

## EXPERIMENTS IN FLEXIBILITY:

## A Study of Inter-Agency Relationships

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WHEN we were asked to write an article for *THE QUARTERLY* about the working relationships of our two agencies we thought it would be a comparatively simple matter. "Yes, certainly," was our immediate and amiable response. It should be easy enough to set down on paper what we do, how we do it, perhaps even why we do it and what we may wish to do next. It is subject matter that concerns us intimately and almost daily. It commands the intense interest of our lay and professional workers alike, from the experienced, and sometimes puzzled, Board members, to the newest recruits on the staffs, as yet too inexperienced to be puzzled. We try new experiments, live to rejoice or to regret, as the case may be, then proceed to try all over again. But in spite of this pre-occupation with inter-agency relationships, we find actually writing about them none too easy.

This may be because our experiments have aroused questions that still puzzle us and lead to heretical speculation on the origin and values of our much heralded specializations. Are these based on actual differences in problems and needs or on out-worn traditions and expediency? Wherein lies the basic difference in function between the two agencies? We are not prepared with final answers. We can only present a review of our experiences in Baltimore, what they have meant to us, and how certain changes

in our relationship have been brought about.

Problems of inter-agency relationships are too well known to require enumeration here. Every Chest, every Federation is only too familiar with the pitfalls that beset the paths of its constituent agencies, and with the need for developing methods of cooperative effort that shall not be a mere verbalization. Inter-agency problems exist everywhere, they always have and perhaps they always will. Perhaps they always should, as the challenge of a healthy diversity, and of objective outside criticism, can serve as excellent and potent serums against the deadly poisons of agency self-satisfaction and complacency. But it does not always work out that way. Diversity can become a dangerous wedge, forcing agencies apart. Criticism is not always given, nor always taken objectively, and the normal and proper differences between related fields, thus transmuted into professional distrust and personal antagonisms, can only erect effective barriers to good working relationships.

Baltimore is no exception. Inter-agency problems of varying kinds and degrees exist here as they do elsewhere. In a comparatively small and closely knit community such as ours, the relationship between the family and children's agencies always was an important factor, but with each step in the coordination of our community services it necessarily became more pro-

nounced. When we arrived at the stage of a single children's agency with the family agency performing all the intake services, matters were greatly simplified but this very simplification undoubtedly increased our sense of inter-dependence and led us to realize more keenly not only our differences, but our similarities. There are many reasons for this.

Our two agencies were first brought into being years ago along traditional lines. Children deprived of parental care needed protection—hence the old Orphan Asylums. Families needed financial assistance—hence the beginnings of the family relief society—and there seemed no connection between the two, conducted as they were under separate auspices and operating as independent units.

The passing years were marked by a series of changes in the structure of our general community organization motivated by the desire to strengthen and coordinate services that were necessary and to eliminate those that were not, and our two agencies passed through a number of different stages that greatly modified their nature and extent.

The Jewish Children's Society, which sprang from the merger of two old orphan asylums and a small foster home system, developed into a child-placing agency by further processes of consolidation. It is the only Jewish child caring agency in the State of Maryland and devotes itself exclusively to its foster care program with the Jewish Social Service Bureau performing its intake service. Although rooted in the old orphan asylum methods, new emphasis in child welfare in both the children's and the family fields has

brought about significant differences in its problems and its methods of meeting them. The family agency is increasing the number of satisfactory adjustments for children whose chief problem is the deprivation of parental care, by making use of relatives or visiting foster mothers. Short term placements because of the temporary illness of mothers have long since become the rare exception instead of the regular rule. But children presenting behavior problems because of difficult home situations are increasing in number and now form a large proportion of the population, demanding much more than the comfortable protection we strove to provide in the old days. The case load of the children's agency runs the gamut of behavior problems and complicated family relationships. It demands intensive service in adjusting the individual to personal and environmental factors.

The Jewish Social Service Bureau travelled the familiar road until it developed those services characteristic of the family society of the twenties. Subsequently several mergers with small agencies dealing solely with girls' problems extended its area and now, relieved from the pressure of administering unemployment relief, it can center its attention chiefly on service to unadjusted families and individuals, always its major interest. Including the Jewish Children's Society intake, it renders what is almost a complete private family case-work service for the entire Jewish community. The "almost" refers to a few specialized agencies still operating independently which remain as mute testimony that our process of coordination is incomplete. Just as we have described the case load of the

children's agency, so can we describe the case load of the family agency—it runs the gamut of behavior problems and complicated family relationships, it demands intensive service in adjusting the individual to personal and environmental factors.

