

TUESDAY LUNCHEON SESSION

JUNE 9, 1925

Luncheon was served at one o'clock, Mrs. Ethel D. Oberbrunner, of Cleveland, Ohio, presiding.

CHAIRMAN OBERBRUNNER: I am sorry we have but just an hour to discuss the important subject before us today. If I remember correctly this is the first time that the subject of parental responsibility has ever been given place on a national program and as the time is very short I, without further ado, shall present Mr. Elias Trotzky, of the Marks Nathan Jewish Orphan Home, Chicago.

Mr. Trotzky read his paper.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ITS ENFORCEMENT IN DEPENDENT CHILD-CARE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

ELIAS L. TROTZKEY

Nothing is more significant in the field of dependent child-care than the emphasis that is now being placed on "parental responsibility". It is possible, however, to talk at great length and with much charm about a thing without making it very clear or meaningful. If we are to avoid this, we must give earnest thought to just what we mean by "parental responsibility" in the case of the dependent child, how we are to go about it to get it, and once we have it how we are going to make use of it as a regular, serviceable and developing feature of our work.

A great change has come about in dependent child-care. The old view and practice was that child-care dependency, whatever the cause, implied primarily dependency in the narrowest and most demeaning sense of that term. Once a parent, through misfortune or irresponsibility, was found unable to unfit to care properly for the child, the State or a private agency took over the task. Once the State or private agency stepped in, the parent stepped out, or rather had to step out. The belief seems to have been current that a parent unequal to the task of rearing his child was not deserving of consideration. The parent had failed and had forfeited par-

ental claims and duties, these being taken over by the State or private agency, acting "in loco parentis". The child was removed from close parental contact; it was not entirely cut off from its parents or relatives, but nothing beyond occasional formal visiting was granted to or expected from those bound to the child by natural ties. The child became a "charge" upon the community and as such, the community assumed the unavoidable task of rearing it virtually in utter disregard of the parent. Under such conditions, parental responsibility was a meaningless term.

This condition, happily, no longer obtains. It has gone or it is rapidly going into the discard. It is now recognized that even where, for urgent and compelling reasons, a child has to be removed from normal family care, parental and family influences should be maintained as a vital factor in child-training. Thus, the emphasis is now being placed where it should always have been placed, where it belongs, upon the home from which the child is taken and to which it is hoped to make it possible eventually to return it. The outside agency, instead of being a force that sunders home ties, is to endeavor to its utmost to salvage whatever fragments of the home and home-ties are left, with a view eventually to restoring them in their entirety. The problem then is no longer the care of the dependent child as an isolated unit in an artificial form, but family-service, with the child as the major object of attention. The parent in this way of viewing the problem, is very much in the picture, in fact, for the very sake of the child, is the most important part of the picture. Instead of merely being tolerated sentimentally and permitted formal visiting occasionally, the parent is now regarded by advanced child-care workers as continuing to occupy the closest possible relationship with the child, except, of course, in cases of moral depravity or utter parental unfitness. And so the tendency now is to give parents increasing consideration and at the same time to hold them to the fullest possible responsibility. Under these changed conditions "parental responsibility" begins to mean something, in fact becomes the key to the situation, and is never to be lost sight of from the time the child is removed from its normal home environment.

Now, just what is "Parental Responsibility?" The pur-

pose of this session is to throw light upon the question and the problem.

Whatever others may think, one thing, to my mind, is certain, and that is, there is not and there cannot be any real parental responsibility unless there is *financial* responsibility. The parent should never have been permitted to escape his duty to contribute to the child's support. *There* is where the evil begins, and if we want to have a child-care program worthy the name, we must first of all plug up that leak or rather strengthen that link in the chain.

