

Service Problems

- forty percent (4,234) of all human service agency cases in the Negev are considered to be of a family/child welfare nature; 12% (1,270) relate to issues of the elderly; and, about 5% (529) deal with youth. The remaining percentages and numbers are scattered among problems and needs associated with the physically handicapped, developmentally disabled, physically ill, etc.
- agency directors (29) reported nearly 10% (44) of the region's human service positions were unfilled as of September, 1983 primarily due to the lack of qualified personnel;
- workers (266) reported the major agency problems affecting human service provision are (listed in terms of seriousness): 1) lack of organization and management of client case records; 2) caseworkers' difficulty in identifying and setting priorities for their clients; and, 3) an absence of uniform operating procedures among workers in similar situations and cases.

Research

- survey respondents (299) reported the most important areas for research are (listed in terms of importance): 1) the effectiveness or impact of services on clients; 2) the degree of agency accountability (i.e., does the agency do what it is supposed to be doing); and, 3) a more specific understanding of client needs.

Conclusion

The Negev's human service problems and needs are just one facet of the reflection of the region's being on the periphery of Israel's development. It has been noted by Gradus¹³ that:

Israel, with its highly centralized, non-spatial, ideological, political system, tried to execute a national policy of balanced regional development, but failed because such development is basically a territorial and bottom-up process, as well as a process of allocating resources from above. In the existing top-down system, the gap between the affluent core and the relatively impoverished national periphery is growing.

It is evident that the problems faced by Israel's leaders especially those of an economic and security nature, supersede the generation of new plans and initiative for vitalizing the Negev. Yet, it seems that the Negev's immediate future relies on these same leaders (those from government as well as private organizations) to prioritize the development of this region as a "new national mission". Such an effort must include policies which promote social, cultural and economic development. Certainly, this cannot be done apart from a positive, well-defined working relationship with Jewish communities outside Israel including their associations with business, industry and universities. If this is not done, the Negev's future does not appear promising.

¹³ Yehuda Gradus, "The Emergence of Regionalism in a Centralized System: The Case of Israel," *Society and Space*, Vol., 1984, p. 97.

The Social Role of the Israeli Community Center*

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There are opportunities as well as risks inherent in the development of community centers [Matnassim]. The greater the risks, the greater the chance that Matnassim will play an increasingly larger role in Israeli society, not only in the realm of leisure time activities but also [in providing] . . . differentiated services . . .

DESPITE the interest in community centers (*Matnassim*) in Israel, very little research has been done and little has been written on the subject there. This article will acquaint the reader with the historical background of the *Matnassim*, their operational principles and objectives and the social roles which they fulfill in Israel.

Historical Background

Community centers have existed and operated in Israel for the past seventy years. Originally, *batei am*, or cultural centers, were established by political parties and ideological movements. The aim was to offer a variety of educational, cultural and recreational activities for various age groups.

In the course of their development, three distinct types or models of community centers emerged: First, there are those associated with social-ideological or political movements. Here, activities tend to be unidimensional and such institutions are often short-lived, in part as a result of financial dependence on a single source of support. Second, there are community centers based on the "country club" model. Activities are provided with an aim towards profit-making and little concern for the needs of the community. The third type of community center is based on an elitist model. Membership is contingent upon

a particular organizational tie or other prerequisites.

In the wake of changes in Israeli society and possibilities of financial assistance from abroad,¹ a new generation of community centers has risen which is neither dependent, transient, indifferent to the environment, elitist, nor profit-making.² This generation is represented by the *Matnas*, an acronym standing for culture, youth and sports center.

Matnassim were established by a government association and today operate in some 100 cities and neighborhoods throughout the country. The majority of *Matnassim* have been established in distressed urban areas and neighborhoods or development towns. Others have been set up in well-established areas.³ In general, we tend to think of cities, especially large cities, as focal points for many of the social and demographic problems of society. Government statistics indicate, however, that in

¹ Chaim Zipori, *The Emergence and Development of Matnassim in Israel*, Jerusalem, The Joseph J. Schwartz Graduate Program for Training Community Center Directors and Senior Personnel at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1972 (In Hebrew).

