

including legal immigrants? Or will they succumb to the temptation to reduce the surplus simply by cutting taxes?

One of the most egregious aspects of federal welfare reform is the elimination of benefits for legal immigrants. The federal Welfare Reform Act and immigration laws passed in the last Congress impose severe restrictions on public benefits for legal immigrants that will be felt in at least three ways: (1) increased hardship on low-income immigrant families, especially if they are older or disabled; (2) diminished ability to afford services for immigrant families; and (3) increased need for services among these same families. "The partnership that the Jewish community has developed with the federal government in the resettlement of almost 350,000 former Soviet Jews over the past two decades" (Friedman, 1995) will be tested severely. The fact that public welfare dependency was minimal among these legal immigrants and that they ultimately became tax-paying citizens did not seem to make much difference to federal policy-makers. Rather, cutting out welfare benefits to immigrants was a prime target for budget savings, perhaps made all the easier by anti-immigrant sentiment prevalent in some parts of the country.

The mood of the country and the political response to it are reactive and cautious. For some, it is a time for getting even; for others, it is a necessary correction to government grown too cumbersome. In looking for corrective action, it is always easy to blame "them," the poor and immigrants and others who are different from us. Politically, that is where the easy cuts are. Our national and state legislatures are not likely to change that practice any

time soon unless they hear loudly and clearly that in this country we will not stand for letting citizens and other legal residents suffer for want of adequate food, shelter, and medicine.

By moving the House of Representatives into a more moderate stance, the election of 1996 did confirm that the American electorate generally does not like extremes of either the Right or the Left. But no trend is constant. To make government responsive requires utilizing the six "Ps" of politics: Planning, Preparation, Presence, Patience, Persistence, and Partnerships.

That's what it's all about in a democratic society. Our cause depends on our ability to make it live in the minds of policy makers everywhere. The big "A" word—Advocacy—is what makes it happen.

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V. ENDNOTES



THE AJFCA Looking Back, Moving Forward

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The celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies coupled with the approach of the twenty-first century, signifies an opportune occasion for reflecting on the past and contemplating the future.

THE PAST

The Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies (the Association) began as a concept in the minds of several Jewish Family Service (JFS) executives who were attending the General Assembly of what was then known as the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in November of 1971. Together they identified several concerns that they felt were not fully addressed:

- The General Assembly understandably focused on issues of concern to the Federation movement, not to Jewish Family Service agencies.
- There was no one assembly place for the exchange of information of concern to JFS executives.
- JFS lay leaders had no gathering place.
- The Family Service Association of America, the nonsectarian umbrella organization for family service, had little interest at that time in the concerns of the Jewish agency.

The executives invited lay input, and a joint decision was made to create the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies, with the primary focus on providing specialized services to Jewish agencies and opportunities for lay and professional leaders to meet and learn from each other. The Association was incorporated and held its first annual conference in November 1972. Thanks to the good auspices of Charles Zibbell, at that time Associate Executive Vice President of the Council of Jewish Federations and a current Association lay leader, the Association was invited to meet contiguously with the General Assem-

bly, allowing participants the opportunity to take part in both meetings. This arrangement continued through 1982, when the General Assembly became too large to accommodate another entire conference within its midst. In 1983, the Association held two "mini-conferences," one a stand-alone in Orange County, California, and the second in St. Louis, in conjunction with the General Assembly. Subsequent to that year, all Association conferences have been free-standing events held at a different time of year.

The Association employed a part-time executive who had to resign shortly after her appointment because of illness. She was followed by Dr. Martin Greenberg, who had served in several professional capacities in the Jewish community, including Research Director for the Council of Jewish Federations. Dr. Greenberg served with distinction, first part-time and later as the full-time Executive Director, concluding his employment in 1986, when I assumed the position of Executive Director, later changed to Executive Vice President.

SERVING THE AGENCIES

The core mission of Jewish family service (JFS) agencies—to preserve and strengthen Jewish individual and family life—continues unimpeded since their origins over 200 years ago. In fulfilling this mission, however, more and more agencies have begun serving non-Jews, taking on new areas of service, and restructuring their organizations in order to meet client (customer) demands more effectively and efficiently.

Key to the membership of the Association is the belief that the Jewish community has

unique human service needs that can best be met through agencies that are both dedicated and sensitive to issues of Jewish identity and communal change. From the resettlement of refugees and premarital counseling from a Jewish perspective, to support services for families in crisis and the care of the frail elderly in a manner consistent with Jewish values and practices, the organized Jewish community retains a major vested interest in having a local JFS agency available to meet these needs.

As the contributors to this *Journal* issue have aptly shown, however, consistency of purpose will not itself ensure either the breadth or the depth of service required for a quality-driven agency. Thus, new services and products must be developed, along with a more precisely defined demographic market. Whether continuing to focus on serving only the Jewish community or opening particular programs to the community at large, the way in which JFS agencies conduct their business must change. Already, many agencies are now pursuing new contract arrangements and regional alliances, additional points-of-entry, and more inviting "customer-centered" business arrangements in order to generate the funding, the community support, and the economy-of-scale required to meet the community's needs.

