

EDUCATION FOR VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL WORK

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ONE of the most challenging tasks facing social work today is that of interpreting itself to the lay community which supports it, and from which come both the volunteers who assist in its program and the clientele who use the service. Opportunities for such interpretation are sought for constantly, and when they occur, every skill is brought to bear in making the most of the occasion.

The Jewish Family Service Association of Cleveland, since 1943, has been extremely fortunate in being able to extend the education of the community through its leadership and participation in setting up a training course for volunteers under the auspices of the Social Service Division of the Cleveland Section of the National Council of Jewish Women. There had already been many years of close cooperation between the JFSA and "Council" in projects of benefit to the community. One of the outstanding projects has been the Jewish Big Sister Association, which started solely as a "Council" activity and then, upon request, was given professional supervision by JFSA. The training which Council believed essential for this group continued to be given, as it proved effective in preparing the volunteer for her work, and produced many strong, sympathetic lay leaders who have made possible the greater development of social work because of their conviction and understanding.

For a good many years, Council, the JFSA, and other agencies have periodically gone over the list of Big Sisters in order to select one for a particular job which required some knowledge of social work philosophy and a disciplined approach. The hope was periodically expressed that, some day, all volunteers desiring to do volunteer work in the agencies would be required to take a training course similar to that given the Big Sisters.

Before the war, there was a reluctance to demand this training for fear of not getting the volunteer at all. During the war, there were hundreds of volunteers needed for vital civilian defense work which drew people to them because of their importance and glamour. Training was required for almost every activity. It seemed to Council and JFSA that the work of the volunteer with groups and individuals in the regular civilian agencies was even more demanding, and should require training.

With this as a background, Council in consultation with JFSA, set up its first Social Service Training Course in 1943. As the Supervisor of the Jewish Big Sister Association had already been teaching Big Sisters for many years, she was the staff member who planned with Council and took responsibility for teaching the basic sessions. She made suggestions as to which experts from the various fields could be used. It should be stated here that in addition to re-

ferring volunteers for Big Sister work, Council has been supplying volunteers to the Society for the Blind, to the Council Educational Alliance (group work agency), to Mt. Sinai Hospital, and to recreational groups for the aged, and now for the new Americans.

It seemed to us that if material given by the experts was to be meaningful, it would need to be preceded by some basic information on the philosophy and concepts underlying social work. It was planned that the first three sessions should be devoted to this material, and that the Big Sister Supervisor should be responsible for these. As the first year was highly experimental, minimum requirements were set up for the granting of the certificate. These were: attendance at six out of nine sessions, and the submission of three titles of books from the reading list which the candidates had read. In the next two years, attendance at seven out of ten sessions was required, plus attendance at two of the four field trips, the submission of three titles of books read, and an oral examination. It was found that the requirements did not deter those sincerely interested, and helped evaluate the future dependability of the volunteer in relation to responsibilities she would undertake.

What, then, of the content of the basic sessions? What, and how much should be told about the field of social work? How much can be grasped in three two hour sessions? Should the emphasis be on agencies or on our concepts about the human being? What method, lecture or discussion, would be most effective?

Because of the effectiveness of the Big Sister Training Course over the years, it was drawn on extensively for this group. It is titled "Community Welfare and Understanding Human Behavior." In order for the group to be oriented

historically, the first session takes the group back to Biblical days. Discussion by the class is stimulated on the reasons for the establishment of "giving" as a blessing, and of the ways and means for this giving to take place. Motives and reactions of the giver are brought out, and are used later in relation to current volunteer attitudes and disciplines. Through lecture, the group is next given a picture of the life of the Jews in Europe following their dispersion, with special emphasis on how the community cared for its less fortunate members. Through discussion, the group participates in outlining basic human needs. The class and the instructor then delineate various circumstances which may prohibit the individual and group from attaining these. Among the points mentioned are: 1) the current political and economic structure; 2) unforeseen circumstances such as illness, accidents, etc., and 3) individual differences in reaction to a similar environment.

Session two begins with a brief review on the part of the class of some of the major points covered in the first session. Through lecture, the remaining time is devoted to a presentation of the way in which human needs have been met publicly and privately through the centuries. Emphasis is put upon the more rapid development of private agencies, and the reasons for this. The Elizabethan poor law is discussed, with relation to its background, and its effect upon relief practices in our country today.

