

Strengthening of the Jewish Family as an Instrument of Jewish Continuity*

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This paper is based upon a monograph in preparation which draws upon data on the Jewish family from almost every country where 5000 or more Jews reside. Social work, sociological and Jewish demographic sources were reviewed from North and South America, Western and Eastern Europe, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia and, of course, Israel as a source for the analysis.

A NUMBER of generalizations can be drawn which describe factors affecting the Jewish family world-wide outside of Israel. While Israel has not escaped some of the trends, it also presents some yet to be appreciated unique and problematical complications which may in turn affect future Israel-Diaspora relations beyond our present understandings.

First, let us review the generalizations which confirm a remarkable profile of common characteristics regardless of where Jews reside outside the state of Israel.

1. Jewish families in most countries are most frequently nuclear in nature and, obversely, extended families are rarely the norm in any of the Diaspora communities.

2. Almost all Jewish families, except for a growing, but still small number of traditional families, (neo-Orthodox and/or ultra Orthodox), have "achieved" zero population growth, and in some communities have reached negative zero population growth. Until recently, there seemed to be a "floor" below which most families had not descended and as a result, the size of families world-wide has remained at a

level slightly below the replacement rate needed to maintain the present population.

3. A growing number of Jews worldwide are postponing their marriages until later in life and a measurable and growing minority are planning on not marrying at all. This growing number of non-marrieds portends a further drop in birth rates in the future.

4. Jews as an identifiable group have a higher proportion of elderly than any other racial, ethnic, and/or religious group in the world. To put this in another way, the median age of Jews outside of Israel is considerably higher by a range of four to thirteen years than that of the general populations of the countries in which the Jews live.

5. Divorce is on the rise among Jews world-wide and, in a growing number of instances, may even be at a higher rate than among non-Jews. The consequences of dealing with new "blended families," with "extra" sets of parents, children and other relatives are just beginning to be identified as a legitimate area for concern within families, educational and communal service institutions.

6. There is an upward trend in the number of mixed marriages in all Diaspora communities. While the rate continues to increase in some countries, it may have stabilized in a few. A growing number of studies indicate that the de-

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gree of loss to the Jewish community through mixed marriage is lower than once feared because a significant number of non-Jews convert to Judaism and an even greater number of mixed marrieds raise their children as Jews even when there has been no conversion. This conclusion seems sustainable even though there is evidence of a growing phenomenon of Jewish women marrying non-Jewish males, which has resulted in children who, while *halachically* Jewish by virtue of matrilineal definition, are marginal to Jewish life because they are identified sociologically as non-Jews.

7. Mobility of Jews has resulted in major and radical population shifts possibly unequaled in human history, with radical ramifications that grow out of discontinuity. There is almost no country in the world except the United States and Eastern Europe where the *majority* of Jews is 3rd generation nativeborn and there is but a handful of countries where the majority of Jews is nativeborn. To put this another way, most Jews in the world live in other than their native country and may, as a result, have a higher proportion of *minimal* verbal communication between first and third generations than is the case with any other people in the world. When grandparents and grandchildren don't fully master identical languages, the role of the middle generation is more problematic.

8. While Jews remain a primarily urban people, there is growing evidence, world-wide, of movement to smaller urban areas, away from the great cities of the world. This is creating a crisis in many countries among agencies and organizations which are not able easily to replicate and offer a comprehensive network of cultural, educational, and social services in these areas of new growth.

9. Outside of the United States and

the British Isles a high proportion of Diaspora families have been seared by the Holocaust. As a consequence, attitudes toward children, forming of second families, memories of the martyred, guilt of the survivors, and haunting evocation of past horrors impinge upon the family members in different ways with a volatility and impact which other families cannot truly fathom or appreciate.

10. The percentage of Jewish working women seems to be increasing world-wide at a greater rate than is the case for non-Jewish women. This is a function of both economic necessity and growing opportunity for women with higher education to enter into the work force at higher levels of complexity and professionalism.

Feminism is at its height in many of the Western countries where Jews reside, and, as has been the case in the past, when radical attitudinal changes have taken place in a society, the middle-class is often at the forefront in expressing these changes. Such seems to be the case among a disproportionate number of Jewish women. This trend is at the heart of the conflicting role expectations which modernity and Judaism put upon women and helps explain the changing nature of family formation, natality rates, and family structure discussed elsewhere in this paper.

