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A community as caregiver

Twin Cities Jewish community will be the first faith community in Minnesota to assess how it cares for those dealing with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias

By ERIN ELLIOTT BRYAN / Community News Editor

In 2007, a small group of community members who were caring for parents with dementia approached [Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis \(JFCS\)](#) for help in organizing support and educational opportunities for others dealing with similar experiences.

“They had formed their own little informal group of support and they went to JFCS and said, ‘We want to institutionalize something in the Jewish community for people who need support who are caring for someone in their family who has Alzheimer’s disease,’” □ said Chris Rosenthal, the senior services director at [Jewish Family Service of St. Paul](#). “So Betsy Sitkoff, from JFCS, pulled together some people throughout the community and said, ‘What can we do?’” □

That initial request launched the Twin Cities Jewish Community Alzheimer’s Disease Task Force, of which Rosenthal serves as co-chair with Annette Sandler, the aging and disability services director at JFCS. Its mission is to guide Jewish agencies, organizations and synagogues to provide education, support and programming regarding memory loss for the Jewish community.

Now the task force — which also includes representatives of [Sholom](#), the [St. Paul JCC](#), the [Mount Zion Temple Caring Community](#) and committed caregivers — has been asked to participate as a pilot community with [ACT on Alzheimer's](#), a statewide collaboration to prepare for the budgetary, social and personal impacts of Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.



Annette Sandler (left), of Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis, and Chris Rosenthal, of Jewish Family Service of St. Paul, serve as co-chairs of the Twin Cities Jewish Community Alzheimer's Disease Task Force. (Photo: Erin Elliott Bryan)

According to statistics, 100,000 people in Minnesota — and one in eight people older than 65 — live with Alzheimer’s disease or a related dementia, whether or not it has been diagnosed. That number is expected to increase by 25 percent by 2025.

And family and friends provide 94 percent of the care of older adults, which is worth approximately \$3.3 billion.

“It speaks to the need to support people in our community as caregivers,” □ Rosenthal said. “Because they’re doing the lion’s share of the work.” □

The state’s involvement with Alzheimer’s disease began in May 2009 with the passage of HF 1760, which mandated the creation of the Alzheimer’s Disease Working Group (ADWG) under the supervision of the [Minnesota Board on Aging](#) and led collaboratively with the [Alzheimer’s Association Minnesota-North Dakota Chapter](#). The group, comprised of 20 members appointed by the Board on Aging and then-Gov. Tim Pawlenty, spent 18 months examining the needs of individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, services available to meet these needs, and the capacity of the state and providers to meet these and future needs.

“That project took two years. There were many high-level people from the state and from organizations that were working on this comprehensive plan,” □ Sandler said. “At the end of the working group, they came up with a proposal, they sent it to the legislature, but it was an unfunded mandate.” □

The volunteers who had worked on the plan knew it was too important to let fall apart, so they recruited additional volunteers and were able to secure funding to implement parts of the project. Among the goals set forth by the working group were plans to increase early identification of Alzheimer’s disease; sustain caregivers; raise awareness and reduce the stigma of the disease; and invest in promising interventions.

For its part, the Twin Cities Jewish Community Alzheimer’s Disease Task Force is focusing on a fifth goal: equipping and engaging communities in support of individuals with the disease and their caregivers to become “dementia capable communities.” □

The Twin Cities Jewish community is one of only six or seven pilot communities throughout the state, and the first and only faith community.

Sandler now serves on the ACT on Alzheimer’s task force, which was an initiative that came out of the working group, and is the liaison between the state and the local Jewish community, and the city of St. Louis Park, another pilot community.

“Part of the work of our Twin Cities Jewish community task force, along with our work in St. Louis Park, has been to develop the tools that will eventually be able to be used across the state,” □ Sandler said. “What we’re creating is an online tool kit that any community could have access to, to say, ‘We want to do something around Alzheimer’s.’” □

The Twin Cities Jewish community task force has now launched the community needs assessment and volunteers are in the process of interviewing rabbis, synagogue and lay leaders, and community members to identify current resources and potential gaps in services for those dealing with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.

“It’s hard to find deep collaborations where both sides of the river are working just as hard to get this work done,” □ Sandler said. “And I think because both Chris and I staff this, we have both of the family service agencies, both of us at the table. And we really look at it as part of our mission with our own work, and [examine] how we can advance the work that we do within our own agencies.” □

Sandler will be presenting information about the Twin Cities Jewish community at the statewide conference on aging in June.

“Before this ever came around, we were already invested in how we can, as a community, respond to this need,” □ Rosenthal said. “And stay tuned. We will want to share what we’ve learned about our own community.” □

For information about the Twin Cities Jewish Community Alzheimer’s Disease Task Force, contact Annette Sandler at JFCS at 952-542-4866 or: asandler@jfcs.org; or Chris Rosenthal at JFS at 651-690-8920 or: croenthal@jfssp.org.

Local Alzheimer’s caregiver support groups meet at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month [Bet Shalom Congregation](#), 13613 Orchard Rd., Minnetonka; and 7 p.m. on the fourth Tuesday of each month at [Mount Zion Temple](#), 1300 Summit Ave., St. Paul.

An educational series titled “Get the Facts: What You Need to Know About Memory and Alzheimer’s Disease” □ will begin Feb. 26 at Mount Zion; call 952-830-0512 or visit: alz.org/mnnd.

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