

# RESETTLING UNFUNDED, UNATTACHED, SOVIET REFUGEES IN SMALL U. S. COMMUNITIES

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*The resettlement of Soviet Jews in the United States has largely been the responsibility of intermediate and large cities with comprehensive federation/agency/synagogue infrastructures. In 1990, 34 small U.S. communities, mostly in the Northeast, Midwest, and South, resettled individuals who were designated as privately funded and unattached; that is, refugees who were both ineligible for public funding and had no relatives in the United States. A telephone survey of these communities revealed that raising funds for resettlement was not a problem; rather, there are limits to voluntarism, which cannot substitute for professional services within the Jewish community.*

**O**n February 15, 1990, representatives of the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with representatives of the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs and the Bureau for Refugee Programs of the Department of State. This MOU enabled the government and CJF/HIAS to conduct a project for the privately funded admission and resettlement of up to 8,000 Soviet Jewish refugees in the 1990 fiscal year, which ran from October 1, 1989 to September 30, 1990.

These "unfunded" refugees comprised 20% of the projected Jewish refugees admitted to the United States from the Soviet Union during fiscal year 1990. According to the MOU, CJF/HIAS would designate these people as unfunded no more than 30 days after admission to the United States. Under the terms of the MOU, CJF/HIAS would "be responsible for the cost of admission (processing, transportation, documentation, medical examination), Reception and Placement and resettlement of all privately-funded refugees for 2 years after admission of those refugees to the United States" or until they attained permanent residency status (i.e. green cards), whichever came first. During this

period, refugees would not be eligible for public assistance, Medicaid, food stamps, or special refugee-related service programs.

Concomitant with the MOU, CJF launched the "Our Town" project in which selected small American communities, with Jewish populations ranging from 350 to 7,200, would each resettle a minimum of two unfunded Soviet Jewish families. Thirty-four communities, all east of the Rocky Mountains, participated in the project, resettling 248 refugees in fiscal year 1990 (Table 1). The refugees arrived in these communities in May and June 1990.

The "Our Town" project had two goals, one ideological and one practical. Ideologically, it would "lend further vibrancy to the small Jewish community that participates. The Project will provide the community with a visible, touchable Jewish purpose, which could help unite the small Jewish community in a *new* Jewish challenge" (Krieger, memorandum, 1990). By participating in the project, small communities could share in the experience and accomplishment of resettlement. Participation also brought promises of a boost in collective morale, as 19 of the 34 participating towns have either had no population increase or a decline in their Jewish popu-

*Table 1*  
COMMUNITIES THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE  
"OUR TOWN" PROJECT

<i>Community</i>	<i>Number of Unfunded Soviet Jews Resettled in Fiscal Year 1990</i>	<i>Total Jewish Population in Community<sup>a</sup></i>
Altoona, PA	8	450
Annapolis, MD	10	2,000
Arnold, MD	3	— <sup>b</sup>
Asheville, NC	6	1,350
Beaumont, TX	7	800
Cape Cod, MA	9	2,900
Chapel Hill, NC	10	2,900
Charleston, WV	8	1,025
Charlotte, NC	6	4,000
Charlottesville, VA	7	950
Columbia, MO	6	350
Daytona Beach, FL	5	2,500
Duluth, MN	9	500
Erie, PA	7	800
Evansville, IN	7	520
Fredericksburg, VA	7	140
Gainesville, FL	6	1,200
Galveston, TX	5	800
Howard County, MD	10	7,200
Lafayette, IN	8	500
Lakeland, FL	6	800
Lynchburg, VA	7	275
Mobile, AL	7	1,100
Muskegon, MI	6	235
Northwest Indiana	16	2,300
Peoria, IL	9	950
Petersburg, VA	5	550
Pottstown, PA	5	700
Raleigh, NC	7	2,775
Roanoke, VA	7	1,050
Tallahassee, FL	7	1,500
Tulsa, OK	9	2,750
West Chester, PA	6	300
Winston-Salem, NC	7	400

<sup>a</sup>Data from Kosmin & Scheckner (1991).

<sup>b</sup>Total population is included in Annapolis figure.

*Table 2*  
CHANGES IN JEWISH POPULATION IN  
"OUR TOWN" COMMUNITIES, 1970-1990

<i>Decline of more than 50%</i>	
Altoona, PA	
Duluth, MN	
Evansville, IN	
Muskegon, MI	
Northwest Indiana	
Peoria, IL	
<i>Decline between 1% and 49%</i>	
Charleston, WV	
Erie, PA	
Lafayette, IN	
<i>No Change in Jewish Population</i>	
Beaumont, TX	
Fredericksburg, VA	
Galveston, TX	
Lynchburg, VA	
Mobile, AL	
Petersburg, VA	
Pottstown, PA	
Tulsa, OK	
West Chester, PA	
Winston-Salem, NC	
<i>Increase between 1% and 100%</i>	
Annapolis, MD	
Arnold, MD	
Asheville, NC	
Charlotte, NC	
Columbia, MO	
Lakeland, FL	
Roanoke, VA	
<i>Increase of at least 100%</i>	
Cape Cod, MA	
Chapel Hill, NC	
Charlottesville, VA	
Daytona Beach, FL	
Gainesville, FL	
Howard County, MD	
Raleigh, NC	
Tallahassee, FL	

SOURCE: Research Department, Council of Jewish Federations

lation since 1970 (Table 2).

