

NEW NEEDS AND NEW APPROACHES IN FOSTER CARE

and day care can contribute much to the prevention of breaking up of family life. Public assistance programs must provide a better standard of living and the needed social services to strengthen the family. Federal and state social insurance systems should provide greater

coverage and be geared to the enhancement of family security throughout the nation. Our nation will provide adequately for its children when it learns to view child welfare as an investment in human welfare rather than as an expense.

THE PROBLEM OF BASIC MAINTENANCE IN THE FAMILY AGENCY*

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IN the Social Service Review of September, 1929, Mr. Rubinow, discussing public-private agency relationships, spoke of the private agency's inability to meet need, and the public agency's unwillingness to meet need. He thought we were faced with an interesting problem in speculative philosophy: here we had the private agency with the desire and no power, and there the public agency with power and no desire. We have come a long way since then. In our theoretical statements we have recognized the individual's right to have the government help him to get the essentials of living when he is unable to provide them for himself, and the government's responsibility to meet this need. We in the private family field no longer see meeting basic maintenance as our job. The Committee on Current and Future Planning of the Family Service Association of America, suggesting a statement of principles for its member organizations, states that: "Basic maintenance relief is the responsibility of governmental agencies and voluntary agencies should resist pressure for the assumption by them of basic community relief." However, despite our theoretical clarity, faced with the every-day reality of client requests, we have at

times felt hard-pressed and uncertain in carrying out such a policy. We are all too aware how the public agency, with its inadequate budgets, really denies basic maintenance to its recipients and defines as ineligible for assistance those families of equally inadequate marginal income. In some situations it is hard for us to decide whether the giving of financial assistance would be related to some aspect of "preserving and strengthening family life" or whether it would be just plain basic maintenance.

Suppose we look at some case illustrations: Mrs. Martin, a recipient of Aid to Dependent Children, comes in to ask for help in buying a warm jacket for her oldest boy, aged nine. His threadbare jacket has been patched and repatched until it has finally disintegrated. She has spoken to her public assistance worker and has been told no special provision can be made to help her purchase this article of clothing. As Mrs. Martin sees it, the choice is between her family eating or the boy going to school. What service if any do we offer the Martin family? Can we be comfortable in realizing that perhaps, other than meeting this request, there may not be any service we can offer that can have meaning for Mrs. Martin?

Some people believe that despite our conviction that basic maintenance is the public agency's responsibility, in the face

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of real client hardship and in the interest of "preserving and strengthening family life," we should meet whatever need we can if there is money available. Since voluntary funds could not be enough to supplement the income of all public assistance recipients, they suggest we select out for our help those families for whom a minimal investment of our funds and time would yield the greatest return in alleviating hardship.

Would the Martin situation be one of those where a "minimal investment of our funds and time" would be justified? Would there be any way of defining, on this basis, which clients we help or refuse—or would it rest entirely with the discretion of the particular intake worker? It would seem to me that if we help Mrs. Martin, we have no real basis for refusing to supplement all public agency recipients; and that if we are selecting out for our help only those families unable to manage on their public assistance grants we have, in a sense, put a premium on "not managing." Should Mrs. Martin's requests increase, at what point would this case cease being a "minimal investment"? More important for me would be the question of how Mrs. Martin would ever really know where she stood with us—whether control of her life would remain with her as she could participate meaningfully in determining her right to this help, or whether she might not be giving up an important part of herself to an uncertain dependency on the case worker. Such a practice would also seem to imply a readiness to take on the job of meeting all basic maintenance needs if we have the money, and I would be concerned about the effect of this approach on our efforts toward securing more adequate public agency programs.

Suppose we refuse Mrs. Martin's request, do we do it out of any conviction about the role of the private family agency or because we cannot chance getting the deluge of referrals from the public agency that helping Mrs. Martin might precipitate? It would seem to me that refusing this request without conviction could be a destructive experience for both worker and client. The worker could not be helpful to Mrs. Martin with nothing in his feelings to sustain him in the rightness of what he is doing—he would be practicing a case work that felt wrong and denying and the feeling would inevitably be transmitted to the client.

Let us look at another clothing request: Mr. Greenberg applies for financial assistance to buy a snow-suit for one of his four children, the oldest of whom is five years old. Mr. Greenberg earns a better-than-average wage as a skilled mechanic. However, he was married once before and a court order takes \$10 a week out of his pay envelope. His net take home pay with this deduction just about equals a public assistance budget for his family of six, and brings it below our agency budget. Mr. Greenberg is making good use of his capacities and the possibility of his increasing his earnings is quite remote. In making his request for assistance, Mr. Greenberg tells us that his two middle children, ages two and three, are sharing one snow-suit and cannot be taken out at the same time. Try as he will, the family has been unable to lay aside enough money to buy a snow-suit.

Here is a request that is made by a family of marginal income to our private family agency. We would probably not be asked for this help were it not for the public agency's inadequate standards.

