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Witness Theater: Evaluation Study Findings Final Report

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1. Background

Witness Theater is a project that brings Holocaust survivors together with junior high school students, most of them eighth graders. At weekly meetings, each of the survivors in the group is gradually given the chance to tell the story of his/her experiences during World War II. Their stories are dramatized and performed by the students, and sometimes roles are played by the survivors themselves. At the end of the project, which generally lasts about a year, the play is presented to a local audience. JDC-ESHEL, the Association for the Planning and Development of Services for the Aged in Israel, joined up with the acting duo Irit and Ezra Dagan,¹ who initiated the project. In recent years, the project has been extended by JDC-ESHEL to additional locations, using group facilitators who have backgrounds in the theater and drama therapy and have been specially trained for the program by JDC-ESHEL. To date, the program has been implemented in 37 places throughout Israel.

2. Evaluation

Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute was commissioned by the Nash Family Foundation and JDC-ESHEL to evaluate Witness Theater (hereinafter, the program). The evaluation had five main objectives:

1. **To examine the goals and components of the program** from the points of view of all those involved in its planning and implementation, including implementation of the new programs based on experience from previous years
2. **To examine implementation of the program:**
 - a. The recruitment and characteristics of the program participants (elderly and youth) and the criteria by which they were selected to participate in the program; the implementation of the various stages of the facilitation, up to and including the final performance; the functioning and involvement of the psychological consultant in the process
 - b. Difficulties arising in the implementation of the various stages of the program and the ways the program implementers dealt with them; discontinued participation and the reasons for it
 - c. Therapeutic and other needs that were not adequately addressed during implementation of the program
 - d. The relative importance and necessity of the different program components, as perceived by the implementers and program participants
3. **To examine the motives for joining the program, the expectations and concerns** of the survivors and the youth prior to starting the program
4. **To examine the participants' views of the benefits of the program:** Therapeutic benefits, fostering of intergenerational relationships, etc.

¹ Expressive and creative arts therapist Irit Dagan has an MA in drama therapy and is an actress, drama teacher and stage director. Ezra Dagan performs at the Cameri Theater in Tel Aviv, is a director and teaches stylized acting and mime at the University of Haifa. He acted at HaBimah, the national theater of Israel, for 15 years (source: <http://www.edut.org.il>).

5. **To examine the emotional effects** of the program on the participating survivors and youth.

An interim report was submitted to the Nash Family Foundation in January 2012, following a six-month evaluation that focused on the program model and observations of the survivors and students, including implementation of the model in accordance with the materials available to us at the time. The final report completes the picture regarding the successes and difficulties of implementing the model, examines the impact of the program on the lives of the participants (survivors and youth) during and after the program, and the social and emotional processes that occurred in the group. In the final part of the report, we discuss issues arising from implementation of the program.

3. Methodology

3.1 Localities in the Evaluation

The evaluation was conducted in three localities:

	Start of Project*	Date of Completion	Group Facilitators	No. Participants at the Start of the Project	No. Participants at the End of the Project
Petah Tikva (Recanati home for the elderly)	March 2011	January 2012	Irit and Ezra Dagan	25 (10 survivors and 15 students)	22 (8 survivors and 14 students)
Modi'in	October 2011	June 2012	Irit and Ezra Dagan	21 (5 survivors and 16 students)	22 (9 survivors and 13 students)
Gilboa Regional Council	October 2011	October 2012	Rachel Levi and Tamar Borer	35 (14 survivors and 21 students)	29 (12 survivors** and 17 students)

* Start of project = start of group meetings

** One of the survivors died before the end of the program.

The study evaluated the program in the three localities from the start to two months after the final performance.

3.2 Sources of Information

a. At the Start of the Program and during Implementation

1. In-depth interviews with the group facilitators (Irit and Ezra Dagan in Petah Tikva and Modi'in; Rachel Levi and Tamar Borer in Gilboa Regional Council), and with Maggie Gad of JDC-ESHEL, in order to learn about the program goals and document the various components of the program

2. In-depth interviews around the start of the program with 17 survivors who participated in the program in the 3 locations evaluated (7 in Petah Tikva, 4 in Modi'in, 6 in Gilboa). The participants were asked open questions about the way they joined the program (how they heard about it and the reasons that motivated them to join), the extent of their preoccupation with the Holocaust before joining the program, their expectations and apprehensions before the program started, and their thoughts about the benefits of the program for them.
3. Two focus groups with the participating students (one in Modi'in, the other in Gilboa). The focus group included discussion of the following: The way participants joined the program, expectations and apprehensions about participating, and their thoughts about the benefits of the program for them.
4. Observations of group meetings.

b. At the End of the Program

1. In-depth interviews two months after the program had ended with 13 survivors who participated in the 3 locations evaluated (3 in Petah Tikva, 5 in Modi'in, 5 in Gilboa). The objective of the interviews at this stage was to learn about the process that the participants had experienced: in what way had they benefitted from the program; the type of relationship established with the students; changes they felt were necessary in order to improve the program.
2. Three focus groups with participating students (one in each of the 3 localities). The goal of the focus group discussion was to learn about the process that the participants had experienced: in what way had they benefitted from the program; the type of relationship established with the survivors; changes they felt were essential in order to improve the program.
3. An in-depth interview with a group facilitator in Gilboa Regional Council, in order to learn whether there were any difficulties during implementation of the program model
4. An interview with the program coordinator at the Democratic School in Modi'in
5. An interview with the program coordinator in the Recanati home for the elderly in Petah Tikva
6. Observation of the final performance by participants in groups in Tel Aviv and Petah Tikva.

4. Findings

4.1 Definition of the Program Goals

As noted in the interviews with the facilitators, the primary goal of the program is to document and commemorate the personal stories of the survivors: *"To preserve the memory of the Holocaust," "To commemorate the Holocaust," "By telling the story, in this way, to the youth, there's continuity,"* etc. The time factor was stressed by the facilitators: *"This is the last generation," "Soon there won't be any survivors left. It's terribly urgent," "We're working against the clock. The population is aging and we*

have to do as much we can in the time that's left." With regard to the educational objective of the program, the facilitators noted the following: *"To expose the children to these stories," "The effect of the project on the children, as human beings, as members of society, the way they develop themselves as human beings, members of society."*

The facilitators agree that one of the most important goals is to establish a relationship between the generations: *"A girl in Rehovot adopted an elderly couple, survivors, and they're like her grandparents to her;" "To make a connection between the adults and youth through acting."*

There was consensus among the facilitators that the participants experience some form of emotional process. The final performance is not necessarily the culmination of the program, but rather it constitutes the conclusion of a protracted emotional and experiential process. The facilitators in Gilboa believe that the program also has therapeutic value, because it creates a safe and calm environment in which to work through the trauma. They believe that this environment also has benefits for the children, because it enables them to listen and take in the stories, while receiving the right support. In the words of one of them: *"The group provides the right setting in which it is possible to bear the trauma."* One of the facilitators gave the example of a woman who, she said, *"had never left her childhood home."* The facilitator believes that telling her story enabled the woman to go through a process of "leaving home." *"She stood still, kissed an imaginary mezuzah, walked out of the house and said 'That's it – I've left home.'"*

Beyond the ultimate goal of commemorating the Holocaust, the program can improve the quality of life of the elderly participants and provide them with a remedial experience of youth, by bringing them together with the teenagers and through their stories about their experiences at home and in school.

