

■ DAUGHTER WAS REPEATEDLY FAILED BY PROFESSIONALS, SAYS DAD

Shul service pays tribute to much-loved Joshi

BY SHARON MAIL

THE memory of a much-loved woman was honoured at the Glasgow Reform Synagogue service last Saturday.

Joshi Smith, died in January, 2020, in Florida from a self-medicated overdose of fentanyl, aged just 24.

Her parents, Mark and Catherine, and brother, Ethan, set up the Joshi Project in her memory to try and help others with mental health issues. GRS has been keen to support them.

Mark Smith told the *Jewish Telegraph*: “The shul already held a High Holy Days appeal for The Joshi Project, because Joshi had been batmitzvah there and there was a real outpouring of support from GRS after she died.

“Many people knew her there. She was already loved at the shul. The time Joshi spent there was probably her happiest time and the minister, Rabbi Pete Tobias, also conducted her stone setting.

“He approached us and asked if he could do a special Shabbat ser-

‘She was as smart and creative as they come’

vice on Joshi as a way of raising awareness about our charity and mental health itself.”

The shul held a JAMI Mental Health Awareness Shabbat service.

During the service of ‘rigorous kindness’, Rabbi Tobias asked the congregation to think of Joshi and ask themselves what they could do to promote the vision of the Joshi Project and encourage and facilitate an honest and constructive conversation about mental health in the community and wider society.

Mark has been a man on a mission since Joshi’s death to try and prevent young people with mental health issues being failed and their families facing the heart-rending agony he, Cather-



**A TRAGIC LOSS:
Joshi Smith**

ine and Ethan faced two years ago.

Mark, author of the book *Treblinka Survivor: The Life and Death of Hershl Sperling*, recalled: “Her tragic final moments came after a lifetime of struggle against deep depressions, high anxiety and punishing OCD rituals.

“Along the way, she was repeatedly failed and abandoned by mental health professionals — both in Scotland and America — who did not provide the care and support she sought and desperately needed to live.”

In Scotland, despite her high intelligence and successful academic performances, Joshi’s daily

life continued to be blighted by episodes of severe anxiety, insomnia, obsessive-compulsive rituals and at times violent temper tantrums.

She was also self-harming, inflicting knife gashes on herself and talking increasingly often about suicide.

Mark said: “It became clear the assembled therapists were exasperated with her unresponsiveness to treatment efforts.

“The multiple therapists and psychiatrists Joshi had seen at Livilands (a Stirlingshire mental health resource centre) had been focused entirely on the administration of antidepressants and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), a talking therapy that aims to distract sufferers from their disturbing thoughts and feelings.

“None of it helped. In fact, CBT

‘Therapists exasperated with her unresponsiveness’

served only to teach her distraction at any cost, which, I believe, helped drive her into the world of self-medication.”

Mark gave up his job as deputy business editor of *The Herald* and the family moved to America in 2012 in the hope of obtaining better treatment there.

However, the help she desperately needed wasn’t available to them in America either.

Mark said: “We found only a system that was many more times as expensive and with even less hope of recovery than Scotland, which is really saying something.

“America, for all its wealth, technological innovation and medical advances, is in fact among the cruellest, most ineffective places in the world to be mentally ill.

“We returned to Scotland in September, 2020, as quickly as we could, given the Covid pandemic. Staying in the US was simply no longer possible — but we returned to Scotland determined to change a system that should have saved Joshi but didn’t.

“In the aftermath of Joshi’s passing, when the physical and mental paralysis of loss slowly gave way to anger and frustration, I became desperate to know if anything could have been done to save our daughter.

“I refused to accept that Joshi’s fate was a lost cause. For years, I laboured with every atom of my will to make her better and I could not stop now.

“With the cold eye of a former

newspaper reporter, I began by looking at the raw facts and figures of mental health systems around the world.”

After much research, Mark found his answer in Italy, in the Trieste model, which had operated in the city for 40 years.

At its core, the Trieste model is a network of Community Mental Health Centres (CMHCs), which are interlinked with the community for the benefit of the individual’s recovery.

The focus of treatment is the individual’s life goals and long-term recovery, as opposed to a diagnosis and the management of symptoms.

The designation of Trieste by the World Health Organization as a “centre of excellence for mental health recovery”, along with the raw statistics on successful treatment outcomes in Trieste, provide the promise of what can be accomplished in Scotland.

Mark said: “The Joshi Project aims to change a system that is incapable of helping those who need help the most.

“Joshi was a lover of Shakespeare and filled notebooks with heart-wrenchingly sad and beautiful poetry. She left behind a small mountain of them. The scent of her perfume still clings to the pages.

‘The scent of her perfume still clings to the pages’

“In her happy moments, she was kind, loving, loyal and funny. She was as smart and creative as they come — and she was surrounded by the love of everyone whose life she touched — but it wasn’t enough.

“We have no doubt that Joshi’s life could have been saved had she had access to the right kind of support.

“The purpose of The Joshi Project is to introduce a more compassionate and flexible system of mental health care in Scotland, aimed at helping the thousands — probably tens of thousands — of people like Joshi, who have so much to give the world, but are stymied and oppressed by the confines of a system without vision.”

The vision of the Joshi Project is to establish the ‘Trieste model’ of mental health care in Scotland. The current plan is to set up a pilot in Inverness before establishing these hubs throughout Scotland and they are currently in negotiations with NHS Highlands.

■ JoshiProject.org

Stanley vows that pandemic won’t stop Green Sunday taking place

FOR almost 35 years, JNF KKL Scotland has organised its annual Green Sunday telethon to coincide with Tu b’Shvat.

Under normal circumstances, the event would have taken place on Sunday.

But the committee’s honorary president Stanley Lovatt has consulted with the appropriate authorities and decided that due to the coronavirus pandemic, it will not be appropriate for the people to gather in one area to make phone calls.

As a result, Green Sunday is

being postponed until next month.

Mr Lovatt said: “The situation this year has turned out to be identical to that of 12 months ago when we were not able to get together and ended up writing to our database, which extends throughout Scotland.

“We are hopeful that this will not be necessary and, in a few weeks, once again we will be able to reach out by phone to all our supporters in Glasgow, Edinburgh and other outlying areas.

“Under no circumstances what-

ever am I going to allow the pandemic to prevent JNF KKL Scotland, in conjunction with similar committees throughout the world, in continuing to green Israel.

“The importance of trees was highlighted at the recent COP26 Conference which took place in Glasgow.

“There are those who always like to donate at this particular time to celebrate Tu b’Shvat and we anticipate donations reaching us by post or by telephoning our office on 0141-577 8232 to pay by credit or debit card.”

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