

Agency Column: JFCS

Shining a spotlight on mental health

The Jewish Review has offered the 18 organizations that receive allocations from the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland the opportunity to write a column during the coming year. The following column is from Jewish Family & Child Service.

BY RUTH SCOTT

As the pandemic continues, so does the challenge of prolonged social isolation.

At the beginning of Covid, Jewish Family & Child Service's Counseling program introduced a weekly group called Community Connections. Conducted via Zoom with very experienced licensed clinical social workers – Douglass Ruth and Missy Fry, with input from Caitlin DeBoer – the group continues to meet the needs of so many throughout Portland's Jewish and greater communities.

What made it so successful?

The answer is benefits such as very low boundaries for attendance, engaging with others during each guided hour and learning how to support peers while receiving support for oneself.

This month, JFCS introduces Mental Health Spotlight. It is an addition to JFCS' expanding Counseling offerings.

It shines a light on areas where all people – children through older adults, including members of our community with a self-identified disability – struggle and can seek help. Spotlight sessions will highlight, for instance, social skills and navigating group dynamics, and resiliency against loneliness and isolation. Some of our new workshop-style groups also are curated for those wanting to learn how to help their friends and loved ones through challenging times.

Mental Health Spotlight provides group sessions and workshop options in the style of both Community Connections and our recent debut and very popular grief-processing group, Walking Beside You. That 12-person group quickly filled and will be offered again this spring. You can read about the group on page 8 of the [Sept. 15, 2021, Jewish Review](#).

Also well-attended since the pandemic began is Coming Together, a bi-weekly online support group for parents of adults and children with disabilities; the group is facilitated by Shayna Sigman, CSWA.

I believe many of us can agree that the social-interaction muscle has atrophied in our collective experience of social isolation. By contrast, our Spotlight group sessions inherently exercise social muscles.

JFCS' new Mental Health Spotlight differs from one-on-one therapy sessions in a few key ways. For example, our practitioners do not diagnose in this format, nor do the sessions mean one has to "out" themselves with their personal struggle. Rather, you can attend simply to be in communi-



Ruth Scott has been JFCS Executive Director since August 2020, after more than two years as interim executive director. Ruth came to JFCS from Lift Urban Portland, where she stabilized and nearly doubled its revenue stream, and before that from the Oregon Energy Fund (formerly HEAT Oregon), where she helped assess and restructure the organization.

ty, dabble to see if this format works for you and gain access to JFCS' robust resources list, all in a safe online space.

In keeping with JFCS' focus on inclusion, Mental Health Spotlight also provides access to a therapist on a sliding scale, as well as resources one may need outside JFCS' areas of expertise.

JFCS is engaged with B'nai B'rith Camp about shining a spotlight specifically on children and their increased mental health needs during the pandemic. Both organizations have seen an increase in anxiety and a need to support children in processing these changing times.

In partnership with the Eastside Jewish Commons, JFCS is planning a Mental Health Spotlight hybrid option for an in-person experience with separate engagement opportunities for children.

But until the time comes where society opens up a little more, I invite our community to log in and lean on Mental Health Spotlight sessions and workshops to acquaint – or reacquaint – yourself with Jewish Family & Child Service by visiting [jfcc-portland.org](#).

Our expanded mental health services may do wonders for your own mental health or for that of your loved ones. May 2022 bring you, Portland's Jewish community, the best of physical and mental health.

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