11. Most Jews outside of Israel are managers, professionals or business people and thus tend to be linked to middle-class aspirations and values, both in Western and Eastern European countries.

12. Jews are at the upper socioeconomic level within their respective countries in almost all instances, and, as a result, have a greater stake in the status quo. Countries with stable regimes are thus seen by Jews as a more desirable place to live. Destabilization

of the status quo, rather than distaste for authoritarian regimes, per se, contributes to Jewish mobility to a greater degree than is often appreciated. Further, when perceived demographic differences between Jews and non-Jews are weighted for socio-economic differences, there is a marked neutralization of these perceived differences. Thus, demographically, upper-class Jews are more comparable to upper-class non-Jews than they are to Jews in lower social economic groups.

13. Most Jews throughout the world draw upon western secular values to shape their lifestyles more frequently and extensively than they utilize Jewish values or sources. Functionally, one can conclude that, while most Jews and Jewish families spend the bulk of their free hours with other Jews, there is little to distinguish them as *Jewish* families in their behaviors.

14. Many of the phenomena identified among contemporary Jewish families as being new are often not as new as commonly believed. For example, trends toward smaller families are first identified in the 19th Century. In spite of efforts to romanticize about the Jewish family of old, there is a growing body of research which suggests that wife abuse, child abuse and alcoholism may be increasing today but were more prevalent in time past than we are comfortable in admitting. The extent of these realities in present-day Jewish families everywhere, including Israel, is far more extensive than appreciated.

The conclusions listed above describe, in thumbnail summary fashion, Jews throughout Diaspora. A great number of these descriptions fit the majority of Jews in Israel while developments unique to Israel and the United States can also be delineated.

To deal with the United States first, all of the trends previously identified as present in the Diaspora communities

are present with the exceptions previously noted, especially with reference to the impact and import of the Holocaust.

Additionally, two phenomena seem to be unique in their extent in the United States. The first is homosexuality among Jews. It is now quite clear that a substantial minority of Jewish men and women in the United States are avowed homophiles. There is even a growing possibility that more males than females are homosexual which may be resulting in fewer Jewish males being available in the marriage pool. At the same time, preliminary research suggests that a growing minority of Jewish homophiles desires to establish some kind of Jewish family life style and in some instances this includes the desire to be parents.

The second unique attribute seems to be the extent to which there are four generation families. This temporary reality has great implications for the present and near future because one generation is called upon to give major or supplemental economic support to the other three generations. This seems to result in a shift in priorities for the involved families which has been particularly exacerbated by the inflationary pressures of the economy. Once discretionary income, which may have been earmarked for Jewish general contributions, will probably be used for serving the needs of the four generations to an increasing degree in the next decade.

Comparisons between Jews in Israel and in Diaspora sustain the following conclusions:

1. Extended families are to be found more frequently in Israel than in Diaspora. Further, the size of the country results in more frequent occasions for members of families to come together, to be affected by, and to affect, each other, and as a result values between generations, while changing, are not radically different.

2. While Jews in Israel represent ap-

proximately 20 percent of the world Jewish population, approximately 40 percent of all Jewish babies born annually are born in Israel. Even so, the birth-rate in Israel is in a downward trend, and as early as the 1920's and 30's Jewish demographers identified this as *a*, or possibly *the*, major concern for all Jews and a concern of highest priority for the Jewish state whenever it came into existence.

3. Marriages in Israel, while still taking place at an earlier age than elsewhere, are moving in the direction of Jewish marriages elsewhere with later marriages being more discernible than in the past.

4. While the Jewish community in Israel has a younger median age than any other Jewish community in the world, the aging population in Israel is causing major dislocations and complications in *moshavim* and *kibbutzim*. There will probably be growing problems for families living in many upper story apartments where there are no elevators. Israel was built by the young for the young and will be faced with the impact of aging upon family structures in the next decade-and-a-half.

5. When compared to Jews elsewhere, the Jews of Israel present an anomaly *vis à vis* their socio-economic status. As previously mentioned, the educational attainment level of Jews has placed them primarily in an upper socio-economic status with a disproportionately high percentage being in the managerial, professional or business class. Projections suggest that this percentage, now inordinately high, will increase slightly or at least be maintained, everywhere, except in Israel.