The proponents of financial parental responsibility do not have to apologize for emphasizing what might seem on superficial view or to social sentimentalists to be merely a material and sordid consideration. Even if the increase of revenue were the leading consideration, we could not ignore it. Let us not forget that we are not dilettante social workers spinning any theories with money freely falling from heaven or growing on trees. We are custodians of public funds and responsible to the community not only for their proper disbursements but also for their due conservation. As it is our duty to see to it that the child gets a square deal, so, too, is it our duty to see that the community gets a square deal and is not imposed upon in the belief that the community's resources are limitless, on the strength of that great philosophy that "a gantze shtodt zohlt," "everybody pays" for the privilege and Mitzvah of maintaining an orphan.

Our duty to the community, therefore, first of all compels us to give serious attention to the matter of fixing and enforcing financial parental responsibility. But the matter does not stop there. It goes to the very heart of the problem of parental responsibility in general. The moral element involved in financial parental responsibility far outweighs any material gain accruing therefrom. Released from financial responsibility, the parent is in danger of being weaned away from the child and gradually losing whatever interest and sense of responsibility he naturally had when the child was under his immediate care and he had to provide for it. Financial responsibility looks still further. Unless we reach the parent in that most vital spot of all, the paying out regularly of real cash towards the child's support, we can be certain we will not succeed

in securing his active participation in any comprehensive plan of parental responsibility in general. Talk cash to the average parent and there is no danger of your being misunderstood. He hears you and "gets you". Further, once the parent is made to "come across" with real hard cash, his status is raised. He has a right to speak up as he did not before. He is entitled to know what is being done for the enduring welfare of his offspring when he is helping to support it. He feels entirely differently in the matter. His self-respect is brought into play. He begins to ask questions, why this is done and why that is not done for his child, and thus becomes a partner in the enterprise of rearing his child, which is just what we want him to be and require that he be. This is precisely what we mean when we talk about parental responsibility—real interest—continuing and growing. Financial obligation in my opinion is absolutely basic to all discussion on parental responsibility. We must, therefore, tackle the question of financial parental obligation without any misgivings. Our first task is to formulate a clear and practicable policy of fixing and exacting, if necessary, the fullest financial responsibility of surviving parents, consistent, of course, with their ability to pay.

The growing realization by both governmental and private agencies of the importance of holding surviving parents or relatives to their financial obligations is an outstanding and gratifying feature of dependent child-care in recent years. So strongly has the current run in this direction that we find very few child-caring agencies not making some effort on their own account or through the State, to virtually compel payment. Those, therefore, who are still opposed to exacting and enforcing regular payments by surviving parents or relatives, have arrayed against them that mightiest argument of all, prevailing practice. While a few die-hards may be right and the rest of us all "meshuggah" in this matter, it is a most satisfactory "meshuggas" to have. It gets results, and that after all is the only thing that counts or should count in effective social work as well as in business.

Actual facts, however, are preferable to theories, however interesting, or personal preferences, however tenaciously held. In order, therefore, to learn at first hand what

the situation at present really is, I communicated in the form of a questionnaire with most of the Jewish child-caring institutions in the country. I limited myself to the institutional group because that is the field in which I am engaged and in which I am naturally most interested.

Let me summarize for you the practice that actually obtains in this respect in the field of Jewish dependent child-care, as ascertained from my check-up.

In New York City, the dependent child entirely maintained by the Jewish Community, is becoming an increasing rarity. In view of the fact that almost all the children cared for in the three leading Jewish child-caring institutions of Greater New York are committed by the Children's Courts or by the Department of Public Welfare of that city which pays a fixed per capita allowance weekly for each child, the City enforces parental responsibility in most cases. It has a special collection department which investigates the financial condition of parents and exacts the payment of weekly reimbursements from surviving parents whenever it believes that such can be made. But in the cases of children admitted otherwise than by the City, known as "private arrangement" cases, the institutions caring for them enforce payments by parents.

In the Hebrew Orphan Asylum of New York City, besides 1,149 children paid for by the City, the surviving parents or relatives of 94 children, representing 63 families pay directly to the institution the aggregate sum of \$1,500 or an average of about \$16 per month per child. Ninety per cent of these "private arrangement" cases pay regularly, and so far the institution has had no occasion to take any parent to Court for delinquency in payments.

