

FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER

EXPANDED IMPACT ON OLDER ADULTS IN NJ JEWISH SOCIAL CONNECTIONS, NEW COUNTY AND STATEWIDE FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVES, AGE-FRIENDLY AND LIFELONG STRONG NJ

SYNAGOGUES AND JEWISH AGENCIES



SEPTEMBER 2025 NEW GRANTEE ORIENTATION AND LEARNING SESSION



Representatives of several Grotta-funded organizations gathered September 3 at the Federation Conference Center for an orientation and sharing session centered on their plans to engage older adults in innovative programs. One-year grants totaling \$230,000 were awarded to 16 organizations. Nine were new grantees, one was extended to this year, and six were recipients of a second year of funding.

During the session, grantees shared their plans for using the funding to start or expand programming, networked with other grantees, and learned strategies for setting goals, measuring success, and sustaining their programs. New grants included a grandparenting initiative at JCC Metrowest, a community film series for older adults at Temple Beth Ahm Yisrael, Springfield, and monthly older adult programming at B'nai Shalom in West Orange. (See box for a complete list.)

Grantees in their second year reported many successes from their first year of funding. Congregation Ohr Shalom in Summit, for example, used its grant to start a monthly speaker series for older adults. The program is a collaboration with the two other Summit synagogues. It has seen participation grow. "Now we are seeing more than 100 participants each month", reported steering committee chair David Ehrenfried.

All attendees received a copy of the "Synagogue and Jewish Agency Older Adult Engagement Guide," featuring successful activities, practical tips and resources from Grotta grant recipients. Attendees met various Federation program leaders who offered to partner with them and learned that they will be invited to training sessions led by Sarah Diamond, Federation's Manager of Synagogue Initiatives.

It was an engaging and inspiring kickoff to our new grant cycle, and we look forward to charting the progress and successes from our newest grant recipients!

2025 Grantees

AHAWAS ACHIM B'NAI JACOB AND DAVID, West Orange

BNAI KESHET RECONSTRUCTIONIST SYNAGOGUE, Montclair

BNAI SHALOM, West Orange

CONGREGATION B'NAI ISRAEL (CBI), Millburn

SUBURBAN TORAH, Livingston

TEMPLE BETH AHM YISRAEL (TBAY), Springfield

TEMPLE B'NAI JESHURUN (TBJ) Short Hills

TEMPLE SHAREY TEFILO-ISRAEL, South Orange

TEMPLE SHOLOM OF WEST ESSEX

CONGREGATION OHR SHALOM, Summit

CONVERSATIONS TO REMEMBER, GMW

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE OF CENTRAL NJ

JCC- Melton School

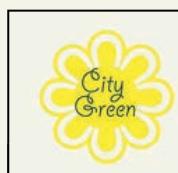
JSDD

TEMPLE EMANU-EL Westfield

Oheb Shalom, South Orange

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FALL 2025 GROTTA FUND GRANTS TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY AMONG OLDER ADULTS



In 2023, the Fund facilitated a collaboration among food-related distributors and rescuers through the Food Health and Equity Coalition (FHEC) in Essex County and spurred them to create a subcommittee around the issues of older adults in the county.

For the past two years, the Grotta Fund, along with FHEC, NJ Food Fund, Hunger Free NJ, and the State have studied the concerns regarding food security in NJ. We are observing the challenges of cutbacks to and from the food pantries, lack of accessible transportation, and limited fresh produce among the top concerns. Especially recently, with federal cutbacks, Grotta is greatly concerned about looming SNAP payment reductions and Medicaid changes. We know these will deeply affect older adults in Essex County in many ways, making the ability for older adults to live healthy lives even harder than before.

This September, following a robust response to an RFP to improve access and delivery of food to older adults in Essex County, Grotta awarded \$290,000 to seven grantees. Each grantee is working collaboratively to develop innovative solutions and expand into underserved communities with novel, enhanced and impactful programs.

"I'm excited that Grotta is supporting two new innovative food security projects, NJ-211 and Clinton Hill Community Store. This funding will improve access to fresh food through partnership and transportation to a food pantry in the Oranges and a new membership model for a community store in the Clinton Hill section of Newark", said Judy Sills, Chair of the Grotta Fund.

