

THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF THE JEWISH CASEWORK SERVICES TO THE WELFARE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY *

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Introduction

In a continuing examination of the purpose and role of the Jewish Family and Children's Services, a Joint Institute, sponsored by the Council of Jewish Federations & Welfare Funds and the National Association of Jewish Family, Children's & Health Services was held on May 24, 1967 as part of the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service.

The Institute dealt with "The Unique Contribution of the Jewish Family & Children's Services to the Welfare of the Jewish Community" from the vantage point of the social planner, the local Federation and the family and child care agency. The three papers given at the Institute are presented herein beginning with Mr. Bernstein's and followed by Mr. Cohen's and Mr. Rawley's.

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THIS paper developed from discussions held by some of the staff of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds with leaders of the National Association of Jewish Family and Children's and Health Services. I am grateful to those who participated in this exploratory process: Philip Soskis, Chairman, Solomon M. Brownstein, Irv-

ing Greenberg, Burton S. Rubin, David Turteltaub and David Zeff. I must add immediately however that they may not recognize the use I have made of their ideas; the views expressed are not necessarily theirs, nor those of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds.

It was natural for this kind of joint exploration to occur. It presages the kind of constructive cooperation, typified by the joint sponsorship of this institute, which I believe can be helpful in working for the achievement of the mutual goals of casework agencies and Federations.

Jewish casework services are an integral part of the Jewish communal welfare program—broadly and narrowly conceived. The statement seems obvious but the affirmation, and this paper, are a response to the questions about their role and functions and the challenges to the need for these services under Jewish auspices. The NAJFCHS has a vital role in responding to these questions and challenges, and in strengthening these services. In doing so, it also contributes to the enrichment of the quality of Jewish life.

In at least a partial sense the paper continues what Arnold Gurin has identified as a persistent tradition of this Conference: the re-examination each year of the issues of sectarianism in

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Atlantic City, May 24, 1967.

Jewish welfare agencies. Though many of us find ourselves largely in agreement with Dr. Gurin's well reasoned statement,¹ I suppose it is characteristically Jewish that there is no unanimity among us. The questions remain and will not let us rest, not if we are moved to seek certainty in this our life. The Committee planning this Institute thought we might carry our examination further this year if a series of inter-related propositions were outlined and then followed by the posing of the relevant questions for exploration.

The subject refers to "the unique contribution" of the casework services to the Jewish community. It is clear, however, that not every aspect of a Jewish welfare agency is, nor, in my mind need be, unique to a *Jewish* agency.² We can push difference too far. It is therefore inevitable that we shall also be talking of characteristics which Jewish casework agencies have in common with parallel agencies under other auspices as well as with Jewish agencies in other fields of service.

With regard to the latter, I take it as an accepted premise that "Jewish communal agencies of every type (of course including the casework services) are and should be expressions and bulwarks of Jewish creativity and continuity of Jewish Life in the United States and for all of world Jewry. Strengthening the Jewish communal structure strengthens Jewish life."³

There is a growing sense that Jewish family life—as is said to be true of fam-

ily life in America today—is falling short of the expectations we have from our history and our tradition.

As Manheim Shapiro has stated, "American Jews are increasingly asking, what is happening to the Jewish family? What is happening to its values?" He goes on to point out that "many Jews assert, without supporting data, that there is a rising divorce rate, increased juvenile delinquency and generally less wholesome family activity among American Jews."

"One can only speculate," says Shapiro, "That this sense of disintegration is related to a more general sense of discontent—as common to non-Jews as to Jews—with the nature of life generally and of family life in particular."⁴

We do not need the latest figures on divorce, delinquency, alcoholism, or narcotics addiction to find validity in *Jewish* casework services; nor need we explore other troublesome aspects of Jewish acculturation to the general society. We know from our own experience how much more, rather than less, Jewish casework agencies are needed today.

With this then as "given," the following propositions are submitted for consideration. Some of them, I think, are fairly obvious. They are included as essential to the understanding of what we hold in common as well as the differences among us.

1. The social worker in the Jewish family, child-care and other casework agencies has, as a first obligation, to use his skills for the welfare of his clients, the families and individuals who are troubled and who seek his professional service. This primary responsibility to use the methods of social work rejects the imposition of educational aims which are not indigenously related

¹ "Sectarianism: A Persistent Value Dilemma," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XLIII, No. I (1966), pp. 38-48.

² See Dr. Herbert H. Aptekar, "The Role of the Jewish Service Agency in American Society," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XLIII, No. I (1966), pp. 56-59.