There was a practical aspect to the "Our Town" project as well. The refugees who were designated as unfunded were also "free" cases; that is, they had no relatives living in the United States. Therefore, a practical goal of the project was to spread the cost of resettling these refugees to small cities so as to decrease the financial burden placed on the larger communities, which normally shoulder the greater financial burden of resettlement.

A committee consisting of professional staff members at CJF, United Jewish Appeal (UJA), and HIAS selected the communities

for participation. Each participating community had to have a professionally or volunteer-run federation, a local UJA affiliate, or a synagogue with a full-time rabbi to qualify (Table 3). Initially the plan was to match refugees with communities. CJF/HIAS attempted to make sure that there was a vocational "fit," that all adults were 45 years old or younger, and that they were in good health. However, a delay in program implementation—the MOU was

Table 3  
HOW THE RESETTLEMENT EFFORT WAS IMPLEMENTED

<i>Community</i>	<i>Full-time Federation</i>	<i>Volunteer-Directed Federation</i>	<i>UJA Affiliate</i>	<i>Synagogue</i>
Altoona, PA		X		
Annapolis, MD			X	
Arnold, MD			X	
Asheville, NC		X		
Beaumont, TX		X <sup>a</sup>		
Cape Cod, MA		X		
Chapel Hill, NC		X		
Charleston, WV		X		
Charlotte, NC	X			
Charlottesville, VA				X
Columbia, MO				X
Daytona Beach, FL	X			
Duluth, MN		X		
Eric, PA		X		
Evansville, IN		X		
Fredericksburg, VA				X
Gainesville, FL			X	
Galveston, TX		X		
Howard County, MD		X <sup>a</sup>		
Lafayette, IN		X		
Lakeland, FL			X	
Lynchburg, VA			X	
Mobile, AL		X		
Muskegon, MI			X	
Northwest Indiana	X			
Peoria, IL	X			
Petersburg, VA				X
Pottstown, PA			X	
Raleigh, NC		X		
Roanoke, VA			X	
Tallahassee, FL		X <sup>a</sup>		
Tulsa, OK	X			
West Chester, PA			X	
Winston-Salem, NC		X <sup>a</sup>		

<sup>a</sup>Not a CJF member

signed in February 1990 but the program did not begin until May of that year — meant that some refugees with special health concerns were assigned to the small communities. Before a community was designated, a team of people (usually a national lay leader and a professional) made contact with the community to explain the project and solicit their cooperation.

#### THE STUDY

In October 1990, the Refugee Resettlement Program of CJF began a telephone survey of resettlement coordinators in the participating communities. By the end of January

1991, all 34 communities had been contacted. Each individual interview took from 40 minutes to over an hour, depending on the specific needs and circumstances of each community, and included these issues:

#### *Assistance*

- subcontracting with a HIAS-affiliated community
- whether the affiliated community had provided the "Our Town" participant with training and support
- whether the local resettlement committees had approached other voluntary agencies in their communities that had resettled

other refugee populations in the past and, if so, what their relationship was with these agencies.

#### *Service*

- refugee case management
- provision of English as a Second Language (ESL)
- available employment assistance
- type of employment that refugees had obtained
- how congruent the refugees' jobs were to their individual education and work histories
- family self-sufficiency
- health care provision (including dental care)
- major medical problems among the refugee population

#### *Fiscal*

- means of funding local resettlement efforts
- any major financial problems related to resettlement
- total amount of cash assistance provided each month to each family

#### *Other Concerns*

- whether any refugees had either moved from the area or expressed an interest in moving
- community efforts to acculturate these families Jewishly
- whether the local resettlement committees would consider future resettlement of refugees
- general problems with the program

## RESULTS

### **Subcontracting, Training, and Support**

Of the 34 communities in the program, exactly half subcontracted through larger cities. However, mainly because of the huge distances between participating communities and federations in major or medium-sized metropolitan areas (Table 4), this relationship was problematic. One

Mid-Atlantic community grew frustrated with the large city that was overseeing it, claiming that it had to "beg for everything." Three Southeast communities claimed that the larger cities with which they subcontracted were providing training and support "in name only." Other towns subcontracted from cities that were more than 100 miles away, with the result being very little contact between them. One city subcontracted from another that had resettled no refugees in the 1990 fiscal year and consequently was unable to provide training or support. Other towns subcontracted from larger communities, but in essence worked autonomously.

