



NEWS UPDATE

www.jfsworcester.org

Summer 2010

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JFS Programs

Child, Couples and Family
Counseling

Elder Guardianship/
Conservatorship

Family Mediation

Adoption

Children Cope with Divorce
Parent Education Seminars

Guardian ad Litem

The CLUB

The Baby Food Club

Executive Director's Message

For Richer or Poorer

What I love about my job is that I'm constantly confronted with challenges in new areas that I have to master. What frustrates me is that these challenges keep presenting themselves.



Stephen Slaten, Ph.D.

For instance, I recently started giving a workshop For Richer or Poorer: Family Coping with Economic Stress, based on my experience meeting with many people seeking jobs and financial help due to the economy. They weren't people seeking counseling, although calls to JFS for mental health treatment have increased by 30% over the past year. I am the gatekeeper to JFS's *Tzedakah* Fund, which provides emergency financial help for those in need of rent money, a car payment and the like.

The situation is more dire than in the past, with many facing possible foreclosure or behind on their rent. The people I help are always deeply grateful, but these households continue to face shortfalls from month to month. Some have already tapped out their savings and have run up additional debt borrowing on credit cards and home equity until they owe more than they can handle.

I'm a therapist by trade; thus I try to help people find solutions to their problems — disagreements in parenting, sexual problems, dealing with in-laws, etc. Still, in decades past, I might have asked one of the many Jewish business owners if they could give someone a job. Or I might know the people who would rent out an extra room to a stranger or a family in need.

Even though money is one of the most common and highly charged sources of conflict in families, therapists don't tend to talk with clients about their financial difficulties. It's as if financial matters were outside our professional expertise — similar to medical or legal advice.

Many of the people asking for help previously enjoyed a degree of financial security. As a community, American Jews largely have been well educated and relatively well off.

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True Stories from JFS

Panic No More

Chris (not his real name) first met Amy Colangelo, LICSW, last spring. Chris is 21 and a recent graduate of Clark University, Worcester, where he earned a degree in biology. Amy, an experienced and highly skilled member of the counseling staff at JFS,



specializes in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and other anxiety ailments.

For much of his life, Chris has struggled with panic attacks, a seemingly very rational feeling of terror and helplessness in certain situations. In childhood, it was sleep-overs and other unfamiliar situations.

As a teen he started to fear driving at night, and in college it grew into fear of daylight driving as well.

"My heart races, I'm skittish and dizzy, the tips of my fingers tingle, and I get a rush of adrenaline," Chris says.

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How We Help

Report on Programs and Services
May 2010

Child and Family Counseling

Due to the stress of the recession, both requests for our counseling services and the number of cases seen have increased by 30%. Our therapists treated close to 1,000 cases each year, of which 55% are child- and family-related problems.

In response to an outcome/satisfaction survey given to all clients at the end of treatment:

- 98% report improved sense of well-being.
- 95% report improved functioning
- 96% report improvement in the problem that brought them to treatment.
- 97% report they are very satisfied or satisfied with the services at JFS, 3% were mixed and none were dissatisfied.
- 98% said they would contact JFS if another problem occurred.

At the 29th annual Jacobson Program, in October 2009, Ron Taffel, Ph.D., presented to a full house at the Beechwood Inn on "Getting Through to 21st Century Teens and Parents."

Beth Greenberg, Ph.D., has provided ongoing mental health consultation to Worcester Head Start through a contract with Together for Kids.

Dave Hollis, LICSW, has been appointed by the Worcester Probate and Family Court as a Parent Coordinator and will conduct Guardian ad Litem evaluations on child custody-related matters.

Children Cope With Divorce

Two-hundred-fifty people attended the court-mandated Children Cope with Divorce parent education program. These attendees represent a combined over 500 children who do not attend but are also the beneficiaries of the program.

Ninety-five percent of the participants reported in an anonymous survey that the information they learned will help them better understand their children.

Mediation

Twelve families were seen in divorce mediation.

Adoption

JFS worked with 10 families involved with various stages of the adoption process. This includes home studies, placements and

post-placement evaluations. Requests for adoption have increased since January 1, 2010, after declining due to the recession. We are involved with more domestic newborn placements. The availability of children through international adoption has changed due to regulations and international relations. Recently, families have been pursuing adoptions from Poland, Taiwan, Ghana and the Philippines.

Elder Guardianship

JFS serves as guardian or conservator at any given time for 90 to 100 elders, who are no longer competent to make decisions on their own behalf. We serve more than 130 elders during the course of a year.

