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MOBILIZING RESOURCES FOR SOVIET RESETTLEMENT

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Jacksonville, a young growing community of 10,000 Jews, has resettled the highest number of Soviet immigrants per capita through its creative mobilization of resources. Under a cooperative arrangement, Lutheran Social Services of Jacksonville provides staff and obtains funding for the initial stages of the resettlement process, enabling the Jewish community to focus upon acculturation of the new Jewish Americans. Jacksonville's experience illustrates how large number of immigrants can be resettled by smaller communities.

The Midrash recounts that King Hezekiah could have become the Messiah, but did not attain that distinction because he did not recite the "Great Hallel." Our rabbis interpret this enigmatic statement as underscoring the need to take advantage of a momentous opportunity when it arises.

This century has seen two such times: one, the horror of the Shoah, and the other, the triumph of the establishment of the State of Israel. We are now in the midst of a third critical period—the opening of the gates of freedom for Soviet Jewry. As many as 1.5 million Soviet Jews may leave the U.S.S.R. during the 1990s, a migration that may become the greatest transfer of Jewish population since the original exodus from Egypt. This almost unimaginable fulfillment of one of our people's fondest dreams of this century is of immense significance to Jewish communities throughout the world.

Because political events during 1989 and 1990 have developed with such breathtaking speed, we have not had the ability to assess their impact upon world politics. Changes in the Soviet Union and their effect on Jewish communities in Israel and

the Diaspora, as well as the sociological, political, and economic implications of this emigration, have not been well defined. We are just beginning to understand that world Jewry will have to pay billions and billions of dollars in resettlement costs to build a successful foundation for the free lives of our brethren.

As Jewish communities everywhere hurry to examine alternatives that will finance and implement our commitment to *pidyon shvuyim* (redemption of captives), the experience of Jacksonville, Florida may be instructive in providing a model for large-scale resettlement at reduced costs.

Jacksonville is an emerging, Sunbelt, "yuppie" community of 10,000 Jews. Before 1989, it had a typical experience with Soviet resettlement when approximately 50 Soviet families arrived during the large wave of immigration of 1978-1981. Perhaps one half of these families later migrated to larger emigre communities. Those who remained have become moderately successful, maintaining varying degrees of involvement with the Jewish community.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

As part of the North American resettlement of 18,000 free cases at the end of 1989, the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) requested that Jacksonville accept 30 refugees in addition to the 20-30 family reunification

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cases previously anticipated. The projected cost of this entire resettlement effort, to be coordinated by the community's resettlement agency, Jewish Family & Community Services (JFCS), was nearly \$75,000.

At this time, Lutheran Social Services (LSS), a communal social service agency with a large non-Jewish refugee resettlement program, offered its assistance to the Soviet resettlement effort. (The director of the LSS resettlement program, a member of the Jewish community, was aware of the expected influx of Soviet emigres.) LSS was prepared to provide staff and obtain funding for the initial stages of the resettlement process, enabling the Jewish community to focus upon longer-term acculturation issues, especially those connected with the Jewish identity of the new immigrants.

Although initially skeptical of this offer, JFCS, in consultation with the federation, accepted LSS' proposal. LSS, with its access to government funding, became a subcontractor of JFCS and was able to collaborate in fashioning a resettlement program that provided for the needs of the new immigrants during the initial 3-month resettlement phase at little cost to the Jewish community. LSS used HIAS refugee funds, the U.S. Refugee Assistance Program, Food Stamps, and Medicaid—but not federal matching grant funds—to free JFCS, and the Jewish community, from the financial burden of furnishing and stocking apartments, providing cash allowances, and the like.

Both the federation and JFCS were cognizant of the implications of beginning a relationship with an agency outside the Jewish community. The possibilities for proselytization of the new arrivals were reviewed. It was felt that LSS's philosophy, method of operation, and personnel precluded such occurrences. The need to maintain the Jewish character of the resettlement program, both for the sake of its clients and for the community at large, was understood. The program was designed to ensure its innate Jewish character.

To further decrease the out-of-pocket costs of resettlement, LSS developed a rela-

tionship with the owners of a relatively low-cost apartment complex. Each refugee family was forgiven the first month's rent in exchange for signing a year's lease. A sufficient number of physicians and dentists were recruited by JFCS to provide free medical care to the refugees for at least one year.

