

RESTRUCTURING JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS AND REBUILDING JEWISH COMMUNITY

GARY A. TOBIN, PH.D.

Director, Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, San Francisco, California

The Jewish community requires one agency that is devoted to the family. Serious attention has to be paid to creating Jewish families, helping Jewish families be Jewish, and providing communal supports for Jewish families. Jewish Family Service agencies must become new institutions if they are going to serve the Jewish community properly. They cannot be in the business of counseling, crisis management, or system maintenance. They have to be leaders in reinforcing what traditionally has been the most important institution in Jewish life, the family.

THE NEED FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The organizational and institutional structure of American Jewry, including the role of Jewish Family Service (JFS) agencies, needs major reshaping. The world in which the current system was created evolved over the past few generations, but has been altered radically by demographic, technological, and geopolitical changes. Although Jewish organizations and institutions have changed dramatically since the 1950s, they have not changed enough. While the human service needs have also changed, it is the context of family and community that has changed the most.

The most important institutions in Jewish life are not, and should not be, synagogues, JFS agencies, or Jewish Community Centers (JCCs). Such institutions should be secondary support organizations for the most important institution, the family itself. Yet no institution in Jewish life has undergone more radical transformation than the family in the past fifty years. The changes are well known. People marry later, they divorce more often, and they remarry more often. They move away from their places of birth. They have children later in life or not at all. They are often infertile and adopt more often. They adopt children of other races. They live longer and healthier lives. They retire earlier and move to retirement communities. The wealth-

iest Jews have accumulated vast fortunes, but most Jews are middle-class and significant numbers are actually low-income. Most women work outside the home for pay. Most Jews live in neighborhoods and go to schools that are predominantly gentile. Most Jews have tenuous formal ties to Jewish life. They marry non-Jews.

Most Jews from the 1940s and 1950s would be shocked to see the Jewish family of the 1990s. JFS agencies have to speak to these new realities. Their attention must be more than the development of a program here or there to address some particular problem or dysfunction. They must engage in a community-building effort.

In the 1990s, the landscape has been transformed so radically that all families are in trouble to some extent or another, because the underpinnings of the community and the relationship between that community and the family are so tenuous. Jewish families are in trouble because American families are in trouble. The disjunction between work, home, education, and all of the modes of life and institutions is great because those basic elements are in complete flux. Organized Jewish life is in upheaval, too, and Jewish organizations and agencies need to make dramatic changes.

The integration of American Jews into the mainstream of American society is now almost complete. Jews have worked diligently for generations to become part of the main-

stream and have achieved great success in that endeavor. They are politically, socially, culturally, and economically integrated into every aspect of American life, with the exception of a few country clubs and a handful of corporations. Although anti-Semitism persists in attitude and expression, Jews are so successfully integrated into America that some observers argue that they are in danger of assimilating out of any recognizable existence. Therefore, the community is now faced with the need to develop programs in its institutions that foster the maintenance of new identity while remaining fully integrated in American society.

Unfortunately, recommendations for change or progress are often rooted in ideologies or structures based on a community that was not so fully integrated. The primary ideological response to assimilation and integration, especially as measured by intermarriage, has been to build Jewish identity through Jewish education. While the value of Jewish education is intrinsic, the community cannot expect more knowledge about Judaism to counteract the effects of integration in neighborhood schools, employment, and family. Looking to institutional solutions of the past is not likely to be very productive in the future.

Jews need more opportunities to meet other Jews; live with other Jews; interact with other Jews in social, educational, and business environments; and interact in meaningful ways as Jews. The opportunity to meet other Jews is especially critical for those who are seeking marriage partners. Some of the efforts in this regard are quite obvious: Jewish dating services, matchmaking services, and so on. Other programmatic efforts are far more subtle, offering venues for Jews to meet one another for such shared experiences as volunteerism, recreation, or social action. Activities either within Jewish organizations or under their auspices designed to attract Jews of similar interests must be expanded vastly. While the community wrings its hands about preventing intermarriage, it does very little to provide opportunities for Jews to meet other Jews, especially younger Jews who do not feel much affinity for synagogues as they are currently

constituted. Such programs have certainly not been targeted in the industries, workplaces, and professional organizations where most Jews tend to congregate. Community-building must have at its core strengthening the network of Jewish possibilities for those seeking to form families.