Thirty-five of these elders were referred by elder protective services due to abuse, neglect and/or financial exploitation.

Once appointed, we typically serve as guardian until the elder dies, so we deal with end-of-life decisions on their behalf. Over 30 elders are referred to the program, and an approximately equal number pass away each year.

At the time of appointment as guardian, 87% of the elders had difficulty accessing medical treatment, 73% experienced poor self-care, 60% were unable to manage their financial affairs and/or were financially exploited, 40% were considered neglected, 27% experienced physical abuse, 13% exhibited violent or threatening behavior, and 33% had some form of legal risk.

Within six months of our appointment, 100% of the elders live in a safe environment, are medically more stable and financially more secure.

The majority of these elders are indigent, with less than \$1,000 of total assets; therefore the agency writes off 75% of the fees charged to the elders. The program is supported by funding from the Commonwealth, the Older Americans Act, United Way and the Mass Bar Foundation.

The CLUB, led by Alan Harris, provided social activities for 10 developmentally disabled adults.

Tzedakah Fund and Connections of Central Mass.

JFS provides limited financial assistance for eligible Jewish families through the *Tzedakah* Fund. The recession has led to a fourfold increase in the number of families requesting help with their expenses.

JFS also has partnered with area synagogues on Connections of Central Mass to help those affected by the recession. More than 80 people attended Success Teams, workshops and/or were directed to resources in the community.

The Fund also provides food coupons from area grocery stores for low-income families and individuals.

News Flash

JFS Worcester will begin offering services in Westborough in the fall through a partnership with the new Boroughs JCC as part of their effort to bring a variety of educational, cultural and social services to their area. www.boroughsjcc.org





Circles Completed

A JFS adoption brings fulfillment and closure to two families

We all face challenges in life, and the psychologists and counselors at JFS Worcester see their share of families and individuals in difficult and sometimes tragic situations. But at least one JFS specialty – adoption services – by its very nature works to bring literally a “bundle of joy” into the lives of adopting families and complete the circle of life important to so many of us.

For Laurie and Tom Lenox (not their real names), this describes their interaction with JFS to a T. Today they think of Simon, their adopted 20-month old, as a blessing and the completion of their long-sought circle.

For more than two years, the couple had been considering adoption following more years of unsuccessful fertility treatments. When they first started down the path to adoption, they considered adopting a child from abroad. Ethiopia was one country they seriously looked at.

“We didn’t care whether a child we’d adopt looked like either of us,” Laurie recalls. “We knew children in that part of the world are very needy, and if we could help just one by mak-

ing him or her part of our family, we’d be doing a good thing.”

For Laurie and Tom, however, the cost of international adoption was prohibitive, and ironically, as it’s turned out, Simon resembles Tom remarkably in complexion and other attributes.

Laurie is an OBGYN nurse at a local hospital. Once the couple settled on pursuing a domestic adoption, Laurie learned of an expecting young woman, Pam, whose circumstances made adoption the only acceptable option. Like Laurie and Tom, the birth mother – determined to bear her child but unable to raise him – had herself expressed to her family a desire to complete a circle by placing her child for adoption at birth.

So here was an opportunity for two families to bring resolution to the needs of a birth mother, and to the hopes and dreams so long a part of Laurie and Tom’s marriage. After the families came together for the delicate discussions of a potential adoption, Laurie and Tom arranged with JFS to handle the process. And from their very first visit with JFS’s Adoptions Services Director, Janet Eckler, things have been smooth sailing.

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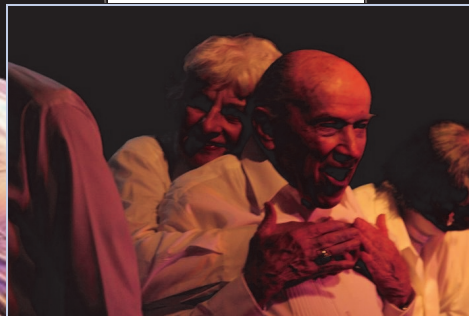
Triumphant Return Engagement!

Their remarkable talent, their wit, and their spirit thrilled and moved us.

Join us again for the glorious Worcester return appearance of the globe-trotting Young@Heart Chorus!

Spring 2011.
Watch for details!

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Days in Their Lives

JFS serves elders every day – often in simple ways that make a big difference

By Stephanie Dujnic, LSW



By its very nature, the work we do at JFS as geriatric care givers is not so much one of healing, but more often that of helping clients find contentment or at least some comfort as they age. I realize that perhaps there are no perfect endings, and the people I help have good days and bad like everyone else. But I am confident my efforts do make a difference in making the lives of my clients a little bit better.

