

GPS Circles of Connection for the Jewish Community

IMPACT REPORT: *GPS Circles of Connection
for the Jewish Community Facilitator Training*

FALL/WINTER 2024



CONTENTS

<u>Executive Summary</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>GPS Group Peer Support Overview</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Background</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Facilitator Training Participant Overview</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Training Content and Overview.....</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Facilitator Training Results</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Next Steps for GPS Circles of Connection</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>Represented Organizations.....</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>Acknowledgements.....</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>About GPS.....</u>	<u>25</u>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Circles of Connection has been nothing short of life-changing. It was deeply moving to come together with so many Jewish people in the Boston area, representing diverse Jewish identities, and create a space to share our pain and grief from the past year.

Together, we held one another in a safe, transformative environment that fostered healing and connection.”

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

On October 7, 2023, Hamas infiltrated Israel from the Gaza Strip, leading to the deaths of more than 1,200 Israelis and the taking of 240 hostages, sparking the Israel-Hamas war and a dramatic global rise in antisemitism. The emotional and psychological impacts of these events have profoundly affected Jewish communities across the globe, including those in Greater Boston. In response, GPS Circles of Connection was developed to address the heightened stress, strain, and emotional toll that the ongoing situation has had on the Jewish community. This initiative recognizes the pervasive impact of these events and the rising antisemitism, not only as isolated crises but as ongoing challenges shaping the daily lives and experiences of Jewish individuals and families.

Built on the highly regarded, evidence-based, and trauma-informed GPS Group Peer Support model, the GPS Circles of Connection initiative represents an innovative and impactful response **to the heightened stress, strain, and emotional toll faced by the Jewish community in Greater Boston**. Implemented in three phases, the initiative is tailored to foster resilience, connection, and communal support during a time of unprecedented challenges.

Phase One, launched in June/July 2024, was a pilot program that targeted unique populations within the Jewish community. This pilot was designed to assess the model’s viability and identify necessary cultural adaptations, resulting in a program that immediately resonated with participants. The outcomes were remarkable: **97% of participants said they would recommend the program to their peers**, and an equal percentage rated the experience as Excellent or Good. Furthermore, 82% expressed a strong desire to participate in future Circles, while over half (55%) were inspired to take on leadership roles by training to become facilitators, ensuring the program’s scalability and long-term sustainability. The overwhelmingly positive results of this pilot demonstrate that GPS Circles of Connection is primed to be scaled to other cities, regions, and states as a critical tool for community-based Jewish organizations seeking to address the ongoing needs of their members. [Read the Pilot Program Impact Report: GPS Circles of Connection for the Jewish Community, here.](#)

Building on this success, Phase Two expanded the program's reach by training a groundbreaking cohort of 85 Jewish community members in the GPS Circles of Connection model. Participants represented a broad spectrum of expertise and leadership, including academic leaders, educators, clergy, clinicians, human resources professionals, experts in conflict resolution and related disciplines, executives, and engaged community members. A variety of organizations participated in the training, spanning synagogues, Jewish Day Schools, universities, Hillel programs, Jewish nonprofits, secular organizations, and community organizations, underscoring the initiative's far-reaching and inclusive impact. Participants praised the GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training for its thoroughness, structure, and relevance, with **all attendees (100%) indicating they would recommend it to colleagues**. This unanimous endorsement underscores the training's quality and its value to the community.

These leaders were trained to facilitate Circles—intimate, supportive groups designed to foster connection and shared growth. Circles focus on reducing stigma, addressing experiences of antisemitism, creating opportunities to talk across differences, and integrating mental health support directly into organizations and communities.

“With trauma-informed care at its core, this model seeks to empower facilitators and participants to create and inhabit a safe, inclusive setting for exploring the complex feelings stemming from the current situation in Israel that are impacting our lives as Jews.”

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

The GPS Circles of Connection program addresses the mental health needs, ongoing stress, and experiences of antisemitism, as well as the generational and historical trauma faced by the Jewish people. It creates a space for individuals to share deeply personal struggles with others who face similar challenges. Through this shared experience, participants can break the barriers of isolation and foster a sense of connection, enabling them to integrate their experiences into a cohesive narrative of resilience, self-efficacy, and hope for the future.

Phase Three, set to launch in January 2025, will establish Circles within community organizations across Greater Boston. This phase represents a crucial opportunity for partners to support a proven, scalable model with the potential to reach thousands of individuals and profoundly enhance the Jewish community's collective well-being.

The GPS Circles of Connection pilot and training programs represent a meaningful collaboration with GPS' partners: Jewish Family & Children's Service of Greater Boston (JF&CS), JCC Greater Boston (JCC), The Beker Foundation, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP)'s Center for Combating Antisemitism. GPS is grateful for the generous support of The Beker Foundation, Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP)'s Center for Combating Antisemitism, The Ruderman Family Foundation, and other valued foundation partners across Boston. Their dedication and shared vision have been instrumental in bringing this impactful initiative to life.

The first report in the series, *“Pilot Program Impact Report: GPS Circles of Connection for the Jewish Community,”* **is available to download here.**

GPS GROUP PEER SUPPORT OVERVIEW

GPS Group Peer Support is a strength-based, trauma-informed, and welcoming approach to group therapeutic care, offering consistent mental health support during times of stress, crisis, and change. This evidence- and trauma-informed model has been successfully implemented across diverse populations and settings, delivering impactful results. By incorporating mindfulness-based stress reduction, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, peer-to-peer support, and other evidence-based modalities, GPS effectively mitigates the long-term effects of stress and trauma. The model allows for rapid replication in an easy-to-learn format for both peer specialists, people with lived experience, volunteers, and lay leaders, as well as professionals. GPS trainings are interactive, ensuring participants gain a comprehensive understanding to begin using this proven, impactful approach in their communities. GPS's innovative, scalable, and replicable approach aims to foster a supportive environment where individuals can find the resources and strength to move through difficult times with confidence and resilience.

The GPS Circle of Connection program is a cultural adaptation of the GPS model and is specifically tailored for the Jewish community in the wake of October 7th. This adaptation is grounded in a collaborative and participatory approach, ensuring that the community's values, concepts, strengths, beliefs, historical and generational traumas, and current challenges are thoughtfully integrated into the model. The program is intentionally designed to be culturally responsive, creating a trauma-informed space that fosters deep and meaningful group experiences.

For Circles of Connection, the GPS model was adapted to reflect Jewish communication styles and incorporates key concepts such as *Lashon Hara* (speech that causes harm), *Derech Eretz* (respectful behavior), healing trauma through the lens of *L'dor V'dor* (from generation to generation), and *Chesed* (kindness). These elements help ground the program in Jewish tradition while advancing the goals of GPS Circles of Connection.



“I very much appreciate the obvious care and consideration that GPS has taken not only in developing this program, but in adapting it to the very specific needs of the Jewish community at this time.”

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

BACKGROUND

Greater Boston-based Jewish leaders report continuous post-October 7th suffering in the Jewish community.

