

POLICY AND POLITICS: The Role of a Local Agency In Shaping National Public Policy

SANDRA LIEF GARRETT

Associate Executive Vice President for Planning and Development, NYANA, New York

and

ELLEN WITMAN

President of Witman Associates and NYANA Consultant, Washington, D.C.

Since 1985, NYANA has played an active role in influencing national policy regarding resettlement and immigration issues. Working in coalition with similar agencies, NYANA has deployed its staff, lay leaders, and clients to influence public policy by testifying before Congress, suggesting new approaches to public policymakers, and inviting government leaders to see its programs in operation. In the future, NYANA will broaden its involvement to public policy agendas at the state and local level and will address a wider range of social issues.

For the past thirteen years, NYANA has played an active and energetic role in influencing national public policy affecting refugee resettlement and immigrant services. Although there were specific instances in earlier years when NYANA's Board of Directors received policy briefings and communicated its views to policymakers, it did so primarily through its national Jewish agency partners. It was these same national organizations—the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF), the American Jewish Committee (AJC), and HIAS—that, in 1985, urged NYANA to become more active in the public policy arena. NYANA's board concurred that the agency should join with these organizations in speaking out on a broad range of public policy issues affecting immigrants generally and refugees in particular. Over the years, NYANA has made public policy activities a priority, and today it is recognized as a valuable ally by Jewish, secular, and other sectarian organizations.

This article examines the approach NYANA, a local service agency, has taken to mobilize its Board of Directors, deploy its staff, and engage its clients in order to influence national public policy. It looks at the benefits and outcomes that can be attributed

to this effort and evaluates whether NYANA's participation has made a difference. Finally, it explores the challenges NYANA can expect as the agency prepares for the next century. By reviewing the development of NYANA's public policy activities, the intent is not only to provide an historical record but, more importantly, to recount the experience in a way that encourages other local service organizations to play a role in shaping public policy.

WHY SHOULD A LOCAL AGENCY FOCUS ON ISSUES OF NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY?

American public policy in the field of refugee and immigration affairs is influenced by myriad events, some planned and thoughtful, others sudden and unanticipated. A well-designed, integrated set of policies and programs must be in place to enable the United States to offer refuge and opportunity to those seeking freedom from oppression and a better life for themselves and their families. On the other hand, the capacity to respond quickly to crises around the world, from the outbreak of civil war to the sudden opening of previously closed borders, is also an essential part of a national refugee policy.

In the development of both long-term program design and emergency responsiveness it is critical that local service providers have a voice because the hands-on work of assisting real, struggling human beings does not take place in the halls of Congress, the White House, or the State Capitol. It takes place in communities and in agencies like NYANA that provide the vital casework, training, and acculturation that will make the difference between the new Americans' success and failure in the United States. In program design, the input of local service providers is the essential component that tells policymakers how theory will translate into practice. In addition, it is the capacity of local agencies to absorb sudden influxes of new arrivals that is the linchpin of any emergency rescue strategy. Without such input, policy, even that developed out of the best humanitarian instincts, will not meet its goals.

The added rationale for NYANA, a New York City refugee resettlement and immigrant services agency, to engage actively in influencing national public policy was tied to its unique qualifications as the only agency under Jewish auspices devoted solely to providing services for refugees—persons who have fled religious, racial or political persecution—and for immigrants, newcomers who enter the United States sponsored by their families or filling labor shortages. In 1985, NYANA was also the largest refugee services agency of any kind in New York State, and since the early 1990s, with the dramatic rise in the flow of Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union (FSU), NYANA has the distinction of being the largest local refugee agency in the United States. In addition, although NYANA is an organization under Jewish auspices and the majority of its clients are Jews, the agency has assisted nearly 500,000 newcomers including refugees and immigrants of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds from more than 150 countries around the world.

