

The Baccalaureate Worker in the Jewish Community Center*

DONALD FELDSTEIN, D.S.W.

Director, Center for Social Work and Applied Social Research,
Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, New Jersey

"The key finding of the study is that baccalaureate Center workers in large numbers are doing a very creditable job in Centers around the country . . . if our efforts are directed at improving the undifferentiated baccalaureates now staffing Centers with professional baccalaureate social work knowledge, we would be raising standards of service. We have an opportunity to do just that in the Jewish community centers today.

JEWISH community centers have always employed baccalaureate degree workers in a variety of positions. But when professionalism flowered after World War II, it might have appeared to some that the goal of employing MSW's for all related positions in Jewish community centers was attainable and near realization. A study of the positions which might be seen as the domain of social work, that is, excluding physical education and other specialties, indicated that in 1955, 58 percent of Jewish community center workers including executives, program directors, branch directors and program assistants, had a Master's degree in social work. At that time, 77 percent of program assistants, the central line worker position, were MSWs and 83 percent of all those between the ages of 21 and 30 were MSWs.¹ Small wonder then that little attention was paid to defining the functions of the baccalaureate Center worker. He was viewed as either an exceptional or residual worker until more MSWs could be found, or a temporary worker putting in a year or two getting some experience before he pursued his graduate degree in social work.

However, several changes in the

* This article is based on a monograph, titled as above, National Jewish Welfare Board, 1975.

¹ Melvin Herman, *Occupational Mobility in Social Work: The Jewish Community Center Worker*, N.J.W.B., New York, 1959, pp. 64-65.

1960's shattered the myth that graduate social work would ever become the sole occupational group for most Center positions.

1. The attack on the "traditional setting" in favor of the clinical weaned some of the best and the brightest young social workers away from the Jewish community center, which had formerly been the highest status job setting for group work graduates.
2. The War on Poverty and other public developments opened up new avenues for social workers and appeared to many to be "where the action was." Working with the poor and in public settings, formerly shunned by many professional social workers, became the thing to do.
3. Along with the War on Poverty came a rapid improvement in salaries outside of the Jewish Community Center field which left the Jewish Community Center, if not far behind, at least no longer in an exclusive leadership position in salaries.
4. The general explosion in the social welfare field made it appear impossible that enough manpower could ever be developed to fill all or most social service positions with graduate social workers.
5. Some thinkers began to question the desirability of social work as the only, or dominant, discipline in Centers.

Thus, by 1970, there was clearly a vast, if unspecified, increase in the number of workers in Jewish community centers, particularly on the line level, with only baccalaureate degrees and no graduate education in social work. This changed picture, and the influence of other manpower utilization projects around the country, impelled the National Jewish Welfare Board to undertake, and Lavanburg-Corner House to fund, a project to investigate the utilization of the worker with a bachelor's degree in the Jewish community center. But events have a way of rushing ahead of carefully planned projects and studies. We evaluate the study of the utilization of the worker with a bachelor's degree at a time when the manpower picture has changed dramatically.

Unemployment in the United States is up significantly from the period of the late 60's. There has been severe shrinkage in the public commitment to the social services in general, and to the employment of professional social workers in the public sector. Meanwhile, the expansion in the number of graduate social workers being produced each year shows the fruits of the efforts mounted during the manpower crisis in the late 60's. All of this adds up to a situation in which Centers are finding it easier to hire the graduate social workers whom they seek.

Given these changes, what interest is there in a study of the baccalaureate Center worker? This study is vitally important to the Center field nonetheless. It is now clear, for a number of reasons, that MSWs should not and could not be expected to be the workers of choice in all line functions in a Jewish community center, even if adequate numbers were available.

Quite apart from the issue of shortage or surplus, some jobs are better performed by other than graduate social

workers. The 21-year-old college graduate may bring a freshness and excitement to the job of camp counselor which most 42-year-old graduate social workers could not. The mature woman with years of voluntary organizational experience behind her may perform some functions in the adult program better than most graduate social workers. Other Center positions demand people with Jewish knowledge or special skills more than they demand professional social work skill. Graduate social work is increasingly training for advanced practice, supervision, and administration. Neither in skill nor in financial cost can Centers afford to seek such people to fill all positions in a complex Jewish community center operation. Therefore, we have analyzed the results of the JWB's Manpower Utilization Project around several key questions:

To what extent are baccalaureate workers being used in Jewish community centers?