The Jewish community is experiencing heightened stress at this time due to a convergence of multiple, interconnected stressors. The emotional impact of the October 7th attacks and the Israel-Hamas war has been profound, compounded by a global rise in antisemitism. During Phase One, GPS interviewed over 20 rabbis, leaders of Jewish organizations, synagogue directors, Jewish clinicians, educators, mediators, and community organizers based in Greater Boston. A recurring theme emerged: the post-October 7th period has been marked by significant suffering tied to diverse factors.

Many Jews in the Greater Boston area are struggling with personal and communal pain. This includes direct connections to family and friends living in Israel, intergenerational trauma rooted in the Holocaust, and centuries of antisemitism perpetuated by various ideological and religious movements. Additionally, rising antisemitism has exacerbated feelings of insecurity and vulnerability within the Jewish community. Alongside these struggles, many have significant concern for the Palestinian people, with many grappling with the moral and emotional complexities of balancing their deep connection to Israel with empathy for the suffering, death, and displacement experienced by Palestinians. This duality often intensifies feelings of anguish and responsibility, adding another layer to their emotional and communal challenges.

Compounding these stressors, post-October 7th political dynamics have disrupted the fabric of Jewish communal life, amplifying long-standing divisions over the state of Israel. These divides have created tension within families and communities, with younger Jews increasingly challenging the perspectives and assumptions of older generations regarding Israel. Together, these intersecting pressures have placed unprecedented emotional strain on the Jewish community at a time of profound global and local challenges.

Rabbi Suzie Jacobson, Rabbi and Director of Congregational Learning at Temple Israel Boston shared in an interview with GPS that there is a need to be able to have “hard conversations,” but they have been difficult to organize, much less facilitate. “Ideally, I would like to be in a position where I could sit inside the tent and be facilitating and leading or educating,” Rabbi Jacobson said.

“I feel like I’ve been hanging out on the tent poles trying to convince people not to leave. And it’s been challenging.”

— Rabbi Suzie Jacobson

As time passes since the October 7th attack on Israel, the situation remains deeply challenging, and in many ways continues to worsen. The ongoing war and a steady rise in antisemitic incidents have intensified concerns within the Jewish community rather than alleviating them. This prolonged and escalating crisis underscores the urgency for additional resources to address the community's growing emotional and psychological needs. The success of the GPS Circles of Connection pilot program demonstrates its significant potential to support the Jewish community during this time. However, to effectively meet the increasing demand, resources and capacity need to be expanded.

GPS recognized that empowering community members to serve as facilitators is the most effective strategy for scaling a crisis response. In fall of 2024, GPS provided Circles of Connection facilitator training to Jewish community members from diverse professional and personal backgrounds, including academic leaders, educators, clergy, clinicians, human resources professionals, experts in conflict resolution and related disciplines, executives, and engaged community members. Feedback from surveys and participant interviews highlights the effectiveness of the training, which blended direct instruction, hands-on teaching, and live practicums to build participants' competence, confidence, and adherence to the trauma-informed model. This comprehensive approach successfully equipped facilitators to deliver meaningful peer support within the Jewish community.

“We’re kind of at a crisis point. As human beings we’re losing the ability to communicate with each other, to get to know, trust, and like each other-- to be kind. I try to be an optimist about things, but I’m also a realist, and I’m worried. So I think this GPS Circles of Connection program is very important.”

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant



FACILITATOR TRAINING PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

To effectively scale its crisis response and meet the growing needs of the Jewish community, GPS prioritized empowering community members to serve as facilitators. This approach recognizes the unique value of equipping local leaders to provide trauma-informed peer support tailored to their communities. In fall 2024, GPS conducted a comprehensive Circles of Connection Facilitator Training program, receiving applications from over 100 individuals, of whom 85 were accepted, and 70% successfully completed the training.

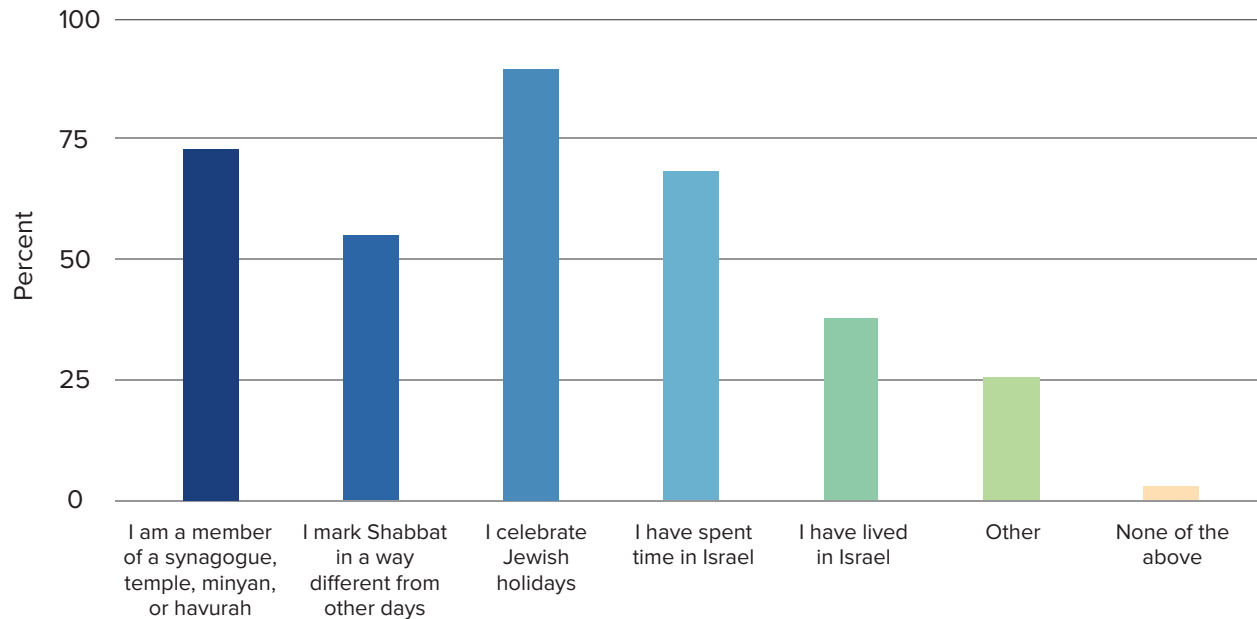
The program brought together Jewish community members from diverse professional and personal backgrounds, including academic leaders, educators, clergy, clinicians, human resources professionals, experts in conflict resolution and related disciplines, executives, and engaged community members. Participants underwent a rigorous and dynamic training process, which combined theoretical learning, hands-on practice, and mentorship. This comprehensive approach ensured that facilitators were well-equipped to lead meaningful and supportive Circles, fostering connection and resilience within the Jewish community during a time of heightened stress and uncertainty.

This section provides an overview of the participants and their experiences in the training, illustrating how GPS successfully built a network of skilled facilitators ready to address the ongoing challenges facing the Jewish community.