The group comes to see how volunteers were responsible for the development of social work into a profession, and for giving impetus to the growth of public welfare out of their concern for the individual as he was affected by poor housing, poor sanitation, crippling working conditions, and inadequate health care. Throughout this presenta-

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tion the group sees how the individual is achieving more and more status, and how that ties in with our democratic concepts.

American Jewish philanthropy is brought in at this point so that the class might have some understanding as to why there are Jewish agencies, their purpose and function historically and at present. The successive waves of immigration are described in relation to what they, the immigrants, were escaping from, and what their coming meant to them and the country.

The class is given information about the qualifications and training of social workers so they have some additional appreciation of the professional nature of this work. Following this, charts on the community welfare structure are reviewed. The class, at this point, has an opportunity to air its attitudes to social work, the relief practices they may have known, and to raise questions about "chiselers", "people who don't want to work," and "what to do about beggars and panhandlers." The charts used cover only the private agencies, with careful distinction being made between agencies supported by Community Fund and Welfare Fund. There are many questions by the group relating to the duplication of services, policies of specific agencies, and cost of maintenance. It is significant that these questions arise in this group since almost every one present participates in fund raising for both campaigns. They have had little opportunity, however, to see the overall picture or discuss it.

In the time remaining for the second session, the focus is on the significance of the individual in our society, and the events and developments which have made possible our greater understanding of his needs, his growth, his conflicts and problems. Freud's contribution is

touched on, and the beginning of the mental hygiene movement is explained. The findings of army doctors during World War I, and their contribution to our understanding of personality are also treated.

In the final basic sessions, the class participates in drawing up a list of factors which influence the infant before his birth, and the circumstances affecting his personality and ability to cope with the world once he is here. Heredity and environment are, of course, the broad headings under which these are set up. Physical and emotional stamina is much discussed from this point of view. It is agreed that varying degrees of physical strength and emotional stability affect the total adjustment of the person. The degree of intellectual ability as a factor governing an individual's adjustment is treated. The idea that intellectual brilliance is in itself a guarantee of good adjustment is disproved.

From this material, we move on to a consideration of what makes for good emotional growth on the part of the infant, and the maintenance of good mental health throughout the life of the person. Stress is placed upon the individual's need for love and security, his being wanted and needed, and his careful training for living constructively in a society. The point is made that poor early training in feeding, toilet habits, sharing, etc., may cause later difficulties in the personality. The effect of parental needs and patterns upon the child's personality and growth are delineated. The group comes to see how early frustrations in the child's development, coupled with weak or distorted parental patterns, may cause basic character defects in individuals who later become society's misfits, such as criminals, prostitutes, alcoholics, racketeers,

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deserters, etc. The tie-up is made between an individual's personal lacks and his intolerance of or discrimination against minority groups.

The way in which these unmet needs and frustrations affect the individual in his marriage, job, and social relations is pointed out. Treatment for these ills is related here to earlier discussions of social work and psychiatry. Recognition of a problem, and the admission that it exists is mentioned as a necessary step in solving it. No longer is the granting of money per se, or better living quarters, or new furnishings considered the cure-all of a family's problems. The class comes to see that no matter what economic group an individual is in, he may have emotional unhappiness stemming from early conditioning which stands in the way of his using his full capacities. As might be expected, class members draw upon experiences close to them to exemplify these points, and often stay after class to discuss their own situation further, some with a view toward seeking help.

A case illustration taken from the JFSA files, and carefully disguised, is used as a concrete way of demonstrating the kind of family which comes, the kind of problem for which they seek outside help, their willingness to pay a fee, and the approach and treatment of the worker. It is gratifying to feel the growth of respect on the part of the group for the field of social work, as they see the consideration given the individual, the importance placed on his happiness no matter who he is, and the uniform quality of service to the fee-paying and non fee-paying person.

