

JFCS adds child therapist to build up the agency's "C"

BY JENN DIRECTOR KNUDSEN

The "C" in JFCS is now firmly in place. Jewish Family & Child Service has welcomed a full-time child and family therapist to its counseling team.

"Laura's position represents the fulfillment of one of JFCS' main goals from our strategic planning process that began in 2019," says board president Larry Holzman. "A child and family therapist provides a crucial tool for JFCS that



Laura Cohen

enables us to provide critical services to an underserved population – especially during and after the pandemic."

Originally from Chicago, Laura Cohen, LCSW, ASCW, comes to JFCS with more than 30 years' clinical and administrative experience, including at a Jewish day school in Houston, Jewish Family Services in Cincinnati and Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare here in Portland.

"My goal at JFCS is to help kids and their families enhance their natural strengths and address those barriers that pop up along the journey toward individual and family health and well-being," Laura says.

She adds her work always will have a "Jewish bent" to it. "My own specific and unique strength is that I approach this work through a Jewish lens."

Behavioral Health Social Worker Missy Fry, LCSW, CAGCS, says of her new colleague, "Laura comes to us with an extensive clinical background, as well as a passion around reconnecting to her Jewish roots through this important work with the community."

Laura's love of social work began in high school, when she landed a summer internship caring for older adults in a Jewish retirement home. College at Washington University in St. Louis followed; there, she double majored in psychology with a focus on gerontology and in Jewish studies. Soon after, she worked with Jewish older adults as a case manager.

After graduate school at Loyola University of Chicago in 1991, she had her first opportunity to work with chil-

dren. In Israel, while her first husband attended rabbinical school, Laura, a Hebrew speaker, worked with high-needs children ages 6 to 10.

She met with them once a week, talking with and listening to them, playing games, sharing ice cream treats. "It filled a need for me, and I hope it did for them, too," Laura says.

At Cincinnati's JFS in the mid-1990s, Laura engaged in workshops for parents in the agency's childhood development center. "This gave me a taste for Jewish parenting" through a social worker's lens, she says.

All told, over Laura's three decades of service to clients' well-being, she has worked with a wide variety of communities, such as Holocaust survivors living with trauma, patients on dialysis awaiting kidney transplants, formerly incarcerated youth and adults, and people living paycheck to paycheck.

"I always return to children and families," she says, citing multisystemic therapy (MST) as a key reason and as a methodology she'll lean on at JFCS.

"Kids live in a social ecology of interconnected systems," explains Laura, herself the parent of two adult children. "My practice tends to involve all of the relevant systems that influence, impact and help change a young person's problematic behavior – with the child in the center and concentric circles of systems around them – family, peers, neighbors, school, community."

In this "very straightforward process of a systems-oriented approach," Laura says, there is no blame, just recognition. "This provides for faster behavior change."

JFCS clinical director Douglass Ruth, LCSW, CCTP, also practices MST.

"Adding Laura to JFCS' clinical staff allows us to provide greater support to the children and families in the Portland Jewish and greater communities," Douglass says. "It is terrific for staff and for our clients that we now have a clinician who brings specific expertise and who has roots in the community."

Laura's child and family expertise rounds out JFCS' counseling program, which includes Douglass; Missy; Caitlin DeBoer, LCSW; Shayna Sigman, CSW, disability support services manager; and consultant Dinah Gilburd, LCSW.

To connect with Laura or to schedule an appointment, email lcohen@jfcs-portland.org.



Leslie Petcher, Rabbi Gary Ezra Oren and Linda Harrison check out the new Sacred Grounds coffee cart at Shaarie Torah

Shaarie Torah rolls out Shabbat coffee cart

"WWRD: What Would Rashi Drink?" Attendees of Congregation Shaarie Torah can now ponder this question upon entering for Shabbat morning services.

Situated outside the sanctuary, the Sacred Grounds coffee cart offers complimentary self-serve coffee and tea every Saturday morning. People are encouraged to help themselves to a hot drink at any time throughout the service.

When Rabbi Gary Ezra Oren arrived at Shaarie Torah in July 2021, one of the first things he said was, "We need a coffee cart on Shabbat – people can use that extra bit of energy to perk up their davening." He'd experienced this concept at other congregations, so Rabbi Oren wanted to bring the practice to CST. He wasted no time ordering the cart and making arrangements with a community member to feature specialty blends of coffee from local purveyor Ava Roasteria.

It took many more months of sampling mug styles, but he finally settled on branded ceramic mugs complete with tight-fitting lids to cut down on spillage. Covid restrictions prevented introduction of the cart until mid-March, allowing extra time to fully outfit the various shelves with everything needed to enjoy a warming beverage while warming up spiritually.

Sacred Grounds will be parked in the upper foyer weekly during Shabbat and holiday services, with the exception of Yom Kippur, of course.