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## JAFCO CEO, Eagles' Haven Founder Sarah Franco Retires After Years of Healing Parkland Community

by [Martin Lenkowsky](#) December 17, 2024



Working with the survivors and families of the Feb. 14, 2018, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting can only be described as heart-wrenching and gut-wrenching, said Sarah Franco, founding CEO of JAFCO, who is retiring after 32 years.

[JAFCO](#), which stands for Jewish Adoption and Family Care Options, opened [Eagles' Haven Wellness Center](#) in March 2019 to rediscover wellness and restore hope to the Parkland/Coral Springs community following the shooting.

“Our team at Eagles’ Haven is there to support the 17 murdered and 17 injured,” Franco said.

Helping victims and families who’ve experienced incredible trauma is a long, arduous task.

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,” Franco said, adding these words are written on a wall at the wellness center.

The loss one suffers in such a traumatic event is beyond devastating. When incidents as big as mass shootings occur, it’s hard for people to grasp and even wrap their arms around it. Franco wants everyone to be connected with everyone else so no one feels alone.

There’s an additional risk after a mass shooting, Franco said, pointing to the aftermath of the horrific [Columbine](#), Colorado, April 20, 1999 school shooting where 12 students and a teacher were murdered with many more injured. She said more people fell victim to suicide following the event than died from the shooting.

Therefore, when such a horrible, traumatic event occurs, there’s a need to provide services to survivors, their friends, and families.

It’s so traumatic for people to deal with such a horrendous incident; it takes them a while to be able to talk about it, Franco said.

Eagles’ Haven is a peaceful, spa-like facility that offers free meditation, yoga, dance, creative art classes, crisis support, case management, and support groups.



“People learn how to breathe, relax, and be with others,” Franco said. “They get to meet the clinical people. We know the people.”

Every attempt is made to match up the right people with the therapist that’s right for them.

Sadly, mass shootings are always happening and are always in the news. Another [school shooting](#) took place on Monday at the Abundant Life Christian School in Madison, Wisconsin, killing three people, including the perpetrator – a 15-year-old girl. These events are described as activators to those having undergone this type of severe emotional trauma.

“There are all kinds of things happening all the time,” Franco points out. Even loud Florida summer thunderstorms and fireworks can sound like gunshots to those already traumatized.

Eagles’ Haven and its team of clinicians are always available if someone needs immediate assistance at no cost. Franco said that all the barriers had been removed.

As the sign on the door wellness center door reads, they’re available “eight days a week.”

Franco’s parents were both Holocaust survivors whose own parents did not survive. As a result of her own life experiences, Franco said one of the reasons for her retirement is to be near her grandson, who lives in Orlando. “I don’t feel being absent from my grandchild is an option.”

Eagles’ Haven Wellness Center is 5655 Coral Ridge Drive in Coral Springs For more information, call 954-618-0350 or visit their [website](#).

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#### Author Profile



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Martin Lenkowsky moved to Coral Springs from NYC in 1982. He has a bachelor’s degree from Brooklyn College. He has been both writer and editor for a number of South Florida publications since 1983. He considers features writing his specialty.



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