

THE APPLICATION OF VOCATIONAL SERVICES TO SUPPLEMENTARY ASSISTANCE CASES

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Editor's Note: This article appeared in the predecessor to this Journal in the Spring, 1953 issue (vol. 29, no. 3). Although its figures are outdated—earnings of \$30 a week are cited as the average—its description of vocational services, the role of the first job placement, and the need for a close working relationship with casework services is very timely. As with the article by Fred Berl, this piece illustrates the rich heritage of NYANA.

This paper deals primarily with employed immigrants whose earnings are being supplemented. Newly arrived placeable immigrants earn \$30–\$35 a week on the average on their first jobs. In some southern communities wage levels drop below \$30 a week. In one large northwestern city the minimum rate for unskilled labor is \$40 with the median wage over \$50 a week. This is the value employers place upon the work capacities of most placeable immigrants in the first months of their resettlement in the United States.

Upon arrival in the United States, the immediate earning capacity of most immigrants is at prevailing pay levels for unskilled employment—that is what their productive abilities are valued at in that early period. Increased earnings come gradually, usually after a period of acculturation, which differs substantially in each case, depending upon age, health, education, cultural and religious orientation, intelligence, and previous work history among other things. Advancement in earning capacity is found to be directly related to the rate at which immigrants learn English, become oriented to the folkways of American industry, and adjust to their first jobs. A small proportion of immigrants, i.e., barbers, engineers, auto-mechanics, possess enough skill to make immediate placement possible in their particular field at a self-supporting level.

ROLE OF FIRST JOB PLACEMENTS

First job placements hold a key role in the acculturation process and throw light upon why some immigrants do not reach full support as quickly as others. It may be worthwhile, therefore, to spend a few minutes on the role of first job placements in the vocational adjustment of immigrants. This approach to first placements is shared more or less by most vocational agencies. Before discussing the role of first job placement, however, the vocational characteristics of the immigrant group should be delineated.

The typical new arrival comes to our shores without a knowledge of language, American cultural patterns, business or industry practices, or working conditions. He has not had work experience for many years, resulting in deterioration of former skills. Idleness has warped work habits. He has become physically and psychologically "soft" to sustain an eight-hour work day. He has been dependent for his sustenance upon others and not from use of his own productive work capacities. Even when he has skills that may be translatable or transplantable, he must first learn the language and take qualifying examinations or refresher training either in school or on-the-job before he is able to meet American job standards. In short, in the early stages most immigrants are unprepared to step into jobs that are in line with their real potentialities. For the time being their vocational status is limited to unskilled employment levels. Yet, despite this, immigrants expect to earn enough to meet their budgetary needs.

This paper was presented at the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1952.

Vocational agency experience shows that career planning has limited value for newly arrived immigrants. Vocational training that is related to previous experience and schooling may sometimes prove feasible. Normally, however, new immigrants do not know until much later what kind of work they are interested in and would like to be trained in. When they do come forward with vocational plans the counselor finds they are unrealistic—at least for the present. And, indeed, how can they be anything else except unrealistic—when knowledge of American industry and jobs is missing.

Vocational agencies have found that an early work experience is the vital spark that lights the way to vocational adjustment. The focus you will note is upon *work* rather than *job*. Work experience is more valuable to the immigrant, the agency, and employers when it is directly in line with interest and aptitude. Job placement standards, in other words, are as meaningful in working with immigrants as with other applicants. However, in the case of immigrants the initial job must be looked at more consciously as a tool or a stepping stone. The immigrant must be prepared for this experience. In the first place, early work experience on first jobs breaks through dependency patterns of long years and puts the immigrant within reach of self-support. The earlier the immigrant can be helped to begin this struggle for independence in his new environment, the greater the chances for victory. Delay in effecting the first job placement continues old dependency patterns and reinforces anxieties and fears toward getting started.

In the second place, early job placement makes the immigrant a productive member of society, much like other members of his community. His long idleness is ended. The work experience of the first job is the bridge between the old and new environments—a more effective bridge incidentally than can be built initially with the use of vocational counseling. He is exposed to American cultural patterns, introduced into the work-a-day world, and through the need for communica-

tion with his fellow workers stimulated to learn English—which he frequently does at a remarkable rate. In short, he has entered the melting pot and it has begun to simmer.