Many communities found that the "Resettlement Manual for Unfunded/ Unattached Soviet Refugees into the Small American Jewish Community," compiled by Richard Krieger and Connie Winters in February 1990 for the "Our Town" project, was particularly useful. In addition, federations and Jewish Family Services in the larger communities assisted in filling out HIAS forms, solving problems concerning health insurance, conducting intake interviews, and with finances and employment placement. One Mid-Atlantic community actually drew up a Purchase-of-Service Agreement with a nearby larger city, which enabled it to use the Jewish Vocational Service, Hebrew Free Loan Society, and the federation-supported hospital.

However, many of the "Our Town" communities were reluctant to seek out help when needed. Some were concerned that larger communities were too busy with their own resettlement efforts. Because of the distance between the smaller and larger communities, many small towns decided to be self-reliant. More help was available at the beginning of the project, when it was too early for either problems to develop or for participating communities to articulate specific concerns.

### **Contact with Non-Jewish Voluntary Agencies**

Several communities reported good relations with Catholic Charities and Lutheran Im-

Table 4

## DISTANCE IN MILES OF "OUR TOWN" COMMUNITIES FROM NEAREST FEDERATION IN A MAJOR OR MEDIUM-SIZED METROPOLITAN AREA

<i>Community</i>	<i>Nearest Federation</i>	<i>Distance in Miles to Nearest Federation</i>
Altoona, PA	Pittsburgh, PA	90
Annapolis, MD	Baltimore, MD	20
	Washington, D.C.	25
Arnold, MD	Baltimore, MD	20
	Washington, D.C.	25
Asheville, NC	Greensboro, NC	160
	Charlotte, NC	105
Beaumont, TX	Houston, TX	95
Cape Cod, MA	Boston, MA	90
Chapel Hill, NC	Greensboro, NC	95
Charleston, WV	Richmond, VA	75
Charlotte, NC	Greensboro, NC	95
Charlottesville, VA	Richmond, VA	75
Columbia, MO	St. Louis, MO	110
Daytona Beach, FL	Jacksonville, FL	85
	Orlando, FL	60
Duluth, MN	Minneapolis, MN	130
Eric, PA	Pittsburgh, PA	115
	Cleveland, OH	95
Evansville, IN	Indianapolis, IN	140
	Louisville, KY	105
Fredericksburg, VA	Washington, D.C.	45
	Richmond, VA	50
Gainesville, FL	Jacksonville, FL	60
	Orlando, FL	60
Galveston, TX	Houston, TX	55
Howard County, MD	Baltimore, MD	15
	Washington, D.C.	20
Lafayette, IN	Indianapolis, IN	60
Lakeland, FL	Tampa, FL	30
Lynchburg, VA	Richmond, VA	75
Mobile, AL	New Orleans, LA	160
Muskegon, MI	Detroit, MI	190
	Grand Rapids, MI	30
	Chicago, IL	160
Northwest Indiana	Chicago, IL	30
Peoria, IL	Chicago, IL	125
	St. Louis, MO	120
Petersburg, VA	Richmond, VA	30
Pottstown, PA	Allentown, PA	35
	Reading, PA	15
	Philadelphia, PA	35
Raleigh, NC	Greensboro, NC	65
Roanoke, VA	Richmond, VA	140
	Greensboro, NC	110
Tallahassee, FL	Jacksonville, FL	180
	Orlando, FL	150
Tulsa, OK	Oklahoma City, OK	100
West Chester, PA	Wilmington, DE	20
	Philadelphia, PA	25
Winston-Salem, NC	Greensboro, NC	30

migration and Refugee Service, particularly those agencies that had settled other refugee populations in the past decade. In some cases, there was joint ESL provision. In one instance, the local Jewish resettlement coordinator provided consultation for local non-Jewish voluntary organizations involved in their own resettlement efforts.

### Services and Leadership

#### *Refugee Case Management*

Voluntary task forces, of which local Jewish activists comprised the core, took the lead in refugee case management in most communities. In a few towns, volunteers from synagogues, or the synagogues themselves, assumed prominent roles. To some degree or another, the few active volunteers in each community have since "burned out," and this factor alone has greatly influenced the decisions of some communities regarding future involvement in resettlement.

#### *English as A Second Language (ESL)*

The major problems associated with ESL have been logistical; namely, lack of transportation to and from classes, the need for child care during classes, and work schedules of refugees that conflicted with class time. Because ESL classes for adults were usually held in the evening, many volunteer resettlement committees were expected to provide not only transportation but also child care while the classes were in progress. Some refugees also held night jobs and could not attend ESL classes. In other cases, adult refugees would refuse to work until they knew "enough" English. Thus, even with ESL, lack of fluent English hindered job prospects.

