are on the rise right here in Wisconsin. Last year, 3,721 cases were reported, an uptick of 15% – nearly half being material or financial exploitation. Of the total, 400 were in Dane County alone.

So, if you're concerned, you may be onto something. Take steps to call JSS at 278-1808.

JSS Offers A Sincere

# Thank You

for Your Tribute Gifts

*The following contributions were made between July 16, 2003 and September 30, 2003*

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*Ron Arm and Linda Jameson for the loving care  
and help they give me*

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Francie and Irv Saposnik

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Betsy and Bezalel Haimson

*Shelvin Singer, speedy recovery*

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*Continued on page 4*

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### How Tributes Help

We appreciate when you honor and remember others with a gift to JSS. Gifts that are unrestricted in nature allow JSS to use them where the greatest needs exist.

Every donation means a great deal to us. We have made every effort to make sure our thank you lists are accurate and complete, but if we have inadvertently neglected to list your name, please let us know. Call Sherry Minkus, 278-1808. Thank-you.

# Thank You

for Your Tribute Gifts

The following contributions were made between February 1 and July 15, 2003.  
We apologize for having mistakenly omitted these names from our previous listing.

## **SPEEDY RECOVERY**

*Claudia Haus*

Joan and Kenneth Riggs  
Frances Weinstein

*Judie Herstand*

Betsy and Bezalel Haimson

*Anita Parks*

Royal and Muriel Rotter

*Irving Saposnik*

Stanley H. Langer

## **IN HONOR OF**

*Sarah Aked's Bat Mitzvah*

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Ralph and Charlotte Musin  
Rosalind Levin

*Her 5th birthday*

Sammy Goldstein

*Stacy Harnett, high school graduation*

Frances Weinstein

*JSS 25th anniversary*

Betsy Abramson and David Seligman  
David and Sandie Ottenstein  
Lester and Ann Druck

*JSS for the holiday wishes and Passover gift*

Eva Deutschkron

*JSS Staff: Barbara, Francie and Lauren*

Rebecca and Jonathon Kaiser

*Raymond and Leah Kessel, 40th anniversary*

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Sylvia T. Root

*Muriel Rotter, 75th birthday*

Gerald and Lorraine Borsuk  
Joan and Kenneth Riggs  
June Klein

*Irv Saposnik, with gratitude*

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Daniel Fromstein  
Sara Sinaiko

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*Sara Sinaiko, happy special birthday*

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*Benjamin Sontheimer*

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*Rose Steinig, 80th birthday*

Harry and Bertha Friedman  
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*Shirley Volpiansky, 78th birthday*

Paula Volpiansky

## **IN MEMORY OF**

*Mildred Agins*

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Continued on page 6

## Thank You for Your Tribute Gifts *(continued)*

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# Thank You

to Vehicle Donors, *November 1, 2002 - October, 2003*

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*Lend real support to people in need with your tax-deductible contribution of a vehicle in working order. We'll tow it, if necessary. For details, call Sherry Minkus, 278-1808, and have your title ready.*

# Did you know...?

- Staff members Lauren Meyers and Barbara Spierer recently attended a University sponsored workshop on Bipolar Disorder in Youth, an issue challenging a number of families in our community.
- At its October 15th luncheon, Downtown Rotary honored JSS volunteer par excellence, Abe Landsman as a recipient of the Senior Service Award. Abe continues to hold the title of most senior employee of the City of Madison for his work at the Madison Senior Center. Abe will turn 90 in January!
- JSS is pleased to offer for a second time a course for people who provide care giving to their loved ones. *Taking Care of You: Powerful Tools for Caregiving* is a six week course that teaches concrete skills, tools, and ideas to ease the stress of caregiving. Participants benefit from a problem solving approach and the support of other caregivers.

The next Powerful Tools class will be held in January 2004! For more information, or to register call Lauren Meyers, MSSW at Jewish Social Services, 278-1808.

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Lauren Meyers, *Contributing Writers*

## RUSSIAN CORNER

# 5,200 Miles for These Smiles

Galina and Vlad Konovalov breathed a deep sigh of relief when their daughter and granddaughter stepped off the plane in Madison in August. "We've been waiting for them to arrive for 2-1/2 years," they said.