Here are examples of my interaction with a few of these wonderful people.

Robert

I remember the first day I met Robert, and having read through the previous case manager’s notes, I expected a man who did not speak and possibly could not understand me. So I was taken completely by surprise when I said “hello” and he said “hello” right back. Since then we have had many conversations, about music, movies and television.

At one point he even told stories of being in World War II and chasing after the “Desert Fox.” I have made many purchases for Robert, including music and movies he expressed interest in during those conversations. He spends much of his time in bed due to his medical condition, so simply being able to watch something other than daytime television or listen to music he liked in his 20s or 40s has made a big difference for him.

Penny

Penny had been through World War II; consequently today she often feels paranoid and upset. Shortly after I started visiting with her at her nursing home, however, she was moved to a quieter floor. This alone seemed to help improve her mood. But during visits often she would still make remarks that suggested some mistrust and depression.

Then I learned that Penny’s hearing is almost nonexistent but that she can

What is Guardianship?

Guardianship for elders involves the interface of medical, legal, financial and social services matters. JFS is appointed by the Probate and Family Court of Massachusetts as guardian of last resort for vulnerable elders who are no longer competent to make their own decisions. The cognitive deficits of these individuals are determined to be a barrier to accessing appropriate healthcare and living situations, and to taking care of their own needs.

As legal guardian, JFS is responsible for making decisions on the elder’s behalf, based on what the elder would have done were he/she competent, or in the best interest of the elder.

To learn more, please visit www.jfsworcester.org/elder/guardianship.asp.

read very well. She is resistant to hearing aids, but someone recommended writing down messages instead of speaking to her. Our first conversation using this approach was an amazing experience! Penny would look at me with clarity and speak, and when she did become upset, she could read, understand and respond to my words of comfort. This simple change has caused much of her paranoia to clear, and at times she seems happier and more pleasant.

Penny still has bad days, when she tells me she’s not happy to be growing old and living in a nursing home. But when you ask how she is doing, she’ll state

that she is good or doing fine, a response very different from before.

Fred

JFS had been selected to serve as conservator of Fred, who was having problems with his finances. In the past he had been too kind to “friends,” and money was spent and gone without ever having been accounted for.

When we met, the bank was on the verge of foreclosing on his house and car. His bills were numerous, with many stamped “Past Due” and “Final Notice” in bold red ink. He had no idea how bad his finances were. Fred is a simple man who assumed that the money coming to him should be more than enough. Sadly, it wasn’t. With help from our JFS guardianship bookkeeper, Renee Harrison, we developed a budget, providing Fred a weekly allowance and getting his bills paid.

It’s still a struggle to keep up with his bills on his limited income, but we are making progress. Seeing Fred able to stay in his house and resume a financially limited but regular life has made the work of managing his finances worth the effort. Fred may not always understand what his money is being

spent on or where it is all going, but today he realizes he needs help, and we are helping.

Lenny

Leonard was one of the hardest cases I’ve dealt with as a member of the JFS staff. Lenny had multiple sclerosis (MS), and from the beginning we were not sure he needed a guardian. Someone with MS is not necessarily incompetent, although they may speak more slowly or have slurred speech. Lenny would speak of his good friends and his cat, Smokey. We made sure that Lenny

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Days in Their Lives

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had representation when the temporary Court decree of guardianship was about to expire, meaning he'd be leaving the rehab facility and returning home.

During our role as his temporary guardian, Lenny made many trips back and forth to the hospital. It seemed he would just recover from one thing when another problem would surface. His medication would be adjusted, and he'd do well for a while, then suddenly he'd decline. Just before the Court date to decide whether he would be going home, he found himself battling

multiple bouts of pneumonia. He was no longer able to swallow correctly and he couldn't eat without risking aspiration.

At times he would plead, "Keep me alive, I want to live." My team was behind me, with the doctors explaining Lenny's declining condition and the risks of any decision. In the end we gave consent for a feeding tube, a decision that was made with great consideration, the doctor's backing, and Lenny stating this is what he would want, "even if I can't drink ginger ale anymore." Sadly, within a week of the feeding tube being placed, Lenny passed. A beautiful ceremony was held for him, and Smokey went to live with a family friend, a

heartrending end to the ups and downs of this gentle man.

