

A FEDERATION VIEW OF PROSPECTS FOR JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICE AGENCIES

JUDITH LANG

Executive Director, Human Resources, UJA—Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York

Jewish survival and continuity give local Jewish family and children's service agencies central importance in any organized community. That being so, shouldn't and don't the Federation and the family and children's agency relate in perfect harmony? No! Why not? Inherent. . . is the emotionally charged issue of control.

In 1983, this author left the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services of New York, after 19 years,¹ for a post at New York's Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. As a Federation professional it is possible to reflect at a useful "distance" upon the problems of presidents, boards, and executives of Jewish family and children's agencies at this point in our history.

1. THE VOLUNTARY AGENCY AND PUBLIC FUNDING

We face a variety of potential threats to the viability, autonomy, and even survival of Jewish family and children's service agencies in the 80's. We certainly face changes of significant magnitude in the Jewish family itself, and in its environment, on many levels.

There is an issue which few agencies can ignore or evade, and that is the "double squeeze." There has been a significant shift in federal social welfare policies in the last few years (with attendant sharp cutbacks in funding for programs which directly touch the lives of Jewish families and children) combined with a national policy which calls upon philanthropy and

the private sector to somehow plug all the holes in the "safety net."² Agencies are caught between a rock and a hard place, and agency leadership must deal with this potential crisis, perhaps as the Chinese do. The character in Chinese for the word "crisis" stands for both "danger" and "opportunity." Let us focus on the "opportunity" side whenever possible, while remaining alert to the dangers.

It is clear that family and children's agencies have become increasingly vulnerable to cuts in human services in the public sector. The Family Service Association of America study in 1981 found that "FSAA member agencies in 1980 received six times more of their combined total incomes from governmental sources that they did twenty years ago. Conversely, their combined total incomes from United Way and sectarian federations decreased by more than one-third during the same period."

In 1980, FSAA found that 37% of its agencies' total income, on the average, came from government sources, while 48% was from United Ways and sectarian Federations.³

Some leaders of 100% sectarian funded agencies can perhaps afford to dismiss these trends. But most cannot. In Greater

Presented at the Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Family and Child Care Agencies, April 28-30, 1985, Chicago.

1. Largely spent with a predecessor agency, Jewish Family Service, now a constituent of the JBFCF.

2. *New York Times*, February 15, 1985, "Corporate Giving Fails to Offset Cuts by U. S." p. 1.

3. *FSAA Highlights*, Nov./Dec. 1981, Vol 7, No. 6, p. 5.

New York, the human service functional field, which includes five Jewish child care and family agencies, receives approximately 89% (over-all) of its combined income from government and other non-Federation sources.⁴ While the percentage varies from agency to agency, all of the agencies have gone to the public sector to expand and enrich basic services. And, lest it is said, "but that's only New York," even a cursory look at agencies in the U.S. and Canada shows an appreciable number of them at the government till.⁵

So what is the problem? Doesn't this mean that agency presidents, trustees, and executives can now draw from a larger pool and serve more people in the community with government funding? The problem is that we have slowly backed into a "catch 22," a paradox. On the positive side, what we are confronting is the emergence of a private—public partnership, which has often worked well, to supplement our efforts; the paradox is that our president frequently and vocally lauds the efforts of the voluntary sector as "neighbors helping neighbors," while cutting human services. But growing dependence on public funding (often, as in New York, encouraged by the Federations) has made agencies vulnerable to severe human service budget cuts (instituted by this same federal administration), driving great holes through agencies' Jewish "safety net." They must then turn again to philanthropy, and philanthropy—Federations, United Way, foundations, and private donors—cannot possibly meet the increasing need for funding. In New York Federation, for one, the campaign has not met the level

of need, nor matched Federation hopes or dreams. And the growing gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" in the general American society is mirrored in the Jewish community, where we have pockets of poverty: among the growing numbers of single parents, the frail elderly, many who are over age 75, the "new" unemployed, the "new" poor, and even the homeless.⁶