² David Macarov and Uri Yanay, "Some Preliminary Findings Concerning Community Centers in Israel," *The Journal of Jewish Communal Services*, 51, (4) (Summer 1975), pp. 332-340.

³ Uri Yanay, "Community Centers in Israel as Service Delivery Agencies". An Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, April 1982A (In Hebrew).

* Based on the Arnulf M. Pins Memorial Lecture, 1983.

Israel per capita income is lowest in new development towns and the rate of juvenile delinquency is highest in some of these areas. Statistics also reveal that the highest rate of out-migration is from Eilat, followed by Arad.⁴ It is no wonder, therefore, that most *Matnassim* have been established in peripheral areas. From a recent study, it appears that 83% of the *Matnassim* are located in areas which are ranked in the lower half of the cumulative socio-economic spectrum.⁵

Although established by a government association, once in operation, *Matnassim* cease to belong to that association and become associations in their own right. Administration is granted to a board of directors or "local executive", made up of representatives from the local authority, the Ministry of Education and Culture, residents and funding agencies. The local executive has the authority and autonomy to make decisions, to plan and implement activities, to draw up contracts⁶ as it sees fit in consultation with the professional staff.

The "Compensatory" and "Enabling" Roles of the *Matnas*:

The social potential of the community center in Israel is two-fold: The *Matnas* performs both a "compensatory role" and an "enabling role". The former is aimed at narrowing existing social gaps by offering compensatory educational and occupational activities to overcome individual and group deficits.

On another level, compensation refers to the bridging of gaps between the

⁴ Yitzhak Berman, *Social Profile of Cities and Towns in Israel*. Jerusalem: State of Israel, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, May 1982.

⁵ Yanay *op. cit.*

⁶ Esther Alon, (ed.), *Guide for Members of Boards of Directors of the Community Centers*. Jerusalem: Israel Corporation of Community Centers, 1982 (in Hebrew).

services provided the residents in large cities and those offered in smaller and more remote locations in Israel. The *Matnas* brings social activities to peripheral regions and in this way provides a variety of services similar to those offered in large cities and densely populated areas. This, in turn, increases the attractiveness of the peripheral town as well as the quality of life and well-being.

Today, more than in the past, families who consider relocating from the city to more peripheral towns in order to improve their living conditions consider also whether their children will be able to study music and dance, whether wives will have exercise classes and whether husbands can play soccer on Friday afternoons. Thus, the *Matnas* plays an important role in the current policy of population dispersal. For those who wish to relocate to smaller towns for reasons of ideology and not only quality of life, the *Matnas* can provide an appropriate base for their involvement and activity as well.

The *Matnas* has the potential not only to attract newcomers to the area but to reduce the trend toward outmigration. Hirschman⁷ posits the theory that the individual who lives in a free society and is dissatisfied with a product, service, quality or standard of living can either remove himself from that which is undesirable ("exit") or attempt to induce change by virtue of involvement and participation ("voice"). The response is determined by the degree of loyalty towards the object. In Hirschman's words, "When there is loyalty, migration means desertion, abandonment and betrayal".⁸ We may claim, therefore, that among other things, the community center ought to be an arena for activity

⁷ Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970.

⁸ *Ibid.*

and participation which will increase loyalty to the institution and, indirectly, to the town as well and mitigate against the desire to leave due to dissatisfaction in other areas of life.

As an enabling agent, the *Matnas* provides opportunities to the individual as a service recipient, as a volunteer who gives of his or her time, abilities or skills, or as a partner who participates on committees or the local board. This experience on the part of the individual or group enables the formation and application of the experience accumulated in the small world of the *Matnas* to other spheres of life. In this sense, the Israeli *Matnassim* resemble the settlement house movement in Europe and America.⁹

The *Matnas* which is by definition an independent, non-political organization, can also offer neighborhood residents assistance in organizing committees, thus demonstrating the value of participation and democracy as the basis of a progressive society.