³ Resolution prepared for the Committee on Public Issues of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, 1967.

⁴ *Council Woman*, National Council of Jewish Women, February 1965.

to the client's difficulty. Other agencies in the community have prior responsibility for Jewish education. Jewish educational content in the casework relationship may, in some instances, play a role in providing preventive or treatment services, or enriching the lives of individuals, but only when it is a natural outgrowth of the client's problems and his request for help. Thus clients with problems of alienation may benefit from the realization of a sense of belonging and even the values of participation in Jewish community life.

As Sanford N. Sherman has pointed out: "The social caseworker has to be individual person-centered. At the moment the client feels the eye level of the worker lifted one notch above him—to a cause, a group or whatever—at that point the worker has lost contact with the client. If, for example, the intermarrying client feels a concern not so much for him but for the *fact* of intermarriage or for ethnic survival, then he looks upon the worker with jaundiced eye."⁵

Questions: Are Jewish clients—all, some, few, none—asking who am I, where did I come from, to what do I belong? Would clients seek more help around their problems of Jewish identity if they saw the caseworker as having competence in this area?

2. As is true of all professions, the commitment of Jewish caseworkers to the highest standards of professional practice imposes on each practitioner the necessity of sharpening his professional skills by constantly adding to his knowledge of the findings of the behavioral sciences and the best that is being developed in social work methods.

⁵ "Intermarriage—From a Casework Perspective," in *Intermarriage and the Future of the American Jew*. Proceedings of a Conference, sponsored by the Commission on Synagogue Relations of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, December 1964, p. 127.

However, the Jewish caseworker, in order to be of maximum usefulness to his clients, must also understand Jewish cultural factors which may bear on the adjustment of families or children. This requires knowledge of the unique characteristics of Jewish family life; knowledge of Jewish values and ethics, customs, traditions; and, at times, knowledge of Jewish history. It also requires awareness of all available Jewish community resources to which clients may, on the basis of their needs and readiness, be referred for preventive treatment and enrichment services.

When we talk of understanding Jewish cultural factors, it would be useful to distinguish between the theoretical, scientific knowledge about, and the creative, artistic use of cultural factors in working with people. As with any life experience, e.g. marriage or raising one's own children, intimate knowledge of, and involvement in, Jewish life will produce greater sensitivity and skill. Professional discipline and self-awareness may require no less regard for Jewish cultural values than for values as to what constitutes a good marriage psychologically.

Being a Jewish teen-ager or a Jewish aged person in the core city or in a suburb has unique meanings. For the caseworker working with Jewish clients, it is important to know what it feels like to be a teen-ager and a Jew, what it means to be an older person and a Jew. The more the caseworker is attuned to Jewish values and problems, the more helpful he can be.

It should be possible, therefore, for the social worker in a Jewish agency to have more opportunities to learn and share the meaning of being Jewish in all its ramifications. If he uses these opportunities, he can be more helpful to the client as a whole person.

Opportunities for caseworkers to add to their Jewish knowledge are being pro-

vided by some Jewish family and child care agencies and Federations. The most systematic and well developed continuous program is that of the Jewish Orientation and Training Seminars sponsored by the Commission on Synagogue Relations of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.⁶

The program of the Yeshiva University Wurzweiler School of Social Work includes courses related to "Jewish cultural forces affecting social welfare within the Jewish community" as an integral part of the School's program. Through its Department of Continuing Education, it also offers seminars with Jewish focus for practicing social workers.

The Philip W. Lown Graduate Center for Contemporary Jewish studies at Brandeis University lists among its objectives that of preparing students "for careers in Jewish communal service, Jewish education and research. The program also provides additional training for those already engaged in Jewish communal and educational work through its course offerings and special seminars, institutes and summer programs."

Questions: How can knowledge of—and sensitivity to—Jewish values in Jewish religion, history, culture and the dynamics of Jewish family life provide the caseworker with additional useable tools for understanding and working with his clients?

Assuming that there is no doubt about the need to provide more or less traditional social work in-service training, how can Jewish agencies best provide Jewish orientation in greater depth?

Could—and should—time away from work and funds be made available for the assumed

professional growth? Is this an agency or a personal responsibility? Would the results in more effective service to clients and the Jewish community justify the investment?