This distinct and distinguished history led national Jewish community leadership to believe that NYANA could contribute signifi-

cantly to the national policy debate on the value of immigrants in America and the importance of the United States maintaining a generous and humane refugee admissions and resettlement policy. NYANA was encouraged to play a leadership role by providing key policymakers with specific examples of the positive results of federally funded resettlement programs and by developing analyses of proposed policies and the impact they would have on the agency's clients and services. While the national organizations certainly could articulate the community's positions and the Jewish texts and traditions that informed them, NYANA could provide the direct, hands-on experience to illustrate the consequence of public policy "beyond the Beltway." In the mid-1980s NYANA documented through case examples the positive contributions of immigrants and refugees, thus helping counteract restrictionist views that were re-emerging as Congress considered reducing refugee admissions levels and implementing more restrictive immigration policies in response to concerns about illegal immigration (see Rubin's article in this issue).

NYANA's Board of Directors agreed that the agency was uniquely situated to help shape positive public policy affecting refugees and immigrants and, therefore, should devote the resources necessary to do so. An operating principle of this effort has been to work in coalition and partnership with an extensive network of organizations at the national, state, and local levels, within the Jewish community and beyond, to ensure that the voice of newcomers is heard in Washington and around the country. These seminal decisions, made more than a decade ago, have allowed NYANA to play a key role in policy development by providing information and advice to policymakers as they crafted legislation, regulations, and program policy guidance. As a result of these efforts, NYANA has become a nationally known, highly regarded agency whose opinions are often solicited by legislators and executive agency policy makers.

HOW CAN A LOCAL SERVICE AGENCY PLAY A MEANINGFUL ROLE?

NYANA is particularly well situated among local agencies to offer leadership in the public policy arena. Because of its size, its long history of resettlement, and the innovative and successful programs that have been developed over the years, NYANA commands respect among its colleagues and policymakers in the city, state, and federal governments. Most of NYANA's executive staff have been with the agency for many years and have developed an expertise that is of great value to policymakers. NYANA's willingness to invest human and financial resources in public policy activities continues to make an important difference in the effectiveness of the Jewish community's activities, as well as in the broader coalitions participating in the debates on immigration and refugee policy.

Among the avenues NYANA has used to influence program design and policy developments are the following:

- commenting on the benefits and shortcomings of current programs as they come up for renewal or change
- suggesting new approaches or alterations in program design that a policymaker can introduce and champion
- working in coalitions of similar agencies (Jewish organizations, other refugee and immigration agencies, agencies providing similar services such as vocational education or literacy training) advocating for or against a particular policy
- traveling to Washington, DC to offer testimony at public hearings or to meet with relevant Members of Congress and the federal agencies
- inviting national and state policymakers to the agency to actually see the programs in operation and talk to the clients they affect
- using the media and other means of educating the public to influence public opinion on important issues

Missions to Washington, DC by

NYANA's lay leadership are another important component of the public policy program. The willingness of volunteers to give up a day or two of their time to meet with policymakers demonstrates a commitment to the issues that is hard for elected officials to ignore, especially when the lay leaders are constituents and prominent community leaders. Conversely, the excitement generated by these trips and the feedback participants receive, positive or negative, in response to their arguments make them eager to continue advocacy efforts when they return home.

On one occasion in 1995, members of NYANA's Board attended a Senate hearing on the "Immigration Control and Financial Responsibility Act of 1995" sponsored by former Senator Alan Simpson (R-WY) who was then chairman of the Senate Immigration Subcommittee. They were stunned as they heard Senator Simpson refer to the program for refugees from the FSU as "a perversion of the refugee program" because he felt Soviet Jews were not "real refugees" since there was no longer state-sponsored anti-Semitism or persecution. Unable to respond to the chairman's comments in the hearing room, the Board members returned to NYANA completely recharged and even more motivated to advocate for their clients. The importance of educating public officials about the realities of anti-Semitism in the successor states of the former Soviet Union (FSU) was obvious.

Equally clear, however, was the key role of the media in informing the American public about what life is like for Jews and other minorities in the FSU. In the past few years NYANA added a component to its advocacy efforts that focuses on public education and public opinion. Working with the member agencies of the National Immigration Forum, NYANA has participated in many press briefings and press conferences aimed at allowing people to become familiar with the faces and stories of real refugees and immigrants and to learn about their courage and skills and the significant contributions they make to our society. The goal of these activities is to reshape public opinion by diminishing ste-

reotyping and scapegoating of new arrivals. Although this message relates to all refugees and immigrants, the fact that NYANA has identified Soviet Jewish clients who have been willing to participate in these activities has enabled the story of Jews in the FSU to be told.

