

## **KEREN GEFEN – Mind-Body Fertility**

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### **Activity Report: February 2016– February 2017**

Keren Gefen is a non-profit organization that supports and facilitates Mind Body Fertility projects in Israel. Gefen was established in 2014, in response to the lack of psychological and emotional support for women undergoing fertility treatments in Israel. Women with fertility challenges often suffer from anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and problems in their relationship with their partner. Harvard University research shows that these stressful emotional states lower fertility potential by up to 30%. Consequently, psychological support is paramount in the fertility treatment process. Our goal is to enhance fertility among Israeli women (and men) who are having difficulty conceiving by providing an array of wellness and psychological services to supplement their medical treatment at **no cost** to them.

Our principal program consists of (1) Mind/Body Workshops and (2) Fertility Yoga workshops. Both programs serve as support groups for women undergoing fertility treatment.

The main project that Gefen funds is the Rimon Mind-Body Fertility Center at Hadassah Hospital Mt. Scopus that was established in October 2013. The Center offers state-of-the-art methods that are being used in hospitals worldwide, based on a successful model of operation that was developed at Harvard University.

Keren Gefen is the only organization of its kind in Israel. Our expertise comes from a highly-trained staff that includes clinical social workers and cognitive behavioral therapists. In addition, our relationship with the Rimon center allows us to work with highly-skilled fertility experts.

Keren Gefen is funded entirely on donations including a multi- year grant from the Stanley & Joyce Black Family Foundation (Los Angeles), the Pratt Foundation (Australia) and private donations from individuals in United States, Canada and Israel.

**Gefen is always renewing. The Gefen staff is continually creating new and innovative programs to reflect the needs of the Fertility-Challenged Community.**

**Here is a review of our Activities over the last year:**

#### **Ongoing Activity:**

**1. Ongoing Workshops:** Keren Gefen continually offers Fertility Mind/Body workshops and Fertility Yoga workshops at no cost. Programs serve as support groups for women undergoing fertility treatment. We reach out to different communities and adapt our programs to their needs. Together they share and build a supportive community, learn relaxation techniques, and do cognitive restructuring to help challenge negative

feelings. In the past, our specialized workshops included workshops for the Haredi Community, for women considering egg donation, for women contemplating becoming single mothers and for women considering adoption.

**Fertility Mind/Body workshops:** Each Mind/Body Group meets once a week for 10 weeks. On average, six workshops take place weekly. Each group is facilitated by a dedicated team of clinical social workers, cognitive behavioral therapists, and fertility specialists. The purpose of the workshops is to share and build a supportive community, learn relaxation techniques, and engage in cognitive restructuring to challenge negativity, which understandably comes with the territory. Participation in the workshops not only increases coping strategies for what can be the most difficult time in a woman's life, but enables habit and mood changes that positively impact fertility. These workshops become a vital space for healing and support and have helped over 400 women to date. Within the framework of the Mind/Body program, we are constantly adapting and expanding the workshops to address needs. It is in this vein that we offer targeted workshops, the scope of which we are constantly expanding to fit the needs of the fertility-challenged community.

**Fertility Yoga workshops:** Yoga exemplifies our mind/body philosophy. Through breath work and body movement, yoga calms the mind and nervous system, while increasing blood flow to crucial areas to support healthy reproductive organs. Yoga is recognized as an important part of many leading fertility clinics around the world, and is now being offered as integral of the Gefen program. We recently initiated a mini – Yoga workshop geared towards women who had experienced a still birth, where they learn relaxation and coping techniques to process the pain find the strength to persevere. We offer continual Fertility Yoga workshops in various locations.

**2. Individual Support: Transfer with Tranquility** We offer one-on-one sessions with women who are going through the IVF process. Before the fertilized embryos are transferred back, we meet with them either on the morning of the transfer or the day before to prepare them emotionally and physically. The session consists of mostly restorative poses, breathing work and gentle movement so the body and mind will be more receptive and relaxed. After the transfer, we continue to offer between two to four one-on-one sessions, so the clients stay relaxed and their stress level stays to a minimum while awaiting the results. We learned from the women themselves that these sessions were instrumental in their relaxation process and some even requested a follow-up session after the transfer, which we happily created.

Here is some of the wonderful feedback we have received from these women:

“The relaxation helped me a lot, to relax and clear my head. I felt a change physically as well – the effects of the hormones were less disturbing.”

“I felt like it was an island of peacefulness in there. A place where I could come clean on the inside. It helped me go through the anxious period of waiting for the results of a pregnancy test (Beta).”

**3. Specialized Workshops for the Haredi Community:** Our specialized programs include Mind/Body/ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Yoga Workshops designed specifically for ultra-orthodox men and women, adapted to be sensitive to their needs with the recognition that infertility in the ultra-orthodox world is highly stigmatized. In the workshop, the women learn and practice stress reduction and coping techniques in a discreet and supportive setting, with experienced therapists who understand the cultural needs and sensitivities of the group members.