By this approach to first job placement of immigrants, the vocational agency helps immigrants get started quickly and also holds relief expenditures for full maintenance down to a minimum. The effect upon vocational adjustment is enlightening. Many immigrants make their way from their first job to other better paying jobs on their own. Many others move up the job and earning ladder in the firm where they were hired. A substantial group lose their first job within a month, generally for reasons beyond their control. Some of these, however, gain enough from their first job to find a second job on their own. A relatively small group are found to have been unable to use a first job constructively, and in fact, in some cases the job may have been harmful to adjustment. Still, even in these problem cases early identification allows the agency to bring to bear special services.

In the early period of initial work experience many families may be expected to require supplementation of their earnings—usually for a short time. Some families, however, because of their size, are unable to become fully self-supporting for some time, if at all, unless another person in the family is available to supplement earnings on a full or part-time job. Where older, physically handicapped, or emotionally disturbed people are concerned, they may be at the top of their earning capacity. The latter type of case will require long-term or permanent supplementation of job earnings.

VOCATIONAL SERVICES

The vocational service agency is in a position to play a vital role in helping long- and short-term supplementary assistance families reach the goal of full self-maintenance. Effective programs have been implemented in a number of communities. In others, vocational programs and services are being

extended to deal with this group. An analysis of these programs points up the methods being used to bring many supplementary relief cases up to full self-support. At the same time it should be emphasized that even with the most effective vocational service programs some families will not become fully self-supporting.

First: An after-placement service provides job and vocational counseling on a continuing basis to help immigrants adjust on the job or plan for a longer range vocational adjustment. Vocational agencies advise applicants at the time of placement that they may return for help by requesting evening appointments. As part of such a service, employers are called for progress reports. Salary levels are discussed with an eye to advancing earnings.

Vocational agencies consider supplementation as much a challenge as a full maintenance case—particularly because loss of jobs is frequent and also because so many newcomers are underemployed during the early period. Responsibility is assumed for periodic evaluation of progress, skills, and vocational readiness to improve earnings. Family agency staffs provide casework support in motivating clients toward active use of after-placement services. They should particularly make use of counselors in seeking re-evaluation of skills and job replacement. At the same time, casework staff should recognize that a reasonable period must be allowed for maturation of earning capacity. Vocational adjustment cannot be pushed any faster than the immigrant's readiness to move to a next step.

Second: Job replacement. Vocational agencies follow the practice of referring immigrants receiving supplementation to better paying jobs. In some communities the agency discusses referral to better paying jobs with current employers first. In other communities, discussion is not undertaken. Generally, it seems to be advisable to discuss taking an immigrant off a job with employers when the agency is able to offer a replacement. However, it is probably best to make no hard and

fast rule about calling employers and it should be done on an individual basis—with the object of maintaining good employer relations.

Third: English is a job tool. In most occupations, English is essential to performance of the job. In some occupations, immigrants cannot qualify until they have learned to read, write, and speak on a satisfactory level. Progress on the job and change to better paying jobs are directly related to learning English. Therefore, facilities for English tutoring and classes should prove useful in improving the earning capacity of immigrants on supplementary assistance. In one community, special small English classes of newcomers have been established with a volunteer or paid tutor. The classes are held usually in the home of one of the members in the class. Instruction is geared to specific vocabulary needs in relation to employment. As a result of this program, progress in learning English has been speeded up as an effective means for improving the earning capacity of newcomers who receive supplementation.

Fourth: Vocational training. Advancement of earnings may come through evening training of skills that will enhance the immigrant's worth on his present job or for other jobs further up the ladder in the same firm. Vocational training is also used to build skills for a new or old occupation. On-the-job training programs provide opportunities for learning a specific job under the guidance of employers while earnings are being supplemented. These types of training programs offer an ideal opportunity that is much desired by vocational agencies because training and job are packaged. We know that at the completion of training the immigrant graduates to a job where the final salary usually makes the individual totally independent.

Fifth: Coordination of vocational and casework services. Planning by vocational and casework staffs in supplementation cases calls for fully coordinated activities. The family agency should share with vocational services information on budget, family com-

position, psychological problems, medical reports, and so forth. Case conferences should explore problems and decide on goals with respect to the family as a whole. The vocational agency should be prepared to give special attention and service in working with these types of cases. Joint plans of action should be developed in which responsibilities of both professional disciplines are defined case by case in a fluid relationship. Sometimes the client should be motivated to ask for a raise. At other times the counselor should call the employer, with the consent of the client, to evaluate progress and discuss wages. In some instances the client may be ensconced comfortably in his low-paying job, and it takes the effort of both workers to help him move on to something better. In other instances, the agencies may agree that a newcomer is at the top of his earning capacity with little likelihood of becoming fully self-supporting in the foreseeable future. In such a situation the family agency takes over responsibility for the case while the vocational agency discontinues service until change in the individual or the labor market calls for renewed efforts toward vocational adjustment.

