

# GROTTA FUND FOR OLDER ADULTS NEWSLETTER

## EDITION 3 SPRING 2025

### 2025 SYNAGOGUES AND AGENCIES SHARE SUCCESS USING ENGAGEMENT GRANTS

More than 40 attendees from 18 current Grotta funded organizations gathered at the Federation Conference Center on May 5 to celebrate their successes, network, and pass along tips to other grantees. It was an inspiring morning of shared learning and celebration.

Grants totaling \$321,000 are supporting programs aimed at promoting older adult engagement within a single synagogue or Jewish organization and through collaborations. Five of the grantee organization leaders spoke briefly about how they launched and expanded their programs, and how rewarding the programming they put together was for participants, resulting in larger attendance than expected.

"From the moment people come into the room, it's electric. People are alive and socializing," said David Ehrenfried of Congregation Ohr Shalom. The three synagogues in Summit host a speaker series, "Greater Summit Community Connections for Jewish Seniors." He reported that attendance grew from 70 people at the first event to over 100 at the most recent gathering.

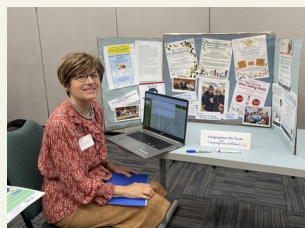
For some grantees, the funding helped to grow programs already in existence. That was the case for Conversations to Remember, a program started by Eve and Robert Lefkowitz in which college students are trained to converse with older adults and then matched for weekly phone calls with people who have requested opportunities to socialize. "Thanks to the Grotta Fund's generosity, we have had 1,108 visits with 56 different older adults and those numbers are growing," Robert said. Eve noted that there is a waiting list of students who want to participate in the program and aim to benefit older adults with their calls.

Three representatives of Jewish Service for the Developmentally Disabled (JSDD), offered lessons learned from applying their Grotta Fund planning grant to expand JSDD's Life Home Tech program to benefit older adults. They provided five tips for launching, growing, and sustaining new programs:

1. Listen, learn, reassess, evolve
2. Take a person-centered approach
3. Spread the word internally and externally
4. Explore social connections and what they mean to your audience
5. Pay attention to success factors, including making concrete plans for the longevity of your program

The event concluded with informal and engaging networking and the opportunity to view grantee displays that showcased their programs. All in all, the attendees enjoyed the opportunity to learn from other grantees and to celebrate their many successes. "It's so nice for the end result to have met the expectations set during this year-long granting process," said incoming Grotta Chair Ilene Isaacs after the event. "The grantees did their jobs well for sure."

*The Grotta Fund is supporting a second grant cycle to benefit new individual "Track 1" synagogues. Grant awards to be announced in June 2025.*



Top left: Mindy Goldberger, JCC Central. Bottom left: Deborah Druce, Ohr Torah Seniors Chaverim Group. Top Right: Susan Solomon, Etan Hindin, Daughters of Israel Quarterly Intergenerational Shabbat Luncheons. Bottom Right: Eve and Robert Lefkowitz, Conversations to Remember.



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### Grotta Council Members Visit JSDD Technology-Enabled Model Home for Older Adults

The Jewish Service for the Developmentally Disabled (JSDD), a current Grotta Fund grantee, is using our funding to expand its Life Home Tech program to include a new market: older adults. The original program, launched in 2023, was designed to provide technology solutions for adults with developmental disabilities to expand their abilities to perform daily activities and live independently. Thanks to the Grotta Fund grant, JSDD is using technology-enabled apartments to showcase and explain how new and emerging technology can improve the independence and quality of life for older adults.

In mid-January, several Grotta Council members toured JSDD's model home at the Village Apartment of the Jewish Federation in South Orange and we were wowed by all of the cutting-edge technology we saw there. Susan Nasberg-Abrams, project coordinator of Life Home Tech, led our tour.



The apartment had sensors, "smart" appliances, safety gadgets, and other devices aimed at making independence and aging in place easier for older adults and their loved ones. The kitchen included an induction cooktop stove with a timer and automatic-off function, and a can opener that opens even the toughest of tops with a single press of a button. A sensor on the front door voiced the reminder "Please lock the door behind you" as we entered. If activated, this sensor will notify a loved one that their family member has left the apartment. Water sensors placed near sinks, toilets and tubs prevent flooding by sending text notifications when detecting leaks.

Nasberg-Abrams said the tech-enabled apartments are tailored to the older resident and his or her caregivers' needs. "It's a person-centered approach," she said. "We interview individuals about their goals and what support system they have. The demo home inspires conversations where we explore various possibilities and then design personalized technology solutions from there." Some residents have Echo Show devices that allow them to place video calls to friends and family. New automatic medication dispensers, smart toothbrushes and fall-detection devices that can automatically alert remote caregivers of medical emergencies are among the options offered to older adults.