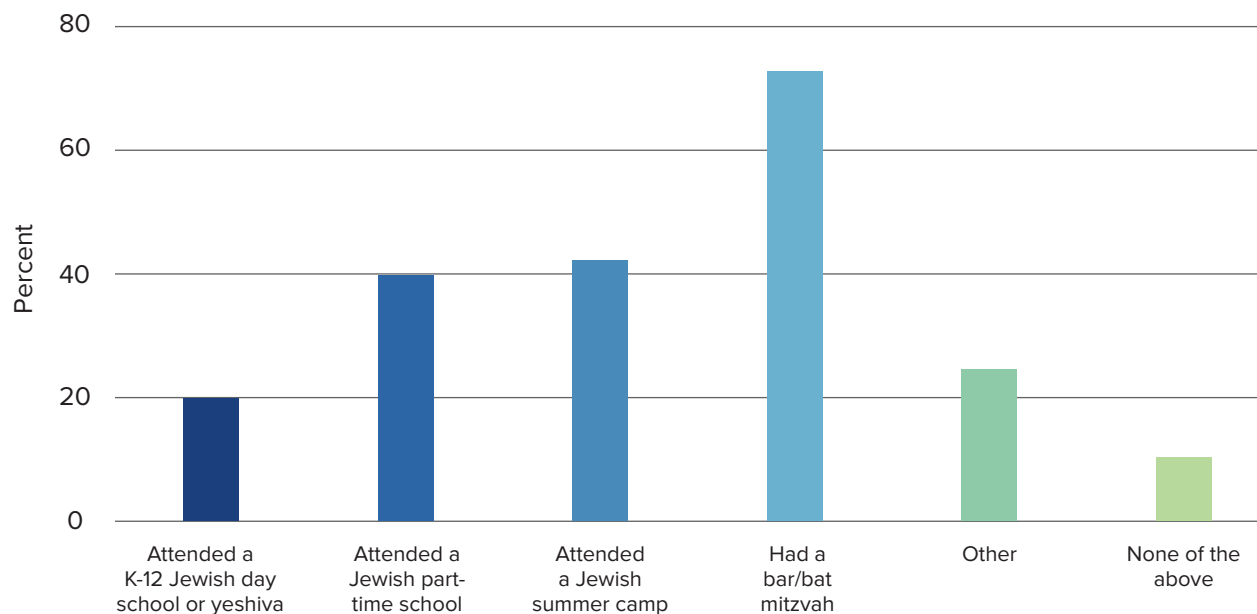
Connection with Jewish Community

An overwhelming majority of participants (98%) in the GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training reported that Judaism plays a significant role in their daily lives. Nearly all (91%) celebrate Jewish holidays, 74% are affiliated with a synagogue, temple, minyan, or havurah, and 56% observe Shabbat. Additionally, 70% have spent time in Israel, with 39% having lived there. 70% have spent time in Israel, with 39% having lived there.

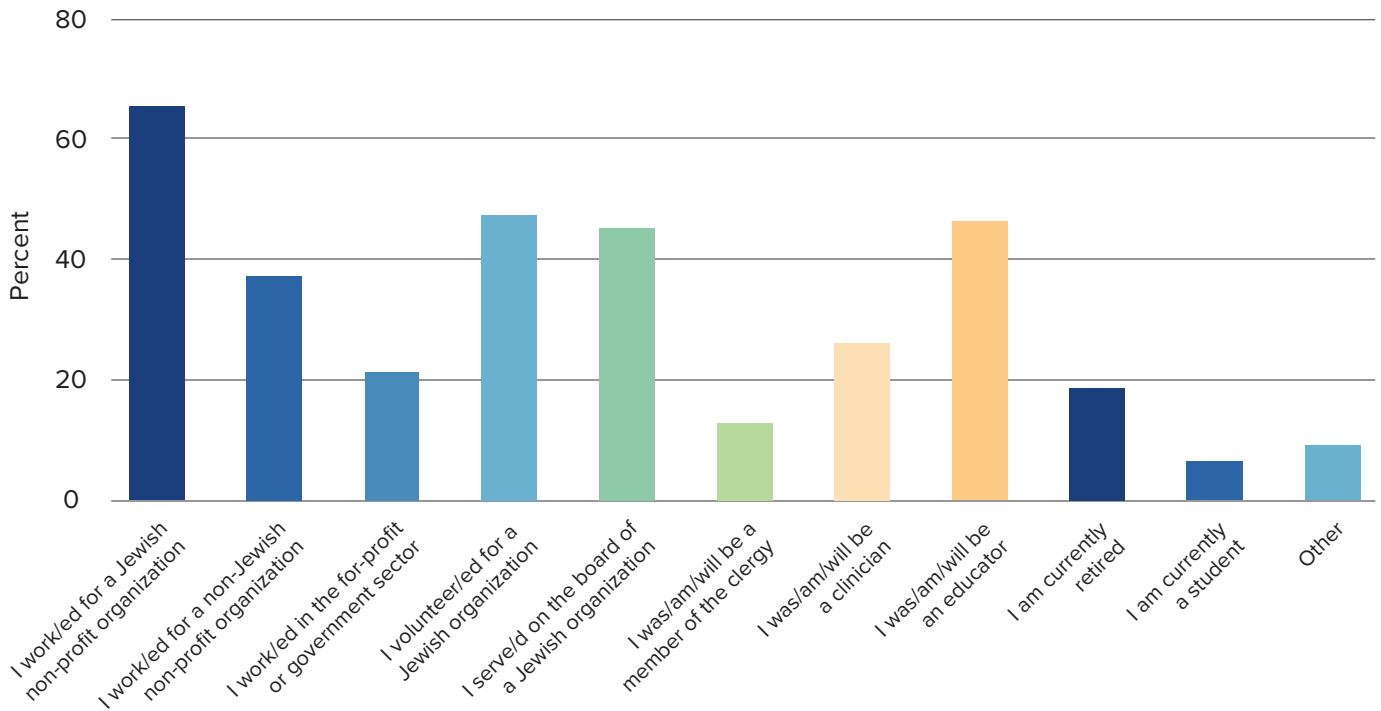


The participants bring a rich array of Jewish experiences to their roles as facilitators. An impressive 73% have celebrated a bar or bat mitzvah, 43% attended a Jewish camp, 41% participated in a Jewish part-time school, and 20% received their education at a Jewish Day School or Yeshiva.

Equally important was the inclusion of secular Jews, with **10% identifying as unaffiliated, non-practicing, and not connected to Jewish institutions**, reflecting the program's commitment to diversity and inclusivity within the Jewish community.



A significant portion of the participants are professionally engaged within Jewish spaces. Notably, 66% currently work or have previously worked for a Jewish nonprofit organization, 45% have served on the board of a Jewish organization, 37% have experience working for a non-Jewish nonprofit, and 13% are members of the clergy.



