

FACTS REQUIRED FOR FEDERATION PLANNING *

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THE subject of facts required for social planning is always timely, but never more than now. Tremendous forces are compelling significant changes in social services and patterns of service. It is of the utmost importance that social planners be kept aware of all data relevant to their objectives and processes.

It has been suggested that the social planning facts we need and can use often depend upon the size of the community. We are all aware of the tremendous difference between the social planning resources of, for example, a New York Federation with departments and specialists, and the more typical community with one or two professionals who do everything, and where social planning is only one of many pressing responsibilities. Nevertheless, there are essential sound objectives and processes related to the collection and use of facts which apply generally, and which make it valid for us to view the problem as a generic one.

Types of Facts Required for Planning

For the purposes of this discussion, we

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can think of planning facts as divided into four major groupings:

1) *Demographic*

The importance of general demographic data such as number of Jews, where they live, age groupings, etc., is well known to all of us. In recent years, certain aspects of these data have become increasingly significant. The *movement* of population has become more crucial to certain aspects of planning, and it would be of value for us to discuss how communities can determine this with a minimum of effort and expense. Philadelphia, for example, has developed a fairly reliable method which is handled largely by volunteers.

Income levels are of greater significance today. Too many of our agencies still approach the question of fees from the point of view of traditional attitudes which are no longer valid. Detroit employs a professional sociologist who has developed a series of reports of Jewish demography in Detroit, including economic composition of the Jewish community. Facts on age ranges are of more importance today in view of the aging population, the pressure for group work services, etc.

2) *Facts on Needs*

There is probably no more misused word in the social work vocabulary than

the word "needs." The naive assumption is frequently made by agency professionals and laymen, among others, that a recital of certain facts and figures are in themselves strong indications of need. The problem here is:

- a) Too often the facts are too general; or
- b) The facts are seen or presented from the special point of view of a particular agency or service.

For example, we often talk of the number of aged people in the population; the pressure for beds for the sick aged; the growing need for community based, non-institutional services, etc. Two types of facts are usually available; first, general data based on national studies, which tend to give us percentage figures on types of and incidence of problems in the general population; and, second, facts based on agency experience. The first type tells us nothing about the actual specific needs of our immediate client groups; the second, being agency oriented, tends to fragmentize the client into certain types of problems, and proposes solutions which are related to those problems and are necessarily partial.

Dr. Robert Morris recently stated the problem succinctly in an outline of a proposed research-demonstration project to develop criteria for use in community based services for the chronically ill. He said: "Evidence from various studies indicates that disabled older persons present a combination of physical, social, and mental difficulties, which have been only partially distinguished in diagnosis. By and large that aspect of disability has secured primary attention which is closest to the original interests of the facility or agency undertaking care for each person. Thus homes for the aged have, in the past, tended to concentrate upon social disability; family agencies upon social isolation; hospitals and medical institutions upon medical

disability; and mental institutions upon mental disease."

In Philadelphia, we are developing a research-demonstration project which will attempt to deal with the aged and chronically ill in a client- and problem-centered way; that is, we hope to develop an experimental program which will determine what are the different services needed to keep these people in the community; how many and how much of these services are needed, and what these services cost. In other words, I am suggesting that we need:

- a) A great many more facts on needs which are determined by sound research and demonstration; and
- b) Facts on need determined by problem-centered rather than just agency-centered activity.

Among the crucial facts related to need are community attitudes on what constitutes a need. There may be thousands of children who are not served by center programs, but this is hardly a useful fact if the policy-making groups in the community do not accept center work as a valid communal responsibility. Very little significant data has been developed on what client groups rather than social workers regard as need.

I emphasize that I consider this entire area of facts relating to need as one of the most neglected areas in the entire field of social work. It is my conviction that this is so because so many of us assume that it is precisely the area about which we do have a great deal of data.

