

Decentralization, Community Control, and Citizen Participation in the Provision of Services for the Jewish Aged*

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THE leadership of America's great institutions — universities, hospitals, homes for the aged, child care institutions, public and private schools — can no longer take for granted community acceptance of their new building programs. The clash of town and gown over the location of the Columbia University gymnasium in Morningside Heights in 1968, and the Forest Hills, New York low-income housing development controversy in 1971-1972, which brought large elements of the Jewish community in Queens into direct conflict with those favoring the integration effort, focused national attention on the new phenomenon: the sharp resistance of local communities to building programs which seemed to be threatening to their way of life. Of particular Jewish interest, during the last two decades was the struggle of the synagogues and YM-YWHA's to secure zoning approvals from local governing bodies in suburban areas which displayed this same resistance to social change.

As more and more institutional building programs in health, education and welfare required government mortgage loans, subsidies, and tax exemption, among other forms of direct and indirect government assistance, institutional development required the legal sanction of local governmental bodies.

During the past decade the working people and middle-classes of major

metropolitan areas, of every ethnic background, have become very anxious about the continued viability of their neighborhoods and schools. Increasing crime rates, the discharge from hospitals of mentally ill patients, the establishment of adult residences and large housing projects in residential neighborhoods, have stirred the fears of people. The increasing Black, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Indian populations coming into the cities and the specter of school busing are especially threatening to "white ethnics". Hostility to government projects and programs is sharply voiced in all middle-income and suburban communities. Legislative, administrative, and political sanction for community demands for decentralization, community control, and citizen participation have indeed affected the development of communal institutions under public, non-sectarian, and Jewish auspices as well.

The climate set by the mandates of government in the funding of health and welfare services, requiring decentralization, community control, and citizenship participation in agency management, have affected Jewish communal agencies in different ways. These nuances of emphasis have characterized United Fund pressures on their beneficiaries.

Coming into existence during this turbulent era, the Jewish Association for Services to the Aged was organized just six years ago by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York. In another time, perhaps, the righteousness of its cause — the aged — could be expected to receive universal approbation and support. In fact,

JASA had a stormy childhood, much affected by the consequence of the national trend toward decentralization, community control, and citizen participation, and marked by controversy.

JASA was established to develop and provide comprehensive services for the care of the Jewish aged in the community, including social services, group work programs, housing, nursing care and other facilities for the ill and impaired. An eighty-million dollar building construction program was contemplated.

During these six years JASA has developed fifteen decentralized, neighborhood-based community service centers, and an additional 31 group service programs in 21 locations in New York City and Nassau County. These services fulfill many of JASA's objectives.

JASA encountered some of its most difficult problems in securing local community support for its building projects. Nevertheless, two housing developments have been completed: Scheuer House, in Coney Island, funded by the New York State Urban Development Corporation, with 196 apartments; and Brookdale Village I, in the Rockaways, at which JASA succeeded the Home of Old Israel in sponsorship of a federally financed FH-202 program with 512 apartments. Brookdale Village II, funded by the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal and HUD under the FH-236 program, with 547 apartments and a 27,000 sq. ft. community service center, will be completed in December of 1975. The site for Scheuer House II, in Coney Island, has been acquired, and 165 units are now being designed. Scheuer House in Brighton Beach, to be constructed on the site of the Shorefront YM-YWHA of Brighton and Manhattan Beach (Associated Y's) will contain 250 units. Thus, some 32 million dollars of build-

ing construction has been funded and another seventeen million dollars is in development.

In response to the historic tides toward community control, decentralization, and citizen participation, JASA's formal organization today is indeed significantly different from its structure six years ago. While the fundamental and ultimate legal responsibility for the agency remains vested in its Board of Trustees, there are now several hundred men and women who participate in JASA Advisory Committees for our social service programs in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, the Rockaways and Nassau County. The concern of these advisory bodies extends over the programmatic, fiscal, and staff functions of the units of service. Their actual authority is, in fact, limited to an advisory role. They are committees of the agency, whose members and officers are all appointed for one-year term by the president of the agency, with sanction of the Board. These advisory groups were mandated by the regulations of the Title VI program of the Department of Social Services of the City of New York, following State and Federal guidelines. Some Advisory Boards include elderly people. The Advisory Boards are representative of our Senior Citizen Associations including JASA's membership, synagogue bodies, and voluntary and government agencies concerned with the elderly. They are predominantly Jewish but include people of every race and creed.