Participant Demographics

The participants in the training represented a diverse age range, from 18 to over 70, with a majority falling between the ages of 31 and 60. White participants comprised 90% of the group, 4% identified as Hispanic/Latino(a), and the remaining participants either selected “other” or chose not to disclose their ethnicity. In terms of gender, 82% identified as women, 16% as men, and 1% as non-binary. Additionally, 11% of participants identified as having a disability or chronic condition. While most participants were American, 10% identified as Israeli. The majority (87%) identified as Ashkenazi, 1% as Sephardic, with the remainder selecting “other” or not disclosing their heritage.

Participant Experience as Facilitators

While 54% of participants had prior training in group facilitation, only 25% had direct experience leading support groups. This distinction underscores the importance of the GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training, which is specifically designed to equip individuals with little to no prior experience in running groups. By providing comprehensive, hands-on instruction, the program expands the capacity of communities and individuals to deliver trauma-informed peer support. This approach not only builds confidence and competence among new facilitators but also ensures that more people in need can access safe, inclusive, and impactful spaces for connection and growth.

TRAINING CONTENT AND OVERVIEW

Facilitator Training Overview

The GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training provided participants with comprehensive instruction and practical tools to effectively lead peer-led support groups within the Jewish community. The training emphasized the following core takeaways:

- **Creating inclusive group environments:** Facilitators were trained to bring people together across diverse perspectives and foster mutual respect, non-judgment, compassion, and safety.
- **Evidence-based approaches:** Participants learned how to appropriately apply evidence-based practices within peer-led group settings to ensure effective and meaningful support.
- **Trauma-informed and culturally responsive frameworks:** The training introduced a support group model that is trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and adaptable to diverse settings.
- **Empowering group dynamics:** Facilitators gained skills to run groups that not only support and empower participants but also provide personal and professional growth opportunities for the facilitators themselves.
- **Strengths-based approach:** The training highlighted strategies to create accessible, welcoming, and transformative group experiences for all participants.
- **Addressing trauma and antisemitism:** Facilitators were prepared to help participants process both generational and current trauma, as well as experiences of antisemitism, in a supportive and constructive way.

The GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training was delivered in a comprehensive 20-hour program designed to accommodate participants' diverse schedules. Training modules, each lasting 2.5 hours, were conducted virtually on Zoom, offering both live and recorded sessions to maximize accessibility. Participants were required to attend all practicums live, ensuring hands-on practice and engagement. This format provided a dynamic and inclusive approach to facilitator preparation.

Facilitator Candidate Profile

The GPS Circles of Connection program selected participants based on specific qualities and skills that aligned with the initiative's goals. Candidates demonstrated:

- **Lived experience as a Jewish person** or diverse cultural competency gained through close connections to unique Jewish communities. Secular Jews and allies/non-Jews were warmly included in the training.
- **A supportive and empathetic presence** that fosters trust and openness within group settings.
- **Strong communication skills** and confidence in leading group discussions.
- **The ability to remain in the role of facilitator** when faced with diverse or challenging perspectives, ensuring equanimity and respect.
- **Consistent self-management** and a commitment to maintaining a respectful and inclusive environment.
- **Self-awareness and the capacity to listen without judgment**, while expressing compassion and understanding toward others.

These attributes were critical in selecting facilitators capable of creating safe, respectful, and supportive spaces for peer-led discussions within the Jewish community.

Training Content Overview

Opening Practicum

The Opening Practicum provides participants with the opportunity to experience a GPS support group firsthand from the perspective of a group member. (In the Circles of Connection program these support groups are called “Circles.”)

Training Modules

The GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training was structured into a series of modules designed to provide participants with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to effectively lead trauma-informed peer support groups. Each module focused on a key aspect of the GPS model, building a comprehensive foundation for facilitators.

1. Introduction to GPS & the Power of Groups

Participants were introduced to the GPS model and explored the transformative potential of peer-led groups in fostering connection, resilience, and mutual support within the Jewish community.

2. GPS Mindfulness Rest Stop

This module focused on integrating mindfulness practices into group settings, and offering techniques to promote presence, emotional regulation, and self-awareness for both facilitators and participants.

3. GPS Trauma-Informed Guidelines

Participants learned the core principles of trauma-informed care and how to apply these guidelines to create safe, respectful, and inclusive group environments.

4. GPS Realities of Life & GPS Principles

This module emphasized strengths-based facilitation by helping participants identify and honor the diverse realities, values, and strengths that individuals bring to the group experience.

5. The Role of the GPS Group Facilitator & the Process of GPS Check In

Facilitators enhanced their skills as a GPS group leader, focusing on the structured “Check In” process as a key tool for fostering authentic connection and meaningful dialogue.

6. GPS Reflective Listening, Weaving, Grounding, & Closing for the GPS Group

Advanced facilitation techniques were taught, including reflective listening, skillful weaving of group dynamics, grounding practices, and closing strategies to ensure cohesive and impactful group sessions.

Together, these modules equipped participants with the knowledge, tools, and the confidence to facilitate transformative peer support groups tailored to the unique needs of the Jewish community.

Practicums

Practicums were available (13 in total), providing participants with hands-on opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge gained throughout the training. Participants co-facilitated a live GPS support circle composed of fellow facilitators, allowing them to practice their facilitation techniques, ask questions, and receive mentorship. These sessions also offered a space for refining approaches to address the unique populations they aim to serve. The practicums ensured that participants developed the confidence, competence, and fidelity necessary to effectively implement the GPS model in their communities.

FACILITATOR TRAINING RESULTS

Evaluation Methods

GPS is committed to ensuring the best outcomes for participants and the communities they serve through continuous learning and rigorous evaluation. To assess the effectiveness of the facilitator training and identify opportunities for improvement, a comprehensive evaluation process was implemented with the following methods:

- **Pre- and Post-Training Surveys:** Participants completed anonymous electronic surveys before and after the training. The pre-training survey gathered demographic information and assessed participants' prior experience in leading support groups, as well as their confidence levels in various facilitation skills covered in the training. The post-training survey included the same questions to measure changes in confidence and competence. Additionally, it featured debriefing questions to gather feedback on what aspects of the training were helpful or less effective and to evaluate participants' experiences with equity and inclusion during the sessions.
- **One-on-One Interviews:** Participants were invited to engage in individual interviews to provide further feedback, share insights, and offer suggestions for refinement.

The evaluation goals extended beyond measuring changes in confidence and competence. They included assessing the fidelity of the GPS model, identifying areas for improvement in the training content and delivery, and ensuring that the training adequately prepares facilitators to serve diverse populations effectively. By integrating participant feedback and evaluation findings, GPS remains dedicated to refining its training model and upholding the highest standards of trauma-informed, culturally responsive peer support.





Key Findings

Participant Completion

The program achieved a **70% participant completion rate**, demonstrating a strong level of commitment, engagement, and follow-through among those enrolled in the training. This rate underscores the dedication of participants to fully engage with the comprehensive curriculum and complete the requirements necessary to become effective facilitators.

Unanimous Participant Endorsement

Every participant who completed the post-training survey expressed unanimous support for the program, with **100% indicating they would recommend the GPS Circles of Connection facilitator training to their colleagues**. This exceptional endorsement highlights the training's effectiveness, relevance, and the high level of satisfaction among participants.