4.2 Target Population

In an interview, we asked the facilitators who, in their opinion, were suitable participants and whom they would not consider suitable. We learned the following from their answers:

Survivors

There is widespread agreement among the facilitators that there is no "hierarchy of suffering" and that participation in the program is based on the survivors' own definition of themselves. In the words of one of the facilitators: *"Everyone affected by that period and who suffered in the war. It doesn't matter where..."* For example, the Modi'in group had participants who came to Israel from Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Hungary, France, Libya and Poland. Most of the participants in the program at the Recanati home in Petah Tikva were originally from Greece – the first time that there was focused attention on that population in Witness Theater. The Gilboa group of participants lived in various countries during the Holocaust: Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, and even one who was interned in Mauritius.

The program is open to survivors of all ages, from the very old to younger survivors who were born during the war. For example, some of the participants in Petah Tikva were extremely old and some suffered from cognitive deterioration and/or impaired hearing. The ages in Modi'in ranged from 75 to 85. In Gilboa, there were participants who were born near the end of the war – i.e., were now in their 70s. The interviews with the facilitators and participants themselves reveal that the main barriers to participation were: Severe disability, which impedes ability to participate actively in the meetings and to get onto the stage, difficulty with speech, and dementia. The facilitators did however note efforts to make adjustments for those with physical disabilities to enable them to take part in the process. For example, it was reported that in one of the programs, one of the participants was an elderly man with hearing difficulties and the facilitators used an amplification system to allow him to participate actively in the meetings. There were also reports of elderly people who *"became less lucid during the project."* Two of the residents of the Recanati home were transferred to the nursing wing of the home in the course of the program. We were told that one of the survivors in Gilboa died towards the end of the program. His moving story was performed on the closing evening.

Another characteristic reported by the facilitators was the articulateness of the survivors, their tolerance of high-spirited teenagers, and their willingness to establish a relationship with them and work with them. As described below, over time, in the groups that we studied, a relationship of openness and mutual acceptance developed between the two generations.

Interviews with survivors in Modi'in and Gilboa revealed that some of them were very active socially. In addition to Café Europa or other support groups for survivors, they reported participation in other enrichment and recreation activities such as Cathedra, bridge, lectures and excursions organized by retirement clubs, and suchlike.

Most of the survivors currently participating in the program were children during the war years.

Students

Most of the youth participating in the program are students in eighth or ninth grade. The facilitators note that at that age, they have not yet been taught about the Holocaust in the school curriculum. The facilitators believe that youngsters of that age are generally mature enough to contend with the Holocaust narrative, while at the same time, they are not dealing with the stress and pressures of matriculation exams. Consequently, according to the facilitators, they can devote more time to the program. The students do not have to have any experience of theater and the facilitators actually encourage the teachers to include those who are less accepted and those who have physical impairments.

Students who choose to participate in the program have the option of receiving an exemption from the Personal Commitment project in tenth grade.

4.3 The Model

In this section, we present the typical model of the program elements as described in the interviews with the facilitators and staff of JDC-ESHEL.

a. Before the Program

Selection of Local Authorities to Implement the Program and Appointment of Steering Committee

The first stage, in which JDC-ESHEL plays a major role, is to identify and make contact with local authorities interested in implementing the project and to enlist cooperation from the municipality, mainly the social service department, and local nonprofit organizations that support the elderly. The next stage is to appoint a steering committee whose members include: the program facilitators and representatives of JDC-ESHEL, the local authority and the nonprofit organization responsible for implementation in the particular locality. The steering committee oversees all stages of the program; more specifically, it discusses ways to recruit participants and coordinates the logistics required to conduct the activity and hold the final performance. The steering committee plays a part in coordination with the local social service department, which can be contacted if the survivors experience emotional difficulties during or after the program. JDC-ESHEL remains involved throughout all stages of the program and is in regular contact with all those involved and responds to problems that arise.

Selection of Potential Participants

Survivors

The search for survivors is generally conducted by professionals in the community, mainly social workers from the social service departments and the nonprofit organizations that support the elderly. Contact is also made through other agencies working with survivors, such as Amcha² (e.g., in Gilboa) and Café Europa³ (e.g., in Modi'in), and with general services for the elderly, such as daycare centers. Other ways of recruiting participants include public information conferences that include a description of program (e.g., a conference held in Gilboa, attended by some 150 participants), articles about the program published in the local press (e.g., in *Modi'in News*) and advertisements on bulletin boards (as done in Safed). The role of the facilitators at this stage is mainly to appear at the conferences and public information meetings at clubs for survivors or for the elderly. Representatives of JDC-ESHEL also attend the conferences and market the program directly.

² Amcha, the Israeli center for mental and social support of Holocaust survivors and the second generation, is a nonprofit organization that has a unique way of addressing the emotional and social needs of survivors and their families through a network of centers throughout the country (translated from the Hebrew website of Amcha).

³ Café Europa is a club for Holocaust survivors and their families that is open 7 days a week and offers a range of social, cultural and therapeutic activities under one roof (translated from the Hebrew website of JDC-ESHEL).

Students

The process generally begins with the local authority selecting a school. This done, the facilitators present the program at an assembly of all the children in the grade. The facilitators have several media for presenting the program: a film made by JDC-ESHEL about Witness Theater, articles about the program and/or the program website. In some places, it is the teachers who present the main points of the program to the children. In some schools, the teachers handpick the students they think are the most suitable, in others, the program is open to all students in the grade. The facilitators note that it is advisable to have no more than 15 boys and girls in the group. However, they reported that in certain places, such as Hod Hasharon, there was great demand and the number of students registering was greater than the permissible number of participants. In others, it was hard to find enough suitable participants and participants for the core group were therefore taken from several schools.

Introductory Meetings with the Target Population

When the selection process has been completed, the JDC-ESHEL-trained facilitators usually hold separate introductory meetings for each of the population groups (survivors and students). The facilitators meet with the group of survivors who have expressed interest and, in the course of the meeting; they present the program goal and prepare them for their joint work with the students. The preparatory work includes an activity – "What does the term 'youth' mean to me?" – in which the survivors are asked to express their thoughts about working with the teenagers.