We need to "recapture volunteerism" in the 80's. An agency leader must keep abreast of potentially damaging societal trends from which Jews are not immune; and needs to know that although there is a national public policy of encouraging volunteerism to meet human service needs and a recent rhetorical rediscovery of volunteerism, many of us feel that the voluntary sector has been weakened in the first half of this decade. "Historically, voluntary agencies have served four vital social functions. First, they have supplemented governmental efforts on behalf of people in trouble; they have done what government has not. Second, they have been a source of diversity, which is vital to a pluralistic society. Third, they have been great innovators. . . and the fourth great contribution of the voluntary sector is its commitment to quality."⁸ These vital functions are at risk.

The dangers which face us are basic ones, even threatening the provision of sectarian-sponsored services by those sectarian-sponsored agencies which accept public funds. In New York, we are in Federal Court, with fellow defendants, Catholic-sponsored agencies; fighting a law suit (*Wilder vs. Bernstein*) instituted

4. "1984-85 *Distribution Committee Budget Report*," Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, p. 48.

5. "Sources of Operating Funds for JF&CS Agencies," Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies, New York, 1985.

6. Barbara K. Caress, "An Evaluative Review," Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, New York, April, 1985, p. 1.

7. *Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services*, "1985 Budget Request Submission to Federation of Jewish Philanthropies," p. 3.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

eleven years ago by the New York Civil Liberties Union. Two Jewish-sponsored agencies are charged with "unconstitutionally" denying "equal access" to quality child care to black Protestant children as a class, despite the fact that the agency admission policies are non-sectarian and that 75% of children in Jewish child care residences are non-Jewish; one-half of that percentage represents black and Hispanic children in need of care and despite the fact that it has been declared constitutional in New York State for religion to be considered in the placement of those children whose parents request in-religion placement and whose best interests would be served by such placement; and despite the fact that, in 11 years, the NYCLU has been unable to prove the existence of even one case of discrimination in the Jewish agencies. The New York case is quite complex and perhaps unique, but some are concerned that it may be a foretaste of the future. Recent charges of "discrimination" by Jewish and Catholic nursing homes have already been labeled "Wilder II" by some though there is still uncertainty about the outcome of "round one" in Federal Court. If the agencies lose, they and the Catholic group will appeal. This is but one disturbing example of how public funding may have an adverse impact on agency autonomy in intake decisions.

Voluntary agencies are indeed autonomous entities which make choices about their goals and directions. Board leaders need to be ever alert to the possible consequences of following one government funding stream or another, and very alert to intrusions on the agency's traditional independence and commitment to quality which could make it a captive of the public sector. One positive lesson of *Wilder vs. Bernstein* is that in various sectarian coalitions there is a strength to be utilized, which has, as its underpinning, a deep and shared concern for traditional,

family-centered religious values.

II. THE CHANGING JEWISH FAMILY

Rapid social change is one of the most conspicuous features of 20th century civilization. And there is no doubt that the Jewish family—and the "normal" family life cycle—is changing. There has been deep concern expressed about the fate of the Jewish family, a concern infused by the fact that the Jewish family and Jewish survival are intricately linked. So, leaders of the Jewish family agencies of this nation stand at the eye of the storm, with everything in motion around them.

The changes in family life have been documented over and over again, in many forums. Divorce, single parenthood and remarriage have now become almost commonplace. A newly emerging family life cycle might be said to progress from marriage to separation to divorce to a period of single parenthood to remarriage. Agency leaders in their responsibility for meeting new needs must remember that $\frac{3}{4}$ of all divorced women remarry, as do $\frac{5}{6}$ of all divorced men.⁹

"Customary" or "traditional" child and family counseling methods are not adequate to meet the needs of the growing population of children of divorce, single parents, and the remarried. Remarried families are extremely complex, only partially understood, are structurally different, and present quite different challenges to our staff than intact nuclear families do. These differences need to be understood, and understanding needs to lead to changes in approach and in helping techniques. This may mean investment in in-service training, and the use of outside experts, in a period of general