Sixth: Job promotion. With work experience under their belts, immigrants become able to meet employer specifications for better paying jobs. In a labor market such as today's where unemployment has all but disappeared in many communities, agencies may have on hand some better paying jobs. Where a community has a considerable number of unemployed, better paying jobs will be scarce. However, through the use of job promotion techniques, a supply of better paying jobs can be stimulated. Job finding campaigns can also be undertaken on an individualized basis for particular supplementation cases. Part-time job campaigns for secondary wage earners may help bring some families up to full self-support. The vocational agency is in a key position because of its knowledge of the labor market to organize and implement job finding campaigns to move immigrants into better paying jobs.

LONG-TERM SUPPLEMENTATION

Up to this point in the paper, we have not differentiated between short- and long-term supplementation cases. The reason is that supplementation of earnings is a generic phase in work adjustment through which pass a large proportion of immigrants. The discussion of vocational services thus far has centered upon broad problems and needs of the group as a whole. Now, however, we should focus attention upon the long-term supplementation cases and the contribution vocational services can make to help them reach full self-support.

To begin with, only a small number of supplementation cases fail to become fully self-maintaining, within six months from the time of first job placement, under the impetus of a vocational service program similar to the one outlined previously. Roughly speaking, when immigrant families do not reach full economic independence within this period, it is safe to classify them as long-term supplementation cases. However, it is frequently possible to spot such cases in the beginning of work with them. For example, the family with four or more members; the family with an unskilled, physically handicapped wage earner; the older aged couple; the single man with less than eight hours' work tolerance, are but a few types of situations. Early vocational diagnosis is of major importance and, as a matter of fact, determines whether vocational services are introduced early enough to shorten the period of supplementation—with ultimate savings in costs to the agency and the community.

Although a large proportion of cases requiring long-term supplementation of earnings can be identified quickly, some are not discovered until reality testing of a job experience brings out difficulties in work adjustment. The vocational service agency is equipped to evaluate vocational potentialities at any point along the line and suggest means and ways for dealing with such situations. A vocational service program for long-term supplementation cases includes the following types of activities.

Long-term supplementation cases should be identified as soon as possible either by casework or vocational services. Vocational re-evaluation and planning should begin at the earliest moment. Casework and vocational service staffs should plan jointly in relation to the family unit as a whole. Casework staff is oriented always toward the family unit while vocational service, normally, is not. This means, therefore, a shift in focus particularly for vocational services to provide for coordinated vocational planning for several members of a family toward the goal of full self-support. For example, if there are two wage earners in the family, placement of both or placement of one and training of the other may enable the family to become fully self-supporting. Full-time employment of one member and part-time employment of the other member are sometimes feasible.

The medical work-up and evaluation of physical capacities have much to contribute in determining top earning capacity. Based upon the medical work-up, the counselor may find that medical or surgical treatment may restore or strengthen physical functions and thereby increase productive capacity. It may also point to the need for a period of work hardening in a workshop or on a special type of job.

Vocational training to develop skills should be made more available to these types of cases. Generally speaking, people who have skills possess a greater earning capacity. Consequently, initiation of training should

be undertaken as a calculated risk early in the adjustment period. Where residual skills from former occupations remain these should be built upon. Arrested tuberculosis or cardiac cases with less than eight-hour work tolerance should be examined carefully to determine whether they are trainable. Training in such cases uses time constructively in not only developing skills but in helping increase work tolerance while they are learning.

Vocational services should be evaluating supplementation cases continuously. Case conferences should be arranged by both casework and vocational service staffs to plan next steps. If next steps are not feasible, which means supplementation of earnings must continue in the foreseeable future—the case is at the end of the economic road. However, in cases where earning capacity could be improved through special rehabilitation services then it would be advisable to take such steps as soon as possible. Immigrants whose earnings require long-term supplementation are often the same cases that were originally hard-to-place and therefore have received considerable medical, psychiatric casework, and vocational services. Some of these cases may turn out to be of the kind that cannot reach full self-support given current labor market conditions. However, we cannot know this until we have bent every effort to move them toward economic independence. Only then have we reason to feel we have done our job.