The survey excluded people with specific professional training in other disciplines, physical education or early childhood education, as well as Israeli *Shlichim*. Even so, 90 percent of responding Centers employed baccalaureate workers in full-time positions. 175 such workers were reported as currently employed (1971) by 76 executives returning the survey instrument, while 8 executives reported no baccalaureate workers on their staffs. Clearly then, minor changes since 1971 aside, the baccalaureate worker is a significant and permanent part of the work force in Jewish community centers.

What are the characteristics of the baccalaureate Center worker?

No formal survey of this question was undertaken, but investigations with Center and JWB staff indicate that the

baccalaureate work force falls into four categories:

- a) The specialist: someone hired because of a special skill — in cultural arts, Yiddish speaking, etc.
- b) The "hometown": a mature adult, usually female, who is a long time resident of the community, active in volunteer work, who brings her knowledge and skills to a full-time paid position in the Center. Many "hometowners" have never completed a baccalaureate degree.
- c) The "novice": a recent college graduate who impresses the executive director with his potential. He may have been a part-time club leader or camp counselor in the Center. He is still doing career testing himself, may go on to another career, other graduate studies, or graduate work in social work.
- d) The baccalaureate career worker: a person committed to a career in Jewish Center work who simply never pursued a graduate degree in social work for any one of a number of reasons.

Interestingly enough, the comments by executives about the strengths and shortcomings of baccalaureate Center workers (reported further on) seem to cut across the full range of those population groups, and in that sense, the implications for training are similar for all.

How are baccalaureate workers being utilized in Jewish community centers?

The utilization patterns cut across a full range of first line positions for full-time staff of Centers, as Table I, below, illustrates.

Essentially, then, baccalaureate Center workers are not generally employed in specially constructed direct leadership or sub-professional jobs created for them, but rather in the traditional department head job of the

TABLE I
Job Positions of Baccalaureate Center Workers

Job Title	Number of Workers
Junior, Elementary, Children's Worker	36
Tween, Junior Hi Worker	9
Teen, Youth, High School Worker	31
Young Adult, College Worker	17
Adult Worker	11
Older Adult, Sr. Adult Worker	9
Combined (2 or more of above)	62
Total	175

Jewish community center, perhaps with minor modifications for their skills and experience. On the other hand, for the baccalaureate Center worker, this line position will probably not be a stepping stone by itself to an executive position in the Center.

How, if at all, are tasks differentiated between the baccalaureate Center worker and the MSW?

Most baccalaureate Center workers head up specific age departments in Centers. In this capacity, they perform the full range of functions almost indistinguishably from MSWs. It's rather a question of whom the Center happens to have hired, MSW or baccalaureate, which determines the percentage of use of MSWs or baccalaureates in such functions as direct leadership, hiring, firing and supervision of part-time staff, short-term counseling, running of mass programs, intake and recruiting, management of departmental budgets, and working with lay committees.

It was impossible to discern any conscious differentiation of tasks in any pattern between the baccalaureate and MSW Center worker in the range of activities of the department head. However, there are some specialized or administrative tasks largely reserved for MSWs. These include long-term counseling, placement of referrals from

other agencies, consultations to other agencies, fee setting and policy making, fund-raising, and supervision of full-time staff or graduate students.

There is an inadvertent differentiation in that the increased use of baccalaureates has made it possible for MSWs to concentrate more on specialized and advanced jobs beyond the line level. It will be hard to differentiate for line workers so long as most Centers are organized around age group departments, with each department head responsible for managing that whole unit. Some agencies are beginning to develop administrative patterns which no longer are locked into the system of grouping members by age. We hear more about directors of group services or supervisors of special projects, as attempts are made to redefine services and job descriptions. When agencies invited JWB's staff to help in a staff audit, new ways of dividing tasks often emerged.

