

IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY

Jewish Family Services and the Federation

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It is time to recommit to a new partnership between federations and family service agencies, based on an equal footing and the recognition that families are our most important community institution. This renewed sense of dedication to human service issues is essential, particularly in view of expected cutbacks in government funding of Jewish family agencies' budgets.

When the screaming headlines quieted down after the publication of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, the next impulse was to consider a complete reordering of communal priorities. "Jewish continuity" became the new buzzword and soared to the top of the federation agenda. Except in a few communities, and in those where Operation Exodus funding helped resettle up to 50,000 Soviet Jews annually in the United States, this new sentiment generally correlated with flattened or reduced allocations to local family service agencies. A more balanced and thoughtful view is now beginning to emerge, however, based on the growing recognition that *families are our most important community institution.*

According to the Council of Jewish Federations in New York, Jewish family service agencies received 7.64% (\$57,154,360) of the gross amount budgeted by local Jewish federations in 1987. This increased in both percentage and actual dollars to 7.88% (\$62,292,264) in 1992, but was reduced slightly in 1993 to 7.82% and \$61,086,506, respectively.¹ The North American Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies collects its own data directly from member agencies in both Canada and the United States. As a percentage of overall

agency budgets, federation allocations to agencies consistently dropped over this same time period. Exclusive of refugee resettlement, but including allocations of United Way monies through federations, total federation support of Jewish family service operations fell from 26% in 1985 to 20.4% in 1989, to 18.5% in 1992, and down to 17.2% in 1993. In large part, however, this percentage drop relates directly to the overall increase in size reported by Jewish Family Service agencies from 1985 through 1993, due primarily to additional income from non-federation sources.²

These facts, although constituting reasons for concern, distort the historical depth and interdependency of the relationship between Jewish family agencies and their local federations. Allocation trends—and, more broadly, the shared planning, community-building, human service, and public relations functions of both federations and Jewish family agencies—should be considered within the context of the enormous

¹These figures include those United Way funds that are allocated by federations in some communities. Although 1993 is the last year for which data are available, anecdotal information for 1994 and 1995 suggests that this recent downward trend has continued.

²Total dollars are not comparable as different agencies report in different years. Most notably, New York's Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (the country's largest private not-for-profit agency), did not respond to the AJFCA survey in 1985, but did in 1989. In addition, although it is true that most agencies grew substantially in overall size during this time period (i.e., mostly via client fees, government reimbursements, direct contributions, endowment investments, and grants), this does not apply across the board, especially to mid-sized and smaller agencies.

growth both entities experienced since the turn of the century, as each benefited immeasurably from its affiliation with the other. Thus, to the extent that federation dollars to Jewish family agencies have recently leveled off (or in some communities, actually declined), this probably has more to do with the overall flattening of federation campaigns in which allocations suffered system-wide, rather than to competition between specific service priorities. In most communities, lay leaders have struggled vehemently—and in large part succeeded—in maintaining the core federation allocation to their local family service agencies. Within that context, most of the fiscal losses to family service agencies, at least to date, have been around the edges: in the lack of inflationary or cost-of-living increases (which can be critically important, as the bulk of family service expenditures goes to salaries); in the reduction of temporarily funded or grant-allocated programs; and, most heartbreaking from the perspective of the human toll involved, in the widening gap between an increased demand for subsidized services and the availability of funding to meet that demand.

If there is any lesson we have learned from our history, it is that we are better off together than going it alone. Fortunately, a renewed sense of dedication to human service issues is beginning to grow at the federation level. One can hear it in the conversations—born largely of fear—at the last several Council of Jewish Federation quarterly meetings: with looming government cutbacks, lay leaders are now asking, “How will local federations respond to the higher incidence of poverty, and to the increased need among Jews who have nowhere else to turn? If those Jews who most depend on our services have to be turned away for lack of funds, how will they survive? And what effect will this have on our agencies and our campaign?”