In addition, Site Advisory Committees and Councils are being organized at JASA's West Side Senior Center, a Title VI program, and at the JASA/East Concourse Luncheon Club in the Bronx and the JASA/Brookdale Senior Citizens Center of Long Beach. JASA's twenty older adult associations, which meet one or two days a week, have their own elected officers and executive committees.

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The approval of JASA's major program to provide social services in three boroughs was achieved on May 1, 1972, through the offices of the New York City Human Resources Administration, the office of the Mayor, the New York State Department of Social Services, and the office of the Governor. The program was funded under Title XVI of the Social Security Act of 1965, as amended. During the first two years of this program, JASA encountered problems in locating two outreach offices because of the reaction of two local organizations - one with roots in the Catholic community of Parkchester, the Bronx, the other in the Lubavitcher community in Crown Heights, Brooklyn — each of which saw a proposed JASA office as a competitive threat to its senior citizens service or proposed service.

The funding of JASA's program in 1972, with a contract of 1.5 million dollars for the first year, was a response to a request by JASA made a year before, in May 1971, to the Council on Poverty and the Community Development Agency for the funding of a \$3.5 million program. The CDA, faced with a diminished OEO/funded budget, did not respond. An earlier effort by JASA to secure funding of a neighborhood based senior citizens center from the Tremont Community Corporation failed. A local non-sectarian association, the East Tremont Neighborhood Association, succeeded in securing a grant for a \$40,000 a year senior center. JASA then had no neighborhood base of support in Tremont. To this day the local Community Corporations, still funded by the City of New York with federal and municipal funds, remain a closed avenue for support of services of concern to the Jewish community or to Jewish community organizations, with the exception of Williamsburg and Crown Heights.

JASA's sponsorship of the East Course Luncheon Club under Title VII of the Older Americans Act, with final designation coming from the Department of Social Services and the Mayor's Office for the Aging, was a result of support for JASA secured by our Borough Office, Bronx Advisory Committee, and our relationship with the Jewish Community Council of the Fordham area. The local Community Planning Board, with no formal jurisdiction, recommended award of the sponsorship to JASA, with a designated number of meals being delivered for service to Black senior citizens in a neighborhood church.

In overview, JASA's social service programs, now funded under Title VI of the Social Security Act and under Titles III and VII of the Older Americans Act, have required review or approval by government officials only, at the municipal, county, or state level. The principal concerned elected officials have been the Mayor and the Governor.

By contrast, the development of JASA's housing facilities and our unsuccessful effort to establish a hostel for the mentally impaired have involved local Community Planning Boards, Community Health Planning Boards, and a Sub/regional Planning Group for Mental Health. JASA's experience is a record of some success and two major defeats.

In Coney Island, JASA was designated sponsor of Scheuer House by the New York State Urban Development Corporation with the support of the Coney Island Community Council and the Henrietta and Stuard Hirschman YM-YWHA of Coney Island (Associated Y's). Of course, JASA's Board and staff were highly regarded by Mr. Edward Logue of UDC and his staff at headquarters, but neighborhood support was essential. In Coney Island the

Trustees and Executive Director of the YM/YWHA had for years been the leaders of the effort to recreate Coney Island and, indeed, preserve the neighborhood for Jewish residence. JASA's Executive Director had been associated with that community over fourteen years in creating the YM-YWHA building and its program services. JASA's community service office in Coney Island was sensitive to neighborhood concerns, and related itself actively to every senior citizens organization in the area. JASA participated in the activities of the Coney Island Community Council, and served on the UDC Advisory Committee for the area. In short, JASA's roots in Coney Island were strong / and shared the strength of the Federation effort in that community. Most important of all, in Coney Island the YM-YWHA was from the outset fully involved in the community life.