For the moment, however, we have baccalaureates and MSWs performing largely undifferentiated functions at first level, full-time jobs, and MSWs in advanced or specialized positions.

What are the gaps or weak aspects in the performance of baccalaureates?

Essentially, executives are pleased with the work of baccalaureates. They hire the baccalaureates by choice as well as by necessity, and do not look forward to replacing them with MSWs. However, certain patterns do appear in the responses of executive directors to the question of what they wish baccalaureates could do better. From a long list of possible areas of knowledge, the one which executives felt most strongly that baccalaureates need more of was *social work theory* (46 percent of executives said additional knowledge by baccalaureates would be desired). And among the list of areas in which bac-

calaureates might need more skill, executives voted most heavily for three listed under social work skills — goal setting (41 percent), group work (39 percent) and supervision (39 percent).

TABLE II
Additional Skills Desired in BA Workers by Executives

	Percentage of Respondents Noting These Additional Skills as Desirable
<i>Program Skills</i>	
Children's Games	7
Arts and Crafts	13
Social Dancing	4
Performing Arts	13
Folk Dancing	14
Water Sports	4
Camping	11
Land Sports	7
Musical Skills	6
Driving	3
Mass Program	14
<i>Language Skills</i>	
Yiddish	10
Hebrew	20
<i>Social Work Skills</i>	
Supervision	39
Casework	19
Groupwork	39
Community Org.	29
Teaching	7
Goal Setting	41
Limit Setting	28
<i>Administrative Skills</i>	
Record Writing	28
Publicity	21
Fund Raising	9
Clerical	3

(In a similar list of knowledge areas, highest return was 46% for knowledge of social work theory; second was Jewish culture with 36%)

Now one might suspect that directors, themselves primarily social workers, might be seeking workers who know their jargon, their "club." But depth interviews suggest that directors are not simply seeking members of their occupational club, but have identified

generic skills necessary in most Center work. These skills include goal-setting, supervision and ability to work with groups. Further, the main complaint of executives about baccalaureates was that the baccalaureates tended to lack a professional sense of self, a discipline which permitted them to understand the agency and the clients. They felt that baccalaureates too often were either shattered by client hostility or overidentified with client requests. What it all adds up to is that executives are generally happy with the baccalaureate Center worker, but would like baccalaureates to have a professional sense of identity and purpose and additional ability with basic social work skills.

Implications of the Study

The baccalaureate Center worker is a permanent and significant part of the JCC work force. Executives are essentially satisfied that baccalaureates can do the job, but want them to improve their professional skills and professional consciousness. The use of MSWs in specialized and supervisory functions is in keeping with the general trend in social work which is likely to continue.

So long as the MSW was the only entry level to the profession of social work, there was some confusion and debate about the value of direct leadership, for instance, versus the reality of MSWs beginning with supervisory positions. But with the emergence of community college and baccalaureate levels in the social service educational continuum, graduate social work is coming to accept that it is preparing for a secondary level of practice. Curricula are increasingly adapting to this approach, dealing more with supervision and administration or advanced practice. The trend is in keeping with the concept of mental health professionals working through the "caretakers of the community" for broader impact. No one is now

looking forward to a mythical day when a graduate social worker can cover every position related to social welfare in America. We could neither mount the manpower nor afford to hire it if we did. If Centers are committed to a concern for the needs of people and social work input, that commitment must become operative through graduate social work diagnosis of needs, program planning, and direction. Implementation will be through other levels, skills and disciplines, so the trend toward use of baccalaureates at line levels and MSWs at supervisory levels may be expected to continue.

It is not likely that differentiation of tasks can be done at all rationally or successfully under current conditions. In the traditional department head type of Center organizations, the demands of the job overwhelm differences between baccalaureates and MSWs in their performance. Differentiation will take place only in the following ways:

1. Leaving the traditional department head job largely to baccalaureates and using MSWs to do the advanced work described above.
2. Reorganizing Center services along different lines, with different tasks for different levels.
3. Establishing standards for the baccalaureate described below, so that a base line of expectations for baccalaureate workers can be developed.