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The problem of when we give help to families of marginal income has been a difficult one. Last year, in an article in the *Journal of Social Casework*, Dorothy V. Thomas proposed possible criteria for private family agency assistance to these families. Starting from the premise that meeting basic financial need is the responsibility of the public agency, Miss Thomas suggested that "There are certain families and individuals, who, for one reason or another, have intermittent financial need which, if met, enables them to function adequately for another period of time. If the periods between need are fairly long and if the need as presented is realistic, this may be a very helpful service of the family agency. It takes skill to determine when and how to give such help so that the strengths in the family may be maintained."¹

Does such a statement answer anything for us, or does it present us with a new set of questions? Would helping the Greenbergs with their request "enable them to function adequately for another period of time," and what would go into determining that? Does not financial deprivation in itself get in the way of a family "functioning adequately"? Would such a policy mean that we would help the Greenbergs if they had not been in for three or four months but that we would not help them if only one or two months had elapsed since their last application?

I feel that we can become pretty immobilized if we get lost in the questions that flow from trying to relate our financial assistance to need alone. I do not think need by itself can give us a valid basis for formulating a policy on finan-

cial assistance in the private family agency. Any such attempt when measured against our own stated convictions and our inability to meet all need would seem to place us, inevitably, in the untenable position of attempting to measure one client's need against another's. It seems to me that the meaningful core of all private family case work, whether related to financial or other problems, lies in our offering the client an opportunity for constructive change—to find how he can use our services, as expressions of our purpose, to bring about some change in his outer circumstances and in his self-organization.

With such a philosophy, the question of whether our financial assistance is used to meet the cost of basic maintenance, or for tuition payments, or something else is not the determinant of our help. The purpose for which the money is used is determined by worker and client together, as they see the reality need for this particular financial assistance in relation to the particular plan for change upon which they have embarked.

Let us look at another case: Mr. Gross asks our help in finding employment. He has been unemployed for a year and his family has been receiving public assistance. He had a clerical job before the war that did not pay very much, but that was before the Gross family had a child and Mrs. Gross had to give up her job. During the war he got a defense job in a steel mill. Later, at his pre-induction physical examination, Mr. Gross was placed in "4F" because of some heart ailment. He requested, and was given a transfer to a less arduous job which he held till the end of the war, earning an adequate wage. Shortly after the end of the war, Mr. Gross, a marginal employee because of his physi-

¹ Thomas, Dorothy V., "Criteria for the Giving of Financial Assistance in a Private Family Agency," *Journal of Social Casework*, May, 1947.

cal handicap, was laid off and not rehired. Now, after a year of unemployment, Mr. Gross is a pretty beaten man. He has not been able to find a clerical job because he lacks sufficient training and recent experience. As Mr. Gross is given a chance to tell about his situation, the worker can sense Mr. Gross' diminishing ability to put himself forward in seeking a job because of his continued lack of success. He has been afraid to seek medical attention and not knowing how sick he is has added to his anxiety.

With the worker's assistance Mr. Gross is able to use referral for medical and vocational help. He is much heartened to learn he is not seriously ill. Vocational tests show a high clerical aptitude. But perhaps most meaningful for him has been his re-developing sense of his own worth as a person. He is able to weather not getting a job to which the employment agency has referred him. And then, after five weeks of service from us, Mr. Gross is able to land a job on his own. The job pays him a somewhat higher wage than our agency "health and decency" budget. Up to this point we have not offered this family any financial assistance.

Two weeks later, however, Mr. Gross tells his worker that the job offers no possibility for advancement and he is in a quandry. The worker confers with the employment agency and they corroborate what Mr. Gross has said. The employment agency recommends that Mr. Gross go to school on a full-time basis for five months. After that they will be able to place him on a better job as a bookkeeper and he can then continue at school on a part-time basis. They have funds to cover his tuition. When the worker tells Mr. Gross of this opportunity he is quite interested. How-

ever, without the worker even asking the question, Mr. Gross tells him that whether his wife would want it or not, he neither could nor would subject his family to managing on a public assistance grant for five more months.

Let me digress for a moment to tell you that the Public Assistance law in Pennsylvania is an excellent piece of legislation. Its only drawback is that the legislature never appropriates enough money to carry out the provisions of the law. According to the most recent estimate of the State Department of Public Assistance, it has funds sufficient to meet only about 80% of what its own staff has determined is a "decent and healthful" standard of living.

With this in mind, do we offer to supplement Mr. Gross' public assistance grant—to use our voluntary agency funds to meet his family's basic maintenance needs? Perhaps in communities where public assistance is more adequate we would say "no." However, I would certainly see this as a situation where we would supplement the public agency's grant. Our service is geared to helping the client bring about a constructive change in his situation. The purpose for which the money will be used, as determined by worker and client together, is a reality need and is specifically related to the plan for change on which they have embarked.

Referring again to Mr. Greenberg's unfortunate situation, I think we would all agree that making it possible for the family to go out together instead of in shifts might well be in the direction of "strengthening family life." But suppose Mr. Greenberg had bought the snow-suit and had then requested instead that we make up the deficiency in the family's food budget, or in their rent, would we help them? And does not this

situation then become the same as any other one of inadequate income.