Ilene Isaacs, Chair Elect added, "one of the many strengths of the Grotta Fund lies in its ability to respond quickly and thoughtfully to emerging issues with funding for programming that is high-impact and targeted to specific needs. It's gratifying, during a time of growing hardship, to be able to fund a mix of new and more traditional approaches to address the difficulties being experienced by our neighbors."

2025 Grotta Fund New Grantees

Table to Table, Inc.

- Nourishing seniors through a sustainable food system in Bloomfield, including identifying new food rescue sites, in partnership with the township Coalition for Food and Health Equity
- Food and nutrition program for older adults at Newark's West Side Community Center, in partnership with United Community Corporation (UCC)

Caresparc Community Connections, Inc.

- Food and resources for grandparents raising grandchildren in Newark

Clinton Hill Community Action-Newark

- Increasing food security for Clinton Hill seniors with a community kitchen and using a membership model

Toni's Kitchen, Montclair

- Senior food outreach initiative in collaboration with Zufall, West Orange Health Dept. and others, providing healthy food to elders in housing sites

City Green, Inc.

- Good Food Bucks Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) expansion with nutrition incentives and education, in collaboration with Rutgers- Newark Beth Israel Medical Center

NJ 2-1-1 Partnership

- Rides to Reduce Barriers: Providing transportation to older adults in Essex County, in partnership with Interfaith Food Pantry of the Oranges

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ESSEX COUNTY AND STATEWIDE FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVES



FHEC Collaborations, Advocacy, Networking, and Awareness

The Essex County Food Health and Equity Coalition (FHEC) has been engaging its membership base of not-for-profit organizations, government entities, funders and businesses, now numbering more than 100, in collaborative discussions about the state of the government cutbacks in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), other upcoming reductions, and ways to cope with uncertainty. Grotta was initially the only funder in the group, and we are now pleased to be joined by others who are gaining an awareness of the local issues and supporting the agencies at the front lines of the cutbacks.



At the most recent monthly meeting of FHEC's Older Adults subcommittee, Grotta Executive Director Renie Carniol and Chair Elect Ilene Isaacs shared the list of new grantees. They commended the FHEC coalition for helping to advance the issues being faced in the community. FHEC organizer, Keily Hayes, expressed enthusiasm at the depth and breadth of the new grants and of the potential for the grantees to present their aims, partnerships and collective impact at a spring 2026 quarterly meeting.

"FHEC has been a critical addition to the food security space in Essex County," said Ilene Isaacs. "In just two years the coalition has mobilized key players, built on each group's expertise and created an environment of sharing, advocacy and action. As the level of uncertainty in funding and services from the government increases, the work of FHEC will become even more critical for older adults residing in the county."



OFSA Meeting in Mt Laurel and Update on NJ Food Fund- formerly called the Food Security Access Fund

On Monday, September 29, 2025, many of the New Jersey Food Funders attended the Office of the Food Security Advocate (OFSA) second annual statewide Garden State Conference on Food Security in Mt. Laurel (see picture above). The event convened 250 individuals and organizations who are enthusiastic and dedicated to improving food security across the state. There were various cross-sector conversations aimed at advancing the collective work to improve food security for all residents.



Judi Sills and Renie Carniol attended from Grotta. "We made multiple connections among several of our new grantees with philanthropic fund leaders, non-profit leaders and state officials. It was inspiring to learn about the State's data collection and goals and connect grantees to one another in person," Judi Sills said.



Other updates are that the Food Fund (formerly known as Food Security Access Fund) is hiring a program associate to support the team's strategy, grantmaking, fundraising and operations. The 2026 Harvest the Future (innovation) grant application deadline ended in mid-October. Some of the past Food Fund recipients have been or are our grantees. The Food Fund's next meeting on December 5 will include a deeper dive into OFSA's strategic plan for food security in New Jersey, aimed at better aligning the Fund's future objectives.

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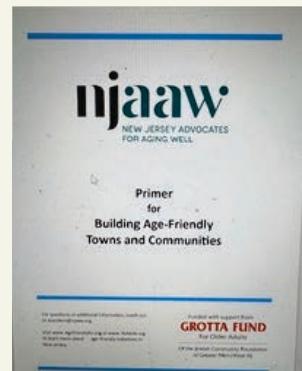
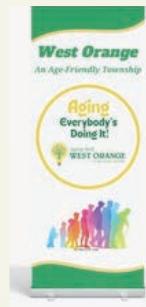
AGE-FRIENDLY NJ EFFORTS AND PRIMER

Age-Friendly North Jersey

Grotta continues to participate with the Age-Friendly North Jersey Coalition comprised of professionals from the Taub Foundation, Rutgers University School of Social Work and others. Led by NJAAW, there are quarterly learning and sharing sessions that are open to age-friendly leaders from Northern NJ and beyond. The AFNJ website offers resources, information on upcoming quarterly education sessions and special events including the statewide conference. To learn more, visit <https://agefriendlynj.org/events>.