In large measure (1) is what will continue to occur: MSWs will become increasingly specialized and baccalaureates will do more of the line work. There will continue to be developments in option (2), but this will not change the reality of baccalaureates in most line positions and their need for interpersonal skills and professional consciousness. Therefore, the Centers must move along option (3) — finding ways of

selecting and training the best baccalaureates possible.

Standards of Expectation

In other words, from the vast numbers of baccalaureates in the United States who might apply for Center jobs, what kinds of screens should be developed to develop the best staffs? Apart from interview and application testing, there are three directions:

1. Using Center experience, part-time and camp leadership, as the screen.
2. Using some professional discipline as the screen.
3. Using specific training programs for Center work as the screen, either before or shortly after hiring.

Scientific proof of the effectiveness of professional education in the delivery of services is hard to come by. This is true in all the service professions. The general commitment to social work education as the single or primary screen is weakening among Center directors, probably based on disillusionment with the products of the sixties. There is a growing bias in favor of Center experience as the most useful screen. Increasingly, Centers are seeking and reporting success with people who grow out of Center experience.

This trend is probably appropriate to a "movement" such as the Center movement; it is desirable and should be encouraged. But whether social work education is valued or not, some of the *skills* associated with social work education still are. Directors still want workers who are sensitive to people, can plan based on goals, can work with groups and who have some professional discipline. In these areas, they find baccalaureates wanting. In addition to Center experience, what shall be sought?

Training programs of Centers, groups of Centers, or JWB, have tremendous value. But we would suggest

that to try to use them, as some have suggested, "as a major carrier of professional identity," is unsound. Baccalaureates are already a more local and less cosmopolitan group than MSWs, who traveled around the country in career development. Failure to provide a wider base of professional identity increases parochialism and cheats the Center as well as the worker of enrichment. For the workers, as the New Careers movement learned early, agency-based training becomes training for work in that agency, and deprives the worker of horizontal, as well as vertical mobility. Therefore, New Careers has moved to make university credentials more accessible, rather than to substitute for them. Occupational identity is no substitute for professional identity. There will be tension between education and practice, but this tension can improve both.

Need to Influence BA Curricula

And so, in addition to Center experience as one base for hiring, we would suggest that Centers and the National Jewish Welfare Board must now begin to relate to baccalaureate education as they have traditionally related to graduate education. If a significant part of the work force is coming from this level, we must deal with it, suggesting content along the way to potential workers, influencing college curricula, recruiting from particular programs, etc. The time is now for Centers to deal with a new reality, the baccalaureate social worker from an accredited baccalaureate social work program. This worker has precisely the background to cover the gaps and lacks in skill identified by the executive directors. He has a professional sense of identity, knows something of goal setting, group functioning and has the potential for professional growth. He sees himself as prepared for first line professional

work, and is ready to operate on that level. He is not marking time for a year before he can move on to another profession. The Center field has been slow to seize the opportunities presented here.

Dolgoff points out² that there is a significant pool of Jewish students with high academic performance emerging from baccalaureate programs. Grodofsky³ describes ways Centers can relate to baccalaureate social work programs. These ways include the following:

a) Since the baccalaureate social work program must be grounded in liberal arts to be accredited, the student, besides social work, is enrolled in many liberal courses. Here is an opportunity for Centers or JWB to suggest content that would give added relevant knowledge to the new Center worker — in Jewish studies, the social sciences, management or the arts. There is room in the curriculum of colleges, and colleges are receptive to modifications which will provide jobs for graduates. Thus, knowledge can be expanded in social work theory and in Jewish studies. The Center which is bringing along young people can now suggest content in the course of their college career, rather than telling them to wait for graduate school. The novice can pursue baccalaureate social work and still graduate with a legitimate BA, in most accredited programs. Thus, he can become a social worker without shutting himself out from potential graduate study in other fields should his interests change.

² Ralph Dolgoff, D.S.W., "The Jewish BA Social Worker: A New Professional for Jewish Communal Services," this *Journal*, Vol. LII, No. 1 (1975), pp. 73-81.