In the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society of New York City, the vast majority of its population are also publicly-committed children. Seven-eighths of the collections made from the parents are made by the City. The City authorities go so far as to deprive parents of visiting privileges if they do not make regular payments. Here, too, ninety per cent of the "private arrangement" cases pay regularly. This institution has a rule requiring a responsible person to guarantee payments agreed upon in "private arrangement" cases. Thus far it has not been found necessary to

take any legal action in any case in order to secure payments due.

The Hebrew Orphan Asylum of Brooklyn has practically all its population, with a negligible exception, committed to it either by the City or State, and so has little to do or think about it in the matter of making financial arrangements with parents or relatives, this being done by the City or State.

In Philadelphia, too, parental financial responsibility is an established fact. In both Jewish child-caring institutions of the "Quaker City," after the admission of a child to the institution, the parent or relative of the child or the Bureau of Jewish Children files a petition for commitment in the Juvenile Court which puts an order of \$3.50 a week for each child on the County Commissioners, and then places on the parent or responsible kin an order to reimburse the county in the amount it deems fair and proper under the circumstances. In rare cases, the Court places an order on the father to pay directly to the Court and through the Court to the institution. Delinquents are followed up either by the County Commissioners or the Court. Only two "private arrangement" cases are reported by the Jewish Foster Home of Philadelphia.

In San Francisco, payments are exacted by the Jewish Orphan Home, whenever conditions warrant, up to the full cost of maintenance, without overhead. In flagrant cases, delinquents are taken to Court and sometimes for failing to pay regularly parents are refused permission to take the child out for a visit but not denied the privilege of visiting the child at the institution. From eight to ten thousand dollars yearly is thus paid directly by parents and relatives, exclusive of a substantial amount paid by them through the Juvenile Court in reimbursement of county aid. San Francisco reports that an increase of parental interest has followed the enforcing of financial parental responsibility.

In Boston, apparently, no State grants are made for institutional child-care. The Jewish Children's Bureau not only takes surviving parents to Court when in arrears, but also where the child will not be seriously affected it is returned to the surviving parent for failure of the latter to meet his financial obligations. Boston, unlike the other communities, finds that the tendency of the surviving parents

is without a doubt to shift responsibility. That the parents' contributions in Boston are not what they should be is plainly seen from the figures submitted by its Jewish Children's Bureau. Out of 56 surviving fathers and 38 surviving mothers, only 38 paid towards the maintenance of their 145 children the insignificant aggregate sum of about \$2,400 per annum. Why this should be the case in one of our most progressive communities, is difficult to comprehend.

The Gusky Hebrew Orphanage and Home, of Pittsburgh, Pa., reports that it also makes surviving parents contribute towards the maintenance of the child, according to their earning capacity, that it finds parents very willing to pay and that such payments are even made in advance generally on the first Sunday of each month, while some payments are made quarterly and semi-annually, also in advance. In Pittsburgh, however, as in Boston, the actual figures are rather disappointing and do not show intensive work, for, according to the statement of the Superintendent of that Home, about 65% of the parents, representing 80% of the children do not pay anything at all, and the total sum received by the Home from parents' payments is only \$2,000 per annum.

In St. Louis, in Kansas City, and in Minneapolis, financial parental responsibility is also rigidly enforced. Of 15 surviving parents of 33 children cared for in the St. Louis Home, 10 parents pay towards maintenance the sum of \$1,400 per year. In Kansas City about \$1,700 is collected from surviving parents toward the maintenance of 43 children, and in Minneapolis, in the year 1924, twenty families representing 36 children paid to the institution the sum of \$3,500. These figures are certainly striking as compared with those of Boston and Pittsburgh.

In Baltimore, I am informed, instead of paying the institution a certain fixed amount for each child cared for, the State or County grants a lump sum to the Jewish Community which is made more as an out-and-out gift to ease its financial burden and does not attempt to reimburse itself through payments by parents. Such a system evinces either lack of concern with enforcing parental responsibility, or unusual confidence in the high ideals and advanced practices of the Jewish Community. Whatever the case may be, parental responsibility is thus left to the Jewish Community,

and is well taken care of by it, as will be explained to us later by Mrs. Guttemacher of that City, who is scheduled to speak at this Session.

