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Have You Ever Heard of a Documentary on Jewish Poverty?

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Did you know that one in five Jewish persons in New York lives in poverty? If you didn't, you are not alone: the common stereotype all around the world is that "Jews got money." This is exactly the cliché that our upcoming documentary by the same title hopes to debunk.

As a matter of fact, Jews without money have always existed, and they still do. It's not only about members of the Jewish Orthodox community: in New York City, which has the largest Jewish population outside of Israel, the Jewish poor also include elderly Holocaust survivors who lost their relatives and Soviet Jews who emigrated to the U.S. after the fall of the USSR, as well as families who, like many of their fellow Americans, deeply suffered from the financial crisis.

While they are almost invisible to the general public, it doesn't mean that they aren't getting help, and there are plenty of Kosher food kitchens and other Jewish charities. It is also important to note that these will support anyone they can, regardless of their religion.

One of these associations is the Metropolitan Council on Jewish poverty, run by William Rapfogel, one of our documentary's key interviewees. Also known as the Met Council, this nonprofit organization has been helping people since the 1970s; no later than a few weeks ago, it played an important role in post-hurricane Sandy relief.

The Hebrew Free Burial Association has been around for an even longer period of time. Since its inception in the 1880s, it has buried over 60,000 indigent Jews, from newborns and elderly people to victims of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire.

I personally found out about the HFBA and its "selfless acts of kindness" in a post that its executive director Amy Koplow published on The Huffington Post Religion blog last year. She then invited us to visit the HFBA's cemeteries in Staten Island, where she and Rabbi Shmuel Plafker kindly gave us thoughtful interviews.

Earlier that month, we had also recorded a very interesting meeting with the Conference of Presidents' executive vice chairman Malcolm Hoenlein, who has been described as "the most powerful Jew in the Western world."

You may be surprised to hear that Jews Got Money's director Sasha Andreas is not Jewish. This is his first documentary, on an issue that is close to his heart:

"There was a story in my home country, France, about the young Ilan Halimi who was kidnapped, tortured and murdered by a gang who assumed that he 'had money' because he was a Jew," he told the blog AbbaNibi last year.

His ambition with Jews Got Money was to put an end to a damaging stereotype, which he associated with Anti-Semitism. To his surprise, he discovered that poverty was also a taboo within the Jewish community itself, as he struggled to get funding and schedule interviews:

"I thought it would be easier, because a documentary on this subject has never been done before and I believed people would be happy to see someone finally address this issue, but most want to keep it that way. I only expected the title to pose some problems, but in the end it was the least of their concerns."

After five years of trying to find backers with no luck, he managed to complete the 40-minute documentary on a very small, self-financed budget, and is now looking for distributors and festivals interested in helping the film and its message find their audience.

Think about it: there's no reason why Jewish poverty should be a taboo. Not only does it fuel anti-Semitism, but it also deprives dedicated charities from donations they need as much as ever. While 'tzedakah' and philanthropy are deeply entrenched in the Jewish culture, many Jews ignore that members of their community also need support.

Luckily, news outlets such as French blog Cultures Juives, Belgian magazine Regards and now The Huffington Post are now helping us to break the silence, and so can you.

Find us on Twitter and help to spread the word about Jews Got Money.