The late spring arrival of the refugees meant an initial reliance on volunteer tutors in many communities, since ESL in a formal, classroom setting was not usually available until the fall. In one Northeastern town, volunteers from the public library literacy program provided ESL. A Southern community hired a private tutor.

When formal ESL classes were available

through local community colleges or the public school system, it was only provided on one level. Many individuals who had studied English in the Soviet Union thought the ESL training was too basic. In some instances, they became frustrated and dropped out of the local programs.

The inverse relationship between age and skill in mastering a new language made it difficult for older refugees to make much progress in the ESL classes. One Northeastern community reported that one of its refugees was diagnosed with a learning disability in the Soviet Union, which made learning English difficult for him. Shyness or lack of self-confidence also prevented many students from speaking English outside of class.

#### *Employment Assistance*

For the most part, either voluntary resettlement committees or local businessmen provided employment assistance. In many communities, individuals did not work until they had acquired enough English language skills to function in the workplace. In the few cases, a Jewish vocational counselor or agency was instrumental in obtaining employment for individuals. A Southeastern city also used state employment services, but reported that they were too bureaucratic and of little help. Other communities relied on local "head hunters" or the local community college, made arrangements with local businessmen to hire the refugees on their arrival, or persuaded local Jewish businessmen to provide jobs for the refugees.

Very few communities had a job refusal policy; that is, a policy to encourage an individual to accept an entry-level position, particularly if it is the only work available. Indeed, under the terms of the MOU, communities could not terminate assistance to a privately funded refugee who refused a position. The community had a financial commitment to these individuals until they either became permanent residents of the United States or were in the country for 2 years. Consequently, resettlement communities could not invoke sanctions

against refugees if they refused to work, which presented a major problem. In contrast, assistance could be terminated to funded refugees after 3 months.

Whether refugees should accept entry-level jobs or retrain for either higher levels or new fields has been the subject of ongoing debate. Some communities were willing to pay tuition fees so that the refugees could learn new skills, trades, or professions; others considered such training programs a way to avoid work. In two communities, resettlement committees warned refugees that if they continued to refuse job offers, their monthly stipends would be cut to public assistance levels. Volunteers from other communities said that some refugees did not understand the need to work and refused jobs for being too demeaning.

The lack of public transportation also caused commuting problems in many towns. In some instances, volunteers drove the refugees to work. In other cases, no-interest loans were given to individuals to purchase automobiles; in some communities, cars were donated. A few refugees were able to save enough money to purchase used cars so they could commute to and from jobs.

#### *Occupational Profile of Refugees*

Many of the "Our Town" communities have severely depressed economies. For example, the unemployment rate of Muskegon, Michigan was 10.5%. As a consequence, only 3 of 34 communities (9%) reported that at least one family was self-sufficient after 4 months; this figure increased to 9 of the 34 (26%) at 6 months.

Many voluntary committees were subsidizing families whose adult members have taken entry-level jobs ranging in salary from the minimum wage to about \$7.00/hour. These jobs are mostly in the service industry and include repairmen, welders, beauty shop workers (hair stylists, manicurists, shampooers), cashiers and sales clerks, child care workers, supermarket workers (baggers, boxers, checkers), food

service workers (bartenders, waiters, kitchen workers, bakers), textile workers, tailors and dressmakers, stockroom and warehouse workers, apprentice auto mechanics, hospital and nursing home aides, hotel workers (painters, maids, maintenance), construction workers, and truck drivers.

Several individuals were able to find jobs in the same or similar trades and professions in which they had worked in the Soviet Union. A mechanical engineer who was fluent in English on arrival found a job within 2 months. He and his family have been completely self-sufficient since then. A former mathematician is now a computer programmer; his family is completely self-sufficient as well. A former voice teacher works part-time as a day care worker and gives private music lessons. A former geologist works on state geological surveys and for private consulting firms. One woman is on the adjunct faculty of a local university, teaching Russian language and literature courses. Other trades and professions include watchmakers, pharmacists, librarians, photographers, bookkeepers, draftsmen, and furriers. However, many of these individuals were either un- or underemployed during their first 3 months in the United States.

Most of the work in which these privately funded refugees are engaged is congruent with their employment and educational backgrounds. There are exceptions, however, and many individuals with professional backgrounds found difficulty obtaining similar employment in the United States. In some cases, they were too overspecialized and were acquainted with only one aspect of a particular field. In others, their professional status in the Soviet Union was equivalent to that of an aide or assistant in the United States. This was particularly true of individuals trained in health care professions, many of whom were unable to pass state certified board exams, even after becoming proficient in English. Differences in technical training, as well as difficulty obtaining residencies, prevented many refugee physicians from attaining the status they had enjoyed in the Soviet

Union. Some individuals switched fields entirely. In one case, a husband and wife who were both employed as electrical engineers in the Soviet Union became a warehouse worker and nurse's aide, respectively.