The *Matnas* is viewed today as a professional body which provides comprehensive, continuous and independent services. It is relatively free of the stigma associated with some other social and welfare organizations. As such, the *Matnas* can play a significant role in community service delivery by providing professional help to those who avoid or reject traditional social service institutions.

Operational Principles and Objectives

Among the operational principles which reflect the underlying ideology of the *Matnassim* are the following:

- (1) Programs should respond to the needs of the local population.
- (2) Residents should participate in

⁹ David Macarov, *The Community Centers as Multi-Service Centers—Development and Problems*. Jerusalem: IACC**, 1979 (in Hebrew).

the planning of services and be involved in the implementation of activities.

- (3) The *Matnas* should serve the community as a whole and achieve a balance among activities for different sectors and strata.
- (4) Fees ought to be charged for services provided.¹⁰

The *Matnas* is intended to operate with and for the community — but the boundaries of responsibility are left open. Different from other local service organizations such as employment agencies, schools, welfare departments, clinics, etc. which are provided with both spheres of responsibility and resources for meeting specific objectives, the *Matnas* has no single and well-defined area of responsibility. Consequently, resources are not guaranteed. With the help of the local executive and professional staff the *Matnas* must find its own niche¹¹ and define for itself an area of responsibility and objectives for activity.

Objectives may range from strengthening the family through joint parent-child activities, to enhancing and broadening of friendships and social networks in the community by drawing individuals out of the home during increasingly longer leisure time. The *Matnas* may work with residents to increase pedestrian safety in the community or to reduce, if not eliminate, violence. All of these are objectives that can be measured in terms of the degree of success over time and the outcomes of activities in the community.

Once responsibilities are defined,

¹⁰ Esther Alon, *Suggested Goals, Principles and Operating Procedures in the Network of Community Centers*. Jerusalem: Israel Corp. of Community Center, 1980 (in Hebrew).

¹¹ Meyer N. Zald, *Organizational Change—The Political Economy of the Y.M.C.A.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

support may be provided by other partners, national or local, private or public, for those activities aimed at a specific objective. But, once again, continued participation in additional activities is not guaranteed.

The definition of objectives and the implementation of activities to meet specific aims are a significant factor in the operation of the *Matnas*. Those who do not find an appropriate niche, tend to disintegrate. Moreover, in the absence of an explicit social purpose, to guide activities towards a deserved end in one defined area, the efforts of the *Matnas* can have no cumulative benefit. In seeking the fulfillment of a given social objective in the community, every program must, in the crystallization phase or peak of its activity, contain the seeds of the next activity, rather than allow for the disintegration and impoverishment of the program. New activities need to be increasingly geared towards the ultimate social goal and generation of change in the community.

Accordingly, every activity or service in the *Matnas* represents a step on the ladder towards a predefined objective. Thus, for example, preparatory courses for childbirth should not be terminated with delivery. Just as birth signifies new life and a new generation, intervention programs must give rise to new initiatives which will continue to involve both mothers and fathers. Participants might go on to join in forums on child care and infant education and new mothers could become leaders or groups for other expectant parents. Reluctant husbands might be encouraged to participate in the "sale" of infant equipment and clothing.

The importance of continuity and development of this type lies not only in the general contribution to the community but also in transmitting to participants the sense of their ability to change, initiate, influence, organize and achieve.

Herein lies the special potential of the *Matnas* which, by virtue of its continuity as well as innovative character, distinguishes it from other traditional service organizations.

Paradoxically, the urgency of defining responsibilities and objectives presents a certain contradiction to the operational principles stated above, and highlights a number of dilemmas facing *Matnassim*. To begin with, one may ask how and by whom the "needs" of the local population are determined. Who are the clients in the community? Can activities, aimed at responding to "needs" as defined by professionals, fulfill the demands or wishes of the local population? Can the response to the demands for certain activities be exploited for the realization of a broader social goal? Can a "balance" among services lead to change or does it preserve a status quo?