9. Clifford Sager, et al., *Treating the Remarried Family*, New York: Bruner & Mazel, Jan. 1983.

budgetary belt-tightening. Responding to the Jewish family of the 80's is not "business as usual."¹⁰

Agency lay and professional leadership must needs review all programs as to their responsiveness to the changes in the Jewish family. This "zero-based programming," if done thoroughly, may even result in the decision to build in adequate outcome evaluation mechanisms which will measure program and cost-effectiveness. It might result in some long-standing programs being dropped, programs with historical meaning to both staff and volunteers. It might also produce a burst of creativity which will give birth to more responsive and innovative—"cutting edge"—programming. But it takes energy, leadership, vision, and even courage to chart this course.

An agency leader may even have to examine his or her own attitudes and feelings when, for example, reacting negatively to Jewish Family Life Education outreach to intermarried couples for fear some in the community may charge it is "encouraging intermarriage." The executive's responsibility may be to research outcomes in his/her own agency and elsewhere so as to substantiate programs by results—as for the example just cited, outreach to intermarried couples by Jewish agencies has resulted in an enhanced Jewish life style for numbers of couples and their children, and, not infrequently, led to conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. Supportive data of this kind are imparted to the board, funding bodies and community to guide program decisions.

Agency leadership in the 80's also has a responsibility to develop sound management skills, to do more with less. For example, they need to encourage:

- use of management information systems and computerized data to analyze trends, and to do better long-range planning;
- development of accurate unit cost mechanisms; accountability for what is spent and how it is spent;
- enhancement of revenue producing programs, when appropriate; leaders need to keep an open mind about the possibilities of revenue-producing endeavors which agencies are capable of operating;
- review of fee-charging and collection of third party reimbursement; to increase, whenever possible, the capacity to self-fund. High quality services should command high fees, on a sliding-fee basis which does not exclude anyone from service.

This list could be expanded, but its message is clear. There should be high management expectations, to be met by a board-executive partnership in which respective roles are clearly defined.

III. FEDERATION-AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE 80'S

Jewish survival and continuity give local Jewish family and children's agencies central importance in any organized community. That being so, shouldn't and don't the Federation and the family and children's agency relate in perfect harmony? No!

Why not? Inherent in the structure of funding dependency and accountability is the emotionally charged issue of control. This is "given" in any community; it is not unique for this relationship to be a tense one at times. It is the very nature of the beast! But it can be a dynamic tension.

A not uncommon phenomenon in agency-Federation relationship is a "hostile dependency." Dependency on Federations which can never provide enough resources

10. Judith Lang, "Agency Response to Families in Transition," Unpub., Read at Annual Meeting of Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies, Houston, 1983.

produces a frustration with both the limitations of funding, as well as with the control and power over agencies which their need gives to Federations. This constant state of affairs, and the attendant tensions produced in Federation/agency relationships, are inevitable and intensified when needs grow and resources shrink.

But there are positive strategies to build a productive agency/Federation partnership:

First and foremost, according to Kahn,¹¹ Federation professionals should have solid functional agency experience. My many years from part-time caseworker (and full-time mother!) to executive post have been critically important in my day-to-day work with Federation lay committees and agency executives. This depth of knowledge of what agencies are all about is vital in the interpretation of agency services, problems, and needs, but it is also critical in conveying to Federation leadership a sense of the tremendous pressures and complexities faced by agency board and professional leadership.

Kahn, a Federation executive, states that Federation professionals who have not had direct functional agency experience should arrange to get it, and then return to Federation work. He calls for the hiring by Federation of professionals with this kind of background.

There are, of course, other positive strategies to improve this critical partnership of agency and Federation.

- Improve the quality of agency/Federation one-to-one relationships, on all levels. These relationships enhance the quality of communication, candor, and mutual understanding.