For in Israel, internal economic and sociological realities will result in a reversal of this trend. Currently, 80 percent of Israeli Jews are in the aforementioned categories of managerial, professional, or business positions. Markedly

fewer Israelis attend universities than Jews elsewhere. Of those attending, the greater percentage by far are *Ashkenazic* Jews, the numerical minority; while the great majority of Jews entering the labor force early are *Edot Hamizrach* (Oriental Jews). Because they enter as workers in skilled and unskilled positions, and as they continue to gain in numerical superiority, they tilt downward the total percentages working in the so-called upper-class positions. It is projected that by 1990 only 60 percent of Israeli Jews will be in the managerial, professional or business classifications as compared to 80 percent at present. The economic status of those in "blue collar" positions will probably exceed the "white collar" groups, but problems of status and social power will remain.

This will have a great effect upon the nature of the Jewish family in Israel and also may be a source of increased polarization between Israel and Diaspora Jewry. The religious, cultural and socio-economic differences will include linguistic differences and thus the sense of interdependence and commonality of outlook and human concern between Israelis and Diaspora Jews may be greatly minimized.

6. Jews in Israel are increasingly urban, but the trends seen elsewhere toward suburban and smaller urban centers are also in evidence. As a result, the efforts of Project Renewal to reverse urban blight and hopelessness will loom greater in importance.

7. The rate of divorce in Israel is on the rise. This confirms the presence of another index which follows trends in the developed countries and among Jews elsewhere. (While the divorce rate is lower among the *Dati* community, there is preliminary evidence in America indicating a marked increase in divorce rates among observant Jews. This could lead one to at least speculate that the differences in divorce rates

between various Jewish groups may well narrow in the future).

8. As would be expected, of all Jewish communities in the world, the mixed marriage rate is the lowest in Israel. There is, however, a small but discernible upward trend in mixed marriages between Arabs and Jews which historically is not a new phenomenon. While outside of Israel the majority of mixed marriages involve Jewish men, there is an opposite tendency in Israel. As long as the structural opportunities for meeting are minimal, as seems to be the predictable case in Israel, the mixed marriage rate should remain remarkably low for the foreseeable future. Outside of Israel, the Jew who marries a non-Jew is not inevitably "lost" to the Jewish community and as noted previously, in some countries, a remarkably large minority of children are raised as Jews. In Israel, this is rarely the case, because the non-Jew rarely converts to Judaism. In the Diaspora, however, the loss rate is as low as one-third of the mixed marriage rate in some countries.

10. The ramifications of mobility for Israel are of a different nature than is the case in Diaspora. The bulk of *Olim* in the last 30 years came as family units, if they were intact, after World War II. Few people moved to Israel in the past 30 years for the ideological reasons which often split families asunder in earlier days. The mass evacuation from the Arab countries accounts for Israel's present majority population. This movement created, almost overnight, a society of extended families in a country of singles and nuclear families, for the pre-state *Halutzim* came to build the land with few three generational families among them.

The recent phenomenon of *Yerida* has brought the realities of mobility and its impact upon the Israeli family to the fore. It has been estimated that most Israelis abroad visit Israel at least once

every three years. The national policy requiring army service of those who moved abroad, will undoubtedly cause more and more difficulties for those families who cannot visit outside of Israel for economic reasons. One can but conjecture what the long term psychological and emotional consequences may be as the intense family ties so frequently associated with Israel are attenuated as a result of government policy and continuing emigration.

11. As in most countries of the world, a large percentage of Israeli women are in the work force. As is also the case in most socialist countries, the government has built in many benefits which encourage women to have children while remaining in the work force. At the same time, attitudes toward women in Israel are much more traditional than in most Western countries and this ambivalence becomes apparent when one analyzes the percentage of women in various fields of endeavor. In Israel, still a developing country, the economic realities, combined with attitudinal realities, account for a much more "traditional" set of expectations of what is "proper" woman's work. Further compounding the inconsistencies is the high illiteracy rate among Jewish women from Arab countries. This helps account for the greater proportion of Israeli women in more working-class related jobs.