In the Rockaways, JASA's succession to the sponsorship of Brookdale Village I (formerly Seagirt Village), following the Home of Old Israel, was arranged "downtown," and required a variety of municipal, state, and federal approvals. By contrast, the development of Brookdale Village II, the additional two buildings, required review by the local Community Planning Board, the City Planning Commission, and the Board of Estimate.

On February 13, 1973 Community Planning Board 14, in the Rockaways, voted 15 to 3 to reject the project. The secretary of the Community Planning Board said, "We have enough senior citizen apartments in the Rockaways." The majority of the residents of the Rockaways, including the Jewish middle-class people and the retired, have been profoundly disturbed by the continued construction of public housing and publicly assisted housing, nursing homes, and adult residences. The once

remote suburban community, a summer colony two months a year, has witnessed a significant increase in the population of Black lower-income people and the Jewish aged. In the face of the action of the local Community Planning Board, the City Planning Commission delayed its decision. JASA appealed to all of the organizations in the Rockaways who might support the program. At last the Jewish Community Council, which JASA and the Gustave Hartman "Y" helped found, reversed its neutral position and voted unanimous support of the project. Other health and welfare organizations in the community lent support. This effort took considerable staff time. The support of the Gustave Hartman "Y" Board was significant. This project was finally approved by the City Planning Commission on May 22, 1973, and the Board of Estimate on June 21, 1973. The delays in securing these government approvals undoubtedly added more than one million dollars to its capital cost.

Subsequent to a defeat of a JASA proposal to build a 200 unit housing in Brighton, JASA secured the consent of the Associated YM-YWHA's of Greater New York to build Scheuer House in Brighton, over the parking lot of the Shorefront "Y", just two blocks away from the original location. Approval of the site has been secured from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal. JASA secured approval of the project from the local Community Planning Board, the City Planning Commission, and the Board of Estimate with the assistance of a wide circle of friends in Brighton-Manhattan Beach and the Sheepshead Bay area. This time the key leadership of the Shorefront "Y" Board took an active role in securing local Community Planning Board approval.

JASA suffered another defeat in its

effort to establish a residence for the mentally impaired aged in the Sheepshead Bay area of Brooklyn. After two years of negotiation and search, JASA secured a capital grant of \$350,000 from the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene for the purchase and alteration costs of a hostel. A suitable building was found at last: the Esplanade Nursing Home on Ocean Avenue T. The nursing home had 60 beds, and certain non-conforming conditions would require its closing. With modest alterations it could have been made into an approved hostel. Moreover, the State Department of Mental Hygiene had assured JASA of full funding of all operating costs of the facility.

On December 19, 1973, at an open community hearing of the New York City Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services, held at the Kings Bay YM-YWHA, a furious crowd from an organization called SOC — Save Our Community — expressed its fury and resentment at the location of this facility in their community. The neighborhood had recently resisted the construction of a proprietary adult residence several blocks away. Legally, the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene required *no* community sanction, or even an advisory opinion, to proceed to purchase the Esplanade, alter it, and lease it to JASA. In fact, however, the State Department of Mental Hygiene had been forced by angry community protest to abandon a similar project for *adults* in a facility on Ocean Parkway already purchased by the State. JASA abandoned its efforts to secure community approval for its hostel. The agency could not mobilize community opinion in support of this project in the foreseeable future in an area in which its roots were shallow and the strength of the Kings Bay "Y" or other Federation organizations rather

modest. The area had no Jewish Community Council.

As the agency considers undertaking a search for another facility, JASA anticipates the hostile reaction of other Jewish communities. It is doubtful whether any educational community organization effort can succeed on behalf of a hostel for the mentally impaired aged. JASA is therefore promoting a publicly funded program of extramural services for the mentally impaired aged in their own homes or in existing adult residences.

Conclusion

JASA has encompassed an extraordinary range of experience, and learned some hard and useful lessons in six short years.