The provision of basic human services must also facilitate interaction among Jews. The community requires mutual support and responsibility. Networks of health care, education, employment, financial need, and other essential human needs must be available within the community. This, of course, does not imply a subsidized welfare state, but rather a system of support through volunteerism, loans, guidance, or some combinations of approaches. Interaction also comes through institutional and organizational networks.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

Useless questions should be banished from our discussions. The first useless question is, Should the North American Jewish community fund programs in Israel or spend the money for local purposes? Certainly, there is a limited amount of money, and it must be allocated somewhere. However, the ideological commitment to the concept of peoplehood requires asking about educational, human service, group, and individual needs of Jews wherever they reside. Rather than asking one simple question, many must be asked. Which local needs? Which needs in Israel? Which needs in Ukraine? For which groups? Under what circumstances? What resources are needed and who should provide them? Individual Jews? The governments of the United States or Canada? The government of Israel? These are all legitimate and important questions to consider. But as an ideological construct, "local versus overseas needs" can only lead to rancor. It also denies the oneness of the world Jewish community and inhibits creative discussions about how to raise more funds.

A second equally destructive question is, Should the Jewish community fund community-building activities, such as Jewish education, or provide such basic human services as

home health care for the elderly and vocational training for the unemployed or newly arrived emigres? Instead, much more serious questions must be asked about which institutional venues provide the highest-quality services, secular or religious, and how the two goals—building Jewish identity and community while also providing high-quality human services—can be combined. The two are not mutually exclusive. When individuals argue that we must do one or the other, the institutional circuits begin to short and the community becomes involved in destructive “Sophie’s Choice” decisions. JFS agencies, which should operate in all realms, can help bridge the gap between these purposes.

A third ideologically bankrupt question is, To which organization or institution does a certain service delivery component belong? Does Jewish education belong in the synagogue as part of its institutional right? Do fitness programs belong to Jewish Community Centers? Do JFS agencies have the exclusive mandate to provide counseling services? Thinking about institutional turf, exclusivity, or right to first refusal on programs may serve the institution, but it does not serve the community. The questions must be rephrased to consider which organization or agency is best suited to offer a particular program or service, whether or not a particular agency is providing the service well, and how to reach the most people most effectively and most efficiently, regardless of which institution provides that service. No agency or institution has either the right or claim, whether historical, accidental, or through some oligarchy of consensus, to offer any particular service to any particular group. This is equally true for JFS agencies. They must be prepared to assume responsibilities for programs that they traditionally have not operated. Equally important, they must be willing to share or relinquish other programs.

BUILDING JEWISH FAMILIES

The JFS agency needs to be reconfigured as an institution that builds family and community. The Jewish community requires one agency

devoted to the family. Serious attention has to be paid to creating Jewish families, helping Jewish families be Jewish, and providing communal supports for Jewish families.

Creating Jewish families is now extremely difficult. Because of later marrying ages and a variety of other reasons, increased numbers of couples have fertility problems. Infertility treatment is both expensive and traumatizing. The creation of Jewish families now necessarily involves infertility treatment and counseling, yet few such service networks exist in the Jewish community. Families are left much on their own to navigate as best they can this complicated, frightening, and expensive world. Infertility problems may well continue to increase over the next two decades, requiring more time and attention than ever before. How far is the Jewish community prepared to go in creating Jewish families, given the huge expense involved in treating infertility? There are also important ethical and religious issues involved in terms of surrogate mothers, legal issues surrounding infertility treatment options, and so on.

