



Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse offers a safe space for Jewish abuse survivors.

KAREN SCHWARTZ CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Samantha* filed for divorce from her ex-husband when her son, now 2, was 3 months old. She had been looking to join a Jewish-focused support group as she grappled to come to terms with the domestic violence she faced at home.

“Everything fell apart once we had a baby,” says the woman, who has a doctorate degree but was routinely told she was too dumb for it, that it was wasted on her. “I really was a victim of emotional and psychological abuse.”

It can be lonely and isolating in Detroit’s Jewish community to be in the position she found herself in, she says. “I feel like, growing up Jewish, you’re taught you

marry a nice Jewish boy or a non-Jew who was willing to convert, in my case. There’s no conversation about what happens if the relationship goes bad.”

Today, she’s a part of a support group of the Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse (JCADA), run by the JFS’ BH Department, a network of agencies, community members and synagogues started over 20 years ago with the support of the Jewish Women’s Foundation to raise awareness in the community.

When she found out about the support group, she says she knew she wanted to be a part of it.

“Until this support group,

I have spoken to no one. I didn’t know anyone else in the community existed who was having similar experiences to me,” she says, explaining that it’s nice to have a place to talk where she’s not worried about people sharing her business.

“I’m sure there are other women, but nobody’s talking about it. So, I think this group is the jumping off point to have these conversations and we’ll hopefully get to the point where people are willing to



Aliza Bracha Klein

share their stories and share their experiences.”

Aliza Bracha Klein, clinical therapist and JCADA coordinator, runs the online group

for survivors of domestic abuse, which started in December on Zoom. Being on Zoom gives participants the option to remain anonymous in Detroit’s tight-knit community, she says.

“It gives them the opportunity to turn off their cameras and change their names so other participants will not know who they are,” she explains.

The group remains open for additional participants, says Klein, a specialist in domestic violence who also provides counseling.

“There are other support groups, but within the community we were hearing from people calling for support; they were looking for something that’s specifically a Jewish space so their lived experience would be understood.

“Also, I think in the current world right now, people aren’t feeling as safe in non-Jewish spaces because they

don’t know exactly what the environment is going to be post-Oct 7.”

Many individuals are nervous and scared to talk about domestic violence, she says, but because, unfortunately, it’s happening in the Jewish community as in so many others, it’s important not to be silent. “We want to create involvement and that’s how we want to see it grow,” she says. “We want more support from the community as far as increasing awareness.”

Beyond the support group, she says they’re also trying to amplify their message that JCADA, supported by Jewish Family Service, is there for the people who might need it.

“There are resources in the community available for people who are survivors, people who are allies to people who are survivors; we want people to know there’s education, too, and we’re able to present to your congregation, your agency, your support group on the signs of domestic violence, the risk factors for domestic violence and for it to also not be stigmatized,” she explains.

IN PARTNERSHIP

In the broader community, Klein is connected with nearby cities’ domestic violence response teams as a JFS representative, both to expand and improve its knowledge of working in this population. Also, if someone’s in a police station and/or needs case management support, she lets organizations know when to contact JFS.

She says JCADA is planning for the year ahead, and hopes to partner with individuals, a sorority, and law enforcement and area programs to increase

visibility and break down barriers around talking about this sensitive subject.

“We want anybody in the Metro Detroit community to be able to show up to these events and get education and resources for helping their friends and loved ones,” she explains.

JCADA, a coalition of Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, and advocates work together to address domestic abuse in the Metro Detroit area. The goal with JCADA is to not only create awareness, but also to implement education and advocacy and to make sure it has access to resources and support for survivors.

“There’s been a lot of partnership and, ultimately, it’s about just working with anyone. They need help, they call us,” says Dini Peterson, chief program officer, mental health and safety net services for JFS.



Dini Peterson

In October, the organization does a campaign to raise awareness and increase conversation

around the topic; this past October, JFS did a campaign on social media as well.