First, government-funded programs for the construction of facilities for the aged cannot proceed without the sanction of the local community, as well as that of every other level of government. These building programs require municipal, State, or Federal loans, subsidies, tax exemptions, zoning and building, health, and education department approvals. Without *local* sanction, the process, at best, will be delayed, adding enormously to the cost of the program. In this time of inflation, such cost increases may force abandonment of projects as economically unfeasible.

Second, community sanction for capital projects cannot easily be secured by a city-wide organization such as JASA in neighborhoods in which JASA has no community roots or in which there is no significant community base of support for Federation institutions. A community base of support would include the active engagement of key leaders in the array of Jewish organizations and institutions in the community, and in non-sectarian political and business organizations.

Third, the trend toward mandatory "citizen participation", "advisory committees", "consumer participation" in the review, approval, and governance of government-funded health and social service programs at local, as well as at the borough, city, state, and federal levels of government, is a continuing one. In New York City under the Lindsay Administration the trend accelerated, as in other communities. This trend has temporarily abated, but under Republican as well as Democratic leadership there is strong political sentiment supporting legislative and administrative regulation which mandates citizen participation and local review. In the dialectics of the social process, the more dependent the local community becomes on governing bodies far removed from the neighborhood, the more certain will be the continued demand for local participation as a balance.

Fourth, JASA was most successful in those neighborhoods in which it had delivered services and been an active participant in the community processes and councils. The support of other Federation agencies and Jewish community organizations was essential. This suggests the need for allocation of time, energy, and resources by all Federation agencies in the local community.

Fifth, JASA continues to be managed by its Board of Trustees, as provided by the Not-For-Profit Corporation Law and the rules of the State Board of Social Welfare. A host of other government funding bodies have mandated Advisory Committees for JASA's program services. JASA has helped write some of those rules while still in draft. For the future, the Advisory Committees will be regarded as part of management — *de facto* and *de jure*. They have great capacity to contribute to the agency.

Sixth, JASA's sectarian objective to serve the Jewish aged has been a source of strength in securing local community support. In fact, legislation and regulation which emphasizes decentralized local control by participants and recognizes ethnicity has made it possible for JASA's programs to be Jewish in character. In JASA's housing programs, JASA has scrupulously observed the non-discrimination rules. The social facts of the city make JASA-sponsored and managed housing particularly attractive to the Jewish elderly. We required no affirmative action program to secure a predominance of Jewish residents at Scheuer House and Brookdale Village.

Seventh, a broad, city-wide perspective had been maintained in the management of both JASA's service programs and housing facilities. The maintenance of close working relationships with community groups in Coney Island and the Rockaways has enabled the agency to resolve some of its problems of the local versus the city-wide interest.

Eighth, JASA has decentralized its service operations on a local community and borough basis. This mode of management is in any case sound administration. The assignments of JASA administrative staff now include a significant component of community work. JASA's strategic and actual plan for provision of service is based upon the organization of decentralized, local comprehensive service centers for the aged, integrally related to communities.

Ninth, for the future JASA will respond to the expressed needs of local communities, shifting its objectives, shaping its policies and resources to meet local needs of the aged. The agency's function must, ultimately, respond to both local and city-wide interests.

Looking forward, JASA has urged

the Federation community to recognize the continued trend toward decentralization in the administration of government services and contracts, and toward citizenship participation. The allocation of Federation resources for the community organization effort to ensure Federation agency representation on the Community Health Planning Agency boards was sound. Every Federation agency needs to commit some resources to community work and organization, in support of its present and future services. The significance of the rise of Jewish Community Councils needs to be appraised, and the active participation of Federation agencies in these Councils ensured. Such participation, to be meaningful, must open our agencies to a sensitive response to the needs of the Jewish community in

continued two-way exchange of concern.

Established Jewish community institutions have long been operating with a sense of certainty about their virtues and wisdom. The expansion of agency facilities and programs without the sanction of local communities is now open to challenge. The movement toward community control, the hostility to large institutions, brings us up short. Perhaps it is time to think about fundamentals again. JASA, as one agency, has responded by restructuring its organization modestly to meet the new demands for local community participation. In fact, that change must ultimately be made far more substantial. These shifts will bring them new problems.