

# Home



## Jewish Family & Children's Service of Greater Boston – Helping in a Crisis

"WE ARE RESPONDING IMMEDIATELY, PROVIDING SERVICES FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY THE EVENTS OF 9/11."

September 11, 2001 is a day this country will never forget. In the aftermath of the initial shock, thousands of families were forced to face the unthinkable – a loved one had perished. Families coped in scores of different ways, turning to faith communities, friends and loved ones for support. At Jewish Family & Children's Service of Greater Boston we were, and are, continuing to help in a number of ways.

We are proud of the rapid response we were able to provide American Airlines in the first hours of the World Trade Center crashes. Within one hour of the first call from American Airlines, JF&CS was able to offer families Visiting Moms and Visiting Dads programs through the Center for Early Relationship Support. We were able to immediately provide counselors through our Jewish Healing Connections program, volunteers through Volunteer Services and counselors trained in bereavement.

Specifically, for the elderly relative of a victim – we began, and continue to provide home care and geriatric mental health. This elderly individual was also visited by one of our volunteers during the Rosh Hashanah holidays so she would not be alone.

A father left with two young children is receiving assistance from our Center for Early Relationship Support. We have also given this father the names of recommended child psychiatrists who specialize in working with young children.

We are providing guidance, resources and referrals to synagogues looking for assistance in helping their congregants. For those unaffiliated, our staff Rabbi and the staff of Jewish Healing Connections are continuously available for counseling and spiritual support.

We are continuing to get calls from families affected by the events of 9/11. We are responding immediately, providing the services they need for their children, elderly relatives or other family members and friends.

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inspire



## Welcome

Dear Friends:

Since our last issue life has changed dramatically for all of us. Now more than ever, families are turning to Jewish Family and Children's Service for help in coping with the major losses suffered in the September 11 terrorist attacks.

We of course, continue our work in other areas. Unfortunately, domestic violence is a major problem in this country. Abuse of women and children knows no ethnic, social or economic boundaries. You will read, in these pages, about two women who were helped by Kol Isha, our domestic violence program, and also meet an individual who supports this program.

As we have reported, we have been serving individuals and families in Massachusetts since 1864. You will have the chance to meet a remarkable woman, now 70, who has relied on us since she was five.

Finally, you will meet a family invested in the well being of the older generation. They are committed to our senior service programs, and assisting families caring for older adults.

As always you can see the diverse nature of what we do. Whether it is immediate care responding to a crisis, or ongoing counseling and intervention, JF&CS is available to any family or individual in need.

Sincerely,

Stephen D. Lebovitz  
President

Seymour J. Friedland, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

## A Life with JF&CS

g rateful for almost a lifetime of assistance from JF&CS, seventy year old Rachel Cooper sits in her cozy apartment telling a story that is sad, happy and fascinating all at once. Hers is a story of new immigrants, a family plagued by mental illness, a view of Boston in the early and mid part of the 20th century, and truly a story of triumph.

Rachel Cooper was the daughter of immigrants who grew up in the city of Boston. The youngest of three sisters, the family was poor. Her older sisters both suffered from mental illness and lived in what Cooper describes "as your typical, old-fashioned awful hospital." Her ethnic Boston West End neighborhood of the 1930s was full of newly arrived and first-generation Jewish families. "We all lived together," says Cooper, "and Jewish Family Services seemed to be available to all of us. My sisters' doctor told my mother that I should be watched for signs of mental illness as I grew older, and recommended she get in contact with Jewish Family Services – JFS – (the name was changed later to Jewish Family & Children's Service JFCS)). The social worker at JFS visited our home, made sure I went to school, made sure I had clothes, and ultimately hooked me up to a summer camp."

"I was five years old the first time I went away to Camp Kingswood, the JFS camp," says Cooper. "I went every summer until I turned thirteen. Jewish Family Services paid for everything. Other children with whom I attended school also went, and we had a great time. We felt free, away from the issues at home, and well taken care of by the JFS social workers." At thirteen, Cooper began to have her emotional ups and downs as her sisters had at that age, but this time Cooper says, JFS was there to work in conjunction with Beth Israel Hospital to make sure she got the appropriate care and help.

At 19 Rachel Cooper married a man fifteen years her senior, and began a happy married life. They lived in Boston, and Rachel went to work. She worked in a law firm, as a bookkeeper, for a travel agency and as an insurance adjuster. In 1973 her husband became ill with cancer and died. Again, says Cooper, JFCS was there for her. "I needed home care to help me take care of my husband, and I needed counseling because I was becoming so depressed. When my husband died, I wanted to go with him. The counselors at JFCS were key in arranging for the mental health services I needed to help me get through the dark days that followed my husband's death."