A similar meeting is held with the students who were selected by their teachers and/or who expressed interest in the project, during which the program goal is presented. The theme of the meeting is "What does 'old' mean to me?" and the students are asked to talk about their acquaintance with an elderly person. The goal of the meeting is to dispel the students' fears about the program and to explain the demands of the program, including the need to sit patiently and listen for lengthy periods of time. The object of all this is to allow the students to consider their participation in the program carefully, thus constituting a preliminary screening.

Irit and Ezra Dagan do not have separate introductory meetings for the two groups. They hold joint meetings for the survivors and the students, along the lines described above.

b. During the Program

The program lasts for 10-12 months. The process that takes place in the group – called Playback Theater – is divided into a series of more or less structured stages:

Stage 1: Introduction and Group Building

The main goal of meetings in this stage, which lasts about 2 months, is to consolidate the group. In the words of one of the facilitators: "*To create a pleasant atmosphere, to reduce the pressure ... to let the stories tell themselves.*" The meetings incorporate theatrical techniques such as improvisation, children's games and stories. The activities are joint activities for all group members, but some activities are held in small groups of survivors and students. One typical example: One of the students

completes a painting done by a survivor and writes what the painting means to him/her, after which the roles are reversed. Next, the survivor and student are asked to tell a story about the elements they painted. In another typical activity, the students and survivors are asked to tell the story behind objects that they have brought with them to the meeting. In one of the meetings that we observed (meeting 2, Gilboa), the focus was on children's games and personal stories based on those games. The facilitators believe it is very important for the students to be included in these activities in order to create a mutually supportive framework.

The meetings in this and some of the further stages have a similar structure: Every meeting begins with a group warm-up exercise, followed by work in smaller groups of survivors and students. After this, there is a short break, and then the whole group reconvenes and the smaller groups present their work to the others.

The elements produced in this stage are used throughout the year: *"The introductory and group building work doesn't stop after three or four meetings – it's always there, in the background"* (facilitator).

Stage 2: Documentation of the Stories

This stage lasts several months, the exact duration varying from group to group as the facilitators feel appropriate for the amount of material collected. The activities are based on stimuli that encourage stories of the Holocaust to emerge. Each meeting begins with a warm-up exercise that introduces a particular subject. This is followed by a discussion in which the participants bring up personal stories. The stories are worked on in small groups and the work is then presented in the full group. To quote one of the facilitators: *"You could call this the stage of drawing out the material."* The stage incorporates theatrical games of voice, speech and movement, *"so there is some action and not just content."*

In this stage, the emphasis is on including the students. *"We have to make sure that there is room for the youngsters to make their own contribution, so we don't become too bogged down in Holocaust stories ... so they don't end up just sitting and listening"* (facilitator, Gilboa). The facilitators encourage the students to speak and share their thoughts with the group and families so that they can express any anxieties that may arise.

The program founders (Irit and Ezra Dagan) divide this stage into several sub-stages, based on phases of the war:

First day of the war: This stage lasts 2-3 months and focuses on events during the early days of the war.

On the way – stories of escape, deportations, hiding: This stage uses techniques such as comic relief to reduce tension.

The height of the war: This stage documents stories about time spent in the camps or escape to other countries.

How the war ended for me: Documentation of stories about events at the end of the war. The survivors are asked to recall events that saved their lives. Irit Dagan: *"Some describe the last day; some describe miracles."*

Stage 3: From Story to Play (Dramatization)

Having spent time listening to the testimonies, the facilitators edit the stories and turn them into plays.

Stage 4: Staging and Rehearsals

Having completed stage 3, the facilitators proceed to production – the roles are cast, the lines are learned, the rehearsals begin. *"It's a difficult transition because it breaks down the relaxed mood that we tried so hard to build up ... they don't need to learn the lines by heart, it's not that critical ... but rehearsing together knowing that we'll stand on stage and be seen by an audience ... when [that reality] sinks in, sometimes it's very stressful"* (facilitator, Gilboa).

Stage 5: Final Performance

Participants perform the play. The facilitators note that the program does not have to end with a play. The goal of the final performance is to hold an event (e.g., a presentation or party) at which the activities of the group are displayed to the general public. Whatever is done, the facilitators believe that performing a play is the best way to disseminate the message of the program to the public.

Stage 6: Conclusion

During the weeks after the performance, the facilitators usually organize several concluding meetings at which they try to sum up the process and learn from the participants what they will take away from the program when they leave. It is customary to hold a farewell party. If the play was videoed, all the participants are given a copy.

4.4 Implementation of the Model

In this section, we examine the success of implementation of the model stage by stage. The section is based on the material collected at the start and end of the program, including the in-depth interviews with the survivors in the 3 evaluation localities, findings from the focus group with the students who participated in the program in Petah Tikva, Modi'in and Gilboa, and the in-depth interviews with the professionals involved in the programs (Maggie Gad of JDC-ESHEL, the program coordinator of the Democratic School in Modi'in, the program coordinator at the Recanati home in Petah Tikva, and the program facilitator in Gilboa).

The main points regarding implementation that arose from the in-depth interviews and focus group are presented below, in chronological order (before and during implementation – stage by stage).

a. Before the Program

The process of identifying potential participants and recruiting them to the program was conducted differently for the survivors and the students. We therefore found it

appropriate to separate the issues that arose in the interviews with the survivors from those brought up by the students.

Joining the Program

Survivors

The interviews with the survivors revealed that most of those who joined the program already attended a framework for the elderly associated with the Holocaust, such as Café Europa or Amcha.

Some of the survivors in Modi'in noted that the program had been proposed to them during a visit to Café Europa. They reported that Ezra and Irit Dagan had presented the program to them and invited them to a trial meeting to see if it was suitable for them. Some noted that a coordinator at Café Europa had telephoned them with the proposal. Other formal means of enlisting participants were invitations via the daycare center and an article in the local newspaper. In Gilboa, Holocaust survivors who regularly attend the Dorot BeGilboa regional center were contacted. Some noted that they have been attending the support group for survivors at the regional center for years. In Petah Tikva, the participants were residents of the Recanati home for the elderly. In most cases, they joined the program in response to a request from the social worker at the home inviting them to do so.