The "Windy City" of the Mid-West, where I hail from, is as usual, of course, quite abreast, of the times. At the Chicago Home for Jewish Orphans payments by parents has been in operation since the year 1912, while the Marks Nathan Jewish Orphan Home, which I have the privilege to represent at this conference, has been doing intensive work in this direction since the year 1920, and is completely and enthusiastically "sold" on the proposition of enforcing financial parental obligation. I am saying advisably "enforcing," for there is all the world of difference between *receiving* payments and *enforcing* payments. With a population of about 300 children comprising 130 cases at the Marks Nathan Orphan Home, 62 surviving fathers out of a total of 80, and 7 surviving mothers out of a total of 22 contributed in the year 1924, towards the support of their 163 children around \$15,000 which makes an average of about \$18.00 per month per case, or \$7.75 a month per child. We employ a full-time professional worker whose function it is not only to see that payments are made, but also and mainly to render social service whenever it is necessary, and to foster co-operation between the parents and relatives and the institution in planning for the child, thus keeping the active interest of the parent in the child alive.

The Jewish Orphans' Home of Cleveland was the last among the larger institutions to begin paying attention to the matter of financial parental obligation. Until about a year ago, it did not accept any monies from parents in the form of payments. The Cleveland Jewish Orphans' Home, it must be remembered, is not a local communal institution. It is supported mainly by the Independent Order of Bnai Brith whose members, always liberal and out of the goodness of their hearts, are willing and glad to help whatever orphans are sent to their institutions from all parts of the country. This institution has the drawback of a time-honored conservative tradition which has its source in "philanthropy" in the old sense of the term. I am informed, however, that there was a general change in the laws of this Home in July, 1924, and that since then payments by parents are accepted. That "acceptance" of pay-

ments is too passive a policy, is clearly shown in the questionnaire returned by our Chairman, Mrs. Ethel Oberbrunner, Director of the Welfare Association for Jewish Children of Cleveland as recently as May, 1925, in which she says, "Cleveland has had a hard row to hoe, on account of the fact that the Jewish Orphan Home does not *exact* payments from parents." It is, however, to be hoped that, under the able and inspiring leadership of our friend, Superintendent Michael Sharlitt, the Jewish Orphans' Home in Cleveland will, before long, take a leading and aggressive stand in the enforcement of financial parental obligation, as it is undoubtedly doing in other phases of progressive modern child-care.

There are only two Jewish child-caring institutions in the land, so far as I know, in which financial parental obligation is not attempted, and these are Denver and Newark. In Denver, the Home for Jewish Children is really a "Sheltering Home," the parents being indigent and tubercular, who must either have hospital attention or by doctors' orders work but a few hours a day, and it would be idle to think about enforcing payments in their cases. As for the Home in Newark, well, all I can say about it is that it is in New Jersey.

A survey of conditions throughout the country, therefore, shows that there is an awakening among Jewish child-caring institutions everywhere to the importance of financial parental obligation. "But the field of parental responsibility from the standpoint of enactment of laws is one thing and from the standpoint of enforcement of laws that have been enacted is quite another thing," says Mr. C. C. Carstens, Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of America, and perhaps the most informed authority on the subject in the country. "Most of our States have plenty of laws on the subject, but public opinion and proper enforcement of standards is quite lacking." I heartily agree with Mr. Carstens. We have to learn yet that no one pays out money without definite reactions and that every time a payment is made, a lesson is learned. It is especially gratifying to see the splendid effect that payments are having upon parents. It is agreed that they have resulted in a decided increase of parental interest.