A policy was instituted that would promote rapid employment and ensure that none of the new arrivals would abuse the system or come to rely upon welfare aid. All monetary benefits would be cut off if an individual refused more than two realistic job offers. The resettlement program consistently reflected successful vocational placements: within 3 months after the arrival of each group of immigrants, over 85% were employed.

Initially, LSS assessed that it was financially feasible for it to undertake the resettlement of 100 immigrants. Once the program was in place and the majority of Soviets had arrived, it became clear that an even greater number could be resettled within the constraints of government and federation funds. Jacksonville then accepted an additional 50 Soviets. Thus, it became the only community in the United States to resettle a larger number of refugees than requested by CJF and, in so doing, resettled the highest number per capita. Subsequently, in March 1990, after nearly all of the first group of refugees had arrived, the federation, in consultation with JFCS and LSS, agreed to accept an additional 150 cases, thereby increasing its original assessment tenfold.

As part of its commitment to this effort, the federation allocated funds to JFCS to hire a resettlement outreach worker whose responsibilities included mobilization of volunteers and integration of the immigrant families into the Jewish community. Additionally, funds were budgeted to supplement certain aspects of the LSS program that JFCS considered deficient—furniture allowances and incidental expenses—and for acculturation programming. With these additional funds, the new Jewish Americans could be resettled in a manner befitting the

Jewish community's responsibilities.

As the elements of the resettlement program were created, the federation organized a committee of emigres who had previously settled in Jacksonville. Its members were informed of the community's new resettlement procedure, understood the need for its implementation, and agreed to assist with its interpretation to the new arrivals. They indicated their availability to provide assistance for the new arrivals whenever it was needed; for example, for airport pickups and translation services.

Although LSS has assumed the major responsibility for the initial phase of the resettlement process, its role has remained clearly that of subcontractor to JFCS. Its staff members assigned to Soviet resettlement work out of the JFCS offices, and it has not sought exclusive publicity for its efforts. The resettlement program is clearly perceived in the community as one sponsored by the Jewish community for Soviet Jewish refugees as part of its worldwide Jewish obligations.

LSS has acquired no profit from the various funding sources and programs it has obtained on behalf of the immigrants. In fact, it has had to advance significant amounts of funds to cover resettlement expenses when U.S. State Department reimbursements via HIAS were delayed. LSS has also made an effort to understand the sensitivities of the refugees and of the Jewish community.

Why then has LSS agreed to serve as a JFCS subcontractor? By reaching out to the Jewish community, LSS has enhanced its image as a nonsectarian social agency serving all who are in need and providing one of the most comprehensive refugee resettlement programs in the region. LSS expects to continue this program in the future as the focus shifts from emergency resettlement of free cases to family reunification.

The LSS involvement has allowed JFCS and the Jewish community to allocate less time and money to the tasks of initial resettlement—apartment set-up, furniture delivery, transportation and escort to various

government and medical offices—and more to the creation of social and organizational relationships with the Jewish community for the new arrivals. Each immigrant family is assigned an American adoptee family that may undertake a host of tasks from home hospitality to driver education. Synagogues and Jewish organizations were asked to reach out to welcome the new Jewish Americans.

During the past year, a series of special orientation programs was conducted to explain Jewish holiday and life-cycle events, as well as the organization of the Jewish community. A Kabbalat Shabbat was held each Friday evening in one of the new Jewish American apartments. Each family was placed at an American home for the Passover seder. A Memorial Day/Shavuot picnic outing was organized at a state park, and Saturday evening Havdalah services/parties were hosted in American homes.

As a result of this programming, the new arrivals have become better acquainted with members of the Jewish community. In turn, the Jewish community is becoming familiar with the immigrants' needs and has mobilized its resources generously for them. It is estimated that over \$4,300 in goods and services—JCC and synagogue memberships, clothing, furniture, household items, health services, etc.—has been donated to each Soviet family. Job searches have been assisted by an informal network of contacts and the ensuing referrals. A special effort was undertaken to make federation staff and leadership accessible to the new arrivals so that they would come to feel comfortable with the organized Jewish community and continue to be part of it in the future.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The final outcome of this resettlement program has yet to be determined. Nonetheless, a number of results of this program are already clear.