Family members and friends also had a guiding hand, informing and encouraging the survivors to participate. One participant reported that her friend pressured her into coming to the meetings: *"It all began with a friend, a teacher, who read about it in the local paper. She got in touch with me, and I said to her 'Do me a favor, I'm tired of all this running. Give me a break.' ... I said I wasn't going. She gave me the telephone of the person responsible for the project and I asked her why she was being so obstinate ... I spoke to her [the coordinator] and she told me she was responsible for Café Europa ... The truth is that I had been to Café Europa, and it sort of put me off, so I told her it wasn't for me. In the end, she said 'Go.' So I called my friend the teacher and told her I was going. I came, I introduced myself, and indeed, we told our stories."*⁴

Another survivor said he was recommended for the program: *"I'm trying to remember ... they recommended me, because there are all sorts of articles of interviews I've done. I appeared on 'Modi'in News' ... my wife told me I could be an actor [laughter]. I was interviewed. I was interviewed at Café Europa as well, because I like to talk."*

Students

The reports of the students about the way they joined the program were similar in all 3 evaluation localities. For example, the participants in Modi'in reported that they joined the program after it was advertised at the school and there was an explanatory discussion with the pedagogical coordinator and project coordinator at the school.

⁴ For clarity, some of the participant quotations in this section have been abridged or edited. To protect their anonymity, all names have been removed.

They noted that at the beginning there were too many applicants, but in the end, everyone who really wanted to managed to join the program.

Reasons for Joining the Program

Survivors

Most of the survivors noted in one way or another that they had joined to program to implant the memory of the Holocaust in future generations and to recall the message of the Holocaust. Some of them noted the urgency of the matter because the survivors were aging and were the last generation. The following are selected quotations from the survivor groups:

"It's a subject that needs to be talked about ... The young people need to know. It cannot be ignored. Today, some people tend to ignore it or belittle it, but they mustn't, they mustn't."

"After I saw those films [about Holocaust denial], I realized that we are the last chance, a generation that is dying out. My parents' generation is no longer here. Thank God we are here, we remained. After all, the war began in 1939, that's 72 years ago. What's left? We're 80 plus. The generation is fading, there's one more decade to go, the last one, and we have to invest all we can."

One survivor noted an interview with a reporter for a German newspaper: *"He asked ... a bit of a tricky question ... did I think that there would be another Holocaust? Both he and I were shocked by the question. I asked him for a second to think. Then I said 'certainly.' And this has to do what I want to tell you, why I agreed to meet [participate in the project]. The new Hitler could be in any European country or in the east – Ahmadinejad. The German was stunned. I softened it a bit and said it didn't have to be a German ... I look for any way possible ... We have to talk about this all the time, nonstop. Because the generation is dying out ..."*

Another survivor reported that he had agreed to participate because he was the last remaining survivor from his community: *"They asked me if I could participate. I said there was no problem. I want to participate because I'm the last one left from the Drakomando area. This is something of a first-hand testimony. There's another one [survivor], an Ashkenazi in Givatayim, and one more in Italy, Greece, and two in America, they're Greek too, and that's it. There are no more first-hand testimonies from Drakomando, That's it. Come here, there are 3 or 4 other Holocaust survivors and they want to do a project, make a play out of the Holocaust ... they asked if I wanted to join them. I said there was no problem. If it has to do with the Holocaust and they want to prove that there was a Holocaust, I don't have a problem with that."* Several survivors reported that one of the reasons that they joined the program was to pay tribute to their rescuers.

Beyond the wish to commemorate the memory of the Holocaust, several of the survivors noted the joint activity with the youngsters as a reason for joining the project. One of them said that he liked working with young people, because when he was with them he felt younger. He believed that working with young people as equals

was good for both sides. In the same spirit, an elderly woman from Petah Tikva who had known many personal tragedies noted: *"I know when these meetings are held with the children. I like the children more than myself. But I don't talk much, so-so... I thought I would never forget to report, for example, that day I can never forget."*

Another survivor noted that one of the reasons he joined was his admiration for Ezra Dagan and his wish to learn from him and Irit how to conduct a project of this kind.

Students

The main reasons prompting the students to join the program were: Interest in the subject and having survivor in the family (*"My grandmother is a survivor and I hadn't heard her story. I was interested in hearing it."*). They also stressed the opportunity for a different type of first-hand contact with the Holocaust (*"It's not enough just to hear about it on Holocaust Memorial day, to see films and read books. The moment you have someone to talk with and see exactly what happened there, even if it's a one-time thing ... I wanted to do it."*). Other reasons were: Interest in the theater and the contribution of the project as preparation for a future trip to Poland.

Dilemmas and Doubts about Participating in the Program

Survivors

One of the fears expressed by the elderly was of the potential negative effects of re-opening the subject of the Holocaust. For example, the wife of one of the survivors expressed her concern about the possible effect on her husband's health and emotional wellbeing: *"[We were in Poland] ... There was a story ... not a very nice story at all ... he fainted on me there. I'm a nurse and I was very worried. By the time we got to Israel, they had done all sorts of tests and it turned out that apparently it was all due to agitation. I won't go into the medical details, but it was really scary. And something unpleasant happened when we were in Washington a few years ago, at the Holocaust Museum. He went in and began to cry, like it happened here, and he left there, very ... He couldn't [bear to] see it, all kinds of things that happened in the small towns he knew in Hungary. It was all so immediate for him and he couldn't stand it. I've had bad experiences of it, there are places it's better not to take him."* The survivor himself said he was relieved when he heard that the personal exposure would be done gradually and gently.

Another fear was the difficulty in exposing the story personally or identifying with someone else's story, as noted by a participant in Modi'in: *"Look, I say, I'm not sure we'll get to the end of the interview without tears. It's not easy and ... first of all you have to tell the children. And you don't want to ... Only a month ago I told [my daughter-in-law] [what happened in the war]. You understand, only then. And I was really afraid how they would take it ... Even now, they don't accept people for what they are. I was awfully afraid that, on the one hand, they wouldn't really believe it, and on the other, that they would say, 'Mother's been through such a lot' and they would see me as an unfortunate, and I can't bear that. People raise lots of questions that don't have answers ... do you understand? That's what stopped me. [Question: So, in fact, you didn't want to go to Witness Theater because you didn't want to tell the story again?] Right. I didn't want to do it again, because in any case as I've said,*

half of Modi'in knows ... I was awarded a prize for outstanding volunteer work and among the things [in the introduction] was the story of the Holocaust. The hall was full ... So, as I told you, half of Modi'in knows, so do the teachers and the school. There comes a time that you say 'give me a break, give me time to myself' ... And unlike many people, I won't go on reality shows, because I saw that my privacy is my privacy. How shall I say it? I wouldn't open up somebody else's refrigerator because it's private."

Students

The focus groups with the students revealed that most of the students consulted with their parents and their parents encouraged them to participate.