Exceptional Participant Feedback on Opening Practicums

Participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences in the Practicums, underscoring the impact and effectiveness of this hands-on component of the training. For 94% of participants, the Opening Practicum was their first experience with a GPS support circle. Despite being new to the model, **90% stated they would recommend GPS support circles to others** following their participation.

When asked to describe their experience in the **Opening Practicum, an impressive 94% rated it as “Excellent” or “Good.”** Participants highlighted several key elements they found particularly valuable, including the “clear guidelines,” the “calming presence and words of the facilitators,” and “how the facilitators modeled sharing.” They also appreciated “the openness of everyone in sharing their feelings” and the “warm, professional guidance” provided by facilitators.

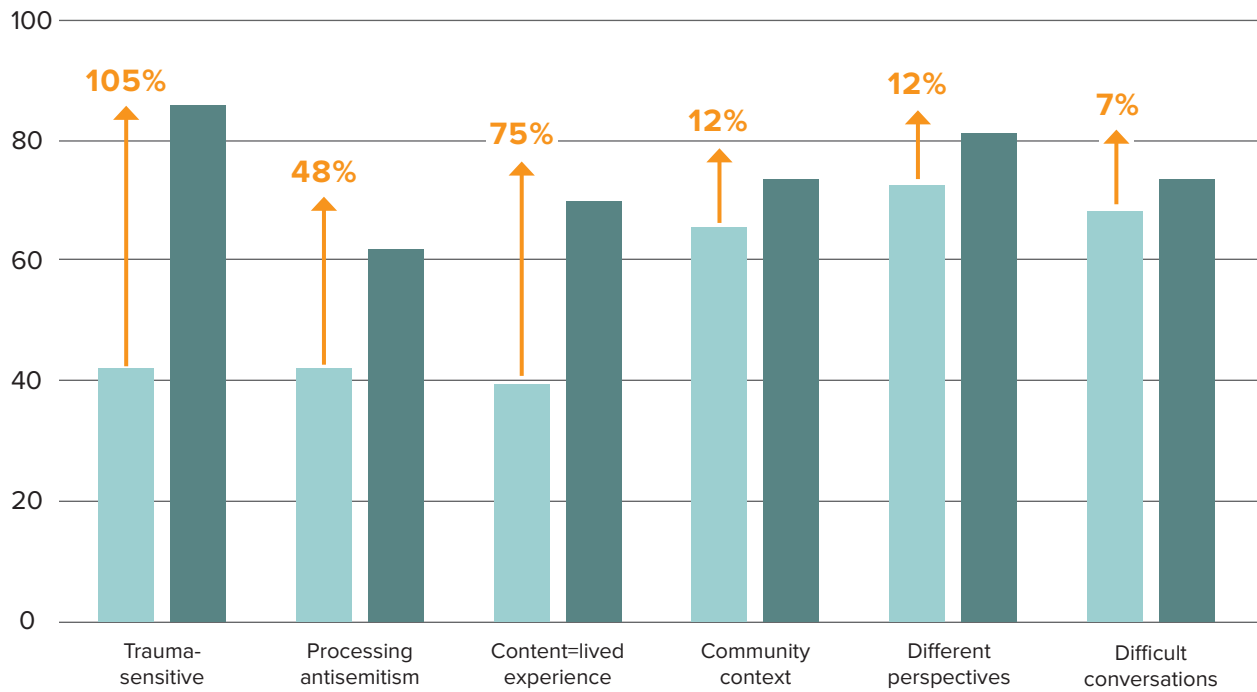
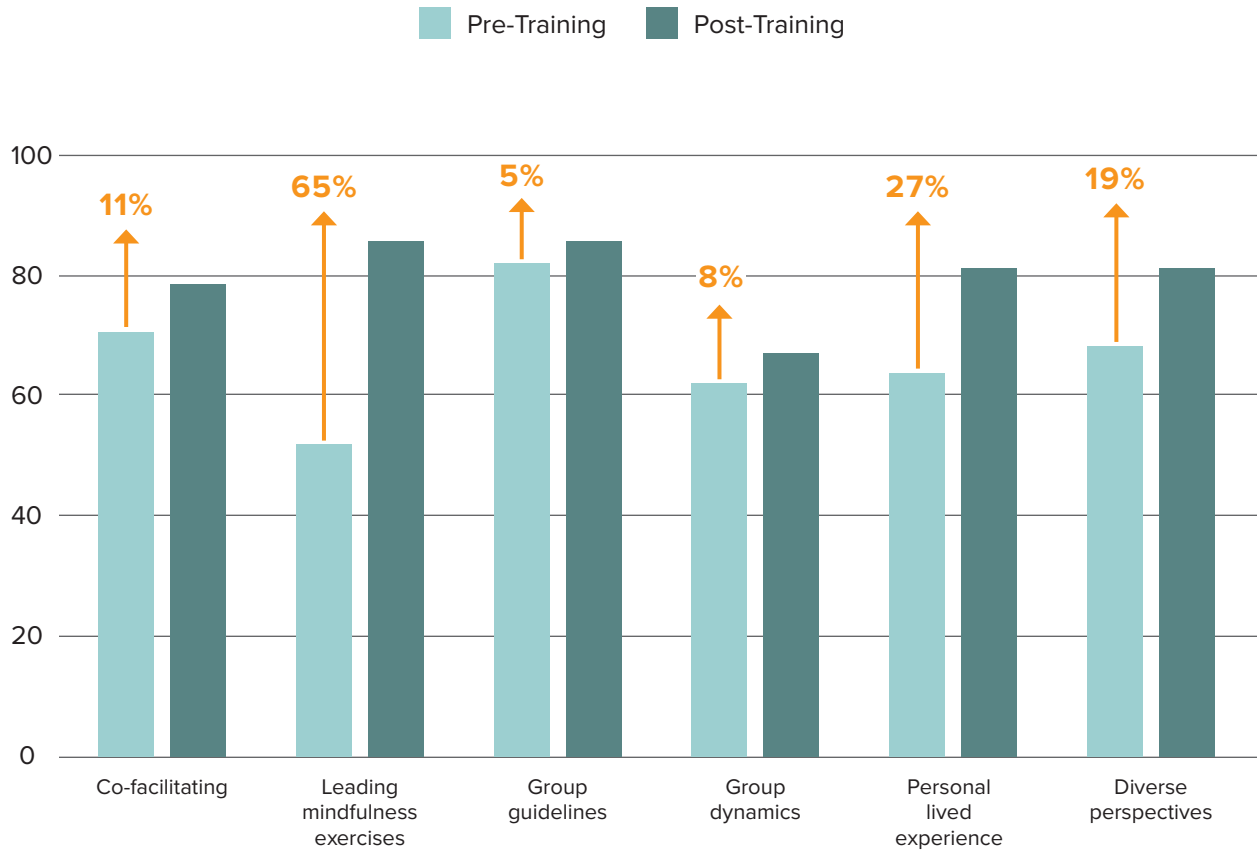
Significant Growth in Confidence Leading Support Groups

The graphs below illustrate the substantial growth in participants' confidence levels before and after the training. Confidence increased across all categories, with a significant average baseline improvement of 35%. Notably, participants experienced a **remarkable 105% increase in confidence** when it came to creating trauma-sensitive settings for circles. These results underscore the effectiveness of the GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training in equipping participants with the skills and assurance needed to lead impactful, trauma-informed support groups.

