

Reaching out to our community

The pandemic in our midst has affected and is affecting everyone, albeit in different ways and to greatly varying degrees, and this is set to continue for the foreseeable future. *LJS News* caught up with Aviva Shafritz, our Community Care Co-ordinator, to find out how she and her team have been responding to this reality.



Aviva, who is a highly experienced professional social worker, took up her position at the LJS six years ago. She is ready to help with difficulties experienced not only by our older

members such as with illness and provision of care, but also across the spectrum of life. She and her team of volunteers co-ordinate and run activities such as Restaurant Tuesday, Video and Tea, and the Out and About Club. In tandem with our Rabbis, Aviva recruits, trains and oversees our many volunteers, and works closely with those who serve as our lead volunteers. Aviva tells us she is hugely appreciative of each one of them, as well as of the vital administrative support from LJS staff member, Naomi Kramer.

With the arrival of coronavirus, there was an immediate need to expand the number of volunteers to address the very difficult issues facing our community. Following a call-out, 120 additional people offered to assist with making calls, going shopping and collecting prescriptions, etc. The Community Care Co-ordinating Committee, which had previously met up every two months, transformed itself into a crisis committee consisting of Aviva, the Rabbis, and four of the lead volunteers: Angela Camber, Judith Diamond, Jenny Nathan and Mary Rossiter. This group – called *Nechushtan*, the Hebrew for serpent, and analogous to our governmental COBRA meetings – now meets weekly.

One of the early outcomes of *Nechushtan* was for every single member of our community

to be contacted – initially the over 70s, then our younger members; and by now, everyone else. Each volunteer is given guidance notes and a list of questions to check on the well-being of the person being called or texted, and information is then uploaded onto a form which goes into a database. In this way, the LJS has a clear picture of any necessary follow-up, be it a regular call, practical help, or further assistance from Aviva or one of the Rabbis. Tribute must be paid to the Bereavement Support team for the challenging work which they, together with the Rabbis, are undertaking.

Although some of our regular group activities can no longer take place, volunteers keep in touch with all participants. Tremendous work has been undertaken to keep Singing for the Mind running online (see page 16).

Certain volunteers have been tasked with assessing the wealth of online resources available and making recommendations. These include resources specifically for the Jewish community – for example, the help JAMI offers for those with mental health issues, the financial advice from the Jewish Leadership Council, and advice from Jewish Women's Aid on domestic violence. Volunteers also help members access these resources as not everyone is tech-savvy; and those who aren't in a position to use the internet or receive emails are not forgotten.

Looking to the future, the experiences of everyone emerging from the lockdown will differ, and for some the isolation and struggles will continue for much longer than for others. We hope everyone in our community knows the LJS is here to offer support.

Aviva can be contacted by email: communitycare@ljs.org or by telephone on 020 7286 5181.