3. The commitment to strengthen Jewish family life, through the process of aiding individuals to solve inter-personal and intra-psyche problems, leads the Jewish agency into programs for family life education. These have as their aims the prevention of family breakdown and the enrichment of family life even when breakdown is not threatened. The technique is educational as distinguished from family treatment and group therapy which may or may not include some educational aspects. These latter treatment methods seem to be gaining greater acceptance with less emphasis on family life education as such.

Family life education requires the caseworker to fuse the best that is known about human beings (psychology, psychiatry, sociology) and Jewish cultural factors. In family life education programs, the caseworker as educator may consistently seek to nurture the individual's identification with the Jewish community as a source of strength and enrichment. Completely consistent with social work goals, he may refer to opportunities for participation in the life of Jewish organizations, the concept of communal responsibility, the obligations of the individual to the community, from which he may derive added sustenance. He may encourage the client to recognize that he is the heir to an heritage which has, to some extent, conditioned his opportunity for maximum realization of his potentialities for a happy and, if you will, meaningful life.

Questions: In practice today, how much in family life education fuses knowledge gleaned from mental health and from Jewish sources? Is there any doubt that they can and should be integrated? What are the ingredients—beyond mental hygiene—which can be logically added? Would discussion of

⁶ See *The Rabbi and the Jewish Social Worker*, edited by Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer, Commission on Synagogue Relations, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, 1964; *Inter-marriage and the Future of the American Jew*, and *The Psychological Implications of Inter-marriage*, Proceedings of Conferences sponsored by the Commission, December, 1964 and April, 1966 respectively.

Jewish views of inter-marriage be helpful? Ritual observances and possible conflicts around them? The Sabbath and its potentialities in making for family cohesion? etc. What relationships could be established with rabbis, Jewish community center staff and others for enhancement of family life education programs?

4. Related to the foregoing is the proposal made by Irving Greenberg and David Zeff in a paper delivered at this Conference two years ago. They suggested that the family agency move into the development of a Jewish Family Life Center, "which will be the result of the joint efforts put forth by the lay and professional leaders committed to the continuity of Jewish casework agencies." They outlined a structure for providing services such as:

- pre-marital counseling;
- family life education;
- family check-up or diagnostic services on a regular basis;
- family counseling and individual counseling;
- day care and treatment facilities for dysfunctioning children, adults and the elderly;
- nursery school facilities for upgrading and observing young children;
- supportive services such as homemakers and housekeepers, friendly visitors and companions, big brothers and sisters, special tutors and adequate income maintenance.⁷

The Jewish Family Life Center has intriguing possibilities for providing integrated services within a Jewish context. It could enhance the image of the Jewish casework agency and thus make more visible its helping potential. Conceivably it could, particularly through the

proposed family check-up or diagnostic service, result in earlier case finding and prevent more serious difficulties.

Questions: Would the value and content of the service—in social work and Jewish terms of reference—be enhanced sufficiently to justify changing the established patterns, particularly the location of some services, e.g. day care and treatment facilities for dysfunctioning people of all ages, nursery school facilities for upgrading and observing young children and some of the supportive services?

Would the Jewish caseworkers be better advised to participate along with others in *planning* for some of the suggested services, if they do not now exist, rather than seek to *administer* them?

How much responsibility can the Jewish casework agency take for income maintenance beyond what is currently the practice?

5. Turning to the community organization aspects, casework agencies, in one sense, are at the center of the Jewish community welfare program. At one time, many of these agencies were the primary Jewish social service agency from which other services radiated. Many have "information and referral services" as a residue of this historic function. They need to strengthen and develop this function while maintaining complete respect for the competence of other agencies.

In providing information and referral services for individuals, the Jewish family and children's agencies are also in a position to develop knowledge and awareness of the unmet needs of individuals and the resources required to meet them. Thus, they can contribute valuable knowledge as participants in Federation and general community planning.

Questions: Is there still validity to the concept of the Jewish family agency as the information and referral center for Jews in trouble? Or, do most people naturally now find their way to the agency best qualified to respond to their needs?

Can the J.F.C.S. become a one-stop service

⁷ "The Jewish Casework Agency: Problems and Prospects in a Time of Paradox"; *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. No. XLII, No. 1 (1965), p. 57.

center for the Jewish community as is being planned for the general community with the cooperation and stimulation of such Federal Departments as Housing and Urban Development, Health, Education and Welfare, the Department of Labor, etc.?

Would such a central information and referral center be more appropriately located in the Federation—possibly staffed by one or more caseworkers?