Some of the students expressed concern about the contents that might come up in the meetings ("*I really get emotionally involved with lots of things and I am really afraid that it will be difficult for me;*" "*One of my fears is of bursting into tears*"). However, it seems that emotional support was provided during the project through schools (as noted by student from Modi'in: "*Because it's a democratic school, it's easier for us to be in touch with the teachers, the teachers are more open, you can involve the school, not just home*"). They also noted that they supported each other ("*We talk about it with others in recess*"). Some emphasized the importance of the break during the meeting as a time to digest what was happening and to reduce tensions.

Some of the students reported apprehension about meeting the survivors, one of them noting: "*I was afraid that it would be embarrassing, that there would be an embarrassing silence ... That someone would say something and it would lead nowhere.*" Another acknowledged that "*Before I joined the project, I thought that all the old people would be bitter and sad. Some of them were like that to start with, but as soon as we got to know them, they opened up ...*"

Regarding the final performance, opinions were mixed. Some of the students were looking forward eagerly, while others expressed apprehension. Some noted that they were not interested in participating in the performance.

Preoccupation with the Holocaust

Most of the survivors reported that until recent years they had not given much thought to the subject. As they became older, they began to talk about what they went through in the Holocaust, sometimes under pressure from their families, sometimes for the sake of their grandchildren's "roots" projects. Some of them had spoken about their experiences at schools or to soldiers. Some of the stories have been documented in books or films. The survivors in the Gilboa group noted that for several years they had been participating in a support group for survivors at the Dorot BeGilboa center.

The following are selected quotations from the survivors themselves:

"I was young when I got to Israel. I think I tried to repress what had happened as much as possible. I was 14 when I arrived in the country, after the Holocaust. But I wanted to be like the Sabras, but it comes back to you, everything comes back, when you're much older, when you have a family and children. Even when the children had

grown up a bit, it begins to come back to you. And in fact, the older members of the family, one by one, gradually, they're all gone, including my mother. So, in fact, there's no [one]."

"I never [talked about the Holocaust]. It was only, maybe, less than a year ago, perhaps a year, when they started at the clubs ... When they said there was a grant for [survivors] ... Then my oldest son took me and my brother; then I began. At the time my brother was 8 or 9 months old and he didn't know the story. So I started telling it, in the car, with my brother. Then my oldest son said, 'You know all this and we've never heard any of it from you? You've never told us.' I told him that I didn't think it was right to tell them."

"I have a granddaughter. When she was in 5th grade ... she sprang it on me: 'Grandma, I've made an appointment in class with our teacher for you to talk about what you went through in the war, in the Holocaust.' I told her I couldn't because I have a volunteer job. She didn't say anything ... and then on the Friday she said: 'Grandma, I've arranged it for Friday because you don't work or volunteer, so you'll come.' I told her it didn't work out because I had to go shopping. She said she didn't feel comfortable because she'd already fixed it with the teacher and principal ... I weighed things up, personally, and ... the child was so insistent and she's my granddaughter, not a stranger. So I really did go and I saw how thirsty the children were, and how they stayed ..."

"Suddenly some guy appeared, at the beginning, and he said he wanted to know how things were and how I was feeling [and asked] what he could do for me. He sat with me and wrote a book. He took me ... on the television. He made a movie. I would speak and he would do [write]. And it became a book."

The interviews revealed that one survivor had never shared her Holocaust experiences with anyone in her family.

"I kept it all in. This is going to be a terribly tough week for me. A granddaughter who lived here was killed in the army, 14 years ago. What can I say? We got through it, we got through it. My daughter went on a trip and didn't come back. She was killed in Poland. There was a car accident too. I still don't know exactly how and what. We got through that too. I've been left alone. I don't have anyone. I couldn't talk, couldn't talk. I don't know where to start, so why speak? Afterwards, the social worker told me there was a gathering and invited me. I told her at once I couldn't speak. Ask my daughter. I had two daughters, one was killed and I've only got one left, in America. And sometimes they ask me 'Why don't you tell us what you've been through?'"

b. During the Program

Stage 1: Introduction and Group Building

As noted in the section describing the program model, one of the main goals of the first stage was to create a supportive, social and comfortable environment that would encourage the survivors to tell their own stories. The themes brought up by the

participants – survivors and youth – indicate that this goal was achieved. Some of the following quotations indicate how the sense of intimacy that developed during this stage affected the interaction between the participants in the subsequent stages, in which the stories are documented.

Attempts to break the ice and seek a closer relationship were recorded at a relatively early stage of the program: *"They [the children] come in and sit down. They don't talk much, the children. Apparently they want to listen. So we tell them a bit. ..." "There's a dynamic. The children are very cooperative. They ask questions. Perhaps not in public, but they can come to me and ask questions. If they come up to you, maybe they don't want to ask the questions out loud; it's a sign they're interested, otherwise they'd say Shalom and that's it. [They asked me] how I reacted when they put the dress on me. How I reacted? What I saw, if I was shocked ... and how hard was it when suddenly I saw them beating ... when the Germans came to take me ... There's a dynamic with the children and it's done very, very gently, [which is] really important."*

"I enjoy it. I enjoy being with these young people. I feel young. We sat and played some game in which everyone drew something and you finish the picture and then turn it into a story. I sat with 4 others and it was lovely. At first, they were a bit stuck – the first meeting, we don't know each other. But I encouraged them to speak and suddenly they opened up. You have to see how fantastic it is when someone opens up. I said, 'Let's make a story, what do you think? What can we draw with all these elements?' And we made up a story. It was fantastic! Like going back to that age, but with greater insight – that's wisdom. I have an advantage over them, because I see things from a different angle."

The interviews at the end of the program indicate consensus among the survivors and the sense of intimacy and cooperation that developed during and after the introductory meetings greatly helped them to open up and tell their stories. Some even said that they felt comfortable disclosing details they had never told anyone. For example, one of the participants in Gilboa noted: *"The closeness to the children opened us up to some sort of dialogue, willingness to tell some of the story."* Another woman said: *"When we see the children, how we bonded, and their interest ... it's fantastic ... the children come and hug us. We really bonded socially."* One of the men noted that the youngsters felt free too and were uninhibited about asking questions and probing the stories.

The experience was similar from the students' perspective. Some used terms such as "support group," "special group of friends," and "family." A student from Gilboa reported that *"In the early meetings, they [the survivors] didn't volunteer to speak; they all kept quiet and didn't want to say anything. Slowly, slowly, those who found it easiest to open up began to speak and eventually, even the most introverted felt comfortable with us ... they spoke, opened up, and let it all out. It made us feel that they trusted us."* Another noted, *"They all disclose their story in front of everyone. That makes you feel that they trust you, that they have confidence in you and want to tell you."* Another student in the Gilboa spoke about the special relationship that

developed between a female survivor and one of the girls: *"They play, talk ... as if they were born sisters. I think it's lovely."* A student from Petah Tikva reported that *"in one of the rehearsals, one of the survivors I was playing began to cry and I came up and hugged him ... ever since then, he hugs me every time he sees me."*

The closeness that developed during and after the introductory stage could also be seen outside of the meetings, as noted by one of the girls: *"Two months ago, my grandfather died and one of the survivors called me, spoke to me, cheered me up ... I didn't expect her to call ... She asked me to tell her a bit about what was going on and how I was feeling."* Similarly, one of the survivors in Modi'in described how the bond that had developed between her and one of the girls had led to a friendship between the two families.