12. Little comprehensive research has yet appeared on rates of child abuse, wife abuse, and alcoholism in Israel. Discussions with, and estimates by, counselors, social workers and other officials suggest that the rates may be as high as in the Diaspora Jewish communities. In many instances the culturally related patterns provide a frame for these behaviors within many families.

13. Finally, Israel has not been immune from the secularization of Jews and, as elsewhere, outside of strongly

observant enclaves, the family has been "successful" in taking on the best and the worst of the secular values represented in the West in commerce, culture, and family life styles.

Patterns of Differentiation in Europe and Elsewhere

While the trends of acculturation and assimilation are palpable everywhere, some Diaspora communities seem to be coping more creatively and positively than others. One of the great variables, aside from government policies and other geo-political realities, is numbers.

Critical mass becomes more than a law of physics. The synergistic interaction of family *and* community creates support networks which sustain individuals, families *and* communities as Jews. The most creative and comprehensive possibilities are only possible where substantial numbers of Jews reside with some sense of, and commitment to, community building and of course, the freedom to pursue the community building enterprise. This very process enhances the likelihood of providing educational, cultural, religious and social services most likely to enrich or reinforce the very values which inform Jewish family life.

Increasingly, some communities in Europe will be enfeebled in their attempts because of the shrinking number of Jews and Jewish families. There is thus every likelihood that Jewish family life and community structures will atrophy in a number of these countries within the next 4 or 5 decades.

The brutally repressive and unremittingly "successful" destruction of Jewish community institutions in Russia, coupled with the near total disappearance of Jews in yet other Eastern European countries, also portends a great numerical loss to our people there within the next 4 or 5 decades. Ironi-

cally, in Russia, there may remain Jews who are Jews in name only because of the government's definition of Jews as a nationality. The "amnesiacs" of our people will not be a life force for Jewish families in the future, and unless a radical change in government policy takes place within the next decade, those Jews both living in and leaving Russia in the future will be highly unlikely candidates for leading "Jewish" lives.

II

Having spent the bulk of the paper on a review of negative trends, it is important to highlight the hopeful signs and their policy ramifications which face us in our respective jobs and countries.

With all that has been reviewed to date, it remains an urgent requirement to note the simultaneous renaissance of Jewish life in many corners of the world. The list will be familiar but remains important so that a balance is maintained when reviewing policy options.

Worldwide all the available evidence suggests that by far most Jews marry, stay married, have children, function reasonably well as parents, live long lives, enjoy life, work hard, behave responsibly and have a sense of pride about being Jews. Most of them continue to want their children to be raised knowing they are Jews and even though they aren't sure how to do this, or why to do this, they want Jews to continue as a group in this world of ours and in most cases even want their children to marry other Jews. Most Jews remain more comfortable socializing with other Jews, and are sympathetic to, and concerned about, Israel.

Yet, for better or worse, most Jews in the world, when given the chance, will *not* move to Israel, even as they maintain an often near-mystical and non-national relation to Israel.

Many Jews find little positive about

being Jews but accept their existential reality as Jews. There is growing evidence of a readiness to join in corporate expressions relating to these realities by taking part publicly in demonstrations against anti-Semitism or in support of Israel.

While no research has attempted to correlate the impact of these public actions upon Jewish family life, I would speculate that it enhances Jewish identity in the home and helps to cement inter-generational relationships while enhancing the possibilities for the transmission of values.

Further, the development of peer support networks in America such as *Havurot*, widows' groups, singles' and single parents' groups, step-parents' organizations, Jewish marriage encounter, family camping, adopt a grand-parent programs, and the like, portend well as transitional systems. They may in some instances come to substitute for extended and even nuclear families and provide new sources for value building and stabilizing Jewish families, albeit sometimes in new forms.

Some small beginnings in experimenting with these tools for strengthening the Jewish family are evident in Israel and many countries throughout the world.

Viewing the positives in an historical context it could well be concluded that, in spite of the problems and difficulties that have been enumerated, the problems today are more controllable than were many of the causes of family disintegration in time past; for the great destroyers and enemies of families in the past—famine, war, infant and maternal mortality, epidemics, massive economic collapse—are matters for reminiscence rather than present reality.

Thus there is much to be optimistic about precisely because so much of the destiny of most Jews in the world is now in the hands of, and up to the will of, Jews to live as Jews.

What then of portents for policy and action?