"THE COUNSELORS AT JFCS WERE KEY IN ARRANGING FOR THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES I NEEDED TO HELP ME GET THROUGH THE DARK DAYS THAT FOLLOWED MY HUSBAND'S DEATH."



Rachel Cooper

Three years later, Cooper went back to school. She had graduated from high school in 1948, and hadn't cracked the books for almost thirty years. "I started at Massasoit College. I worked with Amy, a JFCS social worker who suggested I also use the services of Jewish Vocational Services to help me find a job. After finishing Massasoit in 1982, I went to Bridgewater State College and got a BA in psychology. I got my masters in psychology from Northeastern University in 1992. For so many years social workers and counselors had always been there for me as I struggled with mental illness or the effects mental illness had on my family. Now, with my education, I wanted to give back." For a while Cooper worked at Taunton State Hospital, but then became physically disabled, and was forced to retire.

"My life has been greatly affected by my own mental illness as well as the severe mental illness my sisters suffered. It can be such a stigma. But, thanks to Jewish Family Services I had a chance, and they helped me realize that mental illness was in fact an illness, and that people can live with mental illness and do not have to be shut away."

"It is hard to imagine that one organization could have such an effect on my life," says Cooper. "However, I'm not sure what I would have done throughout the various stages of my life if it hadn't been for Jewish Family & Children's Service. They really have been there when I needed them."

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## Happily Ever After — Myth or Reality

*\*The names and situations in the story have been altered to protect the identity of the women interviewed*

“and, they lived happily ever after.” Every fairy tale ends the same. We all know the stories. The sweet young thing meets the handsome prince, loses the handsome prince, then they re-unite, get married and live together in love, peace and harmony.

For Emily\* and Natalie\* the reality was a tale of abuse and horror. Believing in the concept of Shalom Bayit (peace in the home), they entered their marriages never expecting the years of abuse they endured, and the trauma it caused their children.

Emily, the mother of two children, never expected her husband; a doctor who took care of so many, to emotionally and physically hurt her. “I supported my husband’s career, making sure his needs always came first,” says Emily. I thought that abuse – both verbal and physical – could not happen in a Jewish home. I thought I must have been doing something wrong – I must be the only woman suffering this abuse so I must be causing the problems. I would keep the house perfect; have dinner on the table immediately. I was the perfect wife! Fairly early on my mother realized something was going on, but didn’t want to get involved. She figured I was financially stable, and completely believed that Jewish men make good husbands and providers.

Emily says that one day after dropping one of her children off at school, she saw a very small ad in the school paper. The ad gave a number to call if you were a Jewish woman living in an abusive situation. “I realized I might not be alone. I thought if there is an ad specifically geared to Jewish women in abusive relationships, then others must be in this situation. I called the number.”

Emily began therapy with a domestic violence specialist, and began to understand that the abuse was not her fault. As she gained strength, her husband realized that he was losing his control over her. In an attempt to isolate her, he announced that he would no longer pay for her therapy. The therapist, who is a member of the Jewish Domestic Violence Coalition of Greater Boston, was able to refer Emily for free services to Kol Isha, the Jewish Family & Children’s Service domestic violence program.

“I got restraining orders to keep my husband away, and then he would beg me to come home. We would go through a “honeymoon period” and then the abuse would start again. Finally, I got a restraining order and wouldn’t let him back in the house. He filed for divorce.”

“I THOUGHT THAT ABUSE – BOTH VERBAL AND PHYSICAL – COULD NOT HAPPEN IN A JEWISH HOME. I THOUGHT I MUST HAVE BEEN DOING SOMETHING WRONG.”



## Philanthropy

### A Core Family Value

"At first," says Nicole Lesser, coordinator of Kol Isha, "Emily was directed to the Jewish Coalition and a therapist. They helped her develop a plan to keep her safe from her husband and protect her children. Then, Emily began having financial difficulties. Having stayed at home to raise her children, she was dependent on her husband's income. He in turn he found ways to strangle her financially and prolong the divorce proceedings, forcing Emily to spend money she did not have on an attorney.