Aging Well West Orange

Grotta has supported an Ageism Awareness campaign in West Orange, which has made progress toward reaching its goals. The signs entering the town now say, "Welcome to West Orange, an Age-Friendly Town." West Orange is also implementing its AARP Action Plan, which includes changing mindsets about older adults. "Educating the town residents, high schoolers and others to reframe their words for older adults are first steps," said Olive Ross, the town's leader of age-friendly efforts. At community events, she offers community members surveys to assess if they are "ageist," and provides language alternatives. She also presents to high schoolers and middle schoolers about ageism and different ways to look at and value people regardless of their age. "The Mayor and every town official know about what age-friendly means," Ross said.



In 2024, the Grotta Fund awarded a grant to NJAAW to prepare the Primer for Building Age-Friendly Towns and Communities. This practical, community-driven resource is designed to support municipalities in creating inclusive, livable environments for older adults. The Primer can be used independently or in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJ DHS) Age-Friendly Blueprint.

"This primer is both a starting point and a springboard," said Dorothy Sanders, Age-Friendly Strategist for NJAAW. "It distills local innovations into a format that's accessible, actionable, and rooted in the lived experiences of local communities. We hope that this Primer will inspire and reinvigorate age-friendly efforts across the Garden State."

The Primer offers an overview of the Age-Friendly movement and includes replicable strategies, checklists, and real-world examples contributed by several communities across NJ. These examples highlight programs and policies that have advanced age-friendly initiatives and can be readily adapted by other communities. "We're grateful to the local age-friendly leaders who generously shared their insight and best practices" Sanders added. "Their work reflects the creativity and commitment that make New Jersey a leader in age-friendly progress."

Sanders also developed the AFNJ and Local Library Toolkit, a companion resource that offers practical ways for age-friendly leaders to begin collaborations with local public libraries, which are trusted gathering places and resources for older adults—serving as hubs for lifelong learning, social connection and access to vital services.

To learn more or access the Primer and Library Toolkit, visit <https://njaaw.org/policy-reports/>

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LIFELONG STRONG NJ CAMPAIGN AND OCTOBER CONFERENCE



New Jersey is at a pivotal moment. Our population is aging rapidly, and in many NJ communities, there are already more residents over 60 than students in our schools.

Yet many systems—from housing and health care to transportation and community infrastructure—are unprepared for this shift. Grotta is working with New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW) and communications consultancy Mercury LLC to recommend that policymakers and gubernatorial candidates create a Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA) in New Jersey. An MPA is a coordinated, inclusive, data-driven roadmap that brings together government, the private sector and community organizations. “We anticipate that such a plan will ensure every New Jerseyan can age with dignity, security, and opportunity,” said Cathy Rowe, Executive Director of NJAAW. We have branded ourselves Lifelong Strong New Jersey in this effort. Learn more and take the pledge at www.lifelongstrongnj.org and <https://multisectorplanforaging.org/>.

LIFELONG STRONG CONFERENCE, OCTOBER 15, 2025



The Lifelong Strong Steering Committee hosted a half-day conference on October 15 in Hamilton, NJ. Dozens of experts, advocates, policymakers, thought leaders and service providers came together to share insights, discuss best practices and highlight the urgent need for a Multisector Plan for Aging here in New Jersey.

Speakers included Chris Widelo, Director of AARP; Roberto Muñiz, President and CEO, Parker Health Group, Inc.; Tyla Minniear, Chief Operating Officer, NJ Health Care Quality Institute; Erin Westphal Director, Policy, Programs, and Operations SCAN Foundation; Amy Herr, Director, Health Policy, West Health Policy Center; Steve Leone Principal, Spiezle Architectural Group; and Emily Greenfield, Rutgers University School of Social Work.

Speakers from West Health and California highlighted the benefits of the California plan and emphasized that it is iterative and data-driven. Emily Greenfield concluded with “next steps,” encouraging all of us as NJ residents to promote the MPA and encourage legislators to apply an aging lens in all policies.