The following areas were measured (summarized below)

- **Co-facilitating groups with another leader:** Collaborating with a co-leader to share responsibilities, ensure balanced participation, and provide mutual support in guiding the group.
- **Leading relaxation/mindfulness exercises for groups:** Facilitating calming and grounding practices to help participants center themselves and build emotional resilience during group sessions.
- **Establishing and maintaining group guidelines for the safety of participants:** Setting clear expectations and boundaries to create a safe and respectful environment for open discussion and shared experiences.
- **Managing group dynamics:** Recognizing and addressing interpersonal dynamics, ensuring equitable participation, and resolving conflicts to foster a cohesive and inclusive group atmosphere.
- **Sharing personal lived experience appropriately as a facilitator:** Drawing on personal experiences in a way that supports the group's goals without overshadowing or detracting from participants' experiences.
- **Bringing people together across diverse perspectives:** Encouraging collaboration and understanding among individuals with different viewpoints, fostering a sense of shared purpose and connection.
- **Creating a trauma-sensitive setting:** Designing a supportive environment that recognizes the impact of trauma and prioritizes the emotional well-being of participants.
- **Processing experiences of antisemitism:** Providing a space for participants to share, reflect, and process the impact of antisemitism in a way that validates their experiences and promotes healing.
- **Curating content that resonates with the lived experience of participants:** Selecting materials, topics, and activities that reflect and address the specific experiences and needs of the group.
- **Discussing the community context of participants:** Exploring how participants' community environments influence their experiences and shaping group discussions to reflect these realities.
- **Holding perspectives different from your own, even when they are hard to hear:** Demonstrating empathy and respect while engaging with views that differ from your own, fostering a space for dialogue and understanding.
- **Navigating difficult conversations:** Facilitating challenging discussions with sensitivity and skill, ensuring participants feel heard and respected even in emotionally charged or contentious situations.

Confidence Levels



Post Training Practicums: Applied Practice Sessions

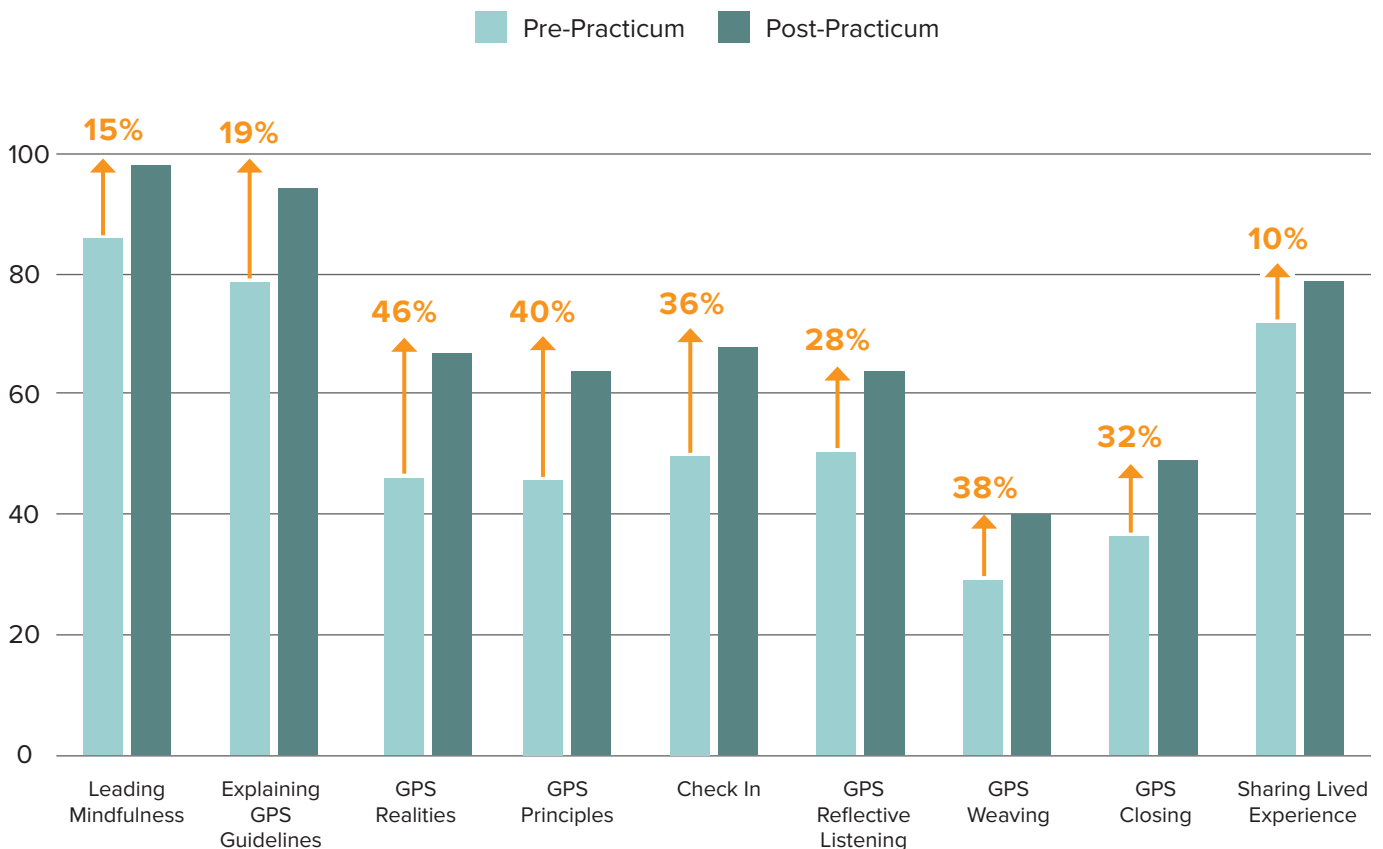
The graph below highlights the significant increase in participants' confidence levels with the components of the GPS Model following the Practicums. These sessions provided an opportunity for participants to practice facilitation components, co-facilitate a live GPS support circle with their peers, and put into practice the skills and knowledge acquired during the training.

Confidence improved across all areas of the GPS Model, including leading the GPS Mindfulness Reststop, explaining the components of the GPS Guidelines, developing and sharing GPS Realities

and GPS Principles, facilitating the GPS Check In process, using the GPS Reflective Listening Sequence, leading GPS Weaving, conducting GPS Closing, and appropriately sharing personal experiences during GPS Check In.

On average, participants demonstrated a **29% increase in confidence from baseline** levels. These results emphasize the effectiveness of the GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training in equipping participants with the confidence and competence needed to deliver the model effectively.

