

Humanizing the work of JFCS

BY DEBORAH MOON

The new communications manager for Jewish Family & Child Service is a storyteller.

“Storytelling humanizes something intangible,” says Jenn Director Knudsen, who joined JFCS in March of this year. She uses storytelling in virtually every communication she writes, because “Our supporters want to know the human story behind what we do.”

As communication’s manager, Jenn provides original content, editing, articles and written correspondence to the public and to donors about the nonprofit agency’s four program areas: Holocaust survivor services, counseling, emergency assistance and disability support services. A fifth area of focus is volunteers, who support the four programs. She also researches and writes grant proposals to support the programs – again

incorporating storytelling.

“JFCS is so fortunate to have Jenn on our team,” says JFCS Deputy Director Susan Greenberg. “She brings her many talents to JFCS including grant writing (and) writing articles internally and externally about what’s happening at JFCS. Basically, she gets the word out. Jenn is a wonderful connector and brings so much to our organization.”

When Jenn was young, her mom told her she would be a therapist.

“Instead I get to work with therapists,” says Jenn. “I really admire what they do. I like the care they give and feel toward their clients. I like working among and for them.”

Jenn works with every staff member of the nonprofit and says it has been a great team to work with on grant proposals.

“I love how JFCS represents

the Jewish community and helps anyone in need,” she says.

Jenn has a deep foundation in journalism and Jewish communal work. She earned a master’s degree in journalism from the University of California-Berkeley in May 1999. She has been a freelance and enterprise journalist since 2000, including co-founding the 2B Writing Company in 2016, where she provided content, reporting, writing, editing, media relations and publicity expertise for individuals, nonprofits and for-profit companies through 2020.

From 2009 to 2014, she served as associate development director of the Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies at Portland State University. A member of Congregation Neveh Shalom, she has served on the board and executive committee as well as numerous other committees.



Jenn Director Knudsen.
Photo by Ken Klein.

She is a monthly contributor and proofreader of articles for the congregation’s newsletter “The Chronicle.”

“The Jewish community is where I feel most comfortable and most at home,” says Jenn.

For more information about JFCS, visit jfcs-portland.org.

Ahavath Achim hires administrator

Melissa Abu (Bloom) joined Congregation Ahavath Achim as the part-time synagogue administrator on July 19, 2021. Over the past seven years, Melissa has helped the congregation in numerous ways, from event planning to communications to applying for a homeland security grant.

Melissa grew up in Portland and worked at various Jewish agencies and synagogues here before attending American Jewish University, formerly University of Judaism, to receive her MBA in nonprofit management and a master’s in Jewish communal studies. She has served as the executive director of Congregation Shaarie Torah; marketing and development director of Jewish Family & Child Service in Portland; and executive director of Temple B’nai Torah in Bellevue, Wash., Congregation Beth Ami in Santa Rosa, Calif., and Westwood Kehilla in California. Until it was forced to close by COVID-19, Melissa owned and operated Yo Zone in Tanasbourne for three years.

Congregation Ahavath Achim, meaning “brotherly love,” was founded in 1916 by Jews from Turkey and the Isle of Rhodes. Today, Ahavath Achim has a broad membership with Jews of Spanish and Portuguese descent, as well as Jews with roots in Greece, Turkey, Israel, Yemen, Persia, Morocco and many countries of Ashkenazi heritage.

After being forced to relocate by urban renewal, the Sephardic congregation dedicated its Byzantine-inspired synagogue on Barbur Boulevard in 1965. In 2017, the congregation moved Shabbat services and many activities to Hillsdale (6686 SW Capitol Hwy.), expanding the space to include a sanctuary and social area.

Melissa is excited to be working with Rabbi Sholom Skolnik and the board of directors to assist in bringing Ahavath Achim into the next chapter. Reach Melissa at melissa@ahavathachim.com.



Cory Willson to lead Foundation School

Congregation Neveh Shalom has named Cory Willson as Foundation School Director. Cory has been in a leadership position at Foundation School since 2018, most recently as assistant director of the preschool. She has decades of experience working with children and families as both an educator and a family counselor, with specialization in human resiliency.

“I’m really excited to be the new director of Foundation School,” says Cory. “Foundation School is more than a preschool, it’s a thriving community, and it’s one that I am grateful and honored to lead.”

Neveh Shalom’s Foundation School is based on the ideals and traditions of the Jewish faith and is dedicated to providing exceptional early childhood education. While the curriculum is centered on the foundations of Jewish learning, the program is open to all. For over 60 years, Foundation School has embraced our youngest learners – sparking imaginations, instilling a sense of wonder, and providing the building blocks for the next generation of creative and confident problem-solvers. The preschool values play as every child’s natural way of learning and views each child as a competent and unique learner.

Cory earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Western Oregon University. She has taught in middle school, first grade and preschool since 1998. She also has her master’s in counseling with a specialty in family/child work from San Francisco State University. After graduating from SF State, she studied with a national leader in the field of resiliency for three years so that she could bring healing and real change to those she serves.

Neveh Shalom’s announcement notes: “Cory brings a passion for children, families and teachers as well as a focus on empowerment and well-being to all the work she does here at Foundation School.”

