New Holocaust project helps keep the legacy alive

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To be run by Leeds based charity the Holocaust Survivors' Friendship Association (HSFA), the two year scheme will explore and document survivors' stories and carry out vital training for new volunteer speakers including second and third generation so they can sustain the legacy of the Holocaust for future generations.

The project will focus on the heritage of Holocaust survivors who settled in Yorkshire, including those who survived in hiding, ghettos, concentration camps and death camps, and those who escaped on the Kinder Transport or as refugees. Persecuted because they were Jewish, the stories of these survivors – both during the Holocaust and subsequently after seeking refuge in the UK - will now be examined through the presentation of oral histories via speaking, web and other resources. The resource will also broaden its remit to include other groups, disabled people, trade unionists, communists, Jehovah's Witnesses, gay, Roma, Sinti or resistors who were also persecuted and lost their lives.

Newly accessible collections of surviving Nazi archive material that has been opened up to local survivors and their families will be used. Available through the International Tracing Service (ITS) based in Bad Arolsen, Germany, the material includes a range of documents such as prisoner identity cards, transport lists, sickness certificates and photographs.

The HSFA is run entirely by volunteers and has 120 members, including 85 first generation survivors, their families (second and third generation survivors) and other interested individuals. Members give talks and contribute to events, publications and exhibitions. Demand is increasing: it is estimated that the survivors engaged with at least 5,000 people during 2007/2008, 7,000 in 2008/2009 and more than 10,000 in 2009-2010.

Fiona Spiers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund Yorkshire and the Humber, explained the importance of the award: "The HSFA is the only Northern organisation meeting this demand in the UK, and whilst the number of Holocaust survivors is diminishing – more and more people are now opening up for the first time about their experiences, coming forward, and wanting to share their stories. This project offers a new opportunity to train more volunteers as speakers so we can pass on knowledge and understanding of these terrible events to future generations so that people can continue to learn from them in the future."

Lilian Black, Chair of the HSFA, explained further how vital this work is to the Holocaust survivor community: "Our small dedicated team of speakers go out every week to speak to groups of young people and adults. They relive the horrors which they once endured because they want to alert the wider community to the dangers of scapegoating, bigotry and persecution which can, and did, lead to the genocide of a whole people. It is vital to meet the huge interest in the wider community that we find a way to pass the living legacy on. We owe this to the memory of our loved ones who perished and to future generations so they may learn from our sad history. We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has recognised the value of this work in the North of England."

Fabian Hamilton, MP for Leeds North East, also commented: "I am really pleased that the Heritage Lottery Fund has confirmed their award to the HFSA so that they can continue their very important work across our region. I have visited Auschwitz on several occasions and feel it is vitally important that the stories of the Holocaust are not lost. The members of the HFSA in my constituency and across the Region will, I'm sure ensure that does not happen."

Notes to editors

* The HLF grant to the project The Holocaust: Sustaining the Legacy for Future Generations is for £146,200 (92% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

To date, HLF has made 331 awards in Leeds amounting to just under £58million.

HSFA
Registered Charity No.1084433
The HSFA is a Leeds-based charity set up in 1996. Our aim is to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and use its lessons to work towards a more tolerant society in which difference and diversity are celebrated. The HSFA website includes survivors' testimonies and a range of learning resources, is used by international audiences. For further information please see: Holocaust learning website

Further information
HLF Press Office, Vicky Wilford, Communications Manager on 020 75916 046 or email vickyw@hlf.org.uk

HSFA: Lilian Black, Chair, on 07968 815 067 or lilian.black@btconnect.com