Perhaps even more important than any of the efforts described above, however, is that NYANA is leading by example and helping to train many smaller, less experienced agencies across the country—including associations of refugees and immigrants—how to participate in a democratic society, how to make their voices heard in the cacophony of opinions and interests being expressed. As the debates continue to swirl around the issues of refugee admissions, funding for refugee programs, immigration categories and quotas, naturalization, and numerous other policy questions, it is the assistance provided to these organizations that will allow them to join with the more experienced advocates, change the tenor of the argument, and tip the balance toward a more generous and humane public policy on immigration and refugees than we have witnessed during these past few years.

HOW CAN A LOCAL AGENCY MOBILIZE ITS BOARD OF DIRECTORS TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC POLICY?

One of the greatest assets in pursuing a proactive public policy program is an agency's board of directors. Board members, who are often leaders within their respective professional/business sectors and frequently have developed valuable associations through their work and other volunteer activities, have access as community leaders to policymakers and to opinion makers who influence policy makers. As individuals, they may have "name recognition" and influence well beyond their affiliation as part of the agency's lay leadership. Board access has a double benefit—it opens the door and then captures the attention of targeted policymakers more effectively than if agency staff (who are seen as being motivated by self-interest and are paid

to promote their organization's interests) make the contact.

As important as the access factor is the interest component. Public policy issues, if presented in a clear and coherent manner, are inherently interesting. Board members are excited by issues that affect the agency's ability to serve its clients (for example, changes in authorizing legislation that affect who can be served and which services can be provided) and by issues that go to the heart of what America stands for, such as changes in education or health care policy, and their impact on the agency's clientele. There is an appeal that touches deeply held values of civic participation; there is also the potential for the board to make a real difference in the outcome of a particular issue or piece of legislation. Many board members request placement on NYANA's Public Policy Committee because of their interest in advancing a pro-refugee/pro-immigrant public policy agenda.

To capitalize on board contacts and relationships, periodic surveys have been conducted identifying board member connections to policy makers. Many of these connections have been personal in nature: one board member rented a summer home adjacent to the summer home of a Senator who became instrumental in assuring the admission of Soviet Jewish refugees; another board member is a close family friend of a Representative who is a leader on the Congressional subcommittee responsible for authorizing legislation for refugee and immigration programs. A few board members have hosted fund raisers for their Representatives. Some board members have "first name" relationships with members of Congress developed while serving in leadership roles with other organizations. These points of access have been extremely helpful, especially when there has been an urgent need to communicate about an issue. More than once, a NYANA board member, after being briefed by staff on legislation that was to be voted on imminently (within hours), called the Representative or Senator and was able to communicate directly the position of NYANA and the Jewish community.

A major opportunity for NYANA's board of directors to be involved in setting the direction for the agency's work through the end of the 1990s was through the two-year strategic planning process initiated in 1992. In the strategic plan—*NYANA 2000*—that resulted from this process, the board set as one of NYANA's five major strategic goals (the only non-service goal) "to affect positively public policy and perceptions on behalf of immigrants." The inclusion of this goal seemed natural for the board after hearing reports from the Public Policy Committee that had been active for seven years, having numerous briefings on policy issues at monthly board meetings, taking pro-refugee/pro-immigrant positions in letters to members of Congress or Letters to the Editor in the *New York Times*, and sponsoring several "missions" to Capitol Hill. It was well understood that there were a broad range of issues on the federal policy agenda, including refugee status for Jews from the FSU, refugee admissions levels, resettlement funding, immigration quotas, and naturalization policies, which would directly affect the ability of a local resettlement agency to serve its clients' needs. Access by non-citizens to benefits and services were being hotly debated not only in Washington but also by states and cities.