3) *Facts on Services*

Every federation is, or should be, concerned with the quantity and quality of service. In this area, the social planner is aware of pitfalls and problems. Some agency methods of recording can be misleading and require careful analysis. Centers present overwhelming attendance figures, family agency figures may

tend to equate the most superficial contacts with intensive contacts, etc. Perhaps we in the federation field, working with the Council and our agencies, should begin to develop agency data which may be more helpful to planning. I am thinking particularly of the possibility of service data regularly reflecting trends in requests for service as well as services given. Such data would point up needs and gaps in service and would be most useful for planning.

With regard to quality of service, very little has been done in the field to test the efficacy of our professional procedures. For example, in the field of child care, the only comprehensive follow-up study of child placement was done thirty years ago by the New York State Charities Aid Association. Today, Bellefaire and the Association for Jewish Children in Philadelphia are engaged in such studies. There is a surprising dearth of such studies in all fields of service.

The question of the evaluation of the quality of service is one for the entire field as well as a federation responsibility. It is an extremely complex problem, requires great research skill, and can be easily misused. I believe that federations are rarely in a position to conduct this type of study. Perhaps it would be fruitful for us to discuss some possible approaches to the problem.

One of our greatest needs is facts on new developments in services and patterns of service. Very often such developments are available in too general a form to be of immediate practical use. We could all use a service which, on a frequent and regular basis, gives the pertinent facts on trends in service, new services, experiments, demonstrations, relationships and patterns of service. Such facts should include data on administration, staff, costs, special problems, and so on. This suggests that the Council of Jewish Federations and Wel-

fare Funds should re-establish its Social Planning Bulletin as a regular service.

Data on new services and trends will themselves suggest further areas of exploration in relation to quality and quantity of service and problem—rather than agency—centered experience.

4) *Efficiency and Costs*

It is with some trepidation that I venture to discuss this area of fact gathering. It is fraught with great feeling and understandably so. As social planners, we are often accused of being more concerned with saving money than in giving good service. It is probably true that too often we tend to oversimplify the problem and to be impatient with the people on the firing line. We are not entirely free from occasional ignorance or lack of conviction about certain services. Agencies do not always understand or accept our responsibility to insure the greatest possible efficiency at the lowest possible cost. It is sometimes assumed that we are attacking standards, and are not identified with the services we should be strengthening.

One of the key problems is the absence of usable facts and criteria on efficiency and costs. Social planners and budgeters actually have very few helpful tools to deal with the problem. Perhaps this is an area to which we might address ourselves. The work being done by the New York Federation on this problem is of particular significance, and I should like to suggest that if possible, a special report on this be developed and distributed.

Use of the Yearbook

Social Planning today requires more than simple statements of service, size of staff and caseloads, and so on. We are increasingly interested in fluctuations in demands for service; in the

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nature of the services rendered; efficiency as measured in terms of work units and interview counts; data on costs and fluctuations in costs.

Many of us would be helped by more data on trends and analysis of trends. The recent Council report on ten-year trends was most helpful and interesting.

Some of the data seemed to require modernization, and to be related to new emphases in service. For example, under family services, there might be data on family life education, group counseling, or other non-individual services. The category of "relief" might be broken down to clarify how much money goes into direct grants to clients as distinguished from a homemaker service.

Under child care, it would be useful to have the facts and figures on placement in different types of settings such as group foster homes. Under health care, it would be helpful to know, for example, the facts on psychiatric units

in general hospitals and medical home care programs.

In such fields as centers, vocational and education services, there is a need for more precise definitions of services rendered. Perhaps these might be developed in cooperation with the appropriate national agencies.

From the point of view of the community organization professional concerned with social planning, it seems to me that there is one additional area about which we need a great deal more knowledge, or if you prefer, a great many facts. This is that great dark, ill-lit area of professional process in the vast and complex field in which we function. Facts are available in abundance on structure, philosophy, financing and history; in fact, on everything but how we function as professionals. There is the need to develop data on process and technique which are so pertinent to the gathering and use of facts.