The Life Home Tech team has been speaking at conferences, to community organizations, synagogues, and caregiver groups. They bring real-life insights into how the right tools can enhance independence and improve quality of life for older adults. Life Home Tech also receives support from the Healthcare Foundation of NJ and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

For more information about Life Home Tech, or to schedule a tour of the model home, visit <https://www.jsdd.org/life-home-tech/>.

### REDUCING AGEISM IN WEST ORANGE AND FLIPPING THE SCRIPT ON AGING



West Orange's Department of Senior Services has launched the Aging Well West Orange campaign. Led by Senior Livability Coordinator Olive Ross and funded by the Grotta Fund, the Township aims to promote an age-friendly mindset and combat ageism.

In alignment with Older Americans Month (May 2025), the initiative began with a presentation to town leaders and will continue throughout the year with community outreach at local events. The campaign and related events will highlight the value and contributions of older residents and encourage inclusive policies and practices.

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### STRATEGIC INITIATIVES - FOOD INSECURITY AMONG OLDER ADULTS IN ESSEX COUNTY



The Grotta Fund for Older Adults has been monitoring the issues of food security in older adults during and since COVID. Its Council members are aware that access to healthy food is critical to the health and welfare of individuals and many older people in NJ struggle with food security.

In 2023 and 2024 we supported MEND Hunger Relief Organization in Orange, NJ, and its efforts to launch one of the largest NJ county-wide food coalitions, the Food Health and Equity Coalition (FHEC). This coalition, a cross-sector countywide collaboration among more than 50 organizations, aims to improve food access, security and sovereignty through collaboration, advocacy, education and coordination of resources.

Grotta is also participating in the Food Security Access Fund of NJ, a collaborative funding group led by the Tepper Foundation.

In Spring 2025, the Grotta Fund recognized the emerging food security crisis in Essex County affecting older adults. This is being driven by many factors, including reduced federal funding, rising food prices, increased fear among immigrant communities and a shortage of volunteers for home and site-based food delivery.

In response, the Grotta Fund aims to optimize collaborative efforts in our communities and support food-security programs benefiting older adults with a Fall 2025 funding cycle. To achieve this, the Fund anticipates supporting four to five innovative initiatives (up to \$40,000 per request) that will benefit older adults for a one-year start-up or scale-up program.

RFP - Grant period: October 2025 to September 2026

- RFP Announcement: June 5
- Info Session - Zoom call: July 2
- Deadline: July 17
- Notification of Awards: September 25th

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#### Funding Purpose: Food Access and Distribution Initiatives

Proposals should target one or more of the following:

- Expanding access to culturally appropriate, nutritious meals for underserved older adults
- Increasing the number of seniors receiving food and services
- Improving SNAP and similar programs for older adults
- Enhancing food distribution operations and volunteer engagement
- Addressing transportation barriers in low-access areas
- Fostering collaboration among food, health, and social service providers
- Implementing efficient technology to improve operations and volunteer coordination



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## LIFELONG STRONG NJ



The Grotta Fund is participating in a multi-organization collaborative to promote awareness of the changing demographics in the state and to improve the lives of New Jersey's older adults. We are meeting each gubernatorial candidate to hear their views and requesting that, by executive order, the next Governor advance the development of a Multi-Sector Plan on Aging (MPA) that will make it easier and more desirable to live in the Garden State.

- We are advocating: Lifelong Strong New Jersey, a campaign to prioritize policies that ensure New Jerseyans can thrive in the Garden State as they age.
- We are highlighting: Older New Jerseyans as important contributors to the state's economy, infrastructure, and communities.
- We are offering resources: We can provide facts, stories, and issues of concern about older adults.

Here are some fun facts that we are sharing:

- Based on current demographic trends, the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce projects that in New Jersey, the population of individuals aged 60 and older will surpass that of those under 18 around the year 2030.
- New Jersey projects that by 2030, approximately 24.5% of the state's population will be aged 60 and over, while the proportion of residents under 18 is expected to decline to about 21.9% . (From New Jersey State Profile, published by the Administration for Community Living.)
- This shift reflects broader national trends, with the aging of the Baby Boomer generation contributing to a growing senior population. This demographic change will have significant implications for healthcare, housing and social services, underscoring the importance of strategic planning to accommodate the needs of an aging population.

What is our ask of the next governor? We ask that the governor recognize our increasingly older population in the State and include aging as an important consideration in all policy discussions so that New Jersey can become an even better place to age well.

What is our ask of community members and organizations that care about older adults? Visit us at [LifeLongStrongNJ Website](https://www.lifelongstrongnj.org).

**Take the Pledge**

## CHECK OUT OUR REDESIGNED WEBSITE

The Grotta Fund for Older Adults website has been redesigned with new resources for grantees, organizations interested in seeking a grant and other funders. It includes information about our legacy and grant process, as well as details about the 2025-2026 grant cycle. The website also houses all of our past newsletters and age-friendly resources and publications. Visit us at [grottafund.org](https://grottafund.org).