To achieve this strategic goal, the board recommitted NYANA's human and financial resources and articulated program strategies to educate public officials at all levels of government and to convey positive messages to the general public about refugees and immigrants. NYANA would also utilize media and public education techniques to target key audiences and stimulate positive responses to refugee and immigration issues. A cornerstone of the plan has been to reach policymakers by working through coalitions. Within the Jewish community this has been accomplished primarily by supporting CJF leadership and enhancing the partnership with New York UJA-Federation. Significant attention has also been given to strengthening NYANA's participation through other broad-based coalitions, notably the National

Immigration Forum and the New York Immigration Coalition.

As the agency has moved forward through the latter part of the 1990s, NYANA's board continues to show a serious interest in and commitment to playing a significant part in helping shape national public policy affecting refugees and immigrants.

HOW CAN A LOCAL AGENCY BEST DEPLOY STAFF AND CLIENTS IN ADDRESSING PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES?

The complex, complicated nature of refugee and immigration policy and the large numbers of federal and state agencies involved in the movement, processing, and resettlement of newcomers to the United States make the role of staff a vital one in shaping an agency's policy positions and communicating those positions to policymakers. One of the most important functions performed by staff is to educate board members as well as public officials and other opinion makers by explaining and interpreting program and policy issues. Although policies proposed by government may seem reasonable from a government perspective, the practical considerations from the perspective of a local not-for-profit service agency may render some policy proposals untenable. The ability of staff to analyze for volunteers and public policymakers the impact of legislative and programmatic proposals, identify and assess various options, and explicate their local implications can contribute significantly to the efficacy of the final product.

Foremost among staff assets in performing this vital function is their technical expertise, drawn from formal education and training, past professional experience, and practice wisdom. On numerous occasions, NYANA staff provided direct advice to shape policy through testimony, comments on regulations, and formal and informal consultations with elected and appointed public officials. The agency's executive vice president, Mark Handelman, has translated his two decades' experience of leading the nation's

largest local resettlement agency into practical recommendations and has offered insights in testimony on such matters as refugee loan policies and employment and training issues. Other staff have participated in refugee policy and program redesign consultations with House and Senate Judiciary staff and with the Select Commission on Immigration Reform; prepared testimony for President Clinton's Health Care Reform Task Force, highlighting the problems of non-native English speakers in gaining access to medical services; and developed model comments on pending asylum regulations. Time and again, the technical expertise of staff is a well from which policymakers can draw sound and practical advice.

Another crucial function of staff is identifying clients whose personal experiences can be used to illustrate the effects, both positive and negative, of public policy. When doubt was raised as to whether Jews from the FSU were "true" refugees—that is, whether they personally experienced persecution—NYANA's caseworkers reviewed their intake notes to identify newly arrived refugees whose persecution stories were undeniably compelling. While protecting the privacy and safety of its clients (some refugees had left family members behind who were still in danger) by not identifying these individuals by name, NYANA drew on these examples in preparing testimony and in discussions with government officials.

On one occasion, Congressional staff visited NYANA and heard these stories recounted by bilingual case aides who themselves had arrived in the United States only a few years earlier under similar circumstances. When the media began to take an interest in the impact of welfare reform on legal immigrants, NYANA's Legal Services staff could put a human face on the impending tragic consequences of cutting 90-year old immigrants, some of whom were Holocaust survivors, off from Supplemental Security Income (SSI), often their only means of subsistence. Staff's ability to assist the media with real examples was a pivotal factor in attracting the

interest and concern of the public and the politicians to these issues, resulting in restoration of SSI benefits to legal immigrants who had arrived before August 1996.

Staff can make an impact through their involvement on a wide range of coalitions by helping shape the agenda of these coalitions and thereby achieve a broader reach on issues of public policy. Members of the NYANA executive staff were the founding members of the National Immigration Forum, the New York Immigration Coalition, and the New York City Refugee Resettlement Forum, and others serve as chairs or members of the boards of these coalitions.