The check-up on the prevailing practice among Jewish

child-caring agencies in the country with respect to fixing and enforcing financial parental responsibility, is enlightening not only because of the practical unanimity that exists in the matter, but also because of the light it throws on the essential features of a workable plan in this regard. The essential features of such a plan, based upon a study of the methods now in force, seem, to me, to be as follows:

1. The matter of financial responsibility should be settled prior to admission. From the beginning, it should be made clear to the parent or surviving relative (except of course in cases of clear inability to pay) that admission of the child does not mean that the parent is absolved from contributing to the child's support, to some extent at least however small, and that this is the condition upon which admission is made. This at once removes any misunderstanding and makes it clear from the outset that parental responsibility must continue during the period that the child is being cared for in the institution.

2. To impress the fact that the matter is to be taken most seriously and not regarded as a promise or pledge lightly assumed and to be forgotten as soon as possible after being made, a definite business-like agreement, carefully and clearly worded with a clause specifying that delinquent payments shall be recoverable in court, should be entered into and required to be signed by parent or relative. The more formally and solemnly this is done, the better. "Signing papers" has always exercised an impressive influence on the average mind. At once comes the realization that the matter is in "black and white" and that there is no use trying to hedge in the matter.

3. Wherever possible, the practice in force in the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society of New York should be followed, namely, that of requiring "guarantors" who are "good" for the amount involved. This makes the covenant that much stronger in law. Besides, an additional agency has been invoked to keep the signer in line.

4. Payment should be made weekly rather than for a longer term, and regular and at the institution. This establishes a habit and makes possible close and regular contact with parents and relatives. Quarterly or semi-annual payments permit of a relaxing of interest, and also involve larger amounts which there is a greater desire to evade.

5. Payments should vary and be fixed in accordance with the budgetary system, but the parent's actual earnings as well as his earning capacity being taken into account. All obligations falling upon the parent should be carefully taken into account, including his personal needs liberally considered, so that the impression will not be gained that he is being "bled" or "squeezed" to the last cent. If he is asked to consider his child he is entitled to consideration himself, and by entering into the matter with him in an effort to do justice to all concerned, good-will is gained which makes relations not only more harmonious but less liable to disturbance.

6. Payments should not be allowed to be stationary. From a minimum they should be revised up in accordance with improved financial and social circumstances until the fullest possible allowance is made for the child.

7. The matter of seeing that payments are made should be entrusted to a professional paid worker who is not a mere collector but an expert on family conditions and family budgeting. Nor is the paid worker's relations to that of the family to be merely financial. There is a great amount of personal service to be done, the giving of advice regarding family conditions and the way to improve them. The paid worker thus becomes a vocational and financial adviser to the family and is regarded in that light. Here a great opportunity for family rehabilitation presents itself which is made excellent use of by the right kind of professional worker.

8. The matter of parents' payments should be under the general direction of a Special Committee of the Board, not immediately under the paid head of the institution. One of the members of this committee should be a lawyer, if not a judge, as is the practice in St. Louis. The judicial element is one not to be lightly regarded in view of the peculiar psychology of our people to whom a judge is something almost sacrosanct. This Committee must especially see to it that delinquencies are handled with the utmost firmness, but short of hardship or undue severity.

9. The courts should be resorted to without hesitation in cases of refusal to pay where there is ability to pay. Chronic delinquents, after repeated efforts have been made

to influence them to pay up, should first be proceeded against in the civil courts and then an order should be obtained from the Court of Domestic Relations or Children's Court for future payments. Failure to pay with this order in hand makes the delinquent liable for contempt of court and thus an additional and drastic means is provided if necessary, of reaching him legally.

10. Arrears should never be wiped out even in "deserving cases". Relief may sometimes be advisable but not release. However small the amount paid on arrears, it should be insisted upon under all circumstances until it is all paid up.

11. The attitude of parents or relatives towards payments should not affect the child or be known to the child. Visiting privileges should not be curtailed. The child must not be penalized for the parents' delinquency. Nor should payments from the parent be accepted from the child. This is a matter entirely between the institution and the parent.

12. As soon as the parent's circumstances have so improved that he is able to shoulder full financial responsibility for the child, except in case of parental unfitness, the child should be returned to the parent and take its place in normal family life. Even the most generous offers towards the child's maintenance in an institution, cannot be considered. Full parental responsibility must follow partial parental responsibility and as soon as possible.