## **New Programs:**

**1. Fertility Preservation Workshops:** Our newest Mind/Body project is the *Fertility Preservation Workshops*, created for women in their 30's who have not yet found their partner and are at prime fertility age. The purpose of these workshops is to empower women to make informed choices about their future by taking their fertility into their own hands. They focus on the decision-making process, understanding the medical procedure, social and economic implications, as well as emotional concerns. In each workshop, one session is facilitated by an IVF specialist physician from Hadassah Hospital, who explains the medical implications and chance of success.

We have successfully piloted three workshops (2 Hebrew, 1 English). The positive feedback was overwhelming. The women were truly empowered by the group, many of whom started the medical procedure and claimed that otherwise they wouldn't have had the strength to do so.

We now have a waiting list for future groups.

**2. Chevruta for Fertility:** Our Fertility Chevruta is a program of learning, discussion and support that is based on Jewish and biblical sources that are used to give inspiration and support for fertility challenged women. The workshop arose from the belief that the words of the Torah have the ability to reach out to a person's soul, help them discover new places and enlighten their hearts.

**3. Continuation Groups:** For those women who are still in the fertility process and feel the need for continual support, sharing, and tools to help cope with the long and stressful process - we are offering the *Continuation Workshops*. In these workshops, we learn to cope with the toll the long process takes on relationships, and how to deal with the continual vulnerability the women feel. The participants create a supportive group which gives them the tools, and strength they need to persevere.

**4. Adoption:** This year Gefen offered an Adoption Workshop for Haredi women who realized their only option to become mothers was through adoption. The focus on the group was to empower them to embrace this legitimate option of becoming mothers. The group dealt with the stigma associated with adoption, and the challenges of integrating an adopted child into the Haredi community. The Gefen staff shared in the pain of these women as we realized that the chances for successful adoption in Israel are very slim.

## **Future Program (now in development)**

**5. Doula:** Pregnancy and giving birth is a different experience for those who experienced fertility challenges. Therefore, we wish to accompany women during this time by offering the support of a professional Doula, who facilitates communication between the laboring woman, her partner and her clinical care providers. The Doula provides nurturing, care and support, physical comfort measures and helps women get the tools and knowledge needed to make informed decisions.

**Staff Training:** Our staff has begun mentoring and supervising a new cohort of professional therapists in order to support them in becoming fertility therapists in the Gefen organization. This will allow us to meet the growing demand for our services. We are continually training psychologists and social workers in the Gefen method and the synergy and interactions of the staff leads us to grow and develop together.

We are currently training licensed Yoga teachers to become fertility therapists in the Gefen organization, which includes leading Yoga workshops and Individualized Transfer with Tranquility sessions (one on one

sessions with women who are going through the IVF process).

### **Program Development:**

Gefen staff is developing new protocols for the Mind/Body Fertility workshops, based on the CBT approach, using our vast experience working with fertility challenged women from different communities, each with its own challenges.

Since many of our programs are new and innovative, the gefen staff is putting a lot of effort into creating new protocols and the process of editing our work, so that we can publish and share it. This way, other organizations may benefit from our work and expertise.

### **Research**

We are now developing a joint research project with partners from Bar Ilan University and Haifa University on the outcome of women's participation in Gefen Mind/Body fertility workshops. We wish to explore and examine the unique characteristics of Gefen mind/body therapy in Israeli society in general and within different sectors in particular.

#### **1. Poster Presentation – “45th Annual EABCT Congress”, September 2015**

In September 2015, we had the honor to take part in the 45th European Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (EABCT) Congress. The Conference featured world renowned CBT clinicians and researchers.

We showcased a poster presentation, which described the unique program of the Rimon Center, and presented the work of Gefen-Rimon in a clinical round table.

2. In 2016, we presented our research at the Ayala (IFA/Israel Fertility Association) annual conference on the topic of the Gefen Rimon mind/body fertility model for the Ultra-Orthodox community. We also presented our research, "Gefen, A Unique Multicultural, Multimodal (CBT/Mind Body) Fertility Treatment Paradigm" at the European Association for Behavioral Cognitive Therapists conference.

#### **3. Poster Presentation – “2016 NASPOG” – Biennial Meeting, Spring 2016**

A poster presentation by the Gefen staff was given at the 2016 NASPOG Biennial Meeting at the New York Academy of Medicine in New York City. The results of a research study conducted on Mind/Body therapy groups was presented.

### **Future Presentations:**

We have recently submitted a presentation about the Gefen Fertility Preservation Program to The Israeli Fertility Association conference. The Conference will be held in May 2017. We will present our Fertility Preservation Program.