

SERVING NON-JEWS IN THE JEWISH FAMILY AGENCY

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Serving non-Jewish clients is now a fact of life in most Jewish family agencies, which cannot exist in their present form without funding from the government and the United Way. How to serve these clients without compromising the sectarian nature of the agency is of concern. Yet, if Jewish social services are to be true to their Judaic roots, they must be provided to all those in need.

For some years, Jewish family agencies in the United States have been struggling with the definition of the Jewish dimension in Jewish family service, particularly in clinical practice. Since the 1960s when Jewish family agencies began to receive direct government funding for their services, this concern has come into sharp focus because of the presence of substantial numbers of non-Jews as clients and the concurrent need to maintain the sectarian nature of the agency.

To place the issue of serving non-Jews in historical perspective, this article traces the history of Jewish social services in the United States, including the changing conceptual base of Jewish family service. It then examines several issues of concern about serving non-Jewish clients—differences in client background, staff development, and the presence of non-Jewish board members.

HISTORY OF JEWISH SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE UNITED STATES

Social services provided by Jews for Jews had their beginnings in September 1654 when 23 Jewish refugees arrived in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, later called New York. The governor, Peter Stuyvesant, did not welcome their arrival, but the Jews were finally permitted to live,

travel, and trade there with the following proviso: "Provided the poor among them shall not become a burden to the company or to the community, but be supported by their own nation" (Saveth, 1942). This became the model for Jewish social services—assistance and aid provided and funded by local Jewish groups to Jews in their own communities. These services were funded exclusively by contributions given by Jews for the express purpose of helping fellow Jews. No government funding was provided for this purpose.

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, various Jewish social service organizations were created, mainly different kinds of benevolent societies. Help was often targeted to special groups—the financially needy, young girls in trouble, ex-prisoners, and the like. Unlike Protestant and Catholic social services that were church connected, Jewish social service agencies developed apart from the synagogue. However, they were not completely secular. Jews took care of their own both for religious motives and to meet community needs.

The large-scale Jewish immigration in the late 1800s and the first two decades of the twentieth century provided a great impetus to the development of these Jewish organizations. The benevolent societies became professionalized, finally emerging into the Jewish family agencies of today.

Just as the federation system of agencies was beginning to emerge in Jewish com-

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munity after community, so were nonsectarian agencies beginning to join together under the United Way umbrella. With the growth of United Ways in the 1950s, there evolved the expectation that a social agency receiving community funds would serve the entire community. The expectation changed gradually, often beginning with a written (or even unwritten) understanding that, for example, a Catholic client coming to a Jewish or Protestant family agency would be referred to the agency of his or her own religion unless specifically requested otherwise, and so it worked all around. This arrangement gradually eroded so that today it is not uncommon for Jewish family agencies to receive referrals from all ethnic, racial, and religious groups and to refer out only if the need is for a service they do not provide or where another agency would be more appropriate, nor would stated policies permit otherwise.

Until the development of governmental social services in the 1930s, such as Social Security, welfare programs, and vocational rehabilitation, the focus of Jewish family agencies was on providing concrete services. These governmental aid programs freed the agencies to focus on counseling services and the individual's personal adjustment.

Just as the focus of services in the Jewish family agencies changed over time, so did their conceptual base. In 1917, the model of assessment as described by Mary Richmond was "an attempt to arrive at an exact a definition as possible of the social situation and personality of a human being in some social need in relation to other human beings and in relation also to the social institutions of his community" (Richmond, 1917). In the 1920s and 1930s, the profession moved from a situational approach to an emphasis on personality assessment and change. Psychoanalytic theory was very popular, and Jewish family agencies were committed to the general analytic view. There were even lengthy dialogues and conflicts about techniques among the contending theoretical positions; for example, among the Freudian, Rankian, and

Sullivanian proponents of somewhat differing analytic outlooks. The analytic approach continued to be extremely influential in social work practice in both nonsectarian and Jewish family agencies into the 1960s.

It is ironic that this emphasis on the individual occurred at a time when Jewish agencies should have been more, rather than less, conscious of the impact of the environment on the individual. Yet, the Holocaust and the subsequent influx of refugees who were under the care of the Jewish family agencies did not cause a deviation from the emphasis on helping the individual in restructuring personality. In retrospect, it seems that there would have been a heightening of the Jewish dimension in clinical practice because of these events, but that was not the case. The agencies had for so long been immersed in a particular ideological commitment—individual personality theory—that they found it difficult to focus on the special and different issues arising from the tragedy in Europe.

It can be suggested that this emphasis on the individual produced a climate in which it was possible for the Jewish family agency to begin to serve non-Jews in a very open way. In this climate, ethnic and religious issues, if not completely ignored, tended to remain relatively unexplored. Family therapy and ethnotherapy were unheard-of concepts. The creation of United Ways and the growing expectation that Jewish agencies receiving community funds should serve all clients, regardless of religion, further strengthened that climate.

The provision of direct government funding for specific agency services in the 1960s dramatically altered the nature of funding of sectarian agencies. In 1959, only 10 of 74 Jewish family agencies surveyed were receiving public funding, and this tended to be a very small amount, an average of less than 5% of their total budgets (Selig, 1959). There are no specific data on how many Jewish agencies were serving non-Jewish clients in 1959, but it is likely that no more than those ten agen-

cies surveyed above were doing so. Thirty years later, a survey conducted by the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies in 1989 found a dramatic change—72 of 75 Jewish agencies reported that they were serving non-Jewish clients in some part of their programs (AJFCA, 1989).