There will also be an increased need for adoption services. The role of the JFS agency, however, goes far beyond helping individuals adopt children. Increasingly, these children will be born of non-Jewish mothers and will also be of other races. The Jewish community offers little positive support for transracial families and has been generally unwelcoming to converts regardless of their age. JFS agencies and the Jewish community as a whole have been accustomed to dealing with in-marriage, at least prior to the last 20 years, and with families that were almost always exclusively white. Transracial families require special attention and skills and a particular sensitivity on the part of the Jewish community.

Creating Jewish families also requires more sophisticated and expansive methods in bringing Jews together. Jewish singles often complain of the inability to find a Jewish mate. Some private sector matchmaking and dating services have developed to help link Jews to other Jews, but most Jewish communities do not offer this service. While discussions of

Jewish continuity rage, the actual expenditures involved in helping Jews find Jewish mates are minuscule. It is impossible to conceive of the JFS agencies of the future and of creating Jewish households without a much heavier emphasis on adoption and matchmaking.

In an open and fluid society, a significant number of Jews will continue to date and marry individuals who are not born Jews. Creating Jewish families will require massive efforts to help non-Jews become Jews within the family context. Many are still ideologically opposed to actively promoting conversion, and the programmatic investment in conversion is quite small. Such efforts must take place in addition to whatever investments are made in Jewish education, both formal and informal, to build Jewish identity. Strong Jewish identities are not sufficient to prevent intermarriage or to ensure that the family will become Jewish after marriage with a non-Jew has taken place. Creating Jewish families in the climate of high levels of intermarriage requires a set of programmatic initiatives, structural change, and financial investment unlike anything seen in the Jewish community before.

Maintaining Jewish families requires another whole set of services. Some of these services are already well known and well established in the Jewish community, such as before-school care, after-school care, and latchkey programs. Yet, these services have not kept pace with the needs. Many preschools have waiting lists, very few communities have infant day care, and well-run latchkey programs are rare. The Jewish community has acknowledged for years the changing dynamic that results from having two working parents, single parents who work, and children living in a variety of family constellations that require communal support. Expanding these programs to meet the need will require a massive community investment. Furthermore, families are constantly buffeted by the crises of divorce, joint custody, remarriage, and the issues resulting from stepparents and stepsiblings. Some communities have workshops, counseling, and other services to sup-

port these reconfigured families, but these too have not kept pace with the demand. This service gap is especially evident when divorce and remarriage involve a non-Jewish spouse, which is increasingly the case.

The tensions between providing human services and building Jewish identity and community are profound. JFS agencies have become accustomed to the public sector provision of basic welfare services. This article would certainly have been different had it been written five or ten years ago. The public sector’s recent withdrawal from support of basic human services has been dramatic and requires rethinking about which human services should be provided by JFS agencies, to what extent, and how they will be funded. Nearly all observers agree that the nonprofit sector cannot compensate for the public withdrawal from human services. Yet, the provision of food, shelter, clothing, and basic medical needs is increasingly required from the nonprofit sector. Within the Jewish community, some will view these needs as in direct competition with the provision of community-building services.

Yet, some endeavors are both community-building and Jewish family-creating. For example, the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Former Soviet Union requires job retraining, language instruction, and a variety of other essential human and communal services in order for these individuals to successfully integrate into American society. At the same time, however, some studies have shown that these first-generation immigrants have a very tenuous Jewish identity that can be strengthened tremendously through communal efforts. Therefore, programs to acculturate immigrant Jews should be part of the mandate of JFS agencies on both human service and Jewish family-creating grounds. All human service needs should be understood in the context of building and maintaining family and community.