6. Jewish casework agencies naturally must maintain and develop strong links with the Federation. They have a strong stake in community planning for needed services, for maintenance of high standards of professional practice, for development of new services, for abandonment of obsolete services, for orderly financing, and so forth. They have as much in common with other Jewish health and welfare agencies, if not more, as they do with casework agencies under other than Jewish auspices.

Their concern with the totality of Jewish community welfare should lead them into responsible participation in the Federation fund-raising program from which they also benefit.

7. The realization of the agency's goals and its acceptance of accountability to the Jewish community requires the strongest possible lay leadership. It calls for a representative board of directors and committees, powerful enough to assure understanding of the agency's functions and their support from the community. Such people should have at least the same commitment as staff members to the welfare of the Jewish community and to the purposes and functions of the agency. They need to be challenging about the relationship of the agency's policies and practices to its objectives, but receptive to new ideas. They, too, as some agencies recognize, require orientation to the Jewish, as well as the social work, content of the agency program and to their functions as policy makers.

Questions: Are Jewish casework agencies as suggested by David Zeff and Irving Greenberg losing the interest of lay leaders who are discouraged by what they see as a kind of professional "mystique"?⁸ If so what can be done about this?

Should casework agencies aim to limit Board membership to those who "must also be exposed to and come from those segments of Jewish community life that are deeply identified with the continuity of Judaism"?⁹

What is the responsibility of the professional for the continued Jewish orientation of laymen associated with the agency? Within the context of the agency's concern with strengthening family life, how do we view Graenum Berger's contention:

"How to educate Jewishly the Jewish layman is the major problem confronting the Jewish community of the future—and this, not so incidentally is the first task of the professional. Only this route can lead to widespread reidentification, for the layman and not the professional speaks into the responsive ear of Jews."¹⁰

How can we more effectively enable Board and Committee members to interpret the contribution of the casework agency to the Jewish community and to reflect back to the agency the community's needs and wishes?

8. The continuity and vitality of the Jewish social service agency requires systematic searching for gifted people to enter the social work profession and to seek careers in Jewish communal services. If it is agreed that Jewish cultural factors have relevance for practice in the Jewish agency setting, then the agency needs to attract people with such knowledge or willingness to acquire it. Similarly, for identification with Jewish community life.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁰ "Critical Factors in a Consideration of the Role of Jewish Communal Services in Strengthening Jewish Identification," Presented at a Session of the International Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Washington, D.C., September 6, 1966, mimeographed, p. 43.

The Jewish agency has a role in the training of students through provision of field work opportunities. Field work training can include orientation to the Jewish community as well as to social work practice per se.

Questions: In recruitment and selection of staff, what weight should be given to Jewish knowledge, commitment to Jewish community welfare, and involvement in Jewish community life? Is it practical to limit recruitment to those with these qualifications, assuming they have the potentials for professional practice in other respects?

Is it really feasible for the agency to supplement the Jewish student's Jewish knowledge and strengthen his Jewish identification and commitment during his field work training?

9. Looking outward from the Jewish community, the agencies have a responsibility for the welfare of the general community.

They must contribute to the strength of the United Funds and Community Chests, especially so, though not for that reason alone, when they are beneficiaries of their fund-raising campaigns.

As they are now doing, they must maintain relationships with community welfare planning councils. Their lay and professional leaders participate in the general community's planning apparatus.

They must also participate in other planning efforts in the general community, e.g. for community mental health centers, "model cities" programs, anti-poverty community action organizations, etc.

They are, of course, within the above, closely related to other casework agencies in the general community and allied with them in developing community programs and fostering understanding of casework services, the needs of people and the resources required to meet them.

Questions: How can an appropriate balance be achieved in the deployment of staff in Jewish and general community planning?

10. The concern of the Jewish casework agencies with the larger general community's welfare imposes the necessity for their careful consideration of the extent to which, without diminishing the quantity or diluting the quality of service to the Jewish community, they can also serve the general community.

Certainly, as indicated above, they participate in general community planning. Many Jewish agencies will be satisfied with this as the limit of their contribution.

Others may consider—and I would argue that they should so do—services which they can offer to the total community and which would not otherwise be available under non-sectarian auspices.

The problems of social disorganization and individual maladjustment in our society are so great that they require the combined efforts of all religious or sectarian groups. It is not in our Jewish tradition to stand aside from such efforts to deal with poverty and a host of other problems.

The method of choice for meeting pressing social needs for which resources do not exist, is to enable an existing non-sectarian agency to provide such services on a non-sectarian basis.