For Natalie, the situation was different, but the abuse the same. Not raised in a Jewish family, Natalie said that she married her husband, who was Jewish, because of the idea of the strong Jewish family. "Everything I read about Judaism convinced me that marrying a Jewish man, and raising children in the Jewish traditions would be wonderful way to live." Natalie had a child from a first marriage, and then gave birth to a child with disabilities. Her husband blamed Natalie for the "damaged" child and was verbally abusive to his stepchild. Natalie said that if her husband came home from work before her, her eldest child would beg her to come home for fear of being hurt. Eventually, Natalie lost her job. She thought about leaving, but her husband threatened to kill her, the children and himself if she tried to move away.

With nowhere to turn, Natalie went to her Rabbi. "I was living in another state, my mother and siblings were in the Boston area, so I turned to my Rabbi. I didn't know what else to do." Unfortunately, he didn't know what to do either. "However," says Natalie, "he did recommend I call the Jewish Family & Children's Service." She joined a support group. "They helped me see what was happening, and I realized I had to leave. Finally, she called her family, who told her to come home. She made a plan, and finally took her children and came home. Once in Massachusetts, she contacted JF&CS and joined Kol Isha's support group. "I still have my house there, but I will never go back," she says, "the schools are better here, my living situation is safe, and the children are finally not afraid."

Emily and Natalie agree on one thing. If not for the Kol Isha program, and Nicole Lesser's ongoing work and support, neither of them would have been able to move forward in their lives.

Natalie says that because of Kol Isha, and the support group that Nicole formed, she was able to find strength from the other women. "Plus, Nicole is always there when I need someone for emotional, financial, or resource support. She helped me understand that taking the initiative to take my children and leave my abusive situation was a major step that took great strength. She has taught me not dwell on the past wondering why I didn't leave sooner; that a better question is why did he abuse."

Emily says that Nicole has helped her in dealing with the courts. "Social workers, counselors, are just not trained in the area of domestic violence," says Emily. Nicole is an advocate for all of us, explaining our situations, and getting the court system to realize what we have experienced."

Nicole Lesser, who has coordinated Kol Isha since its inception in 2000 explains:

- 95% of domestic abuse is committed by men against women, and approximately one in four women are abused.
- Domestic violence against women results in more injuries that require medical attention than rape, auto accidents and muggings combined.
- 25% of women seeking prenatal care are abused.

Ken Novack is a man who firmly supports what he believes. And, Ken Novack believes that all women and their children should live in a safe and healthy environment. He believes this so strongly that when he was a partner at the law firm of Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, P.C. he started the firm's domestic violence program. Today, as one of the key players in brokering the deal between Time Warner and AOL, Novack hasn't lost his passion for the cause, but instead has recently been instrumental in expanding the JF&CS Kol Isha program.

Novack was a partner at Mintz, Levin for 30 years, 10 years as president and managing partner. "I challenged the partners to make a true commitment to community service," says Novack. As a firm we needed to be more active in community issues, and I wanted to make community service a part of who we were as a firm." Novack says that a survey was sent to every single member of the firm, not just the attorneys. "Three issues came back," says Novack, "including education/youth employment; homelessness; and domestic violence. I researched all three and discovered that it made the most sense to focus in on domestic violence. If there isn't peace at home, and the home is disruptive then children will not do well in school, and the mother may have to

leave home leading to homelessness. It only made sense to tackle domestic violence and get to the root causes of some of the youth and homeless issues."

Novack set up a program to assist families faced with domestic violence. He hired a director and set up a relationship with the Elizabeth Stone House. And, the firm began providing pro bono assistance to victims of domestic violence. It was agreed, explains Novack, that the work would be done without publicity. It was more important to help families, than gather recognition. However, as the program grew, so did the recognition.

"One thing I learned," comments Novack, "is that domestic violence is a universal problem – it is not prevalent in any one community or economic grouping. Women may sometimes feel more comfortable receiving assistance from a group within their own ethnic group, but the issue runs across all strata's of society."

Novack explains that his interest in Kol Isha is two-fold. "It is a program to combat domestic violence, and because I am Jewish and this particular program deals with Jewish women I was interested in supporting it." Novack does not limit his giving to only Jewish based organizations, but says he is keenly interested in Jewish philanthropy.

"Philanthropy," he says, "is a core family value. I have four children, and my oldest daughter Laura has also become involved with Jewish Family & Children's Service. We are committed to not just writing a check, but also helping in any other way an organization may need us."

- Children who witness violence are psychologically affected. They may be withdrawn, act out violently, or have difficulties in school and with peers. They may suffer from physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach aches.