OUR HISTORY

To cope with the future, we must first re-ex-

amine our past. Both federations and family service agencies draw upon the moral and religious injunctions of *chesed* (loving-kindness) and *tzedakah* (justice and charity) that obligate all Jews to care for one another. In the United States, these roots go back to 1654 when, under the order of the Dutch West India Company, Peter Stuyvesant allowed 23 Jewish refugees to remain in New Amsterdam so long as “the poor among them shall be supported by their own nation” (Berger, 1980). While historically, federations and Jewish family agencies have continued to honor this promise made to Peter Stuyvesant by our colonial forbearers, what truly animates our contemporary mission is the promise made on Mount Sinai, as elaborated through the *mitzvot* (commandments) in *tikkun olam* (the repair of the world)—one family at a time.

Initially in North America, assistance to Jewish families was provided informally or through synagogues. With subsequent waves of immigration, however, the need for structured charitable societies grew, and with it came the formation of various orphan homes, benevolent organizations, and other antecedent agencies of what is now generally known as the local Jewish Family Service. Local federations came much later—in most cases well into this century. In virtually every community, they were created by existing communal agencies that willingly handed over the responsibility of raising and allocating charitable funds so that they could return to what they did best: providing services.

This arrangement worked well for many years—extraordinarily well—and it generally still does. Nevertheless, a review of the relevant professional literature over the past century (see especially Berger, 1980; Morris & Freund, 1966) reveals several dramatic changes within Jewish communal agencies during this time period. Before World War II and for several decades afterward, most local Jewish institutions articulated four primary goals:

1. to deliver basic social services to indigent members of the Jewish community, especially the aged and orphaned children
2. to resettle refugees and help Americanize both the immigrant and second generations
3. to respond to international crises, especially in Palestine and later in the newly created State of Israel
4. to fight anti-Semitism

Beginning in the 1960s, however, a radical reordering of priorities occurred. Precipitating factors included demographic trends (a drop in immigration and a rise among native-born, third-generation American Jews); a growth in government funding (initially through the Great Society programs and later through Medicare and Medicaid); and—as exemplified by the 1967 Six-Day War—increased pride and identification with Israel and with our own Jewish heritage. In addition, for health and family services agencies, during this time there also emerged a new complexity of treatment methods, which, in turn, produced two complementary movements: (1) an increased professionalization of personnel, with a focus on more therapeutic casework interventions, especially counseling, and (2) a demand for more specialized clinical programs, which ultimately generated the discussion that is still ongoing: “What’s Jewish in Jewish family services?” (see Kahn, 1985; Rice, 1990; Zeff & Greenberg, 1980).

As our agencies have changed, so have our communities. By comparison to much higher figures a generation or two ago, today less than 20% of the Jewish community is poor, which is still way too high, and most often this is a dogged, chronic poverty that is complicated by aging, disability, illness, single parenthood, and/or family dysfunction (Kosmin et al., 1991). Our communities have also aged dramatically, to the extent that approximately 18% of the Jewish community in the United States now

falls into the 65-plus category compared to 12% for the country as a whole (CJF, 1995). Most importantly, over the same thirty to forty years, the Jewish community has increasingly turned to government funding to help meet the needs of these two groups. In 1959, Martha Selig reported on a study of 74 Jewish family service and child guidance agencies, of which only 10 indicated that they received government assistance, totaling on average less than 5% of their budgets. In contrast, in 1993, more than 40 member organizations reported to the Association of Jewish Family and Children’s Agencies that they received public funding, totalling well over \$60 million and constituting about 35% of their annual budgets, exclusive of refugee resettlement.³

From the outset, the motivations for this turn to public financing have been clear. But so have the problems. Consider this historical overview by Graenum Berger, for the period between 1958 and 1978:

The headlong shift to seek government support for sectarian agencies was marked by some of these factors: (1) Agencies, unhappy with the modest increases received annually from Jewish federations, saw an opportunity for dramatically enriching and widening their services. (2) Federations unable to meet the demands of their societies encouraged their affiliates to seek such help....(3) Agencies had become enamored of “big” business attitudes; planning, expansion, computerization, executive suites, use of government consultants, and so forth. There was a definite