There are many different types of abuse that need addressing, she says — physical, sexual, financial, emotional and religious abuse, which can include the withholding of a “get,” the religious divorce a woman needs to be allowed to remarry.

“When it comes to using religion as a way to abuse their partners, that’s what it comes down to, when it’s withheld — a get — it’s

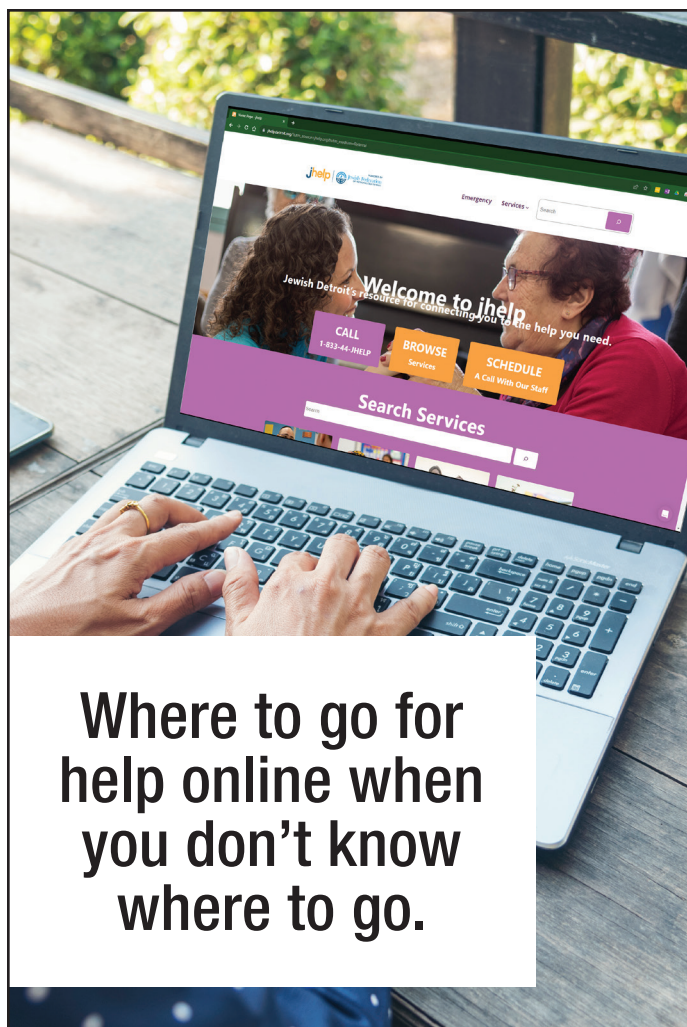
about them being in a position of power or control with their spouse,” she says.

Individuals find JCADA through signs in bathrooms, or in public areas where someone might be alone, such as a doctor’s office, she adds. Those who reach out might be referred for counseling services, mental health support, family support services, or case management and financial services.

“We can help people safely plan potentially for leaving a situation,” she says. “Research shows it’s most dangerous for a survivor when they’re actively leaving an abusive relationship, that’s when the risk for harm is highest, so it’s really important that if they’re leaving an abusive relationship, they do so safely.”

And JFS, through its program is able to offer a variety of supports for those who need it, Peterson says. For example, for Tammy*, who grew up in West Bloomfield, JFS was able to help when she left her ex-husband and was searching for a loan.

“I had found out [JFS] has many resources that enabled me to get clothes and beds for my kids and also school supplies and food, if needed,” she says. “The new program [at JFS] ... has helped me even more. I think it’s very important for survivors of domestic violence. It’s another resource for them. The program helps you feel empowered again, gives you a person you can reach out to when you need to talk.”

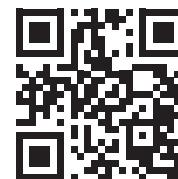


Where to go for help online when you don’t know where to go.

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