Ten communities reported having problems with the families they had sponsored for resettlement, particularly with recalcitrant refugees who refused to take entry-level jobs or who left them either because the salaries were too low or the work was not satisfying. Such cases are part of a normal caseload in a larger city; in small towns, they can become burdens.

Despite attempts made by the "Our Town" coordinators to ascertain congruence between the refugees' educational and work backgrounds and the professional and service needs of a given community, there were problems with underemployment and overqualification. In a few cases, "Our Town" communities simply did not have appropriate jobs for the refugees. People who had enjoyed professional status in the Soviet Union became service sector workers in order to survive financially. As mentioned above, some communities willingly provided tuition fees to retrain individuals either in their original or new fields. However, others considered retraining to be a form of manipulation that could potentially require the community to support the individual for up to 24 months while the refugee was in a retraining program. Payment of tuition fees for retraining programs was yet another financial drain on resettlement committees.

#### *"Problem" Cases*

In addition to the normal adjustment problems experienced by every refugee, some very serious problems emerged during these refugees' first months in the United States, including alcoholism, wife battering, and emotional and/or behavioral problems of children.

About one-quarter of the "Our Town" communities complained of individuals

who were clearly unmanageable or uncooperative. Finding a steady job and keeping it proved to be difficult for them; some insisted on waiting for *the* job. Although these individuals comprised a small proportion of the refugees, they had the most unrealistic expectations of financial success in the United States and were both a psychological and financial burden to their sponsoring communities. Their behavior eventually alienated the resettlement volunteers.

In most cases, volunteers involved in the resettlement effort lacked the necessary training to handle these problem cases. Moreover, two communities involved in the project were retirement communities, and the average age of a volunteer was considerably older than those in the other towns. Distances to larger communities with trained personnel prevented many towns from using the services of a Jewish family or vocational service. To handle these cases, the communities hired local professionals, further increasing the total cost of resettlement.

#### *Health Care*

Nearly every town was able to recruit physicians, surgeons, and dentists to provide health care on a pro bono basis, charging only for the cost of tests and supplies. One Midwestern community elicited the support of a local private foundation that made direct payments to health care providers for certain routine procedures. This community also included optical benefits as part of its resettlement health care delivery system.

Nearly every single refugee was provided with emergency dental care, as well as major dental work including fillings, extractions, root canals, bridge work, and crowns. Most of the dentists who volunteered for this effort did not anticipate the amount of work that each person, on average, required. The major time and expense commitment contributed to dentist burnout. Some



communities even deferred major dental work so as not to alienate volunteer dentists.

In addition, some refugees had chronic health care problems: high blood pressure, diabetes, positive results on the Tyne-tuberculosis test (two individuals in one community), and one case of leukemia. On the whole, there were very few major health emergencies.

None of the families that HIAS retroactively designated as "privately funded" were supposed to contain pregnant women since that would have constituted an undue burden on the sponsoring communities. Nevertheless, some of the women became pregnant in the 3- to 4-month hiatus between the signing of the MOU and their arrival in the United States. Although the cost of delivering some babies was donated by volunteer obstetrician/gynecologists and local hospitals, other communities had to make long-term arrangements with local hospitals to settle related debts. There were also instances of gynecological surgery, including two abortions, as well.

Stress-related medical problems, particularly gastrointestinal illness and depression, appeared in the refugee population. Depression was common among older people. As mentioned above, a few communities reported that refugee children had severe behavioral problems. Few refugees, however, actually sought out psychiatric help, and no or few Jewish professional services were available in these small towns. Consequently, problems were acknowledged but not solved.

There were many complaints about both the cost of the HIAS Basic Insurance for the Unfunded and challenges by HIAS' insurance carrier concerning reimbursement for certain procedures. Some communities dropped the HIAS insurance because of the cost. Others maintained it even after refugees found employment for it was less expensive than the family supplement for most group insurance plans. However, few refugees had work-related medical insurance since they held entry-level or part-time jobs in the service sector.

## Fiscal Issues

### *Sources of Funding*

By and large, special campaigns provided the funds to sustain the "Our Town" project. Sometimes, they were combined with UJA-Operation Exodus campaign. Occasionally, the local synagogue held a separate fund-raising drive. In one Mid-Atlantic community, the local chapter of B'nai B'rith donated money for the resettlement effort. A Southeastern town's resettlement committee set up a specific endowment to provide for preschool tuition for one child.

Each community raised between \$20,000 and \$50,000 for its resettlement efforts, and in some cases a campaign was completed in 2 weeks' time. Furniture and sometimes apartments were also donated. A few towns also set up small-scale guaranteed loan programs for the refugees.

