

# New Connections at JFCS

By Elana Emlen

**W**e all know that this past year has been defined in large part by Covid-19 and the restrictions it imposed on people's lives and livelihoods. Jewish Family & Child Service (JFCS), like many organizations, responded to these needs, and has made an important, positive difference for thousands of people in the Jewish and greater Portland communities, via its mission to improve its clients' quality of life and self-sufficiency in accordance with Jewish values.

I first connected with JFCS years ago, when my mother, Goldie Stampfer, z"l, was demonstrating significant decline. A busy rebbetzin and bubbie, my mother was starting to show signs of confusion. My siblings and I went to JFCS together and met with a counselor who talked with us about dementia, how we could take care of our mom as well as ourselves, and our relationship with both of our parents.

Our visit to JFCS made a profound difference in how we planned for care, and how we talked with each other about it. I was so glad that I could turn to JFCS for advice on aging parents in a Jewish community context. It was this experience that inspired me to serve as a Board member.

There always has been a strong connection between Neveh Shalom and JFCS. Currently, JFCS Board members who also are Neveh Shalom congregants include **Lee Cordova, Justin Zellinger, Kathy Chusid, Eric Kodesch, Erika Meyer**, and me. JFCS's Advisory Committee members include **Carolyn** and **Gary Weinstein** and **Corinne Bacharach Spiegel**; the agency's staff includes **Susan Greenberg** and **Janet Menashe**; two of its contractors are **Jenn Director Knudsen** and **Duncan Gilman. Rich Meyer**, a.k.a. The Challahman, has provided fresh *challot* every Friday to JFCS's clients, includ-

ing Holocaust survivors and those with disabilities.

This leadership, both volunteer and professional, is infusing new energy into the organization. The four primary programs of JFCS provide support for Holocaust survivors; mental-health assistance for people of all ages; inclusion for adults with disabilities and for parents whose children have disabilities, and financial assistance for those experiencing a rough patch.

"Perhaps unsurprisingly, we're witnessing a heightened level of issues related to mental health since the onset of Covid-19," Missy Fry, a JFCS counselor, said. "We know that providing a space for people with similar shared experiences can foster a sense of community, build new connections, and provide validation and emotional support."

One of Missy's clients with a connection to Neveh Shalom who requested anonymity shared, "I came into knowledge of the recent, online Community Connection group from my involvement with TIKVAH, a JFCS social group for people with disabilities."

This individual continued, "At first I was hesitant to join in, but then one week I joined in just to see what was being discussed and found it very engaging. Through the group I have been able to connect with others, and it's been comforting to know that I'm not alone in having certain feelings."

New JFCS Board member Zellinger said, "I appreciate that JFCS is supporting the needs of the community and always looking for ways to serve more people.



The need for mental health services is only growing, and I am proud to help the agency grow and meet those needs."

Erika Meyer, also new to the JFCS Board, joined because, "JFCS does such important work for people in our community," she said. "As a pediatrician, the programs for people with disabilities, emergency services, and counseling really resonated with me. It's a privilege to be a part of it."

Director Knudsen noted JFCS just completed its three-year strategic plan, implementing a long list of important programming goals, such as the agency's laser focus on children's mental-health needs and care, as well as partnerships with synagogues' education programs – ALIYAH among them – to ensure inclusion and accessibility for all children seeking a Jewish education.

Director Knudsen said, "JFCS was there when the Emlen/Stampfer family needed it most, and today we are here to meet the needs of more families than ever before."