

tive. So the program evolved into Jewish Connections, which matches emigres with congregations. Russians and Americans come together for intercultural seders, lectures, Shabbat dinners and other congregational affairs.

Many connections established through the initial Family to Family program were fortuitous. Take the Krymgolds, Zagers and Moehlmans.

Barbara and Herman Moehlman, as well as their 30-year-old son, Phillip, of Farmington Hills, "adopted" the Krymgolds through Family to Family. Later, they became close friends with the Zagers from Gomel, a city in the Ukraine.

The Russian families have celebrated Jewish holidays with the Moehlmans. They've attended concerts and gone on walks. The Moehlmans have helped the Zagers and Krymgolds find jobs, in part by accompanying them on interviews.

The first time Irina Zager — who lives with her husband and two daughters in West Bloomfield — accompanied the Moehlmans to services at Temple Beth El, she felt bewildered, but euphoric.

"I didn't even know what a service was," she said. "I wasn't much interested at first. But the atmosphere...Jews, coming together, openly and without fear..."

"We were not happy in Russia," she said. "There was no tomorrow for the children. We wanted to sing Jewish songs, dance Jewish dances and understand our Jewish background."

Last December, Mrs. Zager and her husband, Dmitry, who works as a laboratory technician at BASF, were remarried in a Jewish wedding at Beth El. The Krymgolds retook their vows during the same ceremony. The Moehlmans were by their side, holding the *chuppah*.

"There wasn't a dry eye in the temple," Mrs. Moehlman said. "They were finally married by a rabbi and they were just overwhelmed."

Ellie Slovis and Sue Stettner of Jewish Experiences For Families, which runs the Jewish Connections program, said more new Americans gradually are getting involved in the Jewish community.

"It was slow getting off the

ground," Mrs. Stettner said. "I believe everyone's looking for 100 percent success with our Russian population, but we cannot even expect that of our American community."

Mrs. Moehlman, who continues to enjoy time with the Krymgolds and Zagers, stressed the ongoing need for American families to reach out to emigres through programs like Jewish Connections:

"They can't live the American way by living in a ghetto. They need the short-term, one-on-one help from American families — not with material things so much as with friendship and acceptance," Mrs. Moehlman said. "We have to help them to help themselves. There's nothing more satisfying than seeing them land on their feet, then start helping their own."

**"We have to help them help themselves."**

Barbara Moehlman

"It's like watching flowers bloom, petal by petal, reaching their full potential." □



Dmitry and Irina Zager (right) retook their vows at a Temple Beth El wedding.

Generation to generation: (below, from left) Arkady Ongeyberg, Sophia Ongeyberg, Mera Polyakhovskaya, Irina Zager, Dmitry Zager, Valerie Zager and Inna Zager.