To succeed under these changing conditions, agency leadership—both lay and professional—must adapt accordingly. They must work together to set a vision and then make the necessary decisions that follow, based on solid demographic and market information. For example, we know that increasingly Jewish seniors today do not live in the same communities as their children; that the elderly are living longer than ever before; and that only about 50 percent of the Jews in North America contribute to Jewish causes, but that most Jews still prefer receiving services from their own ethnic group. This combination of circumstances offers local JFS agencies the opportunity to restructure themselves in order to best meet the needs of their changing constituency, which includes the design and delivery of new products and services, many of which were never even considered when the

Association was founded one generation ago.

For agencies to compete successfully, however, they will also need to demonstrate to their community of users and of funders—and increasingly to government and other funders—that they meet the highest standards of service. National accreditation will become mandatory in many venues. The Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children (COA) remains the primary provider in the United States and Canada of accreditation services for community-based social services; however, some agencies have also been exploring both CARF (the Commission for the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) and JCAHO (the Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Health Care Organizations) accreditation. Since all three organizations have begun accepting each other's accreditation for the appropriate service specialties (though only the COA utilizes a social service perspective), it can be expected that COA will gain an even larger share of the accreditation market among JFS agencies.

THE PRESENT

In response to its constituency, the Association's broad mission has not changed substantially since its inception. Its focus continues to be the Jewish dimension of agency service and practice. However, several circumstances have changed, which have caused a refocusing of mission. Virtually all umbrella groups are being challenged to prove their relevance in today's market. There is significant competition for the membership dollar. Whereas previously it was sufficient to provide meeting opportunities and educate members, umbrella organizations are being urged to provide their membership with "value-added" activities, specifically with opportunities to derive income from their membership.

The creation of an Association presence in Washington, D.C., has enhanced the prestige of the organization. The opportunity to work in coalition with other human service umbrella organizations certainly provides the membership, at least those in the United States, with a piece of the value-added services they

are seeking. A cooperative relationship with Family Service America in Washington, D.C., also enhances the image of the Association, and therefore of the membership.

The Association is one of the smallest Jewish umbrella organizations. It has a staff complement of 6.5 people and a budget of less than \$700,000, although it has a total membership of over 145 agencies, covering virtually every JFS agency in North America. The Association is governed by a Board of Directors of 75 lay and professional agency leaders, with a lay President/paid Executive Vice President and CEO model. Because of the size of the Board, planning and coordination are delegated to an Executive Committee comprising the officers and others appointed by the President. Unlike other Jewish umbrella organizations, one Association Vice President is a member agency executive, and several Executive Committee appointees are also member-agency CEOs.

Currently, the Association is experimenting with a "Committee of the Whole" format for Board meetings whereby every Board member participates in the full discussion leading up to all decisions. The Annual Conference and Executive Committees are the only standing committees, although the President may choose to appoint other committees on an *ad hoc* basis. This innovative approach to decision making is intended to involve more people in the life of the organization and in the details leading up to decisions.

The Association is also experimenting with fee-for-service activities. With a pledge to keep the Association dues the lowest of all Jewish umbrella organizations, we have had to look for innovative ways to fund services. Recognizing that only a small portion of the membership uses consultation services at any given moment, it was decided to remove such services from the regular array offered with dues payment and to make them available on an as-needed basis for a fee. This fee, operated on a sliding scale based on agency size, makes it possible to shift consultation costs to the users, rather than spreading their cost among the entire membership.

THE FUTURE

The future for the Association looks secure and interesting. The member agencies have reaffirmed their commitment to a North American network of agencies with a broadly defined common mission. On the umbrella organizational scene in the next several years we can expect to see the following:

- a focus on activities with the potential to produce income for the membership
- the creation of an income-oriented subsidiary organization
- close cooperation between the Association and Family Service America in a variety of venues, including executive training, on-line services, and shared library resources
- an enhancement of the Association's Washington, D.C. presence, with a full-time staff member
- the creation of specific training opportunities for agency staff members
- the development of an Association Web site, intended to inform the public about the membership and point them to the places to go for help in a variety of areas, including senior services, adoption services, and residences for developmentally disabled adults, with pointers to those member agencies with Web sites of their own
- a Board that is fully involved in the life of its organization, which will in turn produce committed Board members and involved agencies
- further development of fee-for-service activities, perhaps with an *a la carte* list of services for members to use as desired
- a set of services specific to the needs of the Canadian portion of the membership, which will need to be developed if the organization is to remain relevant to this portion of the membership

Umbrella organizations are in flux, as are all other organizations today. The Association is committed to maintaining its vibrancy and leading its membership forward for its next quarter-century of service.



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