- Set a tone of real respect for agency expertise. Agencies know how to deliver services, in most cases better than Federation professionals or Federation lay leaders who are not on the service delivery "front

lines." Federations need to learn to avoid intrusion into agency operations, while still holding agencies accountable for the most effective use of the Federation dollar.

- On the other hand, agencies need to learn to accept (and even appreciate) the central planning function of Federation, which often is able to take the broad view of communal need. In New York, agencies have begun to trust and rely on Federation to help mediate and sort out "turf" and function overlap and competition, which seem to be increasing in a kind of "survival of the fittest" response to shrinking and shifting funding streams. The communal goal is meeting the community's needs as efficiently and effectively as possible, while avoiding wasteful overlap and duplication.

Federation needs to provide appropriate support services to the network of agencies. It cannot rest on its laurels of planning, allocating and fund raising. Some examples of additional services from New York:

- The Weiner Educational Center of Federation provides management training courses and subsidies for agency professionals.

- The new Management Assistance Program (MAP) matches *pro bono* lay experts to agencies which need specific expertise. For example, a marketing expert works (*pro bono*) with a community center, and within three months a newly designed marketing drive attracted 200 new members to the Center.

- The Government Relations Department of Federation has lobbyists in Albany, Washington and New York City. These Federation professionals work with the agencies (for example) to negotiate per diem rates for a variety of services, access public dollars, and influence legislators to pass bills which are "good" for the Jewish community.

- Federation's Department of Endowments and Legacies works directly with

11. William Kahn, "New Dimensions in Federation Agency Relationships."

agencies to assist in the development of endowments, to orient agency board members to techniques of board solicitation, and to help find appropriate foundation support for specific agency projects.

IV. HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Perhaps we have neglected a human resource variable on which the future rests—our lay leadership. We need quality leadership to deliver quality care. We need more diversified and balanced boards. We need consciously to target special groups for board recruitment. Many of our boards are “aging out,” and the nature of the new volunteer is changing. Volunteer “career paths” can be diverse, and individually tailored and tracked. We need to involve our young people, many of whom seem to be self-involved, career-oriented, and preoccupied with material success and recreational pursuits.

As specific examples, we need to involve, more than we have, corporate “heavy-weights,” academics, women from the professional or business worlds, politicians who wield influence, and sons and daughters of major philanthropic families. And we need to retain and reinvolve some of the traditional and generous philanthropists who are being “seduced away” to the now accessible, assimilated and glamorous world of philanthropy in the arts, as just one example of a competing philanthropic need. We also need to develop more effective board and leadership training, to enhance the quality of communal leadership and to build to even greater heights.

In conclusion, I do want to add a few words about another “human resource”—our professional staff. They are the client

and volunteer’s direct “human resource.” Social workers today are usually underpaid, undervalued, and often unable to support a family on a typical Jewish communal salary. Women in Jewish communal service still suffer clear and documented inequities in both salaries and career advancement opportunities. And men are entering the field in too few numbers.

The profession of social work is in deep trouble. Out best and out brightest young people know in advance that they cannot afford to enter this field of service. Schools of social work, in my opinion, due to their own severe economic difficulties in recent years, have opened their doors far too wide—and agencies report that the quality of the graduate student in placement is often unacceptable. We are also suffering a “brain-drain.” “Corporate America,” via our Employee Assistance Program entry into the world of work, has discovered social work, and is ready to pay top dollars for social work skills. Other talented social workers leave agencies for lucrative private practices.

Lay leaders and executives have a responsibility to recognize and try to reverse these trends. There are no simple solutions, but there must be tangible signs of regard for social work skills, and salaries which allow our committed young people to remain in agency practice.

This article reflects a mix of positives and negatives. I have tried to clarify my conviction that the recipe for a successful Jewish family and children’s service is an involved, knowledgeable board working in partnership with a skilled, dedicated staff. Add to the mix a productive relationship with Federation, and you have a combination which is, indeed, greater than the sum of its parts. We live in the best of times and the worst of times, but standing together, we can make a difference.