NYANA has significantly enhanced the national public policy efforts of its staff and board through the targeted use of part-time Washington, DC-based consultants. In 1990, as the number of issues affecting refugees and immigrants began growing at an alarming rate, the Public Policy Committee made a recommendation to the board, which was unanimously approved, to engage a policy consultant in Washington to keep NYANA abreast of fast-breaking legislative developments and to assure that the agency's interests were fully represented.

NYANA's policy consultants have not only served NYANA efficiently and effectively, but in fact have benefitted the entire Jewish communal system as well as other organizations concerned with refugee and immigration policy. Their activities have been closely coordinated through the Washington Action Office of the Council of Jewish Federations. Using relationships that have evolved over time with Members of Congress, their senior legislative staff, and policymakers in the administration, NYANA's highly experienced consultants have been on the scene to provide immediate intelligence and strategic guidance to inform NYANA's public policy work. Doors have been opened to decision makers and testimony has been crafted to focus on critical issues, with the intended result of meeting NYANA's needs while serving the larger Jewish communal enterprise.

A particularly gratifying strategy has been the involvement of clients and former clients in conveying a message to policymakers. Shortly after President Clinton took office in 1992, the Coast Guard was instructed to intercept boats with Haitians seeking refuge on American shores and turn them back. NYANA had been involved in resettling Haitian refugees in the 1980s and continued to work closely with the national and local Haitian advocacy and service agencies. NYANA executive staff decided to demonstrate the agency's concern by "weighing in" with postcards to President Clinton prepared by NYANA's clients—Jewish refugees who had arrived only four to twelve weeks earlier from the FSU. In a program coordinated through NYANA's English School, briefings in class by the executive director of the National Haitian Coalition explained the plight of the Haitian refugees. A "real time" civics lesson in participation in a democratic society took place as clients wrote to the President expressing their appreciation that the United States had been generous and caring in welcoming them as refugees and asking the President to give Haitian refugees the chance for a life of freedom in America.

Two additional examples of clients playing a role in influencing national policy makers are worthy of mention. On a number of occasions over the past decade, NYANA arranged for one or more of its clients to testify before a Congressional committee or provide formal or informal briefings for Congressional staff. The content of these interactions has ranged from the conditions of persecution in their homeland, to the value of the initial resettlement services funded by the federal government, to the adjustment they have made and their successful adaptation to the United States. In one such Congressional staff briefing organized by the National Immigration Forum—with presentations by several newcomers of different backgrounds on the occasion of Citizenship Day—a NYANA client described her journey to America and the challenges and help she had received in pursuing her career as a professional musician, ending with an exceedingly moving expres-

sion of gratitude on her violin.

Clients and former clients can make a powerful statement when they organize themselves and present their concerns directly to Congress. Such was the case when 5,000 Soviet emigres from New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and other sites of resettlement boarded buses in September 1997 to protest the recently enacted welfare reform legislation that deprived legal immigrants of access to public benefits, primarily SSI. There had been concern that these newcomers, organized by grassroots emigre organizations, might communicate a message that could potentially damage the delicate multi-coalition negotiations that were underway to encourage Congress to roll back some of the new law's worst provisions affecting elderly and disabled immigrants. Seeing this not as a threat but as an opportunity, NYANA, working in concert with CJF's Washington Action Office and the Union of Councils of Soviet Jewry, provided a detailed briefing for the emigre leadership, explaining the challenges of developing a winning strategy and assisting the leadership in planning an effective demonstration. On the day of the demonstration, NYANA and CJF publicly greeted the group, the final stage in a partnership that began with strategizing and ended with participation in the demonstration. NYANA's assistance strengthened the partnership between a professional agency and the clients it had served without detracting from the "power of the people."

HAS NYANA'S INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC POLICY MADE A DIFFERENCE?

The answer to this question is easy—it is an unequivocal "yes." It has made a difference in the way NYANA is viewed by policy and opinion makers; it has made a difference in the agency's relationships with its coalition partners, within the Jewish community and beyond; and it has made a difference in the way NYANA's Board and staff view the agency and its mission. By involving NYANA's clients directly in some of the

advocacy efforts, the agency has also made a significant difference in the way refugees relate to government and learn to advocate for their own needs.