"We don't do this work in isolation," says Nicole. "We collaborate with Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Jewish Women International as well as Jewish Domestic Violence Coalition of Greater Boston, an organization that unites concerned organizations and individuals in effective response to domestic violence in the Jewish community. I also work as a part of the JF&CS Center for Family Assistance to help clients access food, pro bono legal assistance or short-term financial assistance. At Kol Isha we offer free, confidential and non-sectarian services to victims of domestic violence. However, we are one of the few places within the Jewish community with the experience to help Jewish women. Our goal is to ensure that a comprehensive, culturally and religiously sensitive system of care is available to all Jewish victims of domestic violence."

Natalie says she has learned through the Kol Isha support group:

- Not to feel guilty for what I can't do.
- Domestic violence wasn't my fault
- Go one day to the next.
- No one can tell you the day to leave the situation – only you will know.
- You are not alone, this happens even in Jewish families.

Is there a happy ending? Emily says that she has been able to get her master's degree, and is looking for full time employment; but despite many gains she is still fighting her husband in court.

As for Natalie – things are calmer, but she says she is still looking for the light at the end of the tunnel.

For Nicole who sees dozens of women, she hopes that they will continue to be safe and will be happy with their decisions. "The scars of the abuse and the toll it took on their children will take time, and work, to go away. My one message is, if you are in an abusive situation, call us. We want to help. You are not alone, and no one will think less of you if you don't know what to do or where to turn."

For information or assistance please call 617-558-1278; or contact us through our web site at [jfcsboston.org](http://jfcsboston.org).

Other information and numbers to keep:

SafeLink – 1-877-785-2020 Massachusetts State Wide 24 hour a day toll free domestic violence hotline

Jewish Domestic Violence Coalition of Greater Boston – offers a speakers bureau and is a resource to the community on Jewish domestic violence. 617-566-2078



# elders

## The Bronstein Fund for The Elderly

**i**t is often said that volunteers or donors receive as much reward as the recipient of the donor or volunteer's generosity. The Bronstein's – Steven and Carylee – would agree. Called on by a friend to join the Jewish Family & Children's Service board during the 1980's, Steven Bronstein extended his commitment to JF&CS once his board term ended. Along with his wife Carylee, they established The Bronstein Fund for The Elderly—a fund to help older adults cover medical needs that insurance may not cover; or will cover only on a limited basis.

"My mother was quite ill after my father died in the mid-1990's," says Steven Bronstein, "and we were fortunate to have the ability to take care of all her needs. But, I realized that there are many folks who needed help as they aged, and could not afford good care, or equipment, or possibly the help of a special aid that insurance does not cover. So, we established The Bronstein Fund. I have never met any of the clients, but in letters I receive from JF&CS, I know a fair number of people have been able to use our Fund."

In fact since 1999, when The Bronstein Fund was set up, a number of individuals have been recipients of the Bronstein's generosity. "I was amazed at some of the stories I heard," says Carylee Bronstein, "and thrilled to know we had helped." She cites the example of a 55-year-old woman who was diagnosed with a brain tumor and had surgery. Five days later she returned home where she lived alone. Following her surgery, she received four weeks of basic physical therapy and home health aide services. However she needed an additional six to eight weeks of personal care and homemaking before she was back on her feet. Because she was only in her mid-50s she did not qualify for state assistance. The Bronstein Fund made it possible for JF&CS to intervene and provide this woman with the support she needed for a quick recovery. Today she is fully independent and considering volunteering with JF&CS.

"My family has a history of philanthropy," says Steven Bronstein. "My grandparents, who were immigrants, and my parents were generous with their time and money to help those less fortunate. My mother was always involved in a number of different charities. I was originally involved in Combined Jewish Philanthropies, and then became interested in the work of JF&CS. My interaction with the other board members, volunteers and JF&CS professional staff was a rewarding experience. But, most rewarding was actually being able to see the capacity that JF&CS had to help so many clients through so many different services. Whether new immigrants received assistance through the New Americans program, an elderly individual needed a home health aid, a family adopted a child, or a new mom needed the guidance of a Visiting Mom – JF&CS was always there with its outstanding staff and volunteers to help families and individuals throughout all of greater Boston."

Both the Bronstein's say that they urge young people to get involved in a charity or community service. If everyone gets involved, together we can make a huge difference.

For more information on The Bronstein Fund, call the development office at 617-227-6641.

"I WAS AMAZED AT SOME OF THE STORIES I HEARD AND THRILLED TO KNOW WE HAD HELPED."

# Sukkot

Rabbi Karen Landy (right) celebrates Sukkot with friends from the JF&CS program Chaverim Shel Shalom. A program geared for adults with mental illness their friends and family.



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