When no possibilities for non-sectarian auspices exist, the Jewish agency may provide such service only if (a) there is no diminution in quantity, or dilution of the quality, of service to the Jewish community, (b) additional resources can be made available to the Jewish agency to perform the services—resources in funds, staff, facilities, etc.

When a Jewish agency undertakes a service to non-Jews, financed by government or other grants, consideration, from the beginning, could be given to designing this service so that it has a "governing committee" responsible for its direction, and responsible to the host agency. Such an advisory or governing

committee could be representative of the clientele to be served, i.e. non-sectarian. It could be nourished, guided, tutored, in the functions of a Board of Directors with the view in mind that at some future time of readiness, it will spin-off from the host agency, become a separate non-sectarian general community agency with a life of its own. In doing so, it would be making a contribution to the ideal of full accessibility of needed services to all people and strengthen the resources of other groups to plan and administer their own services. At the same time, this procedure will leave the core Jewish purpose of the agency intact. The Jewish Vocational Service of Essex County followed just this design in administering COPE, an anti-poverty employment training project, now spun-off into becoming a non-sectarian administered service.

Questions: How practical is this approach to new services, for meeting a general community need?

Is there a correlation between the sense of security in the Jewish agency as such,—the strength of its Jewish identification and commitment,—and its readiness to offer service to the non-Jewish community?

Will the offering of services to non-Jews inevitably lessen services to the Jewish community because of limitations in the availability of staff and finances? If so, what choices can be made and against what values?

11. The Jewish agency, as do all health and welfare agencies, has a responsibility for contributing to the development of social policy.¹¹ It uses its knowledge of conditions confronting its clientele and others who are disadvantaged. It has a social action role in "bearing witness" to the ills stemming from poverty, poor health, poor education, poor housing, discrimination

¹¹ Herbert H. Aptekar, D.S.W., "The Role of the Jewish Service Agency in American Society," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XLIII, No. 1 (1966), pp. 63-64.

against minority groups. It can testify to the gains to be achieved from programs to deal with these ills—improvement of the social insurances, public welfare policies and standards, anti-poverty programs, etc.

Questions: Should every Jewish social agency build into its program systematic consideration and action on matters of social policy, related to its experience?

Will such a social action program have significance for idealistic young and older people who can be led to greater identification with the Jewish community welfare enterprise? If so, is that also a valid consideration?

12. Finally, I am painfully aware of the fact that there are more questions in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy, whatever it may be. They lead me to echo Herbert Aptekar's call for more research.¹²

We need to know more about the characteristics of Jewish family life. Casework agencies have first hand knowledge from experience which has not been exploited, unmined findings which can contribute much to our understanding of family interaction.

As Dr. Aptekar has suggested, we need to know more about "the functional consequences of the services we render." What values do they have for the clients, for the community? How meaningful are Jewish cultural factors and influences of the general society of which we are a part in the healthy adjustment of individuals? How can we test the assumptions we make—some stated above? Can some of our services be just as well provided by non-sectarian voluntary or public auspices? There are a host of other questions which, out of your experience, you can suggest.

Thirteen years ago, the Social Planning Committee of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 60-64.

adopted a statement prepared by Harold Silver and Callman Rawley for its Jewish Family Services Planning Subcommittee on "The Values of Jewish Family Services to the Client, the Social Worker and the Community." This represented a consensus achieved after three years of deliberation. Leaders, lay and professional, of Jewish family services came to the conclusion that the rationale for these agencies "is based on three fundamental factors: (1) many clients prefer the Jewish agency for deeply significant personal reasons; (2) the values projected by the client onto the Jewish agency facilitate a good working relationship with him; (3) the board member and volunteer, as well as the professional, need the Jewish agency as one means of expression for their cultural traditions and religious impulses."¹³

I would be inclined to add that the

¹³ *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, Vol. XXX, No. 4 (1954), p. 452.

Jewish agency also provides the opportunity for those associated with it, lay leaders and professionals, to clarify their own group image in the community and their own self-image by working along with other Jews in communal purposes.

Perhaps the time has come to re-examine the 1954 statement quoted above and to see if research would lead us to any modification. Not every Jewish agency can mount its own research program. Some can contract with universities for investigation of perplexing problems. It may be possible for the National Association of Jewish Family, Children's and Health Services, alone, or preferably, as I think, with the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, to design research to pose the key questions and find the answers.

In the quest for greater certainty and excellence, this would seem an imperative. Perhaps only thus we can be more sure that we are truly responsive to the needs of the Jewish community.