Measuring NYANA's success in influencing policy decisions is not easy. One obvious way is to look at the outcome of the legislation or regulations that were on the agenda. Below is a sampling of the issues NYANA was involved in over the past decade and the decisions made:

- When the Soviet Union first permitted emigration in the late 1980s, thousands of Jews packed up and traveled to the American Embassy in Rome, Italy. Although all of them had lived in fear under the oppression, anti-Semitism, and anti-Zionism of Soviet regimes, some families were being denied refugee status by the U.S. government because they could not show that they, personally, had been persecuted. Some INS interviewers were unfamiliar with the history of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union and were wrongly denying refugee status to these families. NYANA joined the national Jewish organizations, CJF and HIAS, in seeking a legislative remedy to this problem. In 1989, the Lautenberg-Morrison bill was enacted, sponsored by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and former Rep. Bruce Morrison (D-CT), then chairman of the House Immigration Subcommittee. This law instructed INS officers to take into account the historic persecution of religious minorities in the Soviet Union when making refugee determinations; it continues to be critical to the FSU refugee program, enabling hundreds of thousands of Jews to reunite with their relatives in the United States. NYANA has assisted in securing the reauthorization of this legislation each time it has neared expiration, including the recent successful effort to extend the law through FY 99.
- In 1995, the chairman of the Immigration Subcommittee in the House of Representatives, Rep. Lamar Smith, made a strong push to limit the number of refugees who

could be admitted to the United States in any fiscal year to 50,000 (in the current fiscal year, admissions will exceed 76,000). NYANA strongly opposed such a provision and worked with CJF, HIAS, and other refugee serving agencies to see that the admissions cap did not become law. It did not.

- During the 1996 welfare reform debates, NYANA, together with its coalition partners, strongly opposed provisions in the welfare reform bill that denied legal immigrants access to certain public benefits, such as SSI, Medicaid, and food stamps. These advocacy efforts were unsuccessful, and the bill was enacted with these provisions intact. The following year, however, these same advocates, having devoted considerable time to educating members of Congress, other policymakers, and the public about what the impact of denying benefits to legal immigrants would be, succeeded in restoring SSI and Medicaid eligibility to many legal immigrants. This year food stamps were also restored to a large number of those immigrants who were initially denied them.

Not all of the issues in which NYANA engages are specifically aimed at refugees or immigrants. Sometimes efforts to address other policy areas can have unintended consequences that will affect refugees or the ability of resettlement agencies like NYANA to assist them. Consider these two examples:

1. *The Workforce Development Act of 1995*—drafted to consolidate the scores of job training, vocational education, and other employment-related programs funded by the federal government into a large block grant to the states. Its purpose was to lower administrative costs and create one-stop shopping sites for unemployed people and those in need of job-related assistance. In drafting the bill, however, the sponsors included programs funded through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) that are used to help new arrivals become self-sufficient. Refu-

gee Social Services (RSS), Targeted Assistance (TA), and the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program (VAMGP) would all have been rolled into the single block grant for employment services, and refugees would have had to gain access to these services in competition with the general public and without the cultural and linguistic sensitivities provided by a resettlement agency. NYANA was involved in advocacy efforts to remove the refugee-specific programs from the bill and allow refugees to continue to obtain employment services from their resettlement agency. For many reasons unrelated to this issue, the bill did not become law, but the House of Representatives did remove the refugee programs from the block grant. The Senate version of the bill remained unchanged, but was never considered on the Senate floor.

2. Bills to prohibit nonprofit organizations from engaging in lobbying activities have come up several times in Congress in the past few years. Each time NYANA has written letters and contacted members of Congress to voice its strong opposition to such legislation. Under current law there are spending limitations and reporting requirements sufficient to assure that nonprofit organizations fulfill their missions and do not divert excessive amounts of charitable dollars to advocacy. It is critical to their missions, however, to have the right to communicate with public officials and other policymakers about the impact of public policies on the clients they serve.

