

Move Over, Dr. Ruth!

Relationship expert

Dr. Rachel Needle

isn't shy about her commitment to her clients or her dedication to the local Jewish community

By Leon M. Rubin



Sex therapist might not be the first occupation that comes to mind when considering who fits the profile of a typical leader of the Jewish community, but pose the question to Dr. Rachel Needle and she responds with a smile, “Well, why not? It’s the first occupation that comes to *my* mind!”

“I am a clinical psychologist,” she explains. “I specialize in sex and relationships and am a certified sex therapist, but I also do a lot of work with trauma, substance abuse, and cancer patients dealing with psychosocial, sexual, and relationship issues during and following cancer treatment.”

In addition to helping her patients and clients in a wide variety of ways, Needle is firmly dedicated to supporting the local Jewish community — and it fits right in to her mindset. “I serve on the Jewish Federation’s NextGen committee and am the co-chair of the social committee,” she says.

NextGen, a young adults and professionals networking group in Jewish Federation’s The Collaborative <45 association, creates opportunities for young adults in the greater Palm Beaches to connect to Jewish life — and each other. “We participate in a variety of activities, including social, philanthropic, and volunteer events,” adds Needle.

Her background has also become an asset to other young professional women in the community. Needle recently served as the featured speaker for an event about creating balance in the face of conflicting demands of life placed on women by family, work, and fun. The event was organized by Kol Isha, the young women’s group of The Collaborative.

Needle’s roots with Federation and in the Jewish community run deep. Born and raised in West Palm Beach, she attended the Mandel JCC’s preschool and went directly to the Jewish Community Day School (now the Arthur I. Meyer Jewish Academy).

“I had so many meaningful Jewish experiences growing up,” she says, recalling feeling immersed in the Jewish community through her education and a defining Israel travel program she participated in during high school. “It was an incredible and meaningful time,” she recalls. “I hope to go back to Israel in the near future.”

Following high school, Needle received her BA in

psychology from Barnard College, Columbia University. She completed an internship in clinical psychology at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey: Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in Piscataway, NJ. She subsequently received her MS and PsyD degrees in clinical psychology from Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale.

After her studies, Needle yearned to be involved with her hometown Jewish community. She became involved with The Collaborative’s Emerging Leadership Program (ELP), Federation’s high-caliber leadership track for young professionals and adults in the greater Palm Beaches. “I wanted to reconnect with my Jewish roots in South Florida, and that was a wonderful way to begin doing so,” she notes.

Today, Needle keeps a busy professional schedule. She is a licensed psychologist and certified sex therapist in private practice at the Center for Marital and Sexual Health of South Florida and is also the founder and executive director of the Whole Health Psychological Center in West Palm Beach. She is an adjunct professor of psychology in the behavioral sciences, forensic psychology, and criminal justice programs at Nova Southeastern University. She also founded and is CEO of the Advanced Mental Health Training Institute, which provides continuing education to Florida mental health professionals, as well as psychologists and sex therapists across the world.

“It is no secret that many people are uncomfortable discussing sex-related issues, but I found that people would approach me with questions and concerns quite comfortably,” she continues. “I decided I wanted to address it and make sure people had accurate information, an understanding of how they got to where they are in relation to their sexual issues and concerns, and the help toward a path to a healthy and satisfying sexual life.”

Needle has presented her research and clinical work at national and international conferences and been quoted in such popular magazines as *Details*, *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Men’s Health*, and *Shape*. She’s also written several articles for *Glamour* magazine’s online blog, *Smitten*.

In the midst of it all, Needle’s ties to her Jewish identity remain an essential part of her life.

“I cherish the memories of rushing to school early to participate in *minyan* on Thursday mornings and dressing up and celebrating the Jewish holidays at school,” she says. “I learned early on the traditions and beliefs, the importance of giving and family, that are still so much a part of who I am today.” 