

Museum Staff to present at International Holocaust Conference

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Two staff members from the Sydney Jewish Museum have travelled to Krakow, Poland to present at an International Holocaust Conference sponsored by the University of Gdansk.

Volunteer Manager, Rony Bognar and Community Stories Manager, Jacqui Wasilewsky joined a host of international researchers and practitioners examining the effects, implications and responses to the Shoah from an interdisciplinary angle.

For both, the Conference provided an opportunity to bring the unique work of the Museum to an international and engaged audience.

“It’s our belief that the Survivor Focus group is the only program of its kind in the world” says Bognar, who along with psychologist Renee Symon, co-founded the group as a means of supporting Survivor volunteers and guides. “We were excited to share the successes and challenges of a program, which we believe has enhanced the health and longevity of its participants.”

Neither Bognar nor Wasilewsky had previously considered bringing the Museum’s community programs to overseas researchers.

“A colleague sent us the conference details and suggested that we submit an abstract for consideration” says Wasilewsky, who presented and chaired a session on writing and interpreting testimonies. “It came as a bit of a shock when we were accepted overnight. It really goes to show the value and interest in the programs we run here.”

Wasilewsky has been at the Museum for ten years helping Holocaust Survivors and Members of the Community to preserve and share their stories through written or oral mediums. She hoped to give her audience a sense of the passion and support that lies at the core of the program.

“We aim to acknowledge the trauma and hardship involved in the process, providing a safe and respectful service that is savoured by Survivor and team member alike.”

Bognar, for her part, hopes to safeguard the privacy of Focus Group participants while satisfying widespread curiosity about the group. “I hope people see that ours is space for contemplation, comradery and catharsis, and to convey the important role it has played in supporting our Survivors.”

Bognar and Wasilewsky departed for Poland on the 19th and 20th April. Excerpts from their presentations will be available on the Museum YouTube page following their return to Australia.