This dramatic change was of concern to many Jewish communal lay and professional leaders. Speakers at Jewish communal service conferences repeatedly raised concerns about the long-range impact of serving non-Jewish clients, i.e., that the federation/Jewish family agency relationship might be affected negatively, that government priorities might not always coincide with Jewish priorities, and most important, that the intrinsic Jewish nature of the agency would be diluted (Jacobson, 1960; Selig, 1959; Zeff & Greenberg, 1965).

These concerns were expressed in local Jewish communities as well in the 1960s. When the Pittsburgh Jewish Family and Children's Service (JFCS) entered into a contractual relationship with a government program to provide services to a low-income high-rise apartment building for the elderly that had very few Jewish tenants, there were grave doubts expressed by board members. They were concerned that providing this service would undercut the agency's Jewish mission since it was to be used by a majority of non-Jews.

Interestingly, in the literature and in local debates, the concerns raised centered around whether Jews would continue to be served adequately and appropriately once non-Jews became agency clients. There seemed to be an implicit confidence that Jewish agencies would do a very good job serving non-Jews. Nowhere were doubts raised about the ability of the Jewish agencies to serve non-Jews effectively. Nowhere was there expressed the need for staff development to help the social workers serve clients of different backgrounds. This lack of concern is paradoxical in view of the considerable emphasis on the need for

special understanding of the Jewish individual in the Jewish family.

For in the 1970s, at the same time as more and more government funding was becoming available to Jewish family agencies, there was a growing awareness of the importance of Jewish identity in their work with their Jewish clients. A major issue of concern was the definition and use of the Jewish dimension in clinical practice. Agencies engaged in self-examination and embarked on staff training programs through seminars, lectures, and study groups on such Jewish issues as the meaning of rituals in Jewish family life and development of Jewish identity and self-esteem. Many argued that the Jewish family agency should be able to offer a specific therapeutic understanding to the Jewish client. In 1974 Fred Berl wrote of the importance of "relating to the Jewish content as part of a complex dynamic in living" (Berl, 1974). Paradoxically, this new emphasis was occurring at the very same time as agencies were seeing more and more non-Jewish clients.

CURRENT CONCERNS ABOUT SERVING NON-JEWISH CLIENTS

Recently, six agencies—both large and small and in different parts of the country—were surveyed about issues relating to serving non-Jewish clients. The executive directors of these agencies shared a number of common concerns.

In the area of staff development, all the agencies contacted reported that they paid special attention to sensitizing staff to Jewish issues. However, no agency currently offered any such staff training programs on understanding non-Jewish clients. This is in contrast to the late 1970s when many agencies were asked by the government to resettle Vietnamese refugees. At that time, staff training was provided by many agencies to sensitize their staff to the cultural and ethnic background of the Vietnamese.

The fact that no agencies today are providing such staff training suggests that

most non-Jewish clients, particularly for counseling services, come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds to those of their Jewish clients. The greatest difference in client backgrounds seems to be found in those agencies that sponsor large government-funded programs providing services for problems that do not affect large numbers of Jews, such as homelessness. There is a consensus among the agency directors that having the income from these programs enables the agency not only to respond to a significant local problem, even one that does not affect many Jews, but also to maintain its level of service in a time of shrinking federation allocations.

Another example of different client backgrounds occurred several years ago when the child guidance clinic of the Pittsburgh JFCS began receiving more and more referrals of black single mothers and their children. Those clients were not accustomed to a routine of regularly scheduled appointments, and the agency began to experience a large number of "no shows," especially at first appointments. It then became necessary to devise different procedures for appointments than had been used for the mainly middle-class Jewish clients.

All the Jewish agency directors are worried about the so-called danger ratio, the point at which the presence of large numbers of non-Jewish clients will cause the federation and Jewish community to feel that the agency is no longer serving their interests. The consensus seems to be that the danger point is reached when the ratio approaches 1 to 1. The danger ratio holds true even for those agencies in which the federation contribution is less than 20 or 25% of the total budget. In this context, some of the agency directors felt that the Jewish community at large really has no sense of how small a role is played by the federation allocation in the financing of their agencies. Many members of the Jewish community believe that the federation provides most, if not all, of the support for the agency, whereas in fact, that sup-

port is very often a relatively small proportion of the budget.

Some agencies have set up programs by which some of the federation allocation is set aside for use for Jewish clients only. Generally this seems to be for the purpose of financial aid and for Jewish family life education.

One agency that runs a large program for non-Jewish clients has non-Jewish board members, and there are probably other such agencies as well. How this board composition affects the sectarian nature of those agencies warrants further study. It seems quite unlikely that non-Jewish board members would have the spiritual ties to the Jewish community that distinguish many Jewish family agency board members today.

A large number of agencies are using non-Jewish staff in all their programs and in all capacities, with the possible exception of Jewish family life education. In-service training is provided to sensitize and inform these staff members about Jewish issues. How much emphasis is placed on sensitizing both Jewish and non-Jewish staff to such issues is greatly influenced by the inclination and commitment of agency leadership.

Certain agencies in the West and Southwest indicated a widespread community expectation that their agency should serve non-Jews. One director noted an unexpected benefit of its service to non-Jewish clients. As the agency gained a good reputation in the non-Jewish community, it gained in respect and was used more by the Jewish community. Serving non-Jews certainly enhances the perception in the non-Jewish community of the Jews as a caring people.

It is clear that serving non-Jews is now a fact of life in Jewish family agencies. Today, these agencies cannot exist in their present form, offering multiple services to the Jewish community, without funding from the government and United Way. The trend of serving non-Jewish clients will almost certainly continue into the

foreseeable future. We must monitor it with care if we are to counter effectively the dangers to the sectarian mission of the agencies. In the end, however, it should be kept in mind that Jewish social services, to be true to its own Judaic roots, must always seek to provide help and serve all those in need.

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