One of the interesting outcomes, as can be concluded from the interviews, is the mutual **empathy** that developed between the two generations as the program progressed. An example can be seen in the words of a female survivor from Modi'in: *"One of the girls, a little one, very gentle and sensitive ... it was very hard for her and she was crying. And Irit asked me to talk to her, because I was a little one, like her, and very skinny ... So I spoke to her, and she asked me 'But I'm crying, how did you go through all this?' I told her I didn't want it to be hard for her, she should try ... and in the end, she managed ... And after the performance, her mother thanked me a lot."*

The empathy that the students developed with the survivors was reflected in their behavior towards them. To quote a student from Petah Tikva: *"Our relationship with them got stronger and stronger during the meetings. When some of the survivors moved into nursing care, we went to visit them, and even after the project was over, we went to visit them and took an interest in their wellbeing."* Another student described how much his contact with the survivors had affected him: *"One of the survivors whom I played in the performance ... I called his daughter to ask how he was and she said he had been admitted to the hospital and I thought about when to call her again even though she was tired and exhausted, to ask after him and whether I could visit him."*

In Gilboa, some participants dropped out of the program soon after it started. The main reasons that the survivors left were that they felt that the nature of the activity was unsuitable for them, or that it was physically difficult to get to the sessions. New members joined the program during implementation in Modi'in and Gilboa. Three students left the program due to pressure of studies, scheduling clashes with other activities, etc.

Stage 2: Documentation of the Stories

Documentation of the survivors' stories is considered to be the very heart of the program. The time that the facilitators spent on this stage varied from group to group. In most cases, it was the longest stage.

As noted in the previous stage, most of the survivors noted that in the course of time they felt comfortable relating their Holocaust experiences to the group. Despite the apprehension of some of the survivors about speaking directly to the youth, their opinions about the interaction with the students were most encouraging. Some of them spoke about the sense of openness and relief they experienced after meeting with the youth. The following are some of their remarks:

"The children surprised me; when it came to my story, I felt they were very attentive and understanding."

"I'm not sorry I joined. The meetings really open me up, to speak, and altogether, to feel free."

"One of the participants, whom I've known since childhood, opened up completely ... [and revealed] a new world we'd never known."

"I used to be very closed, but now I feel as if a weight has been lifted from my shoulders."

"Thanks to the project, I began to speak more, to delve more into the details, to explain why I am not relaxed and why I don't always sit still ... things I never dared to say before."

"From week to week, they [the children] remember what happened the previous week, meaning it's not something transient. After the project is over, they will know how to tell [the stories]."

The students in all three evaluation localities expressed high satisfaction with the unmediated meetings with the survivors. One of the students described his perspective of what he felt when he listened to the testimonies: *"I liked listening to the story, to hear their feelings. Every single thing reminds them of something else. [I liked] to see the experience with their eyes."* The participants in Modi'in and Gilboa said they were surprised to discover that the activities did not only focus on Holocaust topics, but also on the students' experiences (*"The meetings are a sort of social group, not something cold, there's a bit of humor."* *"They speak about the past and we speak about how the week's going ... about the cake we're going to eat in the break"*). The participants in Petah Tikva emphasized how the stories affected their mood: *"It was depressing and sad, and we cried during the stories ..."* *"You see how broken the survivor is when he tells his story."*

An interesting point brought up in the interviews was the caution exercised by the survivors when exposing the students to Holocaust subjects, since they were in fact about the same age when they themselves encountered the horrors of the Holocaust. As one of them noted: *"They are still small children. ... I didn't tell them the really hard stories – kept it light. When I went through it, I was about 10."* In this context, a woman in the Gilboa group reported that she explained to the students that children play even in the cruelest situations: *"I was in the park, when the cherry trees, the pear*

trees and the apricot trees were in bloom. We used to make posies, ornaments, chains. We used mud to build – not houses, but the furniture we'd have in our home. I didn't know what a home was, but it's what I wanted to have, the armchairs and the bed, how they'd look. We built from our imagination."

The survivors in all the groups expressed high satisfaction with the facilitation. Those in Modi'in commended the facilitators (Irit and Ezra Dagan) for their professional approach and interesting facilitation. The interviews reveal that they show great sensitivity as to the pace at which the survivors disclose their stories. *"Very sensitive, very, very sensitive to the subject and it's important to them, if you don't want to talk to leave it for another time. For example, one of the women didn't want to talk out loud. So she [Irit] went to her quietly and told her it was absolutely OK. In other words, she understands. ... She doesn't push you and tell you to speak because that's what you're here for"* (survivor). Another female survivor notes: *"They are really sensitive. Their questions are to the point. If you don't want to answer, they don't push it. And, so as not to stick with the subject all the time, they also ask things about daily life, so it won't be so heavy. They introduce everyday things. The bottom line is that I'm really pleased I've joined this project for that reason too. They are very sensitive and don't put any pressure, and their questions are to the point. For example, she asked us to bring pictures, and said we could bring contemporary photos too."*

The participants in Gilboa commended the great sensitivity of their facilitators (Rachel and Tamar) when the survivors divulged their stories to the group. One of the women noted: *"The meetings are conducted well, they are organized and harmonious."*

One of the things that impressed the survivors was the sensitivity and attentiveness of the facilitators, not only to the general Holocaust story of each survivor, but also to the minute details of their daily lives at the time, and the feelings that go with these memories. For example, one of the survivors praised Ezra Dagan's conduct: *"I went, and I was really enthusiastic about Ezra's attitude. He goes into simple, small details ... for example, [when] we had to talk – he put all kinds of things on the table and each of us had to take something that meant something to him. I took a white umbrella, and I explained about white. I told them about the [Christian] woman who looked after me for a while ... and I told the story that I cried, why ... I want it too, I'm a little girl and I want it too. In the end, she gave in, went to a shop and dressed me in a white dress with a white umbrella. And I told that story. And he asked me what the dress was like, if it was pretty, if I liked it. Those are very trivial things, but so important to a little girl. I told Ezra how moved I was by the fact that they went into minute detail, where things happened and how it was ... I said I'd come again. And really, the more times I come, the more I'm part of it and the more I want."*

At this stage, it became clear that family members made an important contribution to the success of the program. The interviews reveal that the parents of the students and the families of the survivors were helping "behind the scenes" by providing either moral and emotional support or logistical assistance, such as transportation or

refreshments. In the Gilboa group a meeting was held with the participants' families in order to apprise them of what was happening in the program.