As you can see, each of my clients is a unique person, medically, socially, mentally and emotionally, but I'm confident they all benefit from my efforts. Decisions are made — financial, personal and medical — all with care and consideration for what this person would want before he or she became incapacitated. At times, these are painful decisions for all concerned. But most importantly, we are looking out for them when no one else can or will, and this can have an enormous impact on their often fragile lives.



For Richer or Poorer

Continued from page 1

These people feel embarrassed about having to ask for money. Stress permeates the family. I learned that nearly 40% of American families have experienced job loss, reduction in hours, or a pay cut since the recession started in 2008. Some 47% of those unemployed have been out of work for more than half a year, and the longer they go the harder it is to find work. The recent news of the economy creating 100,000 new jobs is cause for optimism, but the millions unemployed or underemployed still have a long road ahead.

Chronic stress leads to irritability and anger, lack of motivation, fatigue and physical symptoms such as headaches or indigestion. About 40% of all Americans report these symptoms, according to findings of the annual American Psychological Association (APA) Stress in America survey. When stressed, some people resort to counterproductive attempts to cope, such as drinking or eating more, or withdrawing.

Withdrawal is particularly common for the many people who are feeling shame, wondering what they did to deserve this, and what's wrong with them that they cannot find work. Withdrawal interferes with both finding work and effectively coping with stress.

Statistics show that most people find jobs by networking and not through newspaper or online job boards such as Monster.com. Many jobs are not even posted. It's not that your friends or neighbors will give you a job; it's that they know someone who is hiring. Knowing someone in common is an advantage that distinguishes you from other applicants. To some people networking comes easy, but for those on the shy side, it requires effort and practice.

People who withdraw are more lonely, which has to do with feeling alone even if in the company of others. It's a hunger for meaningful connection, and is linked to a host of medical problems, such as depression, high blood pressure and decreased immunity.

In contrast, having a strong social network is the best predictor of happiness, more so than having money. Too often we spend money just to acquire things, but money increases happiness best when we spend it on experiences and other people. Having supportive, caring relationships is also the most important factor in resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity. Yet our culture perpetrates the myth of individualism and self-reliance in the face of adversity...John Wayne, Rambo, Jack Bauer and the like.

In fact, people survive by helping each other through alliances. I discovered I am most helpful to people not through my knowledge of psychological interventions but by putting my Jewish values into practice.

Over time, Jews have survived numerous instances of adversity and persecution through social connection and mutual help, with both fellow Jews and non-Jews. We are taught to pray together and are directed to help those who are genuinely less fortunate. According to Maimonides, the highest form of *Tzedakah* is not the gift of money, but giving someone an opportunity, helping them to become self-sufficient. So when I cannot offer help through money or a job, I focus people on their social connections and building family and community ties. This perspective guides all our work at JFS.

Stephen Slaten, Ph.D.
Executive Director





Panic No More

Continued from Page 1

“Cold sweats cover my skin, my breathing is short, and I search desperately for a safe escape. Worst of all, I fear hyperventilating and passing out.”

During a panic attack, victims typically have unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear and impending catastrophe. The event can last for several minutes and can be one of the most distressing conditions a person can experience. Though the perceived danger is not real, the terror is. Symptoms can closely mimic those of a heart attack. Typically, most people who have one attack will have others.

These attacks are a serious health problem in the U.S. At least 1.7% of adult Americans, or about 3 million people, will have panic attacks at some time in their lives. Scientists don't know exactly why this happens or why some people are more susceptible to the problem than others.

“When my symptoms first started,” Chris recalls, “and when I could force myself to get behind the wheel, I'd think I was going mad and losing control, and I might faint or even die.”

Growing Challenges

As a youngster, like many others in his situation, Chris's attacks left him confused. He concealed his problem out of embarrassment and grappled with a sense of alienation.

“When I was 20 I went into therapy and started on medication,” Chris recalls. “That seemed to help for a while, but the stress of college added to my anxiety. Any relief I found was short-lived.”

In his senior year at Clark, Chris was referred to Amy by Mass Behavioral Health in Worcester. Almost immediately after he began counseling with her, the tools and the techniques she brought to the table reinforced many of the things he'd been working on before.

“Amy's clinical understanding of my condition and her empathy gave me a new foundation for trying to deal with all this,” he says. “Finally, after so many years of struggle, I started feeling not just better, but actually good.”

“From our first meeting,” the JFS counselor recalls, “it was clear Chris was highly motivated and had developed,



Amy Colangelo, LICSW

by this stage of his life, a good understanding of the cognitive aspects of his condition. He's been a model client in every way.”

