

## Vihadarta - Delicious Meals for Seniors

For many seniors, getting to the store, buying food, schlepping it home, unpacking, cooking and preparing their homes for Shabbos and Yom Tov can be daunting. With physical pain, movement limitations, and transportation difficulties, the challenges mount. This is heartbreaking and stressful for people who have honored and celebrated Shabbos for decades.

A group of concerned community members recognized the need, and stepped forward ready to roll up their sleeves and consider solutions. On all accounts, the work of the newly formed group calling their organization "Vihadarta" has been a resounding success.

The group's name is derived from the pasuk: "*Vihadarta pnei zakein – and you shall glorify the elderly*" (*Vayikra 19:32*). The gemara (*Kidushin 31b*) explains that the optimal way for one to honor one's parents is "...to provide them food and drink, to dress and cloth them, and to take them in and bring them out in order to take care of their household needs."

Various efforts have been put in place to date to support the needs of seniors. For example, Rabbi Karp of JEEP received a grant from the Jewish Home to provide holiday meals for close to 200 seniors, delivering a boxed Pesach Seder, Rosh Hashanah dinner, as well as Chanukah and Shavuot gift packages. Other organizations such as K'vod Connect and Age Well, part of Jewish Family Service, and other efforts funded by Jewish Home have met many needs.

For years, Mrs. Elisa Travis coordinated volunteers to each deliver a portion of Shabbos meals for a senior in Amberley Village. Then Mrs. Adina Maravilla took over, coordinating a group of volunteers to prepare Shabbos meals and deliver them to six seniors in the 45237 area as the Travis family prepared to leave Cincinnati. Eight months ago, Mrs. Chana Rivka Black took on the coordination of Yom Tov meals and their delivery for these same six people.

The Vihadarta group, consisting initially of Rabbi Eli Polsky, Dr. Ray Warren, Dr. Elana Plotsker and Mrs. Tamar Goldstein, surveyed the needs of caregivers and seniors to learn what else could be done for seniors in our community who were residing at home. Many of these people could benefit from an assisted living facility but they did not want to move out of their homes, particularly to a place that was outside of the Eruv and in a non-religious setting. The majority of respondents shared that Shabbos meals, transportation and a handyman in the home were areas where they would like to receive help.

Thanks to partnership with a fiscal sponsor, Vihadarta was able to receive a grant for \$10,000 from the Jewish Home of Cincinnati to provide individually tailored Shabbos and Yom Tov meals to seniors and their caregivers, reviewed by a registered dieti-

cian and prepared under the auspices of the Va'ad Hakashrus of Cincinnati, as well as intergenerational connections with weekly visits from many community volunteers. This secondary benefit is crucial, as loneliness and isolation can be devastating, both emotionally and physically. Mrs. Nina Perlove, Executive Director of the Jewish Home shared "The Jewish Home of Cincinnati's focus areas include access to Kosher food, reducing social isolation and mobilizing the skills and talents of volunteers. We are delighted to support Vihadarta's pilot project to provide kosher Shabbos meals to seniors by building a volunteer infrastructure that not only coordinates and delivers the food, but also builds connections with the seniors they serve."

Mr. Ari Weisberg did an outstanding job preparing individually-tailored meals that met the dietary limitations as well as taste preferences of seniors. In total 94 beautifully packaged and presented, user-friendly and abundant meals were prepared during the month of May and delivered to close to an average of 19 people each week.

The comments from both the volunteer drivers and seniors were overwhelmingly positive. Dr. Steve Moses shared that he is "impressed." He knows "various people who have received the meals. It has met an unmet need." Exclamations like "lifesaving,"

"I am overwhelmed with gratitude," "You made my Yom Tov," and "Is all this for me?!" were heard. A volunteer quotes a senior as saying, "I was in terrible pain from the surgery I just had but it was bearable because I knew the food was there." Mrs. Miriam Karp notes, "As a chaplain for isolated seniors from K'vod Connect, I see first hand how much our seniors struggle to maintain their independence and dignity, and how devastating feeling alone can be. What an incredible uplift the food, caring and visits make. More than just the food, they feel recognized, remembered and included in the Jewish community. This can make a dramatic difference."

For their part, the seniors were not passive recipients. They shared their warmth, time and breadth of experience. Upon delivery of the boxes, many seniors have invited the volunteer drivers and their children in for some food, drink and conversation. Individual interviews with seniors by youth are already underway and we hope to grace the pages of this newspaper with the words of the seniors soon.

As a way to honor our precious seniors and dedicated Vihadarta volunteers, please join us for a communal Friday night dinner at Golf Manor Synagogue on June 30<sup>th</sup>. B'Ezras H' details will be forthcoming in a flier.