With this rather general information as a background, the special sessions, led by experts in the particular field, begin. The first is usually a session by a

psychologist or psychiatrist who defines "normal" behavior, describes deviations, sets up danger signals which indicate need for help, and discusses specifically what help can be secured from child psychiatrists, psychiatrists, analysts, psychologists and social workers. This session was added after the first year because there were so many questions asked that it was thought wise to have a doctor set forth this material.

In order to strengthen the group's feeling for the course, the Big Sister Supervisor, who conducts the first three sessions, and a later one on Services to Children, is present at each of the remaining sessions. Because of the relationship developed in the early sessions, class members feel free to come up after class to make comments, ask questions, or explain future absences.

Each of the experts is given the material which is presented in the basic sessions at an advance conference. The particular session is reviewed from the standpoint of how the volunteer can fit, be of service, yet realize her limitations in working with people under various tensions. Points which they stress are: 1) that the volunteer must take guidance from the professional worker responsible for the work being done; 2) that she must not make decisions for the client even though that seems the easy thing to do; 3) that questions about procedures and techniques should be brought back to the worker in charge; 4) that this work is a responsibility which cannot be lightly or casually undertaken.

It is of tremendous importance to give a group such as this some recognition for its sustained interest in following through a course to its completion. To do this, the Council presents certificates at the final meeting to those who have

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qualified according to the requirements mentioned earlier. The examination which precedes this is a verbal one, each member drawing a question from a box. If an answer is incomplete, volunteers complete it from the floor, thus giving the whole group another opportunity to review the most important features of the course. While some fifty to sixty women form the class at the outset, this last year thirty-eight certificates were granted, the highest in the three years. Among the charges given the volunteers beyond the individual job is that of interpreting social work, and taking active responsibility for social legislation.

While no complete study has been made of the extent to which these qualified women have become active volunteers, it is known that many have taken important jobs in the various fields for which they received some preparation. The list of names is constantly reviewed

for persons who might undertake one task or another.

In conclusion, it should be said that such an opportunity to draw lay people more closely to the actual work of social agencies provides social work with a rare chance to demonstrate its purpose and method of working as no other medium can do. Even those who, because of changes in their personal lives, are not able to participate, are thereafter better informed and sympathetic. They have participated in ten two-hour periods covering this material, have visited agencies, and read books designed to broaden their point of view. Such an approach to the education of volunteers is sound, necessary, and effective, one with which the agencies are pleased and proud to assist. It is hoped that with each additional year, the material can be broadened and more interesting ways of presenting it developed.

IN THE COMMUNITY

Edited by Martin M. Cohn

INTEGRATING FEDERATION AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL—EDITOR'S NOTE

THE increasing intensity of pressures on American Jewry arising out of the disturbed social conditions which resulted from the depression and the war have led to increasing concern for effective coordination and planning of Jewish community organization, both locally and nationally. Experience indicates that the development of sound local community life is the first essential.

In the intermediate and smaller communities a pattern of central organization has been emerging. In the larger communities, which include the largest proportion of the population, which have the widest range of services, and provide the largest part of the funds, the problem has been more complex because of the greater diversity of groups and activities. A particularly difficult aspect of the problem has been created by the relationship between the Federation-Welfare Funds and the Community Council.

Growing out of the Welfare Funds, as these had earlier developed from the Federations to include wider areas of organized Jewish interest, the Community Council has, unlike the Welfare Fund, never quite jelled. No specific pattern has grown up, as has happened with the Federations and Welfare Funds, where a defined purpose and method of operation with a fairly widespread acceptance in a range of com-

munities has developed. Started first as deliberative bodies, it was found that talking about unity was not quite enough. Some definite activities were needed. In some places the Council took on civic protective functions. In some places a relationship with the Welfare Fund was worked out which made the Council sponsor of the campaign. In some places it became a means of expression for those groups who did not agree with the Welfare Fund leadership. In the larger communities these Councils have usually not included in their scope Jewish education, group work, the social and health services. There has been a tendency for two "centers of gravity" to develop with the inevitable conflict.

From all this, three things have become apparent.

1. The need for a broader and more inclusive agency than either the Welfare Fund or the Community Council.
2. The need for defining more effectively those aims and programs on which unity can be achieved and which can therefore be dealt with by such an agency. This implies that there are areas where such unity cannot be achieved at present and where differences must be accepted.