

Community

SOS Pittsburgh receives grant to help those in need

Jewish Family & Children's Service of Pittsburgh received a \$10,000 grant from Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield in support of its SOS Pittsburgh emergency assistance program.

SOS Pittsburgh is a resource for individuals and families who traditionally fall through the cracks within the social service system. This includes those who are getting by on their own, but if they were to experience an unforeseen incident or expense, not being able to resolve it could be the difference between remaining self-reliant and a lifetime of hardship.

The program was established in 2005 with the help of Edgar and Sandy Snyder, who previously established similar programs in Russia. The Snyders realized that there was also a need for the program throughout the Pittsburgh area, so they approached JF&CS about creating an SOS program to assist those living in our local community.

According to SOS Pittsburgh committee chair Barbara Shapira, the program is a "safety net of last resort" for people facing crisis who simply have no place to turn. An SOS Pittsburgh social service and critical needs coordinator works intensively with each individual or family to understand the issues they are facing and to come up with a plan for helping them. The coordinator then connects them to any and all applicable community resources and when no other resource is available, petitions the SOS Pittsburgh committee — which is composed of a group of community volunteers who evaluate each case



JF&CS Photo

Pictured from left are SOS Pittsburgh founders Edgar and Sandy Snyder; Mary Anne Papale, director of community affairs, Highmark; Becky Abrams, director, Squirrel Hill Community Food Pantry & SOS Pittsburgh; and Aryeh Sherman, president and CEO, Jewish Family & Children's Service.

and then make funding recommendations — for a one-time grant in an effort to avert crisis.

"Even in the best of times, there will be people who are struggling," said Aryeh Sherman, JF&CS president and CEO in a prepared statement.

"However, with the recent economic crisis, the

need has grown considerably and people who thought they would never be in need of assistance are now turning to us for critical aid."

The Highmark grant will provide funding for these one-time client grants, which average around \$1,100 per case.