Local resettlement had no negative impact on overall fund-raising. Indeed, it sometimes served as a catalyst. When campaigns were stagnant, it was because the community's economy was either depressed or it was a "college town", which traditionally have flat campaigns.

### *Financial Problems*

Despite the initial amounts raised, the "Our Town" communities' special campaign funds were depleted rapidly. In January 1991, after 8 months in the United States, less than 20% of the refugee families were completely self-sufficient according to the individuals responsible for resettlement, although 84% of the adult refugees were employed either part- or full-time. The latter group was still receiving supplemental support from the Jewish community.

When contacted in January, 1991, the communities voiced some reluctance to raise more funds and even hesitated to follow-up unpaid pledges. Most were worried about the effects of the general economic downturn on fund-raising prospects and the job market. Most resettlement

committees thought they could fulfill their commitment to the program if the adult refugees had full-time jobs within 6 to 9 months after arrival. Those communities that had one or more "problem" families face severe financial problems, however. One town, in which additional refugees "appeared," ran out of money after 8 months.

The "Our Town" project also raised some ideological concerns. Some communities believed more funds should go directly to the Operation Exodus campaign. In one town, the federation resettlement committee was struggling to overcome the resistance of its "big givers," who felt strongly that all efforts should be made to resettle Soviet Jews in Israel and not the United States. They did not want to contribute to the local resettlement campaign.

#### *Financial Assistance to Refugees*

The total monthly cash assistance ranged from \$600 to \$1,200 per month for a family of three or four, a level generally higher than that provided by larger communities. This stipend did not include rent, donated furniture and clothing, the HIAS insurance, utilities, or local phone service, all of which were also provided by the community. As noted above, cars and sometimes apartments themselves (through volunteers who are landlords) were donated. Many communities continued to provide a financial subsidy once family members were employed, but remained self-critical that they were not "tough" enough with the refugees in the beginning.

#### **Other Issues**

##### *Out-Migration*

Surprisingly, only 2 of the over 70 families resettled in the "Our Town" project out-migrated in the first 8 months of the program. Some other families did express an interest in moving, and in other instances, the volunteer coordinator suggested relocation for professional reasons or used it as a

threat to scare a recalcitrant family. Sometimes families from large Soviet cities had trouble adjusting to life in a small American town and thought they would find life in such cities as Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, or Philadelphia more attractive. Most refugees realized, however, that they were relatively well off in their current places of residence.

##### *Acculturation*

All communities wanted to integrate the refugees into local Jewish life, an opportunity denied to many in the Soviet Union. Doing so posed a problem, however, in the few instances of intermarried refugee couples. Most small communities tolerate mixed marriages, as long as the children are being raised as Jews. In a few cases, the non-Jewish spouse considered conversion.

Most small towns do not have the resources to provide special acculturation programs for refugee families, although in the few college towns, local Hillel Foundations did create such programs. Refugees were also invited to speak to community groups about life in the Soviet Union.

Because few Jewish communities seem to understand how Russified Soviet Jews were, there was occasional disappointment with their expressed level of "Jewishness," particularly from volunteers whose committees were synagogue-based. One community complained that its families knew nothing about Hanukkah before they came to the United States, and in another, two of its three families purchased Christmas trees for their homes, claiming it was a New Year's tradition in the Soviet Union.

Many communities offered free synagogue memberships and day school or religious instruction scholarships for children and established a network of host families who regularly invited the refugees for weekday dinners, Shabbat dinners, and holiday celebrations. Interaction between refugees and local families tended to decrease as the former became economically self-sufficient. Sometimes work schedules interfered with socializing. Moreover, when "veterans" of

earlier waves of Soviet immigration were living in these towns, refugees were more likely to associate with them than with their American hosts. Refugees living and working in an academic environment tended to have more social contacts with non-Jewish Americans.

In general, most refugee families seemed interested in learning more about Judaism and tended to attend synagogue regularly. Many teenagers over the age of 13 or their adult parents have had, or are preparing for, Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies. Brit Milot and naming ceremonies for younger children have been held. In two communities, resettlement committees purchased Russian-English prayer books for refugee families.

Volunteers helped the refugees learn about the American way of life by showing them how to shop in a supermarket or deal with the telephone company, but teaching them in a formal, classroom setting about the larger American civil society was not a priority for them. Only one community set up a civics course for the adult refugees.

#### *Future Sponsorship*

Most communities were ambivalent about future resettlement endeavors, even if the incoming refugees would be eligible for federal matching grant funds. This ambivalence stemmed more from overextension of volunteer resources than from problems raising money. With no infrastructure support, few realized how much volunteer time and energy were involved in resettlement efforts. However, the resettlement effort did help invigorate many dormant Jewish communities as Jews who had never been active before, or had been unaffiliated, became involved in it.