RESTRUCTURING JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

A debate rages in the Jewish community over

what is the most important institution in Jewish life. An organizational and institutional contest has emerged for communal center stage. Synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, Hillels, Bureaus of Jewish Education, Federations, JFS agencies, Vocational Services, and a whole range of other organizations and institutions are attempting to redefine their role and reestablish their place in Jewish society. A growing sense of confusion and uncertainty has developed about who should do what and how in order to better build the Jewish community. Much of this focus has been on building Jewish identity, alternately called Jewish continuity and Jewish survival. Many are concerned about the possibility that the Jewish community cannot sustain itself in its current size and configuration. Some even fear the Jewish community will disappear except for a small vital Orthodox community. Therefore, we turn to our organizations and institutions as the mechanisms to serve our community and to provide the constructs and vehicles to maintain communal bonds. These efforts must focus first on building the Jewish family.

Maintaining a dual mission of providing human services and building Jewish community and programmatic expansion will require a fundamental restructuring of our communal structure. First, the constellation of Jewish organizations and agencies must change. The current boundaries between agencies are artificial and were created to serve a population and community that no longer exist. Each community will have to undergo a major reassessment of how its agencies are structured and what the best constellation will be in order to serve the Jewish family and build Jewish community. Yet, the Jewish community has shown that it is capable of institutional restructuring: Witness the decline of Jewish hospitals as Jewish agencies, for example.

The communal structure of the 1950s and 1960s does not even exist in such Jewish communities as Tucson, Las Vegas, and Orange County, California, which now are as large or larger than those of Pittsburgh, Cleve-

land, Detroit, and more established Jewish communities. A significant proportion of American Jews now live in smaller Jewish communities, the exurbs of major metropolitan areas, and small cities and towns throughout North America. Technologically linked through the electronic media and transportation by car and plane, Jews can live anywhere and still be connected to the fabric of American life, even while their connections to Jewish life become more tenuous. The critical mass in many of these communities may not be present to form the organizations and institutions that one would find in communities of 4,000, 20,000, or more. These communities must begin to look to different organizational and institutional networks in order to bring Jewish community to these hundreds of thousands of Jews who live outside the limits of the more established institutional networks.

Certain organizations and agencies should be curtailed, some should be merged with others, others should cease doing business, and new organizations and institutions may have to be created. Some programs will be shifted from one organization to another. Others will be dropped and new programs created. This process will be painful and is likely to be politically rancorous. Restructuring efforts will involve enormous risk—by definition, the community will be entering realms in which it may not have any experience. Communities may seek model programs from elsewhere that probably do not exist, and will want certainty of success where none can be given. Individuals and institutions will be frightened by the prospect of undertaking new programs within new structures. Some of these untried and unproven programs will be bound to fail, and many will be extremely difficult to implement. People will crave guarantees when none can be given, having to move forward on faith and hope rather than assurances. The process is bound to create enormous upheaval.

Most of the change is likely to occur bottom to top, rather than the other way around, as the collective changes at the local level force similar changes at the national level. The

community needs to systematically assess where there is programmatic, administrative, or personnel overlap and where there are structural gaps; that is, client groups that are unserved or programmatic goals that are unaddressed. However, having more than one agency provide a particular service can be useful and productive when a population is differentiated by geography, ideology, preference, and need. Therefore, a multiplicity of institutional delivery venues does not necessarily signal duplication and waste. On the other hand, economies of scale might be achieved through shared purchasing, personnel, and space. Higher-quality personnel could be retained perhaps by hiring full-time professionals as opposed to many part-time workers. A prime example of this can be found in youth services. A lack of coordination among synagogues, Jewish camps, JCCs, JFS agencies, and Jewish youth groups results in the expensive purchase of lower-quality personnel where a more coordinated systemic approach could be more productive. Furthermore, communities may find wholesale gaps in the stated vision and the service delivery system as currently constituted.

