

AT YOUR SERVICE: Social Workers

Welcome to our new series, providing a window into the work of the AJR. This issue focuses on Christine Brazier, one of 13 social workers employed by the AJR to work directly with our members. She joined the AJR in September 2014, and provides support to around 50 members who live in Manchester, Liverpool and the surrounding area.

After qualifying in Liverpool in 1991, Christine worked for a number of local authorities in the North West, then became a self-employed Social Worker undertaking assessments on behalf of the Independent Living Fund; when its closure was announced she decided to look at vacancies within the charity sector, where an advert from the AJR immediately caught her eye.

"I looked at the AJR website and found myself engrossed," she explains. "I had some knowledge about the Holocaust but it was never widely talked about when I was younger, and wasn't discussed at school. I wanted to know more and thought the job sounded fascinating."

She hasn't been disappointed. Her clients include AJR members who fled to the UK as refugees, many of whom came on their own as young children via the Kindertransport, plus members who somehow managed to survive the various camps. She also provides support to spouses, and second generation members whose Holocaust family history has an ongoing effect on their own lives.

Christine visits her clients on an 'as needed basis'; some require monthly visits whilst others may only be visited once or twice a year, for assistance with life certificates and to review and update assessments.

Christine's work is wide ranging and includes the undertaking of assessments to enable clients to obtain home care and



Christine and Mrs Strong

various funding grants. "A lot of information is required, including background history, health needs and financial details which can become stressful for clients, so you have to be very sensitive," she explains.

Her work also involves providing help to obtain UK benefits such as Attendance Allowance, plus compensatory payments and pensions from Germany, Austria and Poland.

Christine visits members who are socially isolated and provides information regarding local activities and services, makes referrals to the AJR volunteer befriender service and to the SPF Connect computer scheme. "Emotional support and personal empathy is very important," she says.

Some of her clients are orthodox and Christine has very much enjoyed learning more about the Jewish religion and culture. She recently made a private trip to Vienna, inspired by the desire to find out more about many of her clients' origins.

"My previous jobs have sometimes become mundane, but with my AJR clients I feel far more connected and I learn something new every day," she enthuses. "Their testimonies are amazing, and it's a real privilege to help make their lives easier however I can."

If you are interested in meeting an AJR Social Worker please contact Sue Kurlander on 020 8385 3087 or sue@ajr.org.uk

A CLIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Having spent most of her 86 years helping others, asking for help doesn't come naturally to Sonia Strong. So she prefers to think of her relationship with her AJR social worker Christine as a "caring friendship" rather than a service.

Sonia, who originates from Magdeburg in Germany and grew up in what was then Palestine, describes herself as a "professional volunteer". She has done charity work for years, whether for WIZO, the Holocaust Educational Trust or the AJR itself.

But she is the first to admit she is getting older, especially after an accident two years ago left her with great difficulties walking. So when she met Christine at a Liverpool AJR social group meeting shortly afterwards, she finally conceded she needed help.

Christine assisted Sonia with some Homecare funding, meaning she now has a private carer to assist with cleaning, shopping and health appointments, and can also cover the cost of much needed physiotherapy and taxis.

"Christine is lovely to work with and has been enormously helpful to me," says Sonia who, partly thanks to Christine's encouragement, will shortly receive a SPF Connect computer. "I'm very grateful to the AJR for providing me and other members with this service. Many of us had to make our own way through the world, so it's fantastic to now have some help and guidance on hand."