

Memory Center at JCC MetroWest gets a boost



Successful dementia program seeks expanded space

by [Robert Wiener](#)
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Bonnie Schechter stood in front of a whiteboard that was divided into four sections and asked 25 people sitting around a conference table to help her fill in the empty spaces. They shouted out answers to four distinct categories of questions, which ranged from TV and movie trivia to arguments over women's access to the Western Wall in Jerusalem to complaining about mothers-in-law.

It was an exercise in remembrance for people with failing memories who attend the Jonathan and Nancy Littman Memory Center at the JCC MetroWest, which is endowed by the Los Angeles television executive and his wife, both formerly of West Orange. Schechter, a member of the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners, serves as program director.



Program Director Bonnie Schechter leads a far-ranging discussion on memory for participants at the Jonathan and Nancy Littman Memory Center in the JCC MetroWest. Photo by Robert Wiener

Because of the demand to join the program, the center is about to set up a waiting list, as the adults who attend one to three six-hour sessions each week are already outgrowing their crowded conference room on the JCC's second floor. The Littmans had initially donated \$100,000 in seed money. Because of its popularity, they pledged another \$300,000 to continue the program for another three years. The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey has also granted the Memory Center up to \$168,744 for the JCC MetroWest to expand the space, on top of the \$50,000 it allocated when the program began.

Marsha Atkind, the Healthcare Foundation's executive director, said the grant was necessary to help the aging population of Baby Boomers who suffer from mild-to-moderate dementia.

"This group of people is not [sufficiently] impaired to be in a major dementia program, but too impaired to participate in regular senior programs," she told NJJN. The community "needed something to support the needs of this population."

Harry, a resident of Maplewood (his last name was withheld to protect his privacy), attends one session a week. He told NJJN he joined the center because his daughter "thought it was important to go out and get involved in a community. It stimulates my brain, and gives me the chance to be with others."

He concedes he "definitely has memory issues, and I have to concentrate in remembering things. I feel the program is necessary because I am a very social person. The group is very good for me because it forces me to open up."

Schechter's engaging and humorous style is making a strong impact on participants' lives, according to Sharon Gordon, director of JCC MetroWest's Center for Adult Enrichment.

"They are using their brains," she said. "They are engaged. They are very happy, and some of that rolls over to their homes."

A second perk, Gordon said, is that the program not only benefits the participants, but also caregivers, spouses, and children. "They know their loved one is safe and happy and [the program] gives time for needed respite."

The extra time has enabled some of those caregivers to return to work — at least part-time — after they were forced to leave jobs to help memory-impaired loved ones.

Atkind believes the center fills a need for a "terrible and very challenging illness. There are programs for people with severe dementia, but for people who can still function to a large degree but who have memory issues that impair their ability to function, there was nothing in the Jewish community."

Participants — Jewish and non-Jewish alike — are charged \$70 for each six-hour session. Funds provided by the Littmans will endow scholarships for those who cannot afford the fee.

When the center opened in September 2016, Jonathan Littman wrote to NJJN in an email that his father, who still lives in New Jersey and occasionally participates in the program, suffers from dementia.

"When my father's illness began to worsen, we were surprised there was no program in the area to work with people suffering from memory impairment diseases," he wrote. "It is my hope that this new program becomes a vital resource for many years to come."

Bob, a participant from Short Hills, visits the Memory Center two to three times a week. "I enjoy the people here and we get a pretty good lunch," he told NJJN. "Everyone has a unique story to tell and it is interesting to listen to them."

And he credits the program with aiding his memory.

"It forces me to concentrate."

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williams joey

November 09, 2017

my moma was diagnosed with lewy body demntia, she lived in a memory care facility for 3 months which availed to nothing. this got me scared of loosing her and my siblings. i never believed in prayer until she got prayed for by diviner peterson of newgrace foundation. she's doing fine now in less than a week of prayer and usage of holy items.i'd urge anyone suffering from such or any disease to contact him via email:newgracefoundation@gmail.com

williams joey

November 09, 2017

my nephew loved crack so much. rehabilitation never worked for him. i so much thank God for newgracefoundation prayers on him and that of everybody's. he's a good man now and doing so fine. i know a lot of people out there are facing hell just as i did. you can contact newgracefoundation for help via email:newgracefoundation@gmail.com

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