

CONSTRUCTIVE FUNCTIONS OF SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

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It has often been found that the special agency is responsible for improvement in the general technique and handling of a given social condition. Perhaps the family agency, overtaxed with its caseload in the treatment of family problems, has been unable till recent years to view the broader social aspects; but in some communities, at least, it has been markedly noticeable that movements for improvement in the handling of maladjusted children in the public schools, better case work and study in reformatories, proper analysis and study of inmates of various penal institutions, and improvements in welfare departments of the state have counted heavily on support given by the specialized agency. The ability of the family agency to devote more time and energy to improvement of social conditions now that public relief has been expanded is, of course, a question of future determination.

It is deplorable that only four of the large communities give any consideration to the adult delinquent. It is obvious that family and other social agencies have ignored this type of work, leaving rehabilitation programs and methods to prison and reformatory administrators, many of whom have had no training in approaching this important problem.

It seems incredible that in the State of Maryland no caseworking system is in operation in the penal institutions. Begun a short time ago, it was discontinued through lack of funds. It is only because of insistence on the part of the specialized agencies in the com-

munity that the authorities have given any consideration to this approach in the treatment of thousands of inmates in the institutions, and it is fair to predict that it will be the specialized agencies in Maryland that will be responsible for improvement of the entire social program as related to institutional management and operation.

The Big Brother and Big Sister Federation, Inc., in New York City, is suggestive of the constructive functioning of a specialized agency. Among its Minimum Standards for Membership are provisions that clearly indicate the difference between the family service and that of the Big Brother.

"The organization shall render personal, individual and intensive casework service to children. Preventive service with children under sixteen should receive the chief emphasis.

"Cooperation with local social work agencies must be secured and rendered.

"The use of carefully selected laymen, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, is required.

"Training of laymen by lectures, seminars or reading courses is required.

"The Big Brothers and Big Sisters must be guided and supervised by trained workers. It is suggested that any one worker should not be expected to supervise more than fifty laymen.

"The Executive shall be a person trained in social work and experienced in case work.

"Lay workers, rather than the office, should carry the majority of cases.

"It is essential that personal introduction of the client to the Big Brother or Big Sister be made as soon as possible after investigation.

"Clients should be assigned to Big Brothers and Big Sisters of the same religious faith.

"Case work methods of the organization must be those approved by recognized authorities in social case work and by the Federation Staff. These methods include:

A. Adequate personal and family history.

B. Registration of or inquiry concerning new cases with the Social Service, or Confidential, Exchange; utilization of family histories of other social agencies.

"A case is under active supervision when

there are contacts every month between the layman and the child, the office and the child, or both. The number should depend on the requirements of the case, but three or four are suggested as necessary for efficiency.

"In order that the office may supervise and direct the work of the layman, monthly reports shall be required of each Big Brother and Big Sister.

"Cases shall be formally closed when the period of active supervision on the part of layman or the office ceases.

"The record cards and forms used must be approved by the Federation Staff."

There are, of course, many advantages in centralization; but there are also many disadvantages. Over-professionalized agencies have not succeeded in winning the full confidence of the laymen, who are essentially the sponsors of the agencies and contributors to their support. They should be educated to the work that is being done in the community and be made to feel a sense of responsibility by participation in the various programs of social casework. The Big Brother and Big Sister organizations have always encouraged lay or non-professional participation; unfortunately family agencies in numerous cases have discouraged the efforts of volunteers.

Volunteers can be as effective in providing the services assigned to them as the program developed for the utilization of their services encourages them to be. Active participation gives them experience. Active association gives them the knowledge that is necessary to convey the importance of the work to the community at large.

In April, 1935 Dr. Sheldon Glueck said:

"Big Brothers and Big Sisters might be very active in bringing cases to the attention of the clinics, helping to carry out their recommendations, interpreting their aims and functions to the community. While religious considerations are involved in some of the proposed functions of family-guidance clinics, differences of viewpoint should be accommodated

through frank discussion.

"Some cities, such as Los Angeles and Berkeley, have long pointed the way to a practical instrument for community organization. Community councils made up of representatives of the various civic and social activities in the region, are tending to bring about a much-needed integration of effort to save the finer cultural values of the community and counteract the destructive or vicious forces that readily invade the cracks of a disorganized neighborhood. The Big Brother and Big Sister Federation is sponsoring such community councils, and the workers in this movement can help to organize councils; to bring community problems and needed facilities to their attention, and to interpret their aims and methods to families.

"In the field of education it has many duties. It can establish child guidance clinics in school systems to collaborate with the family guidance centers and the community councils. It can expand its system of visiting teachers trained to detect and cope with personality and behavior problems of children before these become serious or chronic, and here it can bring into play the practical experience and devotion of Big Brothers and Big Sisters working under expert guidance."

In the development of these councils is found an answer to the query as to what Jewish agencies can do to ameliorate the economic insecurity and social hazards which lie behind so many of these problems. Suppression of economic cannibalism, provision for security against old age, sickness and other hazards by means of social insurance reserves, razing of slum areas and providing wholesome places of living for the great masses cannot be the undertaking of any one agency, but calls for the combined efforts of the community.

Those who are interested in the prevention of delinquency have a number of specific functions to perform. In this work Big Brothers and Big Sister service can be most helpful. It becomes a matter of concern to everyone that the standards of living of millions be improved, if they are to be prevented from stumbling through life in a veil of insecurity and despair.