Difficulties arising in Stage 2

Some of the students reported that the profusion of detail sometimes made it hard for them to remember the stories. Even so, meetings that were devoted to a single story or that included work in pairs made it easier for them to deal with the details. On the other hand, one of the survivors said she believed that the meetings that combined stories with the play were less full.

Some of the students resented the fact that the facilitators sometimes cut the survivors off in the middle of their story and would not give them more time. However, some agreed that they understood the constraints on the facilitators.

Stages 3 and 4: Dramatization, Staging and Rehearsals

The findings from the focus groups and interviews with the survivors indicate that the rehearsal stage is the weak part of the program. Evidently, the harmony that characterized the way the program progressed until this point gave way to a sense of pressure and frustration among the participants. The students reported the difficulties they encountered during the rehearsal period: *"Immense pressure. We had little time for the rehearsals, so there was great pressure from the facilitators."* Students from Gilboa noted that after the August vacation, little time remained for the rehearsals and they found themselves in what they described as a "pressure cooker." Some of the survivors in Gilboa reported that during rehearsals they were worried about the success of the project. To quote one of them: *"When we began rehearsals for the performance, there were a few problems. People found it hard to learn their lines by heart, even though it was a text they themselves had told ... until the facilitators said, 'You know what. It's your story. If you don't agree, or if you think that it's necessary to add or remove some of the text we've written, then tell the story personally.' After that, things really did begin to flow."* One of the participants noted that the group coped positively at that time: *"It was precisely that excitement that brought out so much emotion from the children, so much positive emotion – hugs, kisses, caresses, and handing out glasses of water. I see these external signals as a sign of something inside being brought into the open."*

The interviews with the program facilitators reveal that this stage was implemented differently by the Dagens and by the facilitators trained by JDC-ESHEL. Irit and Ezra Dagan tended not to involve the survivors in the rehearsals and did not give them roles to play in the final performance. They said that they feared that repeatedly bringing up the past could have a negative effect on the survivors' emotional state. In contrast, the facilitators in Gilboa allowed those who wanted to play an active part in the rehearsals and performance to do so. The interviews with participants in the Gilboa (both generations) reveal that, altogether, the attitudes towards including the survivors in the performances were positive. One of the students: *"I think it was very right and very nice and it made the final product much more moving, because we too enjoyed working with them and that was part of our relationship."* Another student noted that, *"It added much more emotion to the performance that you see ... for example, if one of the adults plays his brother, or plays himself, or his mother or*

father, then it's far more moving and for him too, it's far more moving than to see one of the other children acting the part." At the same time, a survivor from Gilboa talked about her difficulties during rehearsals: "It's not easy, particularly the recent rehearsal period – going over the lines again and again, choking, crying, choking again ... and it's sleepless nights, all the images come back to haunt you ..."

Stage 5: Final Performance

Most of the participants expressed extremely positive opinions about the final performance. Some of them described it as the culmination of the entire project. They were surprised by the impact it had on the audience. *"In the end, the worries about the performance were unfounded, there were reverberations in all age groups ... there was absolute silence in the auditorium. After the performance, students and parents came up to us with tears in their eyes, [they were] moved to tears ... I think we managed to get them to internalize something ..."* (participant from Gilboa).

Another participant described his experiences during the final performance: *"It was a performance in every way. A play as it should be, with all the props and everything. What can I say? I was overwhelmed. All my worries disappeared. Everything flowed so beautifully."*

The students from Gilboa noted that over the year, they had experienced mixed feelings about the final performance. In fact some of them opted not to take part. However, they all agreed that a play was the best way to convey the message. At the end of the program, they noted the positive responses to the performance, which exceeded their expectations: *"An empowering experience ... people were moved by the fact that during my scene with my grandmother, both of us cried"* (student).

Several of the participants emphasized that the special contribution of Witness Theater, particularly the performance, is that the scenes are played out visually. They believe that this allowed the survivors to see their own stories in a new and authentic light. In the words of a participant from Modi'in: *"What is nice about Witness Theater is that you see the story unfolding in front of you ... especially [when] I saw the scene when my mother hugged me, protected me, and how she suffered the agony of being separated from my father ... suddenly I got it ... what a heroine that woman was."* A survivor from Petah Tikva described a similar experience when he saw the dramatization of his own story: *"I was in a different world ... I closed my eyes for a moment, and it took me back 40 years! I felt I was in a dream, even though I was awake, and suddenly I discovered all kinds of new things."*

A participant from Gilboa spoke of her emotional experience when she saw her granddaughter acting out part of her childhood: *"During the war there were many sirens and they always told us to find a trench and run, and it was summer and my shoes were a few sizes too big for me and I took them off. After the siren, we had to hurry back to work, and I forgot my shoes, and suddenly my father saw that I had no shoes and he reprimanded me ... because he was worried I wouldn't have shoes for the next winter, so I ran back – flew back, I didn't feel my feet touch the ground, I was so afraid. Years later, I thought about how as a girl I was angry with my father. My*

granddaughter acted out the running ... and that part, that running, I'll always remember." For some of the survivors, the visual experience of their story was emotionally empowering.

Some of the participants spoke of a sense of achievement after taking part in the performance. To quote a participant from Gilboa: *"I wasn't talkative. The best feeling was that I managed to overcome my fear of the unknown that I had ... Even now, when people who were at the show meet me at Dorot [regional center], they tell me how great I was. The children too and my grandchildren are so full of praise – 'Grandma you were terrific' – Oh yes! As they say, I did it!"*

One of the students from Modi'in described the change in his self-image as a result of the program: *"Before the program, I was introverted, I didn't open up and I never shared things. I came away more open, speaking, sharing, I feel more sociable ... It's a social thing for me."* Another noted: *"I was a shy girl when I started, and I ended up full of confidence, after I'd participated in the performance."*

Finally, a facilitator from Gilboa noted that sometimes the survivors felt that only some of their stories were put on stage. To compensate for this feeling, an anthology of the entire collection of stories was compiled and distributed to all the participants.

Stage 6: Conclusion

In all three localities, several weekly meetings were held after the final performance. In Modi'in, for example, the facilitators led a meeting to sum up all that had happened. At another meeting, organized by one of the survivors, the participants watched a recording of the final performance. Some of the survivors noted that once the program had ended and there were no more weekly meetings with the students, they were left with a feeling of emptiness.

