

Resettlement of Soviet Jews in Toronto

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Though I am to describe "the unique program of resettlement of Soviet Jews in Toronto," I am not certain that what takes place in Toronto is actually different from that in other cities. Perhaps it is the emphases rather than the services that are not quite the same. Toronto's approach to resettlement can be characterized by focussing on essential life sustaining services and as being more short-term or crisis- than treatment-oriented. The "holy trinity" of resettlement work in Toronto is: housing, English language, construction and job security. Other aspects of resettlement may be important but are considered secondary and much of the resettlement help is given by earlier immigrants in the spirit of mutual self-help.

The *structure* of Toronto's program does differ from that in U.S. cities. Resettlement work in Toronto is largely the responsibility of the regional office of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (J.I.A.S.), Canada's equivalent to the domestic face of H.I.A.S. Toronto J.I.A.S. operates similarly to N.Y.A.N.A. in New York without the latter's vocational service component. National J.I.A.S. is funded by Canadian Federations through the Canadian National Budgeting Conference. The local J.I.A.S. has its own board and for the most part is an independent operation that works in close concert with its national headquarters in Montreal. The national Board in turn is largely composed of representatives from local communities.

There is one other distinct feature of Toronto's structure. A contractual arrangement exists with the local Jewish family agency for providing longer term and more intensive social work service. All reception, immigration and general resettlement services are the province of J.I.A.S. Where there are special

problems requiring follow-up social work, the Jewish Family and Child Service is called upon and is reimbursed for those services on a monthly basis. The dual agency service program has worked extremely well. It should be added that only a relatively small number of cases have been handled by the Jewish Family and Child Service.

To continue with the resettlement program: close to 3,000 Soviet Jews have been received by Toronto, J.I.A.S. An unknown number of others, estimated at 300 to 400, have immigrated to Toronto through family reunions *without* the help of J.I.A.S. During the past few months the number of Soviet immigrants handled by Toronto J.I.A.S. has averaged about 25 family units, or about 65 individuals. Up to May we have not experienced the impact of increased emigration from Russia as the U.S. has because of the restrictive measures of the Canadian immigration authorities and because of the greater number of family and kin reunions in the U.S. However, there presently seems to be some easing of those restrictions and there are indications that we may have a much heavier inflow of Russian Jews. During the past few weeks the rate has jumped considerably.

In the earlier years of Russian resettlement, nearly all family units were J.I.A.S. sponsored. Today, the majority of sponsorships are by relatives. There are financial implications for us in that fact. Canadian law does not permit eligibility by relative-sponsored immigrants for Government-sponsored free English classes operated by our "Canada Manpower." Those who attend Manpower classes are entitled to government payments of \$90 a week for a family head and \$75 for a spouse. Currently, there are 55 family heads and 25 wives in such classes. A few years ago there

were several hundred.

The effect of having more relative-sponsored immigrants, including many more older adults, has been to increase the maintenance costs for J.I.A.S. per family unit. Currently the total supplementation costs per family for resettlement are approximately \$1,000. Several years ago the average in Toronto was between \$500 and \$700. There is a three year maximum for supplementation assistance but the average length of supplementation now is 3 to 5 months. It was less a year or two ago. There are 142 cases on the active roles of J.I.A.S. including older adults.

Except for furniture needs, all supplementation is given as a grant. Money for the purchase of furniture is considered a loan and is mostly repaid. J.I.A.S., itself, will lend \$400 to \$500. Another \$1,000 is lent by our Hebrew Free Loan which requires guarantors. The first repayment to H.F.L. is for the J.I.A.S. portion of the total loan. Thus, nearly all loans are repaid in full.

Above and beyond the loans for furniture, immigrants may borrow up to \$4,000 for assistance in their business or profession. There are two lending agencies, the Hebrew Free Loan and the Loan Cassa of the Toronto Jewish Congress. The former has a traditional \$1,500 maximum. The latter will provide an additional \$2,500 for immigrants only. The two agencies work in tandem. Literally hundreds of Russians have been helped by loans during the past five years. The loans have been used for down payments to purchase taxi-cabs, to establish restaurants, or businesses in hairdressing, jewelry repair, piano tuning, plumbing, electrical repairs, small manufacturing, etc. The rate of repayment of these loans has been over 95 percent.

As in other cities, there have been and are many other agencies and organizations involved in resettlement services. They include: the Jewish Vocational Service, the Jewish Family and Child Service, Jewish Community Centre, various summer camps, Jewish Home for the Aged and other agencies serving the aged, National Council of Jewish Women, Lubavitch Organization, the Board of Jewish

Education and its schools, several congregations, the Jewish Russian Association and others.

A word about the Jewish Russian Association which has over 1,000 members and works closely with J.I.A.S. It has its own office. It has developed an afternoon Jewish school operated by one of our day schools. There are three staff members employed through a special federal grant (Canada Works). A varied and full social, recreational and cultural program flourishes. There is now a government funded cooperative housing project under consideration.

I conclude with discussion of the employment aspect of resettlement work in Toronto. The combination of Jewish Vocational Service, Canada Manpower, the Jewish Russian Association and several voluntary organizations has proven to be most effective in assisting job placement. At present, because of worsening economic conditions in Canada, the largest number of Russians is unemployed since the beginning of Soviet immigration. One hundred family heads are unemployed. Last year (1978) the number was 50 and two years ago at this time it was 35.

J.I.A.S. and J.V.S. have co-sponsored several very significant training programs which have helped reduce unemployment. They have been assisted by Mount Sinai Hospital and various professional groups. The training, lasting up to two or three years or longer in some cases, has been for doctors, dentists, nurses and engineers.

A total of 40 Soviet physicians have arrived in Toronto. Thirty-three have now passed the difficult English Medical exam or E.C.F.M. while 23 have passed all exams and are fully qualified.

Of the 23 dentists who arrived in Toronto only 12 were qualified by North American standards. Again a special course was arranged. All 12 have passed the theoretical exam. The practicum was completed this past week. We are waiting to hear the results. Of the remaining 10 Soviet dentists who were not qualified, two were trained and are working as dental therapists.

Fifteen nurses have come to Toronto. Four have passed their full exam. The rest are working on their training.

The largest number of professionals have been "engineers"—well over 400. However, as is well known, by North American standards a considerably smaller number is qualified; in Toronto, approximately 200. A local committee of Jewish engineers has been functioning to interview, evaluate and, where necessary, to retrain Soviet engineers. This has been done in consultation with the Canadian Association of Professional Engineers. Nearly all the 200 qualified engineers are now employed as engineers. The 200 plus others are also employed, generally at related jobs but at lower salaries.

I believe that the success of Toronto's resettlement program is primarily due to the work of J.I.A.S. That agency can take pride, moreover, in a relatively low cost of operation.

The professional staff members number four in all, including a Russian-speaking case aide. During the heavier inflow of immigrants in 1975 and 1976 an additional caseworker was funded by the Canadian government. And for a somewhat longer period, a half-time coordinator was added to the staff to assist in the work with other agencies and organizations. Should the rate of immigration increase there probably will be staff added again . . .

Here in Canada, our National Budgeting Conference has been reviewing J.I.A.S. throughout the country. An underlying motive for the study was to compare and assess the various models of service that exist in Canada.

I am not certain what the findings of the study will be, but it is my hope that for Toronto the conclusions will call for affirming and for building on the present form of service provision.