

## THE SOCIAL STUDY OF PROVIDENCE, R. I.

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**WE FOUND** that in this community of 250,000 there were eight different private social agencies, members of the community chest, attempting family case work at various levels of operation without a great deal of co-ordination. It is true that only one of these agencies was labeled a family society but many times in reading through records of several agencies it was impossible to differentiate the service of the organizations. There were cases read by the case reader, instances in which several agencies had known the same family, in which it was possible to take the agencies' names off the records and to shuffle these records, after which an impartial person would not be able to recognize any distinctive features indicating difference of functions. Our case reader frequently found that several agencies were active at the same time with the same family, dealing fundamentally with the same problem.

I suppose the two major reasons for this development here are also common to many other communities.

There was the tradition of independence of the New England agencies. Each agency believed in its creative right to mold its own niche in the community, in its own manner, according to its own thinking and philosophy. And when you take into consideration the fact that several of these agencies had long backgrounds of tradition, exceeding 100 years, it is easier to understand their feeling of vested right in creating their field of operation. As a result there was rather superficial consideration of the fields of operation of other agencies.

In the second place we found that in the past few years the family welfare society in this community, in accordance with the thinking going on in many parts of the country, had been consciously changing its emphasis from that of a community case work agency to a society primarily interested in case work with personality problems and desiring to treat people who recognize such difficulties and wanted assistance in overcoming them. It is true that the Family Welfare Society had not reached this state of activity. It is also clear, from a study of the personnel records that the majority of the staff of the agency was not equipped to carry on this approach as a major function of the society, but the agency was limiting the acceptance of new applications with this in mind.

One of the approaches used in the study was a check of all cases over a given period of time, in which children had been placed, or brought into court for delinquency, or an adult or child had been committed to an institution, etc. We queried through the Exchange these cases in which there was official evidence that a breakdown had taken place and, therefore, action detrimental to the general welfare of the community had resulted. The course of these cases was traced back through the social agencies which had known these families or individuals prior to the final breakdown. Of course, we did not assume that even the most expert handling of these cases could have prevented the breakdown, but we did feel it was important to know how the tools and the efforts of the social agencies were

brought into the picture in attempting to prevent this result. The study of records indicated, that judging from the length of time these cases had been known to social agencies, from the number of agencies which had known them frequently at concurrent times and from the overlapping work taking place simultaneously with the same client, that the agencies had not contributed whatever their combined resources or special techniques might have had toward the prevention of these anti-social results. There was frequent evidence that the proper social agency, from the standpoint of skilled service, was not getting into the situation early enough to be of great value, even though the case had been known to several other agencies at an early date.

I mentioned that we found considerable duplication—duplication both in the efforts of the agency and in the treatment of a client. For example, the children's agencies were not accepting the investigation of the family societies when placement was requested. They had been insisting on ascertaining their own facts. It was not infrequent to find that the family society, after a considerable contact, had recommended placement plans to the foster placement agency. This children's agency would reinvestigate the case. They would then refer for court action to another private child-care agency that had official relationships with the court. This third agency would also reinvestigate. It was not infrequent that in the course of these three investigations differences of opinion resulted. There was an instance in which the family society had recommended placement; the first children's agency had agreed to it after their own investigation; and the second children's agency called in for court action felt that placement was not the

proper plan of treatment.

The quality of the intake interview was apparently very mediocre in most of the case work organizations; interview and selection was not being conducted by the better-trained people of the staff. When to this is added the fact that the agencies' own definition of their functions did not differentiate between services of different organizations, confusion of client and community was very apparent. Division of resources for treatment frequently caused the client to chase about the community for the service he needed, and even then the prospects of securing the service might be doubtful.

There were repeated examples of things we see in all our communities; professional jealousies, lack of understanding of other agencies' functions, lack of confidence in agencies' ability, and consequently, conflict among agencies. The Legal Aid Society did not like the kind of investigation which the family society made. It was, they felt, not factual enough, so in cases in which the Legal Aid Society became involved and in which investigation was needed, they called in another agency to secure factual data for them without consulting the family society, even though this agency might have been active. It is easy to see why there was a conflict between the three agencies.

A lack of understanding of an agency's function or an unwillingness to recognize it can be seen in the case of the Bureau for the Handicapped. Here was an agency doing a training job with the physically handicapped and operating a workshop as part of the training program. Agencies frequently referred handicapped individuals to the Bureau even though they knew these persons to be untrainable. They referred them primarily for a job. They wanted them to be put in the work-

shop to earn some money. The Bureau, one of the newer agencies in the community, interested in securing good coordination, often consented to take on such a person. These fellow-agencies were forcing the Bureau to conduct a sheltered workshop rather than a workshop for training purposes. There was ample evidence that the Bureau did have adequate personnel and adequate skill, both for trade training and for a good vocational therapy program for the handicapped.

In the study of personnel records, we found that several agencies had employed individuals found inadequate in other social agencies without consulting the first agency either about the experience or the equipment of the person.

