

WELCOMING THE STRANGER IN A NEW YORK WAY:

The Partnership between NYANA and the UJA-Federation of New York

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The federation-agency relationship, which is often one of creative tension, is more complex in the case of NYANA and the UJA-Federation of New York because NYANA was set up as a national agency. In the late 1980s, the two organizations agreed to an integrated model of resettlement that has enabled not only the efficient provision of services but also facilitated community building among the newcomers.

The relationship between local federations and their affiliated agencies is always a Jewish communal service “issue.” True, we have a shared mission of serving the Jewish community—and clearly we need one another in order to realize that mission. The federations contribute by raising and allocating funds, doing communal planning, and building consensus. The agencies, in turn, also plan, raise funds, and allocate them among their programs, but they have a more immediate focus: service delivery. The people who come to their doors each day are not primarily lay leaders or agency professionals. They are individuals in need of help and they are in need of it right then and right there. Faced with unending needs calling for response, the agencies often view federations as engaging in overly time consuming, not always relevant meetings, process, and planning—rather than working in the real world. These differing contexts can create tension, impatience, problems!

UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK AND NYANA: EARLY TIMES

For NYANA and UJA-Federation, the situation has been even more complex as NYANA was set up as a *national* agency capable of quickly resettling large numbers of immi-

grants and refugees—Displaced Persons from Eastern Europe in 1949—and it worked! Over the past fifty years, NYANA has resettled nearly half of the hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants and refugees arriving in the States—certainly a great deal more than New York’s “fair share.”

As a national agency, NYANA was funded by National UJA, alongside the Joint Distribution Committee and United Israel Appeal/Jewish Agency for Israel. Because UJA-Federation of New York provided financial support to NYANA as a constituent of the national funding stream, the relationship was different from that of federation with its local affiliated agencies. In addition, during the large wave of Soviet emigration in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the lay and professional leadership of the two organizations were often at loggerheads, and the service system established at that time reflected that relationship. There were actually two tracks of resettlement, with refugees receiving assistance from NYANA during their first year after arrival and then from the UJA-Federation network thereafter. This was an artificial division, of course, as newcomers attended federation-sponsored day camp, counseling, and other programs even while still at NYANA.

GOALS FOR THE NEXT WAVE

The second wave of post-World War II Soviet refugee migration coincided with a reassessment by NYANA and UJA-Federation of New York of the existing service system. New leadership at both organizations agreed to a new, integrated model of resettlement wherein NYANA and the UJA-Federation network of agencies would cooperate from day one of the refugee's arrival. Initial resettlement services supported by federal funds would be administered by NYANA, which would subcontract to the network agencies for certain services. UJA-Federation's philanthropic funds would support (1) network services that complemented NYANA's initial resettlement and (2) network services such as employment counseling and training that would be offered to individuals no longer eligible for those same services at NYANA.

At this time, both NYANA and UJA-Federation also decided to involve the emigre community itself in the planning and implementation of programs, as well as in fund raising for resettlement. In 1988, a Russian Division was founded at UJA-Federation, and NYANA brought on several Russian-born board members. Both organizations made a concerted effort to develop a professional staff that was both bilingual and bicultural, and the staffs, in turn, were able to effect change in the service system.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW SERVICE SYSTEM FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS

To institutionalize their proposed cooperation NYANA and UJA-Federation signed a Matching Grant Agreement that spelled out a planning, allocations, and service delivery model for initial resettlement in New York and created joint vehicles for carrying out their work. On the lay level, this was manifested in the creation of these new committees:

- Ten leaders (five from each organization) formed a Matching Grant Committee that

allocated funds for initial resettlement to UJA-Federation network agencies. The committee was jointly staffed by UJA-Federation and NYANA professionals.

- An Ad Hoc Refugee Policy Group comprised of UJA-Federation officers and Immigrant-Refugee Committee chairs was established to respond quickly to new needs and developments. NYANA's President and Executive Vice President were also part of this group.
- Planning and allocation decisions of the UJA-Federation Immigrant and Refugee Committee were informed by the participation of NYANA's President and Executive Vice President.
- When the Refugee Act was re-authorized in 1992, the Public Policy/Government Relations Committees of both organizations set up a joint committee to decide on policy and strategy. Subsequent public policy matters were addressed through similar collaboration.
- UJA-Federation participated in NYANA's strategic planning efforts, and NYANA was involved in UJA-Federation's Domestic Resettlement Planning Committee.

This array of lay committees resulted in cohesive, thoughtful policy for the New York Jewish community. It allowed us to be more effective in national Jewish communal activities, and it made us better at government advocacy. It meant that when a national collective responsibility system was proposed for funding resettlement, UJA-Federation and NYANA were able to work efficiently with the national agencies to establish the NYANA Oversight Committee.

The professional leadership also created several vehicles to assure cooperation, including the following:

- UJA-Federation and NYANA professionals have co-staffed lay committees and coordinated proposal submissions to them.
- The UJA-Federation Agency Professional Task Force on Immigrants and Refugees is

the community's primary vehicle for coordination of resettlement services. It connects agency professionals' concerns to lay leadership and defines new issues for communal attention. It functions through regional committees and those formed around special issues or populations (i.e., emigre adolescents or older adult emigres). Although it is staffed by UJA-Federation, NYANA participates in all committees and all special projects undertaken by the Task Force.

- The Advisory Committee for Emigres (ACE), which involves emigres as volunteer mentors to newcomers, is a joint program of NYANA and UJA-Federation.

CONCLUSION

The two organizations, after ten years of working together, have indeed developed a close working relationship that has manifested itself not only in the "federation" world of meetings and reports but also in the "real" world of people with needs that characterizes agency life. Our collaboration made it possible to meet—in record time—the service needs of Syrian Jews who arrived from 1992 to 1994 with tourist visas. Together with our national and international partners, our lay leadership set policies and our professionals created the service system to provide immediate help to this newcomer population. Following the problems created by welfare reform in 1996, NYANA and the UJA-Federation network implemented a citizenship initiative that quickly helped elderly and disabled emigres throughout our community move forward on the path to U.S. citizenship.

Our collaboration also facilitated new relationships between NYANA and individual UJA-Federation agencies. NYANA's "campus" of services has included on-site assistance from F.E.G.S., the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, Met Coun-

cil, and the Board of Jewish Education. It resulted in such new initiatives as joint funding of graduate school scholarships for emigres en route to becoming MSW social workers at our agencies. It led to innovative approaches to youth problems such as the *Immigranti* project—a musical that brought American-born and emigre teens together in a creative experience that promoted mutual understanding and helped us put together an electronic bulletin board for accessing NYANA information.

The New York Jewish community is a new community because of the New Americans who have made this their home over the last two and half decades. As we look to the future, our task has grown to include not only providing services but also facilitating community building and integration. As we move to ensure that we become one community enriched and enhanced by our newest members, we look forward to meeting that challenge together with NYANA and our network of agencies. The Russian Division of UJA-Federation and the volunteers of the NYANA-UJA-Federation ACE program will give us the ability to achieve these important goals.

Our relationship with NYANA is not perfect. Certainly, NYANA believes we could do with fewer committees and reports, not to mention less process. We understand that as a consensus-building federation, we may seem slow at times in responding to the needs lying at an agency's doorstep. At the same time, in reviewing our work over the past decade, we are convinced that the relationship of trust and cooperation between our two entities has been the foundation of an exceptional communal effort that has made a real difference in the lives of Jewish immigrants and refugees in our community. Together, we have truly welcomed the stranger—hundreds of thousands of them, actually—and in so doing, we too have become less alien.