³These figures were derived from aggregate data collected by the Association of Jewish Family and Children’s Agencies. Government funding is provided via contracts, third party payouts (e.g., Medicare and Medicaid), and occasional grants. Moreover, although 1993 is the last year for which aggregate data are available, anecdotal information for 1994 and 1995 suggests that government reimbursements for services provided by Jewish family service agencies have continued to grow. The terms “public funding” or “government funding” are meant to include federal, state and local dollars, unless specified otherwise.

power shift toward the professional with expertise in government contacts. (4) There was a widespread acceptance of the rationalized social welfare principle which mixed public and private welfare as a boon to experimentation, efficiency, economy and expansion. (5) New services in mental health, in work with the retarded, the aged, those in need of rehabilitation, in drug addiction, in research, and, of course, service to the poor, could now be funded in a way undreamed of by private Jewish philanthropy (Berger, 1980, p. 77).

From the beginning of this foray into public funding, many federation and agency leaders struck a cautionary note. Several focused on the requirement of most government contracts that services be rendered on a nonsectarian basis. As CJFWF's Director of Community Planning in 1975, David Zeff warned that it is not only the specific program, but the entire sectarian character of the agency that could be threatened: "There is a danger that government funds, on which a (growing) number of Jewish agencies depend...may no longer be available to sectarian agencies" (Zeff, 1975).

Within this context, Martha Selig also wrote of the detrimental effect that increased public funds could have on the relationship between federations and their constituent agencies:

One of the factors that has strengthened...the (historic) bond between federations and their agencies has been the federations' responsibility to raise and distribute funds (and) the reliance of the agencies on these resources, (with their concomitant) obligation to participate with the federations in joint programming. (But) when the budgets of the agencies reflect an increasingly large percentage of contributions from public sources and a decreasing percentage of income from federations, a new component has been added. The dual alliance has become a triple entente (Selig, 1980, p. 1284).

THE PRESENT

In the end, however, the opportunity in most communities provided by government subsidies to help the poor and needy—including poor and needy Jews—proved too overwhelming to resist. In some cities, most notably New York and Los Angeles, the growth of government funding dramatically altered the Jewish focus of the family service agency, to the extent that these Jewish family services are now primarily nonsectarian in character. But across the board—even in more conservative Jewish communities, such as Cleveland, Detroit, or St. Louis—every large and intermediate-sized Jewish family service agency in the United States today receives at least some public funds. In my own community of Baltimore we moved relatively slowly in this direction—always hedging our decisions to accept government contracts with the question, "What do we do if the money runs out?" Thus, as part of every government-funded program we started, we had to develop a contingency plan detailing how we would cope if the dollars stopped flowing. (It was, and is, a scary prospect.) Yet, constantly propelling us forward was the overriding knowledge of how many additional people we could help through the provision of these government-funded programs—for example, in residential services for adults with developmental disabilities, in senior-assisted housing, or through targeted programming to prevent child abuse or neglect. If we did not take advantage of public funding, the argument went, our Jewish constituents might never have received the help they needed, or if they did, it would be devoid of the Jewish sensitivity and atmosphere that characterize all of our in-home, residential, and community-based services. (Even though government-funded services have to be provided on a nonsectarian basis, we have never had to negate our sensitivity to our clients' cultural and religious needs.)

As tough as some of these decisions ini-

tially were to accept public funding, they will likely breed even tougher choices in the future. Moreover, to the extent that Congress passes legislation that will significantly curb government reimbursement, we must recognize that there is no way whereby charitable funding from federations (or the United Way) can realistically compensate for the ensuing losses (Beiser, 1995). Yet even in this dark cloud, if we look hard enough, we might find a thin, but bright, silver lining. From Gary Tobin's recent analysis of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, for example, we know that the single-most reason that donors cited for giving to Jewish causes (89%) is to support social services for the Jewish community (Tobin, 1995). This, despite the fact that most annual campaigns are still built around overseas needs. Thus, some additional support—be it via the federation, endowment development, or direct, donor-designated giving—may be feasible.