5. Benefits of the Program

The benefits of the program, as indicated in the interviews with the program participants and the professionals working with them, achieved and even surpassed the program goals:

1. Most of the survivors felt that their personal stories had been preserved and internalized by the young generation.
2. Some of the survivors noted that the program had given them a platform for stories that had never been told before to an audience and documented the efforts of those who rescued Jews during the Holocaust.
3. The regular meetings with the students, culminating in the performance, allowed the survivors to divulge their own story to the group and in some cases to disclose details that they had never told anyone. In some cases, the program allowed the survivors to see their experiences in a new light and gave them closure.

4. The reactions of the audience to the final performance, as reported by the participants, confirm that the performance played a key role in disseminating the personal stories to the general public.
5. The psychological effects of dealing with the past were documented, most of them positive. Among them: grieving for family members who perished in the Holocaust, saying "goodbye" to the family home, coping with anger towards their fathers, reliving the experience of childhood that was taken away from them with the outbreak of war. One of the survivors reported that at the end of the program she felt *"I'm calmer about my surroundings ... I'm not always on my guard. I'm allowed to do other things."* There was one case recorded in which dealing with the past had a negative impact on a survivor and led to sleep disturbances.
6. The youth reported that the program made it possible for them to learn about the Holocaust in a different way from what they were used to (ceremonies, memorial days, history books, school trips to Poland). This is illustrated by what two of the students had to say: *"The abstract concept of six million anonymous people is far less meaningful than a story you know personally." "After I had gotten to know the survivors and heard their stories first-hand, I began to experience memorial days differently. In future Holocaust memorial days, I'll think of the people who were there."*
7. The documented psychological effects of the program on the youth included improved self-image and the ability to cope with stage fright. One of the students noted that the program had helped him cope with a difficult time after the death of both his grandparents.
8. There is consensus that the project led to a closer relationship between the generations. The program coordinator at the Recanati home spoke of the changes that occurred among the elderly participants after meeting with the youngsters: *"Meeting these young people infuses them with the spirit of youth. They come along, laugh, get up to mischief ... as the program progressed, you got to see the child inside the person and then the external appearance and the disabilities don't matter so much."* During the program, the mutual empathy and the friendships that developed between the young and the old were documented, as noted.
9. Some of the students felt that despite the difficulties they experienced, such as missing school days, the program gave them important lessons in life, e.g., seeing difficulties in proportion, being considerate of others, and being polite to members of the older generation. Some of the students noted that the program had inspired them to volunteer and contribute to the community.
10. In some cases, the program provided the survivors with some relief for their loneliness.

The study shows that Witness Theater has certain unique benefits that set the program apart from other programs and activities that bring survivors together with teenagers (such as Café Europa and frontal lectures). These include: the gradual development of a support group in which to relate and listen to testimonies; the use of dramatization

to illustrate the survivors' stories visually and authentically, enabling the survivors to examine their stories through the eyes of young people and helping the young people to internalize the stories. The final performance is a successful medium for conveying the message to the general public.

6. Issues regarding Implementation of the Model and Directions to be Considered

1. In the projects examined in this study, the elderly participants were selected mostly through formal frameworks for survivors (Amcha, Café Europa and support groups for Holocaust survivors). We recommend that thought be given to finding ways to recruit participants who do not go to these frameworks. Apart from wider advertising in the local press, it may be possible to contact the second generation, as intermediaries who could inform the survivors of the existence of the project and encourage them to participate. Professionals in the health system, especially doctors and nurses with whom survivors are in contact, can also be a source of identification and referral.
2. One of the issues of concern for the facilitators in the early stages of the program is the ratio of the number of participants to the time devoted to elements of the program. In Gilboa, for example, the large number of participants caused an imbalance between the time allocated to documenting the stories and to the other parts of the project.
3. Some of the participants reported that the documentation stage was tiresome. Greater use of available options (e.g., meeting in small groups or combining the story and the play) or the adoption of new strategies could help the participants, especially the students, to be full partners in the experience.
4. The rehearsal stage is the weak point of the program. In the three localities evaluated, the students who appeared in the final performance were under great pressure, which often resulted in stressful reactions and missed school days. The facilitators should give thought in advance to the time spent on this stage and include elements to relieve the pressure on the participants during this time.
5. Interviews with the facilitators revealed that the method used by the founders of the program (Irit and Ezra Dagan) differed from that of the facilitators who had taken the JDC-ESHEL course, with regard to the inclusion of the survivors in the rehearsal stage. Despite the generally positive opinions of the participants in Gilboa in this regard, it is recommended that the impact of involving the survivors in the rehearsals and final performance be examined in some additional locations, since the findings of the current study are not conclusive in this regard.
6. One of the issues of concern for JDC-ESHEL, which was also raised in some of the interviews with the facilitators, is how to find the best way of ending the program without leaving survivors with an "empty hole." Since the process brings up painful memories, it is feared that at the end of the program there could be some negative effects on the survivors' emotional wellbeing. The

study findings indicate that at least some of the survivors felt a sense of emptiness after the program ended. The feeling seems to have been stronger in urban areas than in rural areas. Apparently, in the Gilboa regional council, the fact that the residents already knew each other made the process easier. In one case, as noted, a negative impact on one of the survivors was documented. We emphasize the need to involve a social worker and social services in such cases.

7. The study findings indicate that family members might play a key role during the program, be it by providing transport or other logistic assistance, or by supporting and encouraging the participants throughout the various stages of the project. The experience in Gilboa shows that inviting members of the family to an extra encounter during the program helps to get them involved in the project. In addition, although it is beyond the scope of this study, we recommend considering the need to take further action in order to help the family to elaborate their own feelings and to allow them to understand the process experienced by the survivors and students. This would enable them to follow up on their relatives and help them cope after the program has finished.
8. Producing an anthology with all the survivors' stories in full, as was done in Gilboa, could help disseminate the stories to the general public and give the survivors the good feeling that the story they chose to disclose to the group will be documented in full.
9. JDC-ESHEL emphasizes two issues with regard to dissemination: Firstly, continue the exposure of testimony stories to a broader audience, whether by increasing the number of performances/size of the audience or by other means such as publishing biographical books. The second is to broaden the circle of testimony stories by increasing the number of programs. At present, these two options are conditional on additional budgets.
10. The program facilitators commended the cooperation of the local nonprofit organizations for the elderly in all stages of the program. Some of the facilitators reported difficulties with some of the local authorities. They noted that the involvement of the local authorities focused on allocating a venue for the final performance. Other difficulties reported: coordinating times for using the venue, reduced rehearsal times, and the organization of transportation for the participants in the rural areas. As noted, JDC-ESHEL plays a key role in coordination among all involved.