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WITH NEWS FROM THE BROOKLINE TAB

Brookline native aims to restore independence among Russian-Jewish seniors

By Morgan Rousseau
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Brookline —



courtesy photo

Brookline native Danielle Herzberg and Morris Singer, a colleague from Presentense, look at a display during the Launch Night for Herzberg's Elder News Feed.

Twenty-four-year-old Danielle Herzberg, a Brookline native, has a knack for technology, a head for marketability, and a soft spot for her grandparents.

That's why she wanted to help seniors by bringing digital information into their lives.

Thanks to the help of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies, an organization dedicated to helping Greater Boston's Jewish community, Herzberg's Elder News Feed initiative is about to become a reality.

Boston-based CJP recently partnered with Presentense, a start-up based in Jerusalem, which helps support the groundbreaking ideas of

young minds through grants.

"Nothing makes my grandparents happier than talking to [our family], seeing photos and hearing updates on our lives. This is an easier way to do that, because visiting them in their homes isn't always an option," said Herzberg, a University of Pennsylvania graduate and employee at Hubspot, a Cambridge start-up.

In its most simple terms, Herzberg's idea helps keep senior citizens connected -- connected to family, connected to friends, and in touch with the world outside their homes. Whether an elder is living alone, in an assisted living program or in the care of a nursing home, Herzberg's initiative helps seniors become more tech-savvy and independent.

CJP Presentense Boston Fellowship Coordinator Abby Goldenthal manages the Young Adult Innovation agenda, as well as the CJP Young Adult Community Grants and the Young Jewish Leader Council. Goldenthal said Herzberg's idea stood out to CJP because it was unique and went hand-in-hand with their goal of creating opportunities for innovation and leadership in the community.

"Some fellows are coming to us with a brand new idea that just popped into their head, and some are coming in with a venture they've been working on for a few years and need a little refining," said Goldenthal, who describes Presentense as just one program of many that encourages creativity throughout the organization.

One of 13 other fellows in Presentense, Herzberg heard about the program from a former colleague, and was immediately drawn to the fellowship.

Her inspiration for the Elder News Feed came from her own Russian-born grandparents. After several phone calls asking for basic information, Herzberg decided to think up an easy way for seniors to access online information about bus routes, discounts, entertainment and more.

"Sometimes they can feel out of touch and alone. So this is one way for them to get information for themselves. They don't have to rely on other people for simple information, like weather reports," said Herzberg, who has a grandfather at the Coolidge House in Brookline, and a grandmother living independently in Coolidge Corner.

"Although this venture is aimed at introducing the program to assisted-living facilities and nursing homes, I think that it has just as powerful use for people who are living independently like my grandmother," said Herzberg. Statistics show that the population of elderly people who are using the Internet is growing exponentially every year, which is why Herzberg saw huge marketability in this venture.

"It hasn't really been tapped into yet," said Herzberg. "I definitely think the market is there. I've been working on this venture for six months and my colleagues keep emailing me about it. I've noticed many people are trying to get their seniors engaged in the Internet," said Herzberg, adding that her own grandparents have been receptive to the idea.

Herzberg is currently looking into ways to educate seniors, since many may not be familiar with computer technology.

"I'm connecting with local schools that may be able to have teens volunteer and train elders how to use it to incorporate technology into their daily routines," said Herzberg, adding that while she's still building the business module, she's happy to have wonderful grandparents to help her test the technology. She's also enthusiastic for CJP's support of her new venture.

"I love the idea of social entrepreneurship -- it really excites me," said Herzberg. "This venture is exposing me to a new circle of people in Boston who are also very motivated and entrepreneurial. I'm really attracted to start up culture and others who are as well. I'm glad to see what it looks like behind the scenes to actually start a business."

More information about the venture can be found by visiting www.eldernewsfeed.com. For information on CJP visit www.cjp.org.