It is also important to remember that Jewish family service agencies do not only serve the poor. Increasingly, local agencies have restructured themselves into interdisciplinary, innovative family- and community-building institutions. A sampling of programs include outreach to intermarried couples and Jews by Choice; specialized services to assist separated, divorced, and stepfamilies; residential and in-home supports for older adults and people with disabilities; reinvigorated adoption and child care services, and acculturation activities in tandem with resettlement assistance to emigre families from the former Soviet Union. In coalition with community centers, synagogues, day schools, Jewish camps, college Hillels, and local boards of Jewish education, Jewish family service agencies frequently work to ensure a human-service dimension in programs that address Jewish identity and family education. And in response to pressures generated by managed health care, they have also engaged in new alliances, implemented new modalities of

behavioral and in-home health programs, and diversified the range of individual and family support services they offer. Finally, with the constant support of their national trade association, the North American Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies, local agencies have strengthened their boards, revamped up their accountability standards, and increasingly sought measurable criteria for the "J in JFS." Thus, even as many of their government-funded programs have had to become nonsectarian, support to local Jewish family agencies by federations no longer means bypassing the Jewish continuity agenda (Steinitz & Weidman, 1993; Zibbell, 1973).

Despite these hopeful signs, what some call the conventional relationship between Jewish family service agencies and local federations is still hurting badly. Problems arise when federations undervalue the professionalism and extended-family role of their local Jewish family service agency, or are ignorant of the Jewish dimension that underlies their work. Conversely, problems occur when Jewish family agencies seek to short-circuit federations by thinking only about the best interest of their particular organization, rather than the community as a whole. In a few large communities, local family service agency leaders have felt so alienated from their federations that they have hired their own development directors, with little input from or coordination with the annual federation-driven community campaign. In Indianapolis, in 1993, the federation subsumed the local Jewish family agency into the Jewish Community Center (and into the federation itself), out of the apparent inability to otherwise resolve a conflict over the agency's mission and funding (Nadler et al., 1994). And sadly, the talk at both federation planners' meetings and among Jewish family service executives still revolves more around the tension that characterizes some federation-agency relationships than about opportunities for collaboration.

OUR FUTURE

Such community divisiveness helps no one. It is time to recommit to a new partnership—based on equal footing—between federations and family service agencies. By way of example, consider the following. Rather than foster an environment whereby frustrated local agencies go off on their own fund-raising strategies, invariably playing against each other for some of the same donors, federations might invite joint ventures with local agencies for targeted dollars, legacies and endowments, or key, high-profile gifts. In response to government cut-backs, what if federations and Jewish family agencies would pull together an emergency campaign in order to provide for some planful transitioning, restructuring, or strategic realignment of services? Or join together to hire a community grants writer? As local family agencies seek start-up capital for new or expanded revenue-producing ventures, federations might also guarantee their loan or join in directly as a community investor. If done right, the possibilities are almost endless.

Our communities have changed, and so must we. Given this perspective, my vision—and hope—for the future is a new federation/family service partnership based on the strengthening of families, building of community, and the joint solving of problems. This will not come easily. Moreover, in at least some communities, the respective missions, organizational styles, and constituencies of local federations and family service agencies will differ significantly. Yet, by recognizing and working constructively with that difference, we can genuinely enrich the tapestry that has become our communities. Our diversity adds texture and strength to the overall picture.

While preparing for this article I had the opportunity to interview several “key informants” whose experience and perspective on this topic outweigh my own. Even more penetrating than the facts and figures that this process generated for me, however, was the personal story told me by David Zeff,

now 85 years old, whose career has included over 50 years in local and national federation service. In a conversation in June of this year, David said,

Eighteen months ago, my wife died of Alzheimer's disease. For the first time in my life, I made use of direct services offered by my local Jewish family agency. Through this experience, I understood firsthand how Jewish knowledge and sensitivity can be used as a healing factor, when skillfully applied by professionals. It's rather difficult to get people who never felt my kind of pain to understand how fundamental this type of assistance is to our concept of community, or to our dignity as individual Jews. What's fashionable right now is the issue of Jewish continuity. But beyond that lies the bedrock foundation and core communal values of the local Jewish family service agency (quoted with permission, July 25, 1995).

David's situation—or something like it—can happen to any of us. Of what use would we be as a community if we cannot continue to work together to meet our members' most critical needs?

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