It can be seen that our developmental history brought changes in the scope and interests of each agency that necessarily affected both. It is true that some of these changes were definitely planned and executed together and that our working relationships had many positive elements, but in the zeal for self-improvement it was not always recognized that actual progress in meeting needs from the broader community point of view cannot be achieved by separate and unrelated effort.

Therefore, frequently without reference to the extent to which they might have common problems each agency developed independently with a desire to increase its own skills and importance, irrespective of the needs and progress of the other. This was successful in fostering the competitive spirit so inimical to sound working relationships and perpetuated the traditional boundary lines.

However, the actual progress within each agency, although brought about independently, created its own assaults upon these boundaries in its own way. New skills and new practices in one agency seemed naturally to converge towards new skills and new practices in the other, only to be brought up sharply by these well preserved lines of demarcation.

Our family workers, freed from undue pressures, were able to concentrate on direct work with the individual child as a natural part of their service to

the family as a whole. By establishing valuable relationships they were able to prevent untimely placements but, when placement had to occur, they wanted the right to continue service when it seemed best not to interrupt that relationship. They wanted to know more about that mysterious instrument, the foster home, to which they must commit their child and which they must explain and evaluate for his parents. There was growing recognition that the training and use of housekeepers or "visiting foster mothers" entails a form of substitute parental care that has much in common with the regular foster home service. As another example of similarity, the family agency is making more and more use of the private family home for adults, with or without children, whose circumstances make the maintenance of their own homes impossible.

Here then, grew the need for that special technique we are accustomed to look upon as the private property of the children's agency—the development and use of environment for the benefit of an individual or group.

On its side, the children's agency has shown a similar tendency to expand into areas considered the private property of the family agency. With due recognition of the foster child's basic emotional ties with his own people and the effect of their relationships upon him, the children's agency wants the right to deal with the entire family situation in order to treat the problem as a whole, and at the actual roots. Just as the family worker resists a break in relationship after placement, so does the children's worker often consider it essential to continue ser-

vice to the child and his family after they have been united. But all this went contrary to the rules.

With customary procedure thus challenged, the inability to find convincing answers to new questions put by Board members and workers made us uncomfortably aware that our cherished methods of determining what is thine and what is mine might be illogical and unreasonable. We resolved to ferret out the causes of our increasing confusion and so made voyages of exploration into each other's territory that have proved healthy incentives for facing the situation squarely, and together.

We discovered we were performing many identical services. Both agencies were dealing with the same problems of health, recreation and education, with the care of the handicapped and with all the variations of marital and parental relationships. We both were dealing with parents and children in their own homes, in the homes of relatives, and in foster homes. We both struggled to find ways and means of encouraging the discouraged Youth of today. Yet we did not have identical budgetary restrictions nor staffs with identical training and experience so that these services were rendered with some marked differences in standards of relief and methods of approach.

These discoveries created further curiosity and led to experiments in flexibility which are still under way and have been invaluable, if for no other reason, in proving that the limbering up process is good for the soul.

As a first step we formed a committee of executives and supervisors to review the situation and to plan methods of meeting it. This committee still meets to evaluate and modify experi-

ments or to plan new ones, if need be. Other joint committees, both lay and professional, have been increasingly active. Staff members of both agencies meet to consider visiting foster mother service, to discuss problems of child welfare in general or of foster care in particular, problems of parent-child relationships and other topics of common interest.

We have had an inter-locking directorate for many years. Board meetings and Case Committee meetings are attended by lay and professional representatives of both agencies. Facing the issue produced by our differences in personnel policies a joint committee of officers and executives held a series of meetings last year and produced a schedule which established complete parity of personnel standards.

In the effort to learn more about the actual practices in each other's agency we expended much energy at first in revising our system of exchanging information on joint cases. The existing forms of reporting were made more elaborate and detailed, but they eventually proved inadequate as we realized they could not reveal the processes of study and treatment as we believed they should be revealed. Therefore we now read each other's histories on all cases indicating a need for joint services as a necessary preparation to discussion and planning.

Almost as a natural corollary we began to make conscious experiments with entering into each other's areas. When it seems desirable not to interrupt relationships at crucial stages we no longer insist on our hereditary rights. Family workers do not necessarily relinquish service during the period of placement nor is the children's

worker forced suddenly to terminate good relationships after the child's return home. This has required the expenditure of considerable time and effort as each agency gives such situations special supervision or serves as consultant as the case may warrant.