Only a handful of communities would consider immediate resettlement of more families, and the majority of this group have full-time federations with paid, professional staffs. The other communities would only accept more refugees once the first group of refugees was completely

self-sufficient and settled. Some communities would participate only in family reunifications.

No clear correlation could be made between communities with "problem" families and attitudes toward resettling more refugees. Three of the ten communities with "problems" said that they would not resettle any more refugees under any circumstances. However, the other seven were either willing to resettle other family members, or to sponsor unattached cases.

#### *Major Problems/Future Needs*

Many communities expressed a need for more training by larger communities, particularly in job development techniques. They also needed advice on how to implement job refusal policies and wanted some kind of leverage regarding unfunded refugees who would not cooperate in attaining self-sufficiency.

Many resettlement coordinators wanted HIAS and CJF to improve their methods of matching up the educational and employment backgrounds of refugees with individual local economies and urged that attention be paid to local economic conditions in general. Some suggested it might be helpful to ask refugees about the kind of work and community environment they would prefer.

Sometimes, resettlement committees felt totally overwhelmed by the tasks of resettlement. Despite the guidelines and initial orientations, many communities felt that, once the refugees arrived, they were left in the lurch. Small towns required special training in filling out HIAS Reception and Placement forms, as well as information on how to obtain special services. Coping with mental health problems, such as family conflicts and depression, was also a problem. They needed more contact with national agencies and larger cities that transcended paperwork. A support network, consisting of other "Our Town" resettlement committees and HIAS, CJF, and larger federation personnel, was needed desperately. Indeed, some Southern

communities took the initiative and set up their own networks. All of the communities would have welcomed on-site follow-up visits by national agency personnel and CJF-sponsored workshops on issues of concern.

Language problems were also great. In addition to the great difficulties experienced when organizing and coordinating ESL, many communities needed interpreters and had difficulty finding them.

Some communities were critical of information disseminated to both themselves and the refugees while still abroad, particularly concerning the issue of funding. Designation of refugees as "privately funded" was not made until they arrived in the United States; hence no refugees in the "Our Town" project knew they were unfunded until after they had arrived in the resettlement community. Some communities did not understand the full scope of the unfunded commitment, particularly the commitment to continue to support these families even if they had migrated to other parts of the country and were still not economically self-sufficient.

Resettlement volunteers expressed a need for better cross-cultural orientation for both themselves and the refugees, particularly regarding expectations of each other. Many volunteers expected refugees to be unconditionally grateful for every single thing that the community did for them and were disappointed if they were not. Problem families frequently strained relationships that volunteers had both with other refugees and each other. Volunteers argued about what course of action they should take and frequently did not consult the family itself.

Few volunteers were prepared for the difference in attitudes toward work between Americans and Soviets. Many of the refugees had unrealistic expectations about the kind of jobs they could obtain, the salaries and benefits they would receive, the amount of work they would actually have to do on the job, and their general standard of living in the United States. Too, many resettlement volunteers were alienated by what they perceived to be manipulative person-

ality traits. Moreover, new refugees tended to be suspicious of both volunteers and veterans of earlier migration waves. The refugees and their resettlement committees were not on a collision course, however. Indeed, the high expectations that each had of the other had the opposite effect; that is, they talked past each other.

#### RETROSPECT, PROSPECT, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of the "Our Town" project was to give the smallest Jewish communities the fullest opportunity to resettle refugees from the Soviet Union and to have them share in the cost of resettling the unfunded refugees. By that criterion alone, the project was nominally successful. Through the resettlement of unfunded, unattached refugees in small communities, the program provided new lives for them. Small Jewish communities also benefited, becoming part of a continental Jewish community that embraces both federated and nonfederated systems. Surprisingly, local Jewish population changes have had little or no impact on the program. Of the six communities that expressed enthusiasm for the program, one witnessed a decline in its Jewish population of more than 50% since 1970, three had no substantial population changes in that period, one had its Jewish population increase slightly, and one had its Jewish population more than double. As mentioned above, many individuals who had been either inactive or unaffiliated participated in this cooperative endeavor, thus invigorating Jewish life in the small communities.

The Krieger and Winters (1990) manual was helpful, but it presented an extremely optimistic view of the actual resettlement process. Many volunteers had no prior relationship with a larger Jewish federation, HIAS, or CJF. The manual was not a substitute for ongoing personal contact with these agencies. Moreover, that opportunity for contact was denied them once the refugees arrived. The project did boost community morale, but it simultaneously

made demands of volunteers for which they were not prepared, causing a tremendous emotional drain.

This strain was manifest in several ways. First was the question of time. Many volunteers knew that refugees would be very dependent on them in the beginning. They did not, however, expect to provide transportation to the extent that they did, including accompanying refugees on job interviews or bringing them to medical and dental appointments, ESL classes, or the like.