Is there any service we can offer Mr. Greenberg? The worker in this situation refused to meet Mr. Greenberg's request, but at the same time offered him an opportunity to discuss his situation to see if there was something the family could do to enable it to manage better. The family was able to use help in deciding that with their decreasing fuel bills as winter passed, they could borrow some money from a non-profit loan agency with which to purchase clothing, and that with careful management through the year they would be able to repay the loan as well as accumulate sufficient money to meet clothing costs for the following winter.

However, what if a family situation is such that it is decided after thorough exploration that the family can neither increase its income nor decrease its expenditures? Perhaps for such families the agency service terminates at this point, when the client concludes that there is no change possible in his external situation and that he has to make peace with the life he has to live. I think we would all agree that such help can have a great deal of value for clients. Nevertheless, I would not want to minimize the real difficulty many clients have in accepting our inability to give them financial assistance. Such difficulty is inevitable for all private family agencies as long as they cannot meet all need, no matter what the basis for giving. It seems to me, though, that a refusal that comes from the essential nature of the agency function as presented here can have more meaning for both client and worker than that based on some arbitrary differentiation of need itself—whether financial or psychological.

Because we know what living on inadequate income over extended periods of time does to families—the toll it takes in personal and family disorganization and disintegration, it is easy to understand why we frequently find ourselves meeting the residual needs of the community; why despite our conviction about not meeting basic maintenance needs we offer financial assistance to people ineligible for public assistance and supplement inadequate public agency grants and marginal incomes. I think we are all in agreement with the oft-repeated statement that governmental agencies will not assume responsibility for more adequate programs as long as the private agencies make up the deficiencies in public assistance. We have seen in our own experience, however, that contracting our relief services has not necessarily resulted in the public agencies taking on a more comprehensive role. We are certainly justifiably concerned about the welfare of those families, who, but for our inconsistency, would not be eligible for needed help from any source. Though we have gained a great deal in clarity and direction in recognizing that our primary contribution lies in our case work skills as practitioners, in this advance we have somehow lost some of the kind of concern and need for positive action we once had, that expressed itself in a real involvement with such questions as minimum-wage legislation, low-cost housing, and social security.

Another difficulty for us is the community's misunderstanding of our role. Our supporting communities still see us as being engaged primarily in giving financial assistance. In one form or another, the "waif" with her skimpy clothes and broken doll continues as the symbol for communal support of vol-

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untary agencies. Some community leaders still ask why it costs so much to give so little relief. They are questioning our very existence by asking why, in view of the public agency program, we should be supported at all. We have been told that we have left the public behind us—that we have done a poor job of interpretation. Without presuming to suggest an answer, I really do wonder if this would have happened if we had been clear as to what our direction should be.

Though the viewpoint expressed in this paper is by no means new, it has had real meaning for me as a practitioner. I have found that there is a practical and psychological use the client can make of our short-time help. With the approach to financial assist-

ance suggested in this paper, as well as with any other approach, the pressure from clients, community, and our own needs create problems for us in deciding when to give and when not to give. In any particular case, a worker's decision would have to flow from a real feeling conviction about and identification with over-all agency policy; for I doubt if any agency policy can ever be formulated in such a way as to eliminate completely the element of professional decision. I believe that help granted for a limited period of time to families who want to bring about a change in their situation—to work toward achieving a "more stable or independent way of living" is a valid basis for carrying out an assistance policy in the private family agency.

ELIGIBILITY AS A DYNAMIC IN RELIEF SERVICE TO NEW AMERICANS*

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RESPONSIBILITY for financial help to newcomers is not a new problem. Helping the immigrant put down roots in this country has been the historic task of the Jewish family agency. My own agency, the Jewish Family Service of Philadelphia, had its beginnings in this service. Giving financial assistance is of equal importance today, although the concept of social case work and the method of administering relief as part of a case work process have changed radically.

In the past few decades, case workers learned to administer relief not only so as to meet the immediate need but, through the skill with which it is given, help the client begin something for himself and resolve some of his internal confusion so that, through a limited experience with the agency, he could begin to handle the problem situation alone.

In their day-to-day practice, family case workers developed a method of relief giving which made such a sound and limited goal possible. By holding to a process of establishing and maintaining eligibility for a relief service, the case worker was able to help the family organize its own forces to deal with the problem which beset it. Such a method

is based on the working together of a client who chooses to seek and decides to accept help from one particular organization and an agency which decides to offer it to him.

With the new American, however, the family agency is met with a whole new set of conditions. The request for financial help and the circumstances under which it is offered are quite different.

The way the resettled refugee comes to us is unique in the usual case work practice. Arriving in San Francisco or New York, he does not have the choice of whether he shall go to another community or not; he is expected to leave. Nor does he have final control over *where* he is to go; often it is a question of which community is willing to take him. He therefore may have little or no choice in the coming, the community to which he is sent, or the agency. Nor—and this is equally important—has the agency really chosen to work with him in the way that it does with its usual clientele. There has been no application interview on which a responsible mutual decision to work together can be based. The agency, as well as the client, is working in the blind.

At the very basis of the family agency's present method of relief administration, which I have already briefly sketched,

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