In the triad which is formed between residents, staff and local executive, the public is interested in consuming their favorite services while the local board has its own interest as representative of various organizations. In a recent study it was revealed that representatives from the local population, who ought to be partners to the director and staff in their service orientation, identify themselves with the general public and are willing to sacrifice service delivery geared to specific groups in the community in favor of more popular activities.¹²

Thus, in the field, one finds many activities, ranging from sports and physical fitness to *Gemara*. *Matnassim* offer formal studies towards matriculation along with summer camps for children; elementary school classes along with

¹² Uri Yanay, "The Function and Influence of Members of the Local Board of Directors", *Summaries and Objectives 1981-1982, IACC*. Jerusalem: June 1982B (in Hebrew).

mobile maintenance units; ballet as well as hot meals for the elderly; programs to encourage house and neighborhood committees as well as rock groups; a resident theatre as well as counselling in areas of income tax and national insurance.¹³ Recently, the question of allowing classes in Eastern cults within the *Matnas* has even been raised.

The *Matnas* can be conceptualized on a continuum where at one end it is identified with the familiar leisure-time activities that have often guaranteed survival and, at the other end, it is defined as a professional organization involved in the delicate task of identifying distress and diagnosing needs. The dilemma which confronts the *Matnas* is not merely one of priority — activities in response to popular demands as opposed to professionally defined needs — but rather how to guarantee change and social improvement without endangering the very survival of the organization in the future.

In the case of other local service organizations, such as employment agencies, schools, welfare departments, clinics etc. which are established on the basis of laws and regulations, the survival of the organization is not dependent on the quantity or quality of public usage and participation. Even if the demand is low at certain times, the organization is maintained by virtue of law.

In the case of the *Matnas*, we must emphasize again that there is no law or regulation which defines its role. Survival and the capacity to function at a given time are not guaranteed. Rather, the *Matnas* has an obligation to prove and maintain itself.

¹³ Uri Yanay, *Annual Survey of Community Centers — Findings 1976-1981*. Jerusalem: The Joseph J. Schwartz Graduate Program for Training Community Center Directors and Senior Personnel at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the IACC, October 1983.

Thus, the professional staff and, in particular, the director, must navigate between accepting social responsibilities and ensuring the survival of the organization. This means, among other things, identifying and promoting those objectives which can be successfully undertaken.

Who, then, are the clients in the community and what is meant by balance? Does not variety in programming imply variation in participation as well as involvement and commitment?

Our own study¹⁴ revealed that the extent of participation is higher and the intensity relatively greater in distressed communities, particularly the smaller ones. This may be due to the fact that in such communities the *Matnas* is virtually the only social service delivery agent of its type and it attracts many local residents who have nothing else to do. In contrast, in well-established areas, the size of the community has the reverse effect: the larger the town or neighborhood the greater the extent of participation, despite the presence of alternative services. Moreover, the intensity of activity is similar to that in distressed areas.

This finding is worthy of elaboration: In distressed areas, we observe overrepresentation of participants of European-American origin with relatively small families. In established areas, on the other hand, we find overrepresentation of residents of Asian-African origin and primarily those with large families who participate to an extent which exceeds their proportion of the general population. In an attempt to explain the latter phenomenon, we may hypothesize that in well established areas, large families who want to "keep up with their neighbors" must seek less

¹⁴ Yanay, *Summaries and Objectives, 1981-82 op.cit.*

expensive alternatives to music academies, private lessons, sports clubs or museums. The *Matnas* fulfills this role by providing for the needs of those who cannot afford to purchase services in the expensive private market. In distressed areas, the *Matnas* fulfills the demand, if not the need, of those who are seeking a framework for social, cultural and sports activities in the community.

One additional finding: Most of the activities in *Matnassim* are geared towards children, youth and elderly. The number of programs for these age groups are proportioned to their representation in the local population. Relatively few programs are geared for adults and even less for toddlers. This suggests that the *Matnas* serves those groups who in fact, come and who seek out the services, programs and activities offered.