Confidence Levels



This feedback demonstrates the success of the Practicums in creating a supportive, well-structured environment and reinforcing participants' confidence in the GPS model. It reflects the training's ability to set a high standard for group facilitation and peer-led support.

“I’ve rarely participated in a training that is more thorough, practical, challenging, and supportive.”

Qualitative Responses

Participants Highlight the Impact and Value of the Training

Participants overwhelmingly described the GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training as a highly enriching and meaningful experience. They commended the program’s **thoughtful design, the seamless integration of diverse methodologies**, and the opportunity to develop **practical and impactful facilitation skills**. Many expressed enthusiasm and confidence about applying their training to support and strengthen their communities, highlighting the program’s value in addressing critical needs.

“This training is critical for all people in our world. We need to experience being heard and cared about and cared for, even from people who may disagree with us.”

“This is a great training about facilitating circles of support. It teaches one how to facilitate empathetically and effectively.”

“The training was very powerful and the facilitators were very thoughtful and gifted. I especially enjoyed the breakout exercises and the opportunities to practice.”

“This is excellent training. It is deep, clear, respectful of the range of experiences of the trainees (life experiences, education, professional, etc.), with plenty of time for practicing each facet of the model and facilitating groups with the model in a way that honors learners wherever they are.”

“I’ve already been telling friends and colleagues how well-designed this training is. It is so obvious that it is based on deep experience and integrates so many wisdom traditions into one very structured model that attends to an amazing number of details.

I’ve rarely participated in a training that is more thorough, practical, challenging, and supportive.

I’m thrilled to be on board!”

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

The Power of the GPS Model

Participants praised the GPS Circles of Connection model for its structured, step-by-step guidance and trauma-sensitive approach. They highlighted how the intentionality and adaptability of the model created a supportive space for learning and practicing new skills.

“I like the way each subsequent module builds on the previous one/s, so that we heard most pieces of the process several times, in various situations. It was a good learning experience.”

“It’s an excellent example of modeling by design. The intentionality with which you designed and delivered this training provided learning in every moment, from the content you shared to the way in which you facilitated. I was able to learn by both listening and watching. You held a courageous and supportive space for all of us, which allowed for vulnerability and learning with humility.”

“I’m so impressed with how this training teaches psychological skills. It was well thought through and able to include a trauma-sensitive approach.”

“This is a very well-thought-out training and very well presented. It builds upon the modules, and the breakout rooms allow for practice that moves along with the modules. The facilitators were warm, encouraging, supportive, and extremely knowledgeable.”

“It’s excellent! I love the structure and step-by-step guidance for running groups. I also think it’s very adaptable to many different groups and different populations.”

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

Skill Development and Confidence Building

Many participants emphasized how the training helped them strengthen their facilitation skills and build confidence in their ability to lead groups effectively. The structured approach and focus on trauma-informed practices were particularly impactful.

“I have facilitated many learning and coaching groups before. So a lot of these skills are natural and intuitive for me. However, having a prescriptive model that lays out the steps, and the whys behind them, clearly and fully, has enriched and elevated these skills and enabled me to feel more confident and competent in applying them. Also, being aware of what makes something trauma-informed and how to ensure the facilitation I do is aligned with that will make such a difference in my work moving forward.”

“I learned how to use the invaluable structure of a group session and put my own stamp on it while being true to the mission of the group.”

“I improved my confidence, my listening techniques, and my ability to remain grounded while facilitating. I also learned new mindfulness techniques.”

“I learned so much. One element that stands out is understanding and practicing the scripted GPS PATH Reflective Listening... I feel much better about my ability to reflect on what participants say.”

“I learned the transformative power of non-judgmental listening and sharing with the awareness that what is shared will be free of judgment. I also learned excellent tools and scripts to guide and facilitate groups.”

“I improved the most in creating trauma-sensitive environments and using trauma-informed skills. This has greatly enhanced my ability to support group members effectively.” — GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

Connection to Jewish Community

Participants deeply valued how the training fostered a sense of Jewish community and addressed the unique needs of Jewish participants. Many highlighted the meaningful connections they built and the relevance of the training in addressing community challenges.

“It was powerful for me to meet so many Jewish people in the Boston area, from all different Jewish backgrounds, and all have a chance to share our pain and grief from the past year and just hold space for one another in a really safe, productive way.”

“I learned a lot about leading trauma-sensitive groups in the Jewish community.”

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to be of help to my Jewish community and also grateful to be able to bring new ways of thinking, and new skills into my personal life.”

“Thank you for providing this important and holy learning and training and for the opportunity to serve our communities in this sacred way. What a blessing.”

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

Experiencing the Model Firsthand

Through the practicum sessions, participants had the opportunity to experience a GPS Circles of Connection circle. This firsthand exposure underscored the transformative power of the model and inspired many to bring these practices to their communities.

“I felt very welcomed and safe. I appreciated the conversation of being our authentic selves while also being mindful about the words we choose and how we can be inclusive to many different experiences and perspectives.”

“I’m feeling grateful for the space to be present with each other. I’m feeling appreciative of the kind and expert facilitation. I feel calm as a result of the gentle pace of the conversation.”

“I found the circle to be supportive, caring, and compassionate in a way that made my feelings and thoughts affirmed.”

“I feel really nourished by the time I spent in the group today. I feel a palpable sense of relief and release.”

“It was more important than I realized to have a space to be vulnerable and share what was on my mind and heart. The intentional guidelines and caring facilitators quickly built trust in the group.”

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

“The opening circle was a nice introduction to what a circle feels like. It was interesting to learn the norms, and I felt very safe in the room.”

Overall, the GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training left a profound impression on participants, equipping them with skills, insights, and inspiration to make a meaningful difference in their communities.

Participants have already made plans to bring GPS Circles of Connection to their own communities and Jewish populations, including individuals 55+, youth, parents, pregnant and postpartum people, LGBTQIA+ folks, Orthodox Jews, secular Jews, Jews born outside the US, and more!



Participant Testimonials

Participant Testimonials on the Training's Excellence

In one-on-one, post-training interviews, participants consistently praised the GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training for its comprehensive and effective approach. Deborah Coltin, a seasoned leader in the Jewish nonprofit sector, expressed admiration for the program's thoroughness, stating that she was impressed by the depth of material covered and emphasized that **"nothing is left to chance or guessing."** Evelyne Dreyfuss, a psychologist with over 40 years of experience, described the training as **"masterful,"** noting how it skillfully distills complex therapeutic concepts into clear, actionable guidelines. These endorsements highlight the program's excellence in preparing facilitators to lead with confidence and precision.

"The training introduced a way of listening that feels even deeper than what I've practiced before.

It also emphasized the importance of a facilitator's role in holding not only our own thoughts and emotions but also the diverse perspectives and feelings of the participants. It gave me a valuable opportunity to reflect deeply on this responsibility."

