

Progress in Brooklyn

By S. C. KOHS

THOSE who are informed on the situation in Brooklyn and who will see the title of this article will find themselves in the position of the farmer who, when he saw a giraffe in a zoo exclaimed, "There ain't no such animal." They are likely to exclaim "There ain't no progress in Brooklyn." Nevertheless a few significant changes have occurred, some of which will be outlined below.

A little over two years ago, when the writer was invited to accept the Directorship of the Jewish Federation in Brooklyn he looked upon this opportunity as one in which it might be possible to accomplish a constructive piece of work, in the largest Jewish community in the world. His friends in Jewish social work were almost unanimous in the opinion that no tangible achievements were possible in Brooklyn. Their comments were that the community was poor, the organizations were poorer, and no borough-wide community spirit existed which would make real constructive work possible. Nevertheless, there was a lurking suspicion that a community the size of Brooklyn must have in it potentialities of great promise.

During the last two years there have been a few discouraging events and also a number of positive accomplishments to give one renewed courage and enthusiasm to carry on. Perhaps more time may be required to achieve our objectives, but one is no less convinced of the fine forward movement which the situation promises. Recent progress, which is to be described below, is not alone encouraging in itself, but it lays the foundation for the advancement of social work in ways thought beyond possibility before.

To begin with, please visualize 916,000 Jews in one Borough—more than double that of Manhattan, and larger by 16,000 than that of Manhattan and the Bronx combined:

Manhattan	400,000*
Bronx	500,000
Brooklyn	916,000

Visualize also the comparative financial support for approximately equal needy populations in the following comparative statement (1929):

Manhattan and Bronx	\$5,209,736
Brooklyn	758,255

Yet in spite of the equal load of work and the terrific disparity in financial support, Brooklyn is expected to build and to carry through a social work program equal to that

of neighboring communities. Perhaps at a later time we shall present our analysis explaining the underlying causes for this difference in financial status. For the present let it suffice to state that Brooklyn can make its appeals only to 15% of the Jewish wealth of Greater New York; that indigenous and also extrinsic and adventitious factors point to a fixation of this situation for perhaps the next few years, if not longer. This condition exists, in spite of the fact that 50% of the working population of Manhattan comes daily from Brooklyn, and the creation of Jewish wealth in Greater New York is equally due to the labors of the tens of thousands who pass West through the subways under the East River, as of those who pass South under the Harlem River. But inter-borough philanthropic services have sharp and distinct lines of demarcation as far as Brooklyn is concerned: "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further."

The history of the Brooklyn Jewish community is a history of sections. Williamsburgh has an origin and evolution radically different from Bensonhurst; Brownsville has a communal "personality" as distinct from South Brooklyn as that of Minsk and Stockton, California.

Coming more specifically to our present topic, perhaps the greatest progress of any Jewish social agency in Brooklyn has been made during the last two years by our United Jewish Aid Societies, of which Mr. Samuel Rabinovitch is the Director. This organization is one of the largest in the United States. Mr. Rabinovitch, during his eighteen years with the organization, has struggled against almost insuperable obstacles such as inadequate staff, inadequate budget, an uninformed community, an absence of community spirit, and a general lack of understanding of the objectives of a modern family case-work organization. Although he had, from time to time, the assistance of far-sighted lay leaders, such as the present president of the organization, Mr. Mortimer Brenner, who aided him in what he aimed to accomplish, progress was slow because of the huge task which the organization faced and the inadequate facilities for attacking the problem effectively.

In 1929 the Brooklyn Federation of Jewish Charities made available to the United Jewish Aid Societies an increase of 15% in its annual budget for the purpose of increased staff and for the improvement in the quality of its personnel. With this encouragement the organization began making definite strides in advancing the standards of its case-work. More recently, in the fall of 1930 another important step along this line was taken by this agency. In co-operation with the Training School for Jewish Social

Work a training district was established for the purpose of training students of the School and the new workers in the organization.