What is being done to reach the less active groups? Can we anticipate that all residents will come and ask to participate? This may be true for one time, mass activities (holiday celebrations or local functions), but what about other, on-going activities with an explicit social goal? How can the community center realize its ideological commitment to serve the entire community? How can it reach the non-participants in the local public?

Here, the *Matnas* has a choice: either to bring the participants to the activities or the activities to the participants. In the first case, the primary means is by marketing and advertisement as well as reaching out, often door-to-door. The second case is more complex and, studies have shown, less common. Activities are brought to participants primarily in those *Matnassim* that have succeeded in organizing either active volunteers or a paraprofessional staff of residents who have accepted responsibility for some of the professional tasks in the community. Among the services

which are brought to residents in their homes are hot meals or kerosene oil for the elderly, laundry service and day care (*mishpachton*).

The dilemma of resident participation, however, is related not only to the nature and extent of the efforts to reach residents but also to the "rationing" of programs.

There are a number of mechanisms by which a community center can ration activities and determine selectivity of participants including: type and contents of activity, cost, location and timing. Other factors such as individual commitment and quality of leadership also affect participation.

It has been claimed that the cost of *Matnas* activities prevents some sectors from participating. However, an empirical study has shown that most of the activities defined as related to "needs" are offered to the public at no charge: The majority of educational activities, elementary education and tutoring, and all activities in the framework of community work are free, although this violates the explicit principle of *Matnassim*. There is a relatively small number of cultural and social activities and summer programs that are provided at a fee to the public and only a few sports activities or one-time events that are free. The latter can be viewed as a response to demand rather than need.

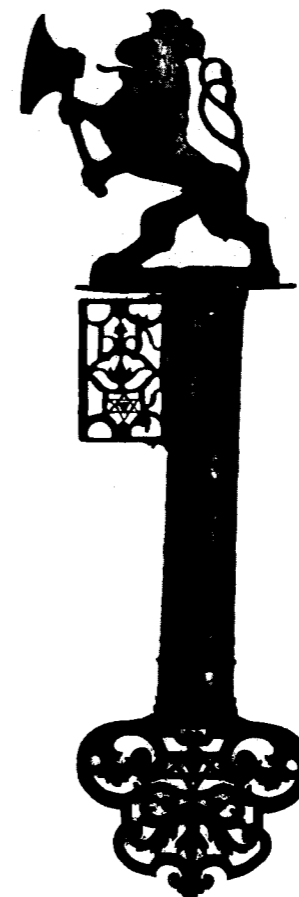
Another interesting empirical finding points to considerable variation in the fees for activities not only among various *Matnassim* but within a given *Matnas*. The fee is flexible and varies according to characteristics of age, family size and even family income, all on the principle that cost should not prevent participation. Thus, in many *Matnassim* we may find the custom of examining the individual's financial situation. Until now, *Matnassim* have generally been free of the stigma associated with some of the traditional welfare services. But this

status is endangered so long as the cost of participation continues to be determined by the staff rather than as a fixed and unified policy.

The dilemma of selectivity needs to be re-examined in the light of the social role which the *Matnas* has taken upon itself in the community. It may be that the principle of "balance between sectors and strata" is inconsistent with the explicit social ideology. There will always be participant selectivity, but it ought to be used in a conscious way to serve the purpose and the social objective of the *Matnas* and to generate change.

In conclusion, it can be said that the *Matnas* movement in Israel and its development up until now reflect unique directions and characteristics which distinguish it from other traditional social services. There are opportunities as well

as risks inherent in the development of community centers. The greater the risks, the greater the chance that *Matnassim* will play an increasingly larger role in Israeli society, not only in the realm of leisure time activities but also as an innovative organization which accepts responsibility for continually changing social goals and, in keeping with defined goals, provides differentiated services for the population in general and distressed groups in particular. Future development is dependent to a large extent on the professional staff and its ongoing training, on the local board and its leadership, and on the encouragement of active members. Each of these is an important variable which will guarantee the success of this unique community service organization.



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