Was NYANA's involvement really important to these efforts, or would the outcome have been the same regardless? It is really impossible to answer this question with certainty, but this much is clear: NYANA's leadership in the coalitions, willingness to commit financial resources, participation in strategy and planning discussions, and contacts with key members of Congress—especially Senator Alfonse D'Amato (a member of the Senate leadership) and Rep. Charles

Schumer (a member of the House Immigration Subcommittee)—and other influential officials such as Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Governors Cuomo and Pataki were critical elements of these and other advocacy campaigns. On the occasions when NYANA's Executive Vice President has presented testimony in Congress, the interchange between him and members of Congress, most of whom have not had first-hand experience with newly arrived refugees, has demonstrated how important it is to bring the local experience to national policymakers.

Influencing public policy is about more, however, than winning or losing the immediate battles. It is also about improving the public's understanding of the issues so good decisions are made now and in the future. It is about creating alliances with other institutions, those with whom there is general commonality of interest and those with whom there may be common cause only in one or two areas. It is about building relationships with public officials and the staff who serve them, relationships that will last over many years through many battles. It is about building trust in the agency and the individuals who serve it by providing public officials with accurate, useful information and being responsive to inquiries and requests. In all of these ways, NYANA has made a difference and has moved closer to the ultimate goal of ensuring that the best interests of refugees and immigrants who come to this country are reflected in the programs and policies adopted by the U.S. government.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

If NYANA is to continue to make a meaningful contribution to the creation and retention of just and humane policies affecting new Americans, it will need to broaden its involvement beyond specific legislative and regulatory issues related solely to refugees and immigrants. It will be essential for NYANA to expand its focus in two ways: first, by increasing its attention to the public policy agendas at the state and local level, and

second, by building relationships with other advocacy systems to address a wider range of issues, including those affecting civil rights, children, families, the elderly, domestic violence, and other areas of social policy.

Lessons learned during the welfare reform debate, and in its aftermath when NYANA participated in the concentrated effort to roll back some of the worst provisions of the resulting legislation, provide valuable insights for the future. It is clear that as the federal government pulls back its funding and shifts to states and counties the responsibility for fundamental welfare policy and the discretion to appropriate funds to fill gaping holes in the social safety net, greater attention to state, county, and city policy and politics will be in order. NYANA will be able to draw on its close partnership with New York UJA-Federation's public policy staff who have developed excellent relationships and earned a high degree of respect throughout New York State and New York City. The recent hearing in City Hall on the impact of the federal welfare reform legislation, sponsored by several committees of the State Legislature in which NYANA testified as part of the UJA-Federation delegation, demonstrated the importance of making an impact on state and local legislators who are now in charge of implementing the most far-reaching changes in social policy in the last sixty years.

The rationale for expanding NYANA's public policy focus beyond refugee and immigration issues to the broader range of social welfare policies affecting all members of American society is both pragmatic and philosophical. Programmatically, NYANA has come to recognize that, given the limited interest of public funders and foundations in underwriting projects exclusively for refu-

gees and immigrants, it is often necessary to operate programs that serve the general population in order to reach the foreign-born. In New York City, where nearly half of the residents were born in another country, there is little risk that NYANA will dilute its specialized expertise or forgo its core mission by, for example, offering domestic violence prevention programs for any needy individual while incorporating culturally sensitive, linguistically tailored methods for immigrant clients. NYANA's programmatic interests therefore dictate the agency's involvement in influencing a broader range of social issues.

There is a further philosophical dimension to the challenge that NYANA faces as it enters its second half-century. Just as in the past, NYANA believed that it should advocate for generous and humane policies for all refugees and immigrants—not only those of the Jewish faith—so NYANA's leadership, both lay and professional, now recognize and have begun to articulate the fundamental role the agency can play in community building.

A decade ago, NYANA demonstrated the value of community building through its Urban Skills Project in which refugees and their American-born neighbors were assisted to organize themselves in their apartment buildings and in their neighborhoods to improve the quality of their lives (see the article by Bierman and Oltarsh in this issue). Building strong, thriving communities of all Americans, including newcomers, will strengthen the fabric of the civil society in the twenty-first century. With the experience gained to date and by broadening its involvement in other human services coalitions, NYANA is positioned to make important contributions in shaping public policy in the future.