Another natural development has been that much emphasis has been placed on improving methods of selecting foster homes for adults, and at present the Children's Society, which provides all such homes for the Bureau, gives them more thorough preliminary study than was hitherto thought necessary. This service, which has recently increased in volume and intensity has much significance in relation to our case-work practices that still needs more analysis than we have been able to give it.

Problems of intake affect us both vitally and still remain a frequent cause of confusion and dissatisfaction. The children's workers believe that their more protected and concentrated experience gives them an acute perception of the significance of danger signs in children's behavior that the family workers have only recently been able to develop. Therefore they have been critical of situations referred at a time when the child's age and the seriously aggravated nature of his problems makes treatment either at home or in foster care of doubtful value. The traditional zeal of both agencies for preserving the family unit may also have been responsible for unwise delay in placement.

It is agreed that the children's agency should participate in the diagnostic process preliminary to removal, just as

the family agency should participate in plans for uniting the family group. Efforts are made to initiate this joint activity before situations become crucial but this is not always possible and the preparation for placement does not always run smoothly when service responsibility is thus divided. We believe that both agencies have inherent values necessary to adequate diagnostic studies and are trying to learn how to utilize these values to the uttermost. Until we do, some confusion and dissatisfaction will probably remain.

Obviously we are confronted with many questions. We have already stated we are not prepared with final answers nor can we make confident predictions as to the future. The very process of reviewing our experiences for *THE QUARTERLY* gives us perspectives that reveal how much we still have to overcome. We shall continue to try to find answers and a recently formed committee of our Board members and members of the Associated Jewish Charities will study the situation for the purpose of future planning. Observations of our experiments lead us to believe that the basic content of our two fields is practically identical. It is true we have developed specializations but it is also true that these can be looked upon as tools to be used in the general process of service to families and children, and are based on good generic case work procedure. We have learned much about each other. We now face the task of learning how we can most effectively strengthen our respective services and harmonize them for the benefit of client and community.

## RE-EDUCATIVE ACTIVITY FOR DELINQUENT YOUTH

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### Individualization in Therapy

**T**HE re-educational program of a modern progressive school for delinquent youth is based upon the accepted facts of modern psychiatry that a large number of personality difficulties arise from unconscious sources and that such disturbances are essentially individual in their nature. Because of the individual nature of the personality deviation, the treatment program must be individualized. Another consideration that enters in the construction of a re-educational and treatment program for delinquent youth is the re-conditioning of attitudes toward group life and toward adults by friendly and satisfying living experiences with adults and peers.

Enlightened psychiatry and education recognize that the strivings, drives and conflicts which remain latent and serve to distort personality need expression through some medium.<sup>1</sup> If this expression is constructive and leads to group recognition, self-esteem and satisfaction, the integrative process in the personality is aided and it is thereby helped to accept social and group restraint. This re-educative process is further aided by satisfying group life under the leadership of understanding and sympathetic adults who serve as parent substitutes.

In view of these basic elements of corrective education, the re-educational department of the Hawthorne-Cedar

Knolls School of the Jewish Board of Guardians made an analysis of its student population before proceeding with definite plans for its work.<sup>2</sup> These studies revealed that the median of intelligence of the student body is about 90, approximately ten per cent being above an Intelligence Quotient of 100. The Mental Age scatter was very wide in relation to Chronological Age, which indicated both immaturity and considerable personality instability. The population was classified in terms of degree of socializability and influence boys had upon each other—destructive or constructive—in and out of their own cottages. Each boy's and girl's special talents and interests were ascertained from the psychologist's records and through a questionnaire submitted to all adults who knew or worked with the boy or girl. A similar study was made of each boy and girl as to his or her standing in academic subjects and vocational shops in the school. In a later stage of the educational department's work, cottage and other group attitudes were established as to boys' own attitudes and strivings toward adult status.

### School and Life Groupings

On the basis of these and other studies, and on the basis of the psychiatric material and the psychologist's data available, the boys were classified for their school work under the following

1. In psycho-therapy this medium is language. In corrective education the medium is creative expression forms and human relations.

2. The present article deals only with the educational program of the school. It does not describe the individualized psycho-therapy employed in the treatment of the more severe cases of personality deviations or its program of vocational training.