³ Daniel Grodofsky, "Opportunities and Implications for the Use of BA Social Workers in Jewish Communal Service," *Proceedings*, 1974 Conference, AJCW.

b) Since the baccalaureate social worker comes to the Center with basic social work skills and identity (the two areas of need identified by executives), further advanced studies for Center work can be in other areas — Jewish studies, arts, management, public administration, etc. (Or advanced degrees in social work in a shorter time. Increasingly, baccalaureate social workers are admitted directly into the second year of graduate schools of social work.) These studies can provide a worker specially suited for career advancement in the Jewish community center field, a real problem now for the baccalaureate career worker.

c) Since baccalaureate programs are not usually as rigid as MSW programs about fulltime residence, it is possible to bring workers along, studying as they go, towards a baccalaureate degree in social work. This possibility is particularly relevant to the "hometowners," many of whom have not completed baccalaureate education of any kind. They can study as they work.

d) By developing field placements and student units with baccalaureate programs in social work, Centers can still move in "on the ground floor" with this new level, having significant impact on curriculum development.

JWB's Personnel Services are deluged with baccalaureate job applicants. It is impossible to see, much less to place, all who call. Staff has worked valiantly at developing some sort of screen or sieve through a questionnaire to decide which applicants are worthy of follow-up. The baccalaureate social work program provides such a screen. On the Master's level, there are occasional MA's in English or Chemistry who have special experience, talents, or skills, and get into Center work. But JWB reaches out to and deals essentially with graduate schools of social work. Similarly, there will be baccalaureates picked up by Cen-

ters who will find their way to JWB. But a basic relationship, sending of brochures, interviewing graduates, should proceed with *accredited* baccalaureate social work programs, and the programs should be seen as the basic source for baccalaureate manpower referred to the Centers.

Four types of baccalaureate Center workers were described above. Centers will continue to need the specialist, and will continue to find the talented "hometowners" no matter what their academic backgrounds. When that background does not include a completed baccalaureate degree, courses in a baccalaureate social work program can supplement their education with greater relevance. But these recommendations are addressed more to the larger number, the "novices" and the baccalaureate career workers. The former lack a professional sense, and come and go very quickly. This turnover becomes expensive for Centers. The latter is hampered in career development because he never learned the ABCs of those social work skills needed in Centers. These positions should be filled from the start with the growing number of Jewish graduates of baccalaureate social work programs, and the programs themselves should be influenced by Centers to include relevant material for potential Center workers. Baccalaureate social work is ideally placed to complement the growing emphasis on Center experience as a criterion for hiring.

JCCs then should move to professionalize line positions with baccalaureate social workers. JCCs and JWB should begin influencing these programs, housing student units, setting up model projects, etc. Neither JWB nor Center directors, by and large, have had the time yet to know or to test baccalaureate social work or its prod-

ucts. There is certainly no commitment, nor should one be expected at this stage, to make the baccalaureate in social work *the* basic qualification for line positions in the Center. But the time is already overdue to mount a series of experimental programs to test the bias expressed by the author.

JWB might develop a cohort of five or six Centers which could organize student units with baccalaureate social work students. Centers should be educated about the existence of this new level of accredited program and to the difference between accredited programs and others which call themselves social work. Dialogue should go on with schools, encouraging the development of more appropriate curricula, part-time admission of Center workers studying for a BA, etc. Jewish community centers and baccalaureate social work need to get acquainted.

The key finding of the study is that baccalaureate Center workers in large numbers are doing a creditable job in Centers around the country. This should not surprise us. Some 80 percent or more of the manpower in the social services now is provided by baccalaureates or those with lesser education. If the new baccalaureate social workers were simply to replace MSWs, as some have feared, standards of service would have been lowered. But if our efforts are directed at improving the undifferentiated baccalaureates now staffing Centers with professional baccalaureate social work knowledge, we would be raising standards of service. We have an opportunity to do just that in the JCCs today. Together, baccalaureate and master degree social workers can forge a team effort of professional service in which JCCs can, again, as so often in the past, be the models and pace setters in social work for the nation.