But in fixing financial parental responsibility alone in the specific ways I have just enumerated, we must not imagine we have a solution, a panacea for the whole problem, that great and fundamental problem not merely of the child and the home but of Society itself. Whether the parent pays, and how much the parent pays, important as that is, is not in itself an assurance of the fixing and deepening of real parental responsibility that shall operate not merely during the time the child is being cared for outside the normal home but when he returns to it and throughout life. Nor must we assume, because the parent does not pay and cannot pay, that parental responsibility has died in him or cannot be and must not be reawakened. We have the problem still with us, whether the parent contributes to the child's support or not. No parent must be permitted to get beyond

our interest any more than any child, for in holding parent to child and child to parent we are rendering the greatest service to both. We are the channel through which the stream of parental solicitude and filial love is not permitted to dry up but to flow in an ever-increasing stream.

We must not then be satisfied merely with the knowledge that we have succeeded in accustoming and training a growing number of parents to pay regularly and uncomplainingly towards the support of their children. So far, so good. We must labor for the full rehabilitation of the parent, encourage him to take the fullest interest in his child's welfare and future, save him from the thought that the institution can do more for his child than he can himself, in a word awaken him to the full significance of parental responsibility which, seemingly burdensome, is the source and the means of the only joy and satisfaction he can know in life.

It is this that makes parental responsibility, fully visioned and worked for, so important, so worth while giving ourselves completely to. Once we set ourselves to the task, there is no turning back, and we cannot stop half way or part way on the journey. We begin with financial responsibility but we do not stop there. We must take the parent's hand, not merely the cash he holds in his hand, and whether he holds cash therein or not, hand in hand, labor with him and for him and for his child and family.

This is the crown of our work and this is the respect wherein, I think we must all agree, we fall short. We do not meet the problem by merely fixing parental responsibility and dodging responsibility ourselves. None can dodge. All must assume their share of the mighty responsibility of bringing child-life to fruition.

This can be accomplished only through genuine good-will and hearty co-operation between us and the parents in the planning for the child to which subject a special paper has fittingly been assigned to our friend and colleague, Armand Wyle, of Rochester.

CHAIRMAN OBERBRUNNER: I take great pleasure in calling upon Mr. Armand Wyle, of the Jewish Orphan Home, Rochester, who will discuss financial endorsement and parental co-operation.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ITS ENFORCEMENT

ARMAND WYLE

With special reference to "Co-operation between Child-caring Organizations and Parents in Planning for the Child"

Parental Co-operation with Child-caring Institutions is notable because of its rarity; it is almost as mythical as Thomas Bailey Aldrich's heroine, "Marjorie Daw". I regret that my experience induces this negative expression, which may be my fault or perhaps caused by the policies of the institutions with which I have come most intimately in contact. Their small populations were mostly due to the desire of the communities supporting them to prevent the threatened breaking-up of the families of the least exigent cases; many have been preserved intact, with the burden placed where it properly belongs—on the Family Welfare Agency. It may be that those with whom it was possible to co-operate have been thus eliminated from the discussion.

In one institution where I found a population of 91, a great exodus was made necessary because of the failure of the family agency to re-open the cases after the children, properly or improperly, had been separated from their parents. The original cause of the family break-up had ceased to exist but there was no chance of co-operation with the parents, who feared the results of re-union, because of the psychological state of mind remaining over from the time of mental and physical strain associated with conditions prevailing when the children were removed; they retained a haunting fear that with the return of the children, there would also recur the distress previously experienced.

In conjunction with a Home-finding Department started on an experimental budget of \$1,500, the population of this orphanage with a capacity of 150, was reduced to 28. This would have been further reduced had not the Board felt that children placed in the institution prior to the inauguration of the home-finding policy should not be transferred to foster homes without the consent of their parents and some of them, for no good reason, objected. In this experience were found some exceptions to my general belief that