"We can sleep peacefully now."

The gregarious Tatyana has made many connections in her new community with the help of JSS. She's particularly grateful for her ESL volunteer Monica Merry-Mason. "Monica's weekly English lessons help me feel more confident. She also teaches me about American culture."

Tatyana was a dentist and wants to get her license and certification here. So, she attends English classes in the morning and has been volunteering in dental offices most afternoons. Drs. Dana Lubet and Jay Hazen welcomed her in to observe their work.

Recently, Dr. Lubet hired Tatyana as a dental assistant. "Tatyana is a classic example of a new immigrant coming to America," says Lubet. "She's the best and the brightest. Tatyana's situation reminds me of what it must have been like for my grandparents when they immigrated here."

"I needed to have a job to support myself and my daughter," Tatyana remarked. She notes, "I will now be able to study in the evenings and am on my way toward achieving my goal of working in my field of dentistry."



**Tatyana Kudinenko, age 31, and her 7-year-old daughter, Valeriya, are Madison's newest arrivals from the Ukraine, hailing from the city of Kharkov.**

"I don't know what I would do if JSS were not assisting me during this resettlement process," she said. "I never expected to receive this much help. It's heartwarming to know that I'm not alone. I feel surrounded by people who understand my situation and are always there to provide the help I need."

# It's as Easy as 1-2-3

**F**or Ronald and Cherie Diamond, the decision to donate their old cars to JSS was easy.

"In these times, everybody wants to do something, whether it is writing out a check, volunteering your time or giving a part of your soul," says Cherie Diamond.

The Diamond family chose JSS instead of selling their used vehicle themselves or to a dealer. "JSS is such a wonderful organization, their help in the community often goes unnoticed," says Cherie. "This was an opportunity to give something to them."

And the process was so simple that they did it again. In three years, the Diamonds have donated two vehicles to JSS.

"All I did was call JSS," she says. "They came to the house and picked up the car. They did all the paperwork. It was very easy," she explained. And the tax deduction was an unexpected bonus. "To be honest," admits Cherie, "I hadn't even thought of the tax deduction."

*To donate your car, truck, boat or trailer, have your title in hand and call Sherry Minkus at JSS, 278-1808.*

## Borscht for the Soul

Meet Sue Goldstein, a JSS volunteer for 20 years, who began teaching English to Russian emigrés twelve years ago.

### How did you get involved with Jewish Social Services?

When I first moved back to Madison in 1979, I was divorced and had two small children. Jewish Social Services, among many others, were very kind and supportive to me when I needed them, so I offered to give back by driving the elderly during the day when my kids were in school.

About 12 years ago, I think it was 1989, I started getting involved in teaching English to the Russian population here in Madison. My maternal grandparents and paternal grandmother are from Russia and I was very intrigued by working with them. I have had four students in total, one particular student since 1994, and she and I have become very good friends.

It was an easy transition from tutor to

friend. She is a woman of my own age, with very similar interests.

In fact, the husband of one of my students was born in the same town as my grandmother. I cried when I heard this. As such, he and his family that remain in Russia are a wonderful resource for me as I am currently working on a genealogy project

### How is it to teach English to a non-native English speaker?

Well, since both of them were in their sixties when they came to Madison, it was clear to me that they needed to be more functional in English than fluent. So, I started very simply. I would try to incorporate "everyday English" into our lessons. I would bring things over to their house to cook, thinking that this would be a natural way to learn the words that they needed from that experience. Well, silly me. I didn't realize that it was the husband in this family that did all the cooking. I soon took a very different approach.

### Is it very difficult to get through the cultural boundaries between Russians and Americans?

Absolutely there are cultural differences, but they work more as bridges than obstacles. For example, there is no Russian word for volunteer. It took my students a long time to realize that I was doing this because I wanted to, not because I was getting paid.

### What would you say to others about volunteering with JSS?

This has been an incredible and rewarding experience for me. I got to participate in their granddaughter's wedding, see them become US citizens. They have been at my home for holidays. And they are so appreciative. My advice: "Try it, you'll like it."

JSS Volunteer Coordinator Louise Goldstein (no relation) matches your interests with those who need help. Give her a call at 278-1808, ext. 26.

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