For most of us the “rational” thing to do is avoid what we fear, which tends to make the problem worse. But central to the Chris's therapy is a technique called exposure. “Think of exposure therapy as the ‘jump in the deep end’ approach,” Amy says, “where you force yourself to be in challenging, terror-inducing situations, to pretty much face the fear head-on.”

For Chris, this means getting behind the wheel and putting up with the anxiety of driving for as long as possible, pulling



over for a time, and repeating this again and again, until he becomes less and less sensitive to the situation. Over time, the panic subsides as he comes to realize that the feared, anticipated outcome does not occur.

A More Productive, Fulfilling Life

Panic attacks can rear their heads for a lifetime. But Chris continues to work on his challenges and, with Amy's ongoing help, is making great strides.

Today medication remains part of Chris's treatment, but he and Amy hope someday he will be able to eliminate that as well.

“This is hard work,” he admits, “but I'm confident the more I work at beating my fears, the more control I'll have over this thing.”

As Chris joins the ranks recent college grads entering today's challenging job market, he needs to shift his personal life into *Drive*.

Overcoming his fear behind the wheel, in whose grasp he once felt helpless, is putting Chris in the fast lane to a more productive, fulfilling life.





Circles Completed

Continued from page 3

As Laurie puts it, "Everyone at JFS has been awesome! Of course Janet was our primary contact, and I can't say enough about her calm, competent style. From the office staff to Dr. [Steve] Slaten, who was directly involved, I can't imagine a more ideal experience under the circumstances."

Bonding from Birth

Unlike most adoptions, the events leading to this one found Laurie and Tom literally at Simon's birth. Almost immediately, the couple took custody of the infant, enabling the vital process of bonding between mother, in this case Laurie, and child.

"Simon knows only Tom and me as his parents," she says. "He is a gift to us, and our gift is knowing we were able to help Pam find some closure to her very difficult challenge."

As the adoption proceeded, both Janet and Dr. Slaten, Executive Director of JFS, became deeply involved. The two shared the exhaustive tasks required of a licensed adoption agency. Janet undertook the required home study of Laurie and Tom's household, meeting with them over the course of several months. There they explored the reasons the couple wished to adopt and helped prepare them for all of the changes adoption would bring to their lives.

Meanwhile, Dr. Slaten interacted with Pam's family and handled other parts of the process.

"Steve met with Pam and her family several times leading up to Simon's birth," Janet recalls, "helping smooth the adoption, which included tactfully gauging Pam's commit-

ment to giving up the child. Fortunately for everyone, the separation went without any complications."

JFS's adoption services seek to benefit all participants in the adoption arena: children, birth parents, adoptive parents and even adult adoptees interested in learning more about their birth parent(s). JFS is licensed as an adoption agency by the

State of Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.

As with all JFS adoptions, Laurie and Tom have stayed in touch with Janet since taking Simon home. "We share photos of Simon with Janet as he grows," says Laurie. "She's assured us she'll be there if we hit any bumps in the road. This is so comforting."

"Adoption is a lifelong process," Janet says, "and JFS will continue to be available to provide services to Laurie and Tom for as long as necessary. I couldn't be more pleased with the outcome of this adoption."

Laurie concurs. "Every day with Simon brings Tom and me overwhelming joy. Yes, there have been the usual sleepless nights tending to an infant. But this only gives us another chance to be with him. We know we helped Pam out of a heart-wrenching ordeal, and

completing the adoption through Janet, Dr. Slaten and everyone else at JFS had made it that much more gratifying. For everyone involved, I believe, this experience has completed the circle of life."



Janet Eckler, LCSW

SECURE ONLINE GIVING TO JFS

Nonprofits everywhere are experiencing financial challenges unlike any in recent memory. As JFS Worcester continues to help those in need without regard to race, religion or the ability to pay, your generous donations are more important than ever. You can contribute to JFS through our secure, easy-to-use online giving portal. Please go to www.jfsworcester.org and click on "Donate" at the top of the page. Or contact us by email, postal mail or phone.

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Thank you!



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The 32nd Annual Irving W. Jacobson Program

Sponsored by JFS Worcester
October 22, 2010 / Beechwood Hotel
363 Plantation Street Worcester MA 01605

**When Professional Caregivers Need Care:
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When renowned psychologist David Treadway was suddenly hospitalized with advanced cancer and given less than 25% chance of survival, he convinced his physician-wife and two sons to write a book with him on their experiences together. Based on their newly published book, *Home Before Dark: A Family's Portrait of Cancer and Healing*, Dr. Treadway and his family will share their very personal experiences on confronting sudden, extremely advanced cancer.

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