RETHINKING THE JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE

As JFS agencies evolve over the next twenty years, each will do so in the context of its own demographic, cultural, and political context. The demographic contexts are particularly variable. In some communities in South Florida a majority of individuals are over the age of 65, and sizeable proportions of the population are over 75 and 85. Boston and San Francisco have disproportionate numbers of people between the ages of 18 and 30. Larger cities tend to have higher proportions of economically dependent populations. Communities in the West have much higher proportions of transplants and much higher levels of intermarriage. The programmatic emphasis in each JFS agency, therefore, is dependent on the local community. Yet, the JFS mission is a national one. What JFS agencies

are supposed to do requires a uniform rethinking, regardless of the programmatic emphasis within a particular community.

Three essential structural changes will be required if JFS agencies are to thrive in the next century. The first involves mission. Their mission must be clearly defined to include both human service and community-building efforts. The Jewish family has come under such assault that an agency that both nurtures and repairs the family, and in turn helps the family nurture and repair the community will play a vital role in the future Jewish community.

Redefining the mission of the JFS agency must be a process that begins *de novo*, rather than being limited by the current landscape of organizational and institutional prerogatives. This redefinition must take place in the context of what the Jewish community wants to be. What are the organizational and institutional gaps? What services are being offered and which are not? How can a Jewish community best be served?

Next, JFS agencies must redefine their structure, including location, staff structure, financial practices, and so on. For example, past and current ways in which they raise money, charge for services, and produce income may be inappropriate in the future. If JFS agencies are going to fulfill a new and expanded mission, alternate structures within the organization and with other institutions will be required.

Programmatic change will also be required. Certain programs will have to be eliminated, others will be expanded, and still others will need to be created. JFS agencies have been successful in adopting new programs over the years. The question, however, is whether they have been as successful in *eliminating* programs, and whether or not the pace of change has been rapid enough. Most of the programs needed in the community can now be found at one JFS agency or another. However, such programs may be at the periphery of the organization's agenda as opposed to the core, taking 2 percent of the budget as opposed to 20 percent.

FUNDING THE FUTURE

Key to the future success of JFS agencies is financial security. They cannot be dependent on the annual campaigns of Federations, which in any case are likely to remain relatively stagnant with perhaps marginal increases over the next ten years. Given the ways that monies are allocated within the Federation system, which is primarily through an entitlement program of existing institutions and programs, there are not likely to be major shifts of funds to JFS agencies either for existing or new programs. Federation endowments, both restricted and unrestricted, may be a likely source of revenue over the next decade. However, JFS agencies are more likely to receive emergency allocations with an air of crisis than to receive substantial infusions of funds to build and maintain the Jewish family.

Therefore, JFS agencies will be required to create major endowments of their own in order to fund the necessary fields of service. These may be created cooperatively with Federations; these structural issues can be decided within each community. Yet, given the rather tiny amounts of money invested in identity-building and family-creating activities other than formal and informal Jewish education, the creation of endowments for these purposes will require hundreds of millions of dollars over the next decade. Indeed, they may require endowments in the billions of dollars. These numbers should not be considered frivolous or frightening—the Jewish community has the financial capability to create these endowments. What is lacking is a set of programmatic initiatives, sound faith in the system, and a sense of administrative efficiency. In other words, if the right ideas are presented and enough faith in the institutional structure can be reestablished, the financial resources are the least problematic obstacle.

The changes necessary in the Jewish community will require annual investments in significant multiples of the current annual campaigns for fields of service endowments, capital expenditures, and new programmatic

monies. These community-wide campaigns will require mega-gifts of \$10 million, \$50 million, or even \$100 million from major Jewish philanthropists. Such gifts are certainly possible—Jewish philanthropists have been making gifts of these sizes to many organizations, primarily outside the Jewish community. The only hope for building the Jewish community of the future is to help Jewish philanthropists feel comfortable and inspired to participate in the rebuilding of the Jewish community as part of a grand vision.

At the outset such efforts may even require spending down additional capital in family foundations and endowment funds. The investment capital may pay off uncounted ways in the future.