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

Experienced Facilitators Highlight New Insights and Skills Gained

Participants with prior experience in group facilitation praised the GPS Circles of Connection training for providing fresh perspectives and advanced techniques. Roberta Unger, a seasoned educator, facilitator, and active synagogue member, shared that the training deepened her understanding of the facilitator's role, particularly in navigating challenging and contentious discussions.

Sharon Grossman, a school psychologist with extensive expertise in group facilitation and counseling, described the training as **"incredibly well thought out"** and commended its integration of **theoretical knowledge, practical exercises, and hands-on learning opportunities.** These reflections underscore the program's ability to enhance even seasoned facilitators' skills and approaches.

A Safe and Supportive Learning Environment

Participants universally praised the GPS Circles of Connection training for fostering a safe and supportive learning environment. Sharon Grossman noted that the training provided an **“emotionally safe”** space, which she found particularly meaningful given the challenges she has faced in other community settings as a Jewish person engaging in discussions about the Israel-Hamas war. This emphasis on emotional safety allowed participants to engage deeply with the material while feeling respected and supported.

Commitment to Supporting the Jewish Community

All interviewed participants expressed a strong commitment to utilizing their newly acquired skills to support the Jewish community during this time of heightened stress and anxiety. Deborah Coltin envisioned implementing GPS Circles of Connection in diverse settings, including programs for teens, Jewish communal workers, parents, and college students. Evelyne Dreyfuss shared plans to introduce the program within her synagogue and explore adaptations to meet the needs of Israeli participants. These reflections highlight the participants' dedication to leveraging the training to address the evolving needs of their communities.

***“It was the best training I’ve ever been to on Zoom-- ever!
The professionalism, the quality, the presenters’ ability to engage us,
and maintain our interest – I felt like they were right here with me
in my office!***

This program is a gift. It is so needed.”

— GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training Participant

Recurring Themes in Participant Responses

Accessibility

Participants consistently highlighted the GPS model's clarity and ease of understanding, emphasizing how its approachable design made the learning process both enjoyable and effective. They expressed confidence in their ability to implement the model within their communities, underscoring the training's practical and accessible nature.

“The facilitator manual has everything we need. We don't need to recreate anything, and it helps us stick to the mission and purpose of GPS Circles of Connection. There's a lot to remember, but the presenters made it doable and it wasn't scary.”

“The training was thoughtfully put together, and everything was laid out clearly. There was a wonderful pacing of the content and the practice. Liz's enthusiasm and energy was so stimulating.”

“It's a fabulous, fabulous program. I have a lot of experience in training and in facilitation and teaching, but I also, I'm always eager for models that I feel work well with my style, and this does.”

“I think part of why it works is because they shift back and forth between lectures and small groups. Even sharing very meaningful quotes as a transition —I find that to be really helpful, and the quotes really resonate. I think that the thoughtfulness of the way that everything was presented has been really exceptional.”

Healing and Growth: Build Skills While Addressing Personal Struggles

Participants expressed a desire for a training environment that went beyond skill development, seeking a space that also fostered personal healing and growth. This dual focus on professional preparation and emotional well-being was a key aspect of their experience.

“I've been searching for something where I was going to learn, but I was also going to be able to contribute to growth and healing, and by doing that, I would get something back, too.”

“I'm usually the caregiver. For me to be on the receiving end of that kind of support was so different and so deeply appreciated.”

Creating a Judgment-Free Space for Open Expression

Participants expressed deep appreciation for the opportunity to engage in a space where diverse perspectives and emotions surrounding the Israel-Gaza conflict could be shared openly and without judgment. This environment of respect and understanding was highlighted as a critical and valued aspect of the training experience

“We need places where we can express ourselves and work through this conflict since others in my religious community feel differently.”

“I felt like this work is really important to me, and I need to do it in a place like GPS Circles of Connection, where I feel safe and I feel comfortable and I feel like I can express my thoughts and feelings.”

NEXT STEPS FOR GPS CIRCLES OF CONNECTION

Building on the success of the pilot program and the initial facilitator training, Phase Three is currently launching, bringing support circles to communities across Greater Boston. These circles will serve as vital spaces for connection, healing, and mutual support, offering a beacon of hope and resilience during this critical time.

GPS is also deepening its impact by expanding opportunities for facilitator training, empowering more individuals with the skills and knowledge to lead GPS Circles of Connection. This effort ensures that the program's transformative potential continues to grow, fostering strength and solidarity within the Jewish community.

To learn more or explore bringing GPS Circles of Connection to your community, please reach out to us—we would be honored to support you and your community.

REPRESENTED ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to a number of private practices, 40+ organizations, synagogues, and schools were represented by the participants who attended the GPS Circles of Connection Facilitator Training.

Ahavath Torah Congregation	JCC of Greater Boston
BaMidbar	JCC Newton
Beker Foundation	Jewish Family and Children's Services
Boston College	Lappin Foundation
Boston University	Lehrhaus
Boston's Jewish Community Day School	Mayim Hamayim
Brookline Center for Community Mental Health	Minyan Ma'or
Cambridge School System	Moishe House
Camp Ramah	Northeastern University
Camp Tel Yehudah	Orthodox Union
Camp Yavneh	Temple Beth Avodah
Chabad of Newton Centre	Temple Beth Elohim
Congregation Beth Shalom of the Blue Hills	Temple Beth Shalom
Congregation Mishkan Tefila	Temple Beth Zion
Congregation Shaarei Tefilla	Temple Emanuel
Combined Jewish Philanthropies	Temple Hillel B'nai Torah
Dignity Hospice	Temple Isaiah
Emerson College	Temple Shalom
Gann Academy	Sharon Jewish Action Committee
Hebrew College	Unitarian Universalist Church
Hebrew Rehabilitation Center	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GPS extends its heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to our esteemed partners—Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Greater Boston, JCC Greater Boston, The Beker Foundation, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP)’s Center for Combating Antisemitism—for their visionary leadership and invaluable collaboration in shaping and implementing the GPS Circles of Connection program. This initiative was made possible through the generous support of The Beker Foundation, CJP’s Center for Combating Antisemitism, The Ruderman Family Foundation, and other philanthropic leaders in the Boston community. We are deeply thankful for their commitment to fostering connection and combating antisemitism.



ABOUT GPS

GPS Group Peer Support is a strength-based, trauma-informed, and welcoming approach to group therapeutic care, offering consistent mental health support during times of stress, crisis, and change. This evidence- and trauma-informed model has been successfully implemented across diverse populations and settings, delivering impactful results. By incorporating mindfulness-based stress reduction, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, peer-to-peer support, and other evidence-based modalities, GPS effectively mitigates the long-term effects of stress and trauma. The model allows for rapid replication in an easy-to-learn format for both peer specialists, people with lived experience, volunteers, and lay leaders, as well as professionals. GPS trainings are interactive, ensuring participants gain a comprehensive understanding to begin using this proven, impactful approach in their communities. GPS’s innovative, scalable, and replicable approach aims to foster a supportive environment where individuals can find the resources and strength to move through difficult times with confidence and resilience.

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