I would like to attempt to sum up the direction of the evidence:

1. It seemed to us that there was inadequate intake personnel and service at the point of application; that adequate study of the client at his first contact with a social agency was not taking place.

2. It seemed to us that the available community resources were not coordinated and the result was that the client had to chase around when in need of services, such as a temporary plan for the care of children.

3. It seemed to us that there was a need for inter-relationship of which lack of confidence was a basic part, so that duplication, harmful to the client and wasteful to the community could be avoided. This was especially true in the relationship between the children and family agencies.

4. It seemed to us that the diagnosis and study service did not relate the client to the source of service best equipped to meet the client's need. The client should be related to the agency at a point much earlier than at present obtains. It seemed to us that there was confusion for client

and community because distinction in services among the agencies was not worked out. We felt that the specialized agencies were substituting for an opportunity to create an individual, specialized service, a family case work job on the same level as a half dozen other agencies.

5. We believe that some of the problems created in the relationship between public and private agencies were due primarily to the lack of coordination among the private agencies themselves. If the private agencies themselves did not understand each other's functions, how could one expect the public agency, with a comparatively new staff, to understand and use properly the services of the many private agencies. In order to get a good working relationship between growing public service and the private services, which are attempting to define their present direction, the private agencies themselves had to distinguish more clearly what they were attempting to do.

The description of the state of affairs in the community of Providence would seem to indicate a pretty completely disorganized community. But that is not so. A person entering Providence would undoubtedly not see or be aware of the disorganization and lack of coordination pointed out. A good deal of this is below the surface. It shows up in records, in personality relationships, and one becomes aware of it only after detailed examination. There were agencies doing excellent work. The situation was probably neither better nor worse than in many other communities in the country. What the community survey did bring out was that coordination of case work services was essential if the resources of the private agencies were to give the best of their combined abilities for treatment of client and welfare of community.

## Business Session

### Tuesday, June 2, 1936

The Business Session of the National Conference of Jewish Social Service was called to order at 9:00 p.m., at the Hotel Chelsea, Atlantic City, N. J., with Mr. Harry L. Glucksman, president, in the chair.

#### Minutes, 1935 Meeting

The minutes of the 1935 Business Session having been printed in the Conference proceedings, it was moved, seconded, and carried that their reading be dispensed with.

#### Report of Committee on Resolutions

Mr. I. S. Chipkin, acting chairman, reported the following resolutions on behalf of the Committee on Resolutions:

*In Memoriam—I. Irving Lipsitch, Samuel Rabinovitch*

The National Conference of Jewish Social Service wishes to record with profound sorrow the recent deaths of I. Irving Lipsitch of Los Angeles, Calif. and Samuel Rabinovitch of Brooklyn, N. Y. Veteran social workers still in the prime of life they had much to give in service and devotion to Jewish social welfare. For many years they were active in their own communities and in this Conference, applying themselves to the problems of American and world Jewry and to the improvement and increased security of Jewish life here and abroad. Their respective communities and the members of this Conference will keenly feel the loss of these devoted and effective professional leaders.

The resolution was adopted by a rising vote and the secretary was instructed to send copies to the families of I. Irving Lipsitch and of Samuel Rabinovitch.

*Vote of Appreciation to Officers, Program Committee, and Speakers*

The Conference desires to express its appreciation to the officers of the National Conference of Jewish Social Service for their sound and constructive leadership, to the Program Committee and to its chairman, Dr. Joseph J. Schwartz, for the able performance of their difficult and exacting tasks, and to all those who contributed to the richness and variety

of the program of the Conference this year by the preparation and reading of papers, by participation in panel discussions, and by effective leadership of sessions.

The resolution was adopted unanimously.

*Vote of Thanks to Committee on Conference Arrangements and Local Reception Committee*

The Conference wishes to extend its thanks to the Committee on Conference Arrangements and to its chairman, Mr. Jack Nadel, and to the Local Reception Committee for the care and thoroughness exercised in receiving and entertaining Conference delegates and in providing for their every comfort.

The resolution was adopted unanimously.

*Vote of Appreciation to the Secretary*

The Conference expresses its deep appreciation of the able services rendered during the past three years by its outgoing secretary, Mr. Michael Freund. He has labored indefatigably and creatively to maintain and develop the Conference on the high plane of a unifying, stimulating, professional body.

He has earned the warm regard of all members of the Conference for the zeal and intelligence which he displayed as secretary.

The Conference regrets Mr. Freund's resignation as secretary but looks forward to his continued counsel and participation in future Conferences.

The resolution was adopted unanimously.

*Request for Session on "Behavior Problems" in 1937 Program*

The May 31 session on "Place of the Layman in Agencies Dealing with Behavior Problems" manifested such great interest in the increasingly closer relationship between lay and professional workers in Big Sister and Big Brother work, brought out so clearly their common interest in the field, and elicited so much constructive criticism and suggestion requiring further exploration, that the session unanimously decided to request that the Executive Committee of the National Conference of Jewish Social Service consider for the program of the 1937 Conference a General Session on "Lay and Professional Participation in Jewish Agencies Dealing with Problems of Personality and Mal-