The provision of ESL also presented a problem. Because all of the unfunded refugees arrived in the late spring, ESL was provided on a somewhat ad hoc basis until formal classes through school districts or local colleges were available in the fall; teams of volunteer tutors were organized, or individual tutors were hired. Furthermore, those refugees who had begun their study of English in the Soviet Union or while in transit were frustrated at the low level of the classes. Because of the lack of effective ESL programs, particularly multi-level classes, many of the initially more advanced students dropped out of the program altogether. Those who had learning disabilities, or older adults who were resistant to learning a new language, were not accommodated at all.

ESL classes sometimes conflicted with work schedules or were held in places not accessible by public transportation. In those cases, the capabilities of the volunteer committees were further strained. Often, volunteers were expected to provide child care services while parents were in English classes, another time demand that was not anticipated. ESL or lack thereof was also an excuse to avoid work. Some individuals claimed that they had an insufficient command of English and therefore could not look for jobs.

Yet communities that had problems were more likely to blame themselves, rather than the refugees they were resettling, for their failures. One community leader said it was "bruised by its own passivity." When families were recalcitrant, or working but

not totally self-sufficient, resettlement committees claimed that they pampered their refugees too much. Many communities had unrealistic expectations concerning the occurrence of self-sufficiency.

Even when self-sufficiency was achieved, problems remained. Many refugees could not find employment in their chosen fields and frequently had to change fields or were economically self-sufficient but underemployed. One consequence of refugee frustration was that resettlement committees felt that they were doing an inadequate job, even when circumstances, such as local economic conditions, were beyond their control.

Local economic conditions affected not only how refugees earned their livings but also the fund-raising enterprise. A vicious cycle would develop in a depressed economy: Refugees had trouble attaining total self-sufficiency since the job market could not sustain them, and more money had to be raised to assist them.

A dearth of discretionary funds also became problematic when special services were required. In larger communities, such problem cases could simply be referred to a local Jewish family or vocational service. Most participants in the "Our Town" project were at least a 45-minute drive from the nearest federation service agency, and some were as many as 4 hours away. Such services as counseling or psychotherapy either had to be purchased on a local level, further depleting the resources of the voluntary committee, or had to be solicited on a pro bono basis, further enervating already enervated committees. In many cases, problems were simply ignored because services could not be provided readily.

The services offered by the larger cities were helpful before the resettlement process began, but once refugees arrived in these small communities, the voluntary committees that were involved in case management felt isolated and on their own. In towns where contact was made and maintained with non-Jewish voluntary agencies, this sense of isolation was reduced. Indeed, contact with local social service agencies

that had been involved in refugee resettlement strengthened the resolve of many volunteers. They realized that they were not doing this important work alone and that some of the resettlement problems they were encountering were not particularly "Jewish." Nevertheless, the absence of an individual in a larger agency to whom a refugee coordinator could turn on a day-to-day or even week-to-week basis made the resettlement process more difficult.

Despite these problems, most communities were not discouraged by their efforts, and some were willing to resettle more refugees in the next fiscal year. The main problem was not availability of funds, but availability of volunteers willing to take responsibility for these individuals.

The refugees who were resettled in the "Our Town" communities in fiscal year 1990 have begun to invite their relatives in the Soviet Union to join them. For these individuals to be integrated successfully into the Jewish community, certain changes must be made at the national level. National, as well as local, lay resettlement leadership should be developed. More initial training should be provided to local communities, followed up by personal communication with lay leadership and professionals associated with larger federations or national agencies. A hotline, either with CJF or HIAS as well as with a larger federation, needs to be instituted so that individual volunteers will not feel as if they are lost in a bureaucratic maze if and when things go wrong.

More contact also needs to be made on a local level with other voluntary agencies and social service organizations, and when necessary, the purchase of services should be considered. Although it is inarguable that if Soviet Jewish refugees want to live as Jews in the United States they should be resettled by Jewish organizations, certain resettlement problems, such as provision of ESL, transcend country of origin or religious background. Many small communities had provided new homes for other refugees in the past. The Jewish community

should be active in seeking out their experience and wisdom and in sharing its own when non-Jewish refugee populations arrive in these communities.

Volunteers must also be realistic about their own expectations of the time and energy commitment involved. Resettlement is an endeavor that requires more than good will and frequently involves much time and energy, particularly in health care delivery. Few volunteer physicians and dentists realize that they will encounter medical and dental problems that will require their long-term commitment.

Given the deteriorating political situation in the Soviet Union and the change in its emigration law, it can be safely assumed that more Soviet Jews will apply for U.S. refugee status and arrive here in the next few years. It should be the goal of everyone engaged in resettlement efforts—CJF, HIAS, the larger federations, the local "Our Town" committees, and the refugees themselves—to make the transition from refugee to citizen easier by sharing the wisdom of their experience not only with each other but also with those who have yet to arrive.

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