This project, undoubtedly one of the most important steps it had ever taken for improving the quality of its work, came about because of the need for an internal stimulus to advancing standards within the agency, and as a result of the need for increased case-work training facilities on the part of the School due to the two-year program which was first set in full operation this fall, thus making available additional students for placement. With the School program calling for a definite period of field-work with a family case-work agency, for all the students, regardless of the specific field for which they were planning ultimately to prepare themselves, additional facilities were necessary besides those already available through the Jewish Social Service Association of New York City. Accordingly the United Jewish Aid Societies of Brooklyn, through its president and its director, in negotiation with the School officials decided to establish a training district which would be under the joint auspices of the School and the U. J. A. S. It was decided also that the director of the district shall be a full-time faculty member of the School so that the standards and quality of the work in this district might be maintained on the highest possible level. Miss Beatrice Z. Levey, a graduate of Indiana University, holding the master's degree from the Smith College School of Social Work, with twelve years' experience in family case-work and in psychiatric social work, was engaged to organize and direct this district. The district office was recently opened in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn.

It may be of interest to record briefly some of the plans which those in charge of this experiment have outlined for this training district.

As already indicated the district is under the joint auspices of both organizations interested in it. It has a committee composed of representatives of the Board of Trustees of the School and of the Board of Directors of the U. J. A. S. The staff of the district has been engaged by the U. J. A. S., but is satisfactory, from the standpoint of training and experience, to the School. It is hoped that the staff in this district when completed will all be professionally trained, and that the spirit and the attitude on the part of this professional staff will be conducive to the best training and development of the students. It is planned also that the district will train new workers for the U. J. A. S., and that the better workers of the organization, especially those who are eligible for promotion, will also be trained in this district, possibly for supervisory positions. The relationship between the district and the rest of the organization is to be a very close one. Miss Levey is, to all intents and purposes, a member of the U. J. A. S. staff, so that she

participates in the councils of the organization and brings to it all that she has to offer in the way of training and experience.

A new departure in training-centers of this kind is its close physical proximity to the Brownsville district office itself which handles the day-to-day work of the section in which the training district is located. The Brownsville district office adjoins the quarters of the training district. The supervisor of the district office works in close co-operation with the Director of the training district, so that the students in the latter have the advantages of protection from undue load, and at the same time are in a position to observe the normal load, and thereby learn to appreciate the pressure under which case-workers sometimes labor. It is planned that the standards of work in the district office shall be the same as those of the training district so that there may be free exchange of cases, case records, and occasionally even of workers.

Those in close touch with this enterprise are enthusiastic regarding the possibilities which this joint effort holds for both organizations. Involved in this program are some very distinct lines of departure both for the School and the U. J. A. S. Thus, for instance, the field work which the students are doing in the training district is intimately related to the class discussions in the theoretical course in case-work. Miss Levey directs both the field work and also teaches the case-work in class. Moreover, it is contemplated that the students will not begin actually to handle families until they will have made a fairly intensive study of the community and its resources. This study may take the first half of the first quarter so that the students may acquire an intellectual background in case-work before entering the field. In other ways, too, some rather important experiments are contemplated which may have an important bearing on the training of workers and students. However, the most important result to flow from this effort is the hope, encouragement, and improvement of work which the enterprise will bring to all those associated with the U. J. A. S. and with the other agencies in Brooklyn. In the last analysis, the quality and the effectiveness of the work of the family agency sets the pace for good or for poor social work throughout the entire pattern of social service in any community. And if one attempts to build from the foundation, it is the family society that touches bottom, touches fundamentals more definitely than any other social agency. Improvement in quality there, is bound to reflect itself in general improvement of the work of all the other organizations and institutions. And so, limited financially as we are in Brooklyn, we have taken this means to move a step forward, realizing fully, however, that the dawn of a greater day cannot come until there is a unification of Jewish social work forces throughout all the boroughs of Greater New York.

*Statistics from the Jewish Communal Survey of Greater New York, p. 67, prepared by the Bureau of Jewish Social Research, October 1929.