Paradoxically perhaps, the Jews who serve Jewish families throughout the world can more easily establish an agenda of common concern than vehicles for concerted action. For, while approximately 45 percent of world Jewry live as Jews through totally voluntary affiliation and/or structures, the others fall into a number of categories which, because of their status, represent differing policy implications. Jews in Israel represent nearly 25 percent of world Jewry and, of course, through the government, can create family policies which have immediate and long range ramifications upon their psychic, religious educational, cultural and physical lives. Outside of Israel, roughly 20 percent of Jews reside in countries where their status is at best marginal, or at worst, desperate. As such, to speak of policy priorities is to conclude that *any* policy or strategy which can rescue Jews from these countries will be seen as redemption of the captives. And further, if that were to come to pass, we could say, Amen.

The remaining 10 percent most often have some official status as a community in their respective countries. The extent to which the organized Jewish community can respond to the needs of its Jews depends on a combination of government and private funding, coupled with a mixture of Jewish community action with government support or sanction. These can have, of course, either a positive or sometimes a negative effect.

As an example, the Swedish Jew must first identify himself as a Jew to the government. Thus, the tax monies set aside for Jewish purposes can be transferred to the Jewish community to underpin the educational, cultural, social and religious services available to Swedish Jews under Jewish auspices. Those services are not, however, available to Jews who have not so identified themselves.

Conversely, in French Canada long established Jewish agencies have been absorbed into a government-sponsored "non-sectarian" network. Further, Jewish schools continue to garner financial support by accepting "French Canadianization" as part of their Jewish educational agenda. The mechanisms for dealing with trends, both positive and negative, will perforce vary country to country.

In addition, the status of professionals will affect the seriousness with which strategies are effectuated. Although the communal professionals are not among the most highly respected professions, their status is, nevertheless, much higher in North America than elsewhere.

The power, sanction and authority of professionals are widely variable. This in turn creates problems or possibilities, depending on the strength of the professions in Jewish communal service. Additionally, the status of the Jewish community itself is an important variable when the policies are enacted in a country. Government policies *vis-à-vis* the family as an institution are shaped then by the philosophies of the respective Jewish communities, the philosophies of the government and the status of the community and its professionals in a given country.

In light of the variety of realities described thus far, strategies needed to strengthen Jewish families can be limned but faintly.

I will however, suggest the following directions and/or emphases *given* that the feasibility of implementation can never be removed from the fabric and context of the society in which Jews reside.

1. The economic barriers for living fulfilled and creative Jewish lives must be lowered so that no Jew is prevented from taking part in Jewish life and benefiting from its services by reason of the

cost of those services. In some countries the high cost of Jewish educational experiences and of affiliation has added to the downward trend in formal affiliation. It calls for innovative, sometimes revolutionary, ways of funding and providing these services. This may have to include transferring the idea of Israel Bonds to Diaspora as *one* funding technique.

2. The technological revolution must be channeled and be put more and more to Jewish purpose. In America there are the beginnings of a Jewish television network, the growth of low-cost "How to be Jewish" books, experimental subscription services for games, resource materials, music, cassettes, comic books, digests, language study materials, video tapes all geared to Jewish concerns, life style, values, content and teachings. All these must be expanded and made available wherever Jews live and in as many different languages as possible.

3. Every means possible must be utilized to encourage Jewish young people to marry Jews and have children. This effort must begin at an early age through the development of special curricular materials for institutions and young parents. Material geared to elementary pre-adolescent and adolescent ages must be further created which would include special movies, discussion guides, magazine articles, video tapes, posters, camping theme programs and the like. The experimenting in England with the American Coalition on Alternatives for Jewish Education is a healthy step in this direction.

In short, the most sophisticated approaches must be identified, utilized and sustained in order to help Jews heed the commandment "to be fruitful and multiply."

4. In some countries, alliances with other groups with shared concerns will be needed. In the United States, this

may hasten redefinitions of understandings and expectations regarding "church-state" relations and the place and responsibility of government in granting tax credits, incentives and support for sectarian purposes.