- In contrast to the \$1,000 per refugee, considered by CJF to be the Jewish community's average resettlement cost

- throughout the nation, Jacksonville's program (one of the few in the United States not using federal matching grant funds) costs significantly less, particularly in terms of direct expenses during the initial resettlement phase. Many of the costs incurred by communities elsewhere were covered by state or federal programs or by volunteer efforts.
- The scope and quality of this resettlement program are in no way less comprehensive and may perhaps be more effective than others in resettling new immigrants during the first phase of their arrival. Since professionals and volunteers in the Jewish community have the opportunity to work more intensively on the creation of social and organizational relationships with the new arrivals, closer connections with the community have been created. Savings from the initial resettlement phase enhance other aspects of the program—funding for driver education courses, more Jewish programming, social outings, etc.
 - A collaborative relationship with another social service agency can allow Jewish refugee resettlement to remain under Jewish auspices while simultaneously enlisting additional resources and expertise for the effort. Furthermore, this experience indicates that Jewish agencies can directly gain access to an array of federal, state, and local funding to offset a significant portion of resettlement costs without the assistance or intervention of other agencies.
 - Large numbers of immigrants can be resettled by smaller communities. The impact upon the community is positive, with many educational and fund-raising benefits. The new arrivals come to appreciate the advantages of the personalized attention unavailable in the resettlement process of large metropolitan areas. Once the appropriate staff and volunteer structure is created, it becomes increasingly efficient to serve larger numbers. Jacksonville's decision to accept an additional 150 free cases (for a total of 300) was a logical outcome of the staff and volunteer structure developed months earlier.

CONCLUSION

American Jews live in what may be the most affluent Jewish community in history. We have immense resources at our disposal. There is very little that we cannot accomplish if we so desire. The immigration of Soviet Jews presents a sublime challenge that we have no choice but to meet. To do so, communities through the nation must creatively examine all possible alternatives to devise a successful resettlement process.

In My Opinion

Federation: An Agency in Need of Change

Does today's federation possess the ability to shape our community and begin honestly to confront new realities?

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It is no great revelation to acknowledge that the American Jewish community is currently facing severe problems. If not addressed in a direct and honest way, these problems will, at worst, foster growing intracommunal tension and an increasingly divisive atmosphere and, at best, for those of us in the federation world, simply produce fund-raising anomie. While the demand for campaign dollars has increased and the range of needs has expanded, there has been no concurrent increase in the communal campaign base. In fact, community fund raising, although seeming to produce more funds through the inclusion of "special campaigns," has actually generated fewer real dollars for use both locally and to support the ongoing work of the Jewish Agency. This single issue has the potential of creating animosity where harmony has existed, fostering inter-agency strife where cohesion and unity may have prevailed, and, as a result, setting into motion an ongoing downward spiral,

both in available funds *and* in community solidarity. It is the responsibility of the federation, the single most inclusive of community agencies, to deal with this shortfall in fund raising and to do so now!

THE ISSUES, ONE AT A TIME

Israel

During the 1970s and 1980s, our national campaign effort increased dramatically. Communities across the country experienced unprecedented economic growth, and the Jewish community had more philanthropic dollars available for its use. We developed a national network that attracted the influential and the financially secure, and we anticipated a national campaign that would produce \$1 billion! Israel, on the heels of Entebbe and Camp David, was still the major fund-raising draw, and the programs we offered took advantage of an upbeat mood. Both Israel and our local agencies reaped the benefits of this positive sense of Jewish identification.

Generally, fund raising was in a "coast" mode. We did what was necessary and knew that each year would be better than the year before. Our attitude was glib. We boasted of Israel's accomplishments and knew that most in the Jewish community would support us. But we were ignoring signs of change. We did not address problems as they arose, but continued to respond according to old patterns, based upon outmoded assumptions. Although our community and Israel were changing, we were not.

Initial concerns regarding the Likud election victory in 1977 soon abated with the signing of the Camp David Accord. Will any of us ever forget the smiling faces of