These changes may also require an outsourcing of many of the services that JFS agencies currently provide. For example, counseling services may be best provided by counselors, therapists, and social workers in the private sector who may be part of a network of a JFS agency, but not necessarily full-time or part-time employees. Creating partnerships with the private sector will be essential, since it will be impossible to create organizations with enough infrastructure or personnel to accomplish all that needs to be done. Proposals to create such superstructures will evoke natural suspicion and resistance on the part of donors, so alternate structures will have to be created that include major and innovative arrangements with a variety of service providers. Endowments cannot be created to establish bureaucracies, as many major donors see Jewish organizations.

JFS agencies must also provide services for people who can afford them at approximate market rates, thereby increasing their revenues. Not all Jews are economically dependent, and JFS agencies cannot have the image of serving only those who cannot afford other quality services. The notion of Jewish agencies as places of last resort undermines their image of quality and thereby limits the ability to raise funds to support their work. Major donors are not intrigued by the idea of supporting institutions that are by definition of

CONCLUSION

Jewish agencies and institutions have done remarkably well over the past two generations, but the changing character of the Jewish community requires once again that the organizational and institutional network be restructured. The need for realignment does not suggest failure on the part of Jewish organizations and agencies. Quite the contrary, it points to their great success in achieving integration into American society.

The common bonds of language, neighborhood, and history now are tenuous in some places and gone altogether in others. Thus, a very strong organizational and institutional presence is required to support both the family and the community. Now is the time for bold reconfiguring and reconstructing of these agencies. Tinkering at the margins will only maintain the status quo. JFS agencies must become new institutions if they are going to serve the Jewish community properly. They cannot be in the business of counseling, crisis management, or system maintenance. They have to be leaders in reinforcing what traditionally has been the most important institution in Jewish life, the family. The institution must live up to its name and become an agency that serves all aspects of Jewish family life.

The task will involve major political infighting, jockeying, and struggles with other Jewish organizations and institutions, all of which are trying to maintain their place in Jewish life or create a new place. In some communities, the reconstruction will be relatively cooperative. In others it may involve institutional battles and warfare. Something has to give. The question is whether JFS agencies will step forward and become leading institutions or diminish in importance and influence. If the community is really as concerned about Jewish identity, survival, and continuity as it claims, it will need a bold new blueprint to build community and family life. Can the constellation of JFS agencies, so relevant to the world of the Jewish past, also be a leading institutional force for the Jewish future?

lower quality. JFS agencies therefore will have to be conceived of as elite organizations that can attract the highest-quality professionals, volunteers, and donors.

The massive infusion of funds will only come about if JFS agencies establish their credibility among major donors. This credibility does exist within some communities, but even in the best-case scenarios there is suspicion about inefficiency and waste. Addressing the perception of lax management or low-quality services is essential, since a basic lack of trust in the system is epidemic among Jewish philanthropists. Study after study shows that most major donors, and indeed most moderate-sized donors and consumers, have little understanding of what Jewish organizations and agencies actually do. Most assume that they are doing decent work, but are uncertain as to what that decent work might be or whether it is being done efficiently. The negative view of nonprofits as being generally wasteful and inefficient plagues Jewish organizations as well, even where there is no basis in reality.

Donors are also interested in aligning themselves with agencies that they think can make the most difference in Jewish life. The constant bemoaning of the loss of Jewish identity and community can be a rallying cry for agencies that are creatively addressing the underlying issues in the decline and demise of Jewish life. Such organizations will require charismatic leadership. There is a dearth both of high-quality positions and available individuals. Salaries in most of these agencies are mediocre, and executives and associate executives are still considered by many to be Jewish communal *servants*, with all the negative baggage that the word "servant" implies. They need to be seen as high-level executives and professionals in charge of running sleek, efficient, and powerful nonprofit organizations. It is no accident that the museum, symphony, and universities are attracting donor time and money. JFS agencies must be perceived as such if they are going to go to the next level of building Jewish community and family.