5. In the last ten years up to ten percent of world Jewry has migrated, mostly to America. Therefore, outreach to all manner of Jew, to embrace them as Jews, wherever they choose to live, must be seen as a matter of high priority. Ideological differences and conclusions arise from disparate premises *vis-à-vis* the future of Jewish life in Diaspora and in Israel and they will continue to permeate policy decisions wherever they are made. If the result of these decisions is to deny services to Jews and Jewish families because of the reality of where they live, it should not blur the reality that ultimately *how* Jewish families live as Jews remains as important today as it has been in the past. Therefore, the quality of that life style must be enhanced without regard to *where* they live.

Those Jews not living in Israel represent too large a number to be treated as Jewish pariahs, left to fend for themselves and kept outside the pale. The future health of their families as Jews will assure positive long range possibilities for all Jews, everywhere. That health is best assured through energetic efforts to respond to their needs on all of the levels discussed here. As painful as this may be for some, the history of Jewish life suggests the rectitude of this position. It is clear that the traditional Jewish families, while not immune from the weakening of Jewish family life and values, have fared better to date in dealing with the buffeting to which the family as an institution is being subjected.

It is also apparent that most Jewish families in the world will not return to traditional Jewish life style, roles, and

behaviors as a way of dealing with their difficulties. There are many, however, who are turning to the body of history and experience we call the tradition, in order to find some connection to tradition, though not to be bound by it.

Traditional Jews and traditional Judaism offer some insights which can be used as broad guidelines in evolving public policies and private commitments to further encourage enriched Jewish living. Not all traditional Jews personify the application of these guidelines but when they are present among traditional Jews they constitute a model for the principles which follow.

There are, it seems to me, four informing principles at the heart of traditional Jewish life.

1) a sense of destiny 2) a sense of discipline 3) a sense of delineation of time and roles and 4) a sense of difference.

1) The covenantal imperative gives purpose and focus to traditional Jews. This anchoring in a belief system provides faith in a time of questioning and a frame of sense and sensitivity in a time when both are too frequently absent from our modern minds and lives. A sense of destiny brings a different perspective to the search for values and purpose for its timeless nature gives a sense of the infinite to the mind and heart of the finite human.

2) Out of this sense comes the readiness and capacity to accept a life of discipline with a sense of discipline. The prescribed and proscribed gives structure to the purposes and at its best informs the behaviors which grow out of the acceptance of the discipline with joy and wonderment.

3) In turn, as a result of this combining of destiny and discipline, there has evolved an approach to time and functions which delineates the holy from the profane, the abiding from the mundane, and in doing so, helps humans

approach the use of time, inter-generational relationships and responsibilities with predictability, familiarity and responsibility.

4) In order to keep these three principles alive, the need to be different becomes paramount. This sense of being different permeates life style, home life, eating habits, use of time and the very nature of associations on a personal and community plane.

It is my premise that most Jews today will not return to traditional Judaism as an all-permeating life force. Those Jews, however, who are most successfully engaged in building or strengthening Jewish life in home and community are making use of these four principles even though they may not have articulated them as such.

So it must be as those of us who are not traditional evolve policies, strategies, priorities and commitments, we must do so through bringing non-traditional and innovative approaches to bear in re-defining or, re-shaping, re-constructing, re-forming our sense of destiny, discipline, delineation and difference.

We Jews have much to give to each other. We have much to learn from each other. Our past teaches us the reality of our abiding optimism coupled with our capacity to cope, adjust, create, respond, anticipate, recover and proceed with the business of being Jews and being Jewish. With all we have done, with all we have become and are becoming, we live—and will continue to live in families—some new in form—and in communities—some yet to be created. But live we will, because we have the will to live. *Kadima*.

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Twenty-Five Years Ago From the Pages of this Journal of 1957-8

For some leaders who have spoken recently on this matter, especially among the rabbinate, the Synagogue-Center aspiration is based upon a philosophical conviction about the nature of Jewish life and the place of the synagogue in it. This defines Jewish life now—and increasingly so in the future—as essentially religious in character. It minimizes such concepts as "peoplehood," "Judaism as a civilization" or other definitions which view Jewishness as a blending of religion, culture, group identification, and ethnic factors. Those inspired by this concept believe that the synagogue should be the center of all that is Jewish. This viewpoint has far-reaching implications, not only for the replacement of the Jewish Community Center by the synagogue, but eventually for the substitution of synagogue activities for many other programs and services now conducted by communal agencies.

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