

Federations to their constituent hospitals represents a small percentage of the hospitals' operating budgets and is generally used to defray outpatient department deficits. Contrary to the situation which obtained some years ago, the proportion of Jews using the outpatient departments of some Jewish hospitals is very small. Thus funds from the Federation may not be used by a hospital to fulfill specific Jewish needs, but are diluted into the pool of general urban philanthropy and public support.

Although the Federation allocations to hospitals are small, they "could and should be used for the subvention of specific services which are quite important, as important in our own day as earlier justifications were decades ago . . . From the point of view of the Jewish community (these allocations) could be used to prod and assist the hospital into developing community programs."¹⁵ There are special Jewish needs in the health field, particularly among the aged. Diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension, although not restricted to, are widespread among the Jewish elderly, and cause serious debilitation and complications. The delivery of health-care, including preventive health-care, requires trained health personnel. Cooperative efforts between Federation hospitals and Federation agencies could provide this personnel. For example, the staff might include medical residents supervising medical and nursing students. The experience

¹⁵ C. Sheps, "The House of Health," *Moment*, December 1975, pp. 57-58.

could provide the students with unique exposure to the social and emotional problems of aging as well as the physical manifestations. Simple diagnostic and screening procedures would be handled at the Center, and acute conditions would be immediately referred to the back-up hospital. Services could be reimbursed by Medicare or Medicaid. The lower cost and resulting benefits of preventive services, astutely and competently monitored, should prove superior to the current pattern of crisis medicine and perfunctory medical care.

As the cost of living and medical care has risen drastically, there has been an increase in Federal programs to meet these costs. Jews, however, even those subsisting on low, fixed incomes, traditionally resist participation in public health and welfare programs. Culturally, the Jewish people strive to maintain their personal independence and to solve their own problems and those of their fellow Jews. Many, especially the elderly, are reluctant to apply for welfare. They often do not utilize benefits to which they are legally entitled.

Therefore, it is now time to use the philanthropic Jewish health dollar to meet the needs of the Jewish population per se, especially those with the most pressing health needs . . . the aged. Jewish health and welfare agencies have always sought to provide innovative services of high quality. Cooperative efforts can be mobilized to achieve this goal. We must respond to the needs of the aged with new and sound approaches, and reapplication of existing resources.

What is a Preschool Doing in a Jewish Community Center?

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It is perhaps eclectic acceptance of Judaism as well as the Center's function as a community organization which enables a J.C.C. preschool to attract children from a diversity of Jewish backgrounds and to offer a wide variety of experiences in Judaism for Jewish children. When a child attends a Center preschool, he enters into many activities of the Jewish community with no age, sex or denominational segregation.

What is a preschool doing in a Jewish community center? Some may charge that it's too late to ask that question after several generations of early childhood programs have existed in Centers throughout the country. Others may think it is an unsophisticated question of a program which supposedly has attained a certain degree of maturity. Some children are now enrolled in the same Jewish Center preschools their parents attended. Even if the question was asked when nurseries first evolved in Centers, needs are no longer the same. Change is rapid and continuous in our society. In order to clarify who we are and what we are doing, we must raise this question constantly. Actually the question has two parts: first, why have a Jewish preschool and, second, why have a Jewish preschool in a Jewish community center?

It may be particularly appropriate to raise the question of Jewish preschools now, as the state begins to take more responsibility for early childhood education. In recent years we have watched the statistics climb until over 50 percent of American mothers are part of the labor force. Of those working, more than one third have preschool age children and are making increasing demands on the public sector to sponsor preschool programs. Some legislators even recognize the importance of capitalizing on the curiosity of the young, and nationally subsidized programs such as Head Start and Title I preschools in public school systems are not uncommon. The government, as pressure increases, is likely to respond and

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we may eventually find the state providing a complete preschool program. Can we then justify a more costly, private experience?

It is commonly acknowledged and readily documented that renewed interest in Judaism is expanding the role of Jewish education today. Parents are now more concerned that their children have a positive attitude toward being Jewish and that they feel a sense of belonging to a Jewish group. Although Jewish education once carried the more narrow responsibility simply of teaching Jewish subject matter, it must now take on the awesome task of inspiring Jewish commitment. The advantages of a secular preschool may become increasingly less attractive to Jewish parents if there continues to be a growing need and reliance on Jewish education to preserve Jewish identity.

The preschool from many points of view is the most appropriate place to begin a semi-formal experience in Jewish identification. By the time a child is three, he is interested in belonging to a group. He enjoys conventions and rituals. It is a crucial stage for forming values and building a healthy self concept. In a Jewish preschool the child has the opportunity to become socialized not only in a peer group but in a Jewish group. He receives the benefits of a fine educational and social experience along with the enriching bonus of a fully integrated Jewish curriculum.

Jewish curriculum in a J.C.C. preschool is a natural part of the educational process. The child begins to become knowledgeable about the historic background of his heritage, its holidays, traditions and terminology. The "Cultural transmission of the selective memo-

ries of the group"¹ is vital in helping the child to feel and be Jewish. It is not enough merely to be in a Jewish setting. The cognitive aspects of the curriculum must begin to produce basic knowledge of Jewish customs. Activities must encourage an appreciation for Jewish tradition on which to build an intellectual as well as an emotional commitment as the child grows. Children learn about the evolution of their holidays and the rationale for traditions. They celebrate festivals and learn rituals, values, and teachings intrinsic to the culture. There are songs and stories, Hebrew prayers and phrases. There is challah, and matza and hamentashen. There is the menorah, the seder plate and the lulav and etrog. Holidays are fun and exciting—filled with experiences upon which to build memories.

In school the child may absorb even more knowledge about actual Jewish subject matter than at home, because the information is always on his own level. Explanations are age appropriate. Children have the advantage of sharing ideas with their peers and to engage in programs—not available at home—which explore concepts through a wide variety of activities. Children act out the story of baby Moses, make their own menorahs and follow the seder with their own modified Haggadas.

Although Jewish content in the curriculum stimulates initial recognition of Jewishness, it is in its affective domain that the Jewish preschool encourages the young child to embrace his Jewishness and nurtures strength in his identity. When the Jewish child attends a Jewish preschool, he enters into the Jewish community for the first time as part of a majority group (an experience he may never again enjoy); he does not have to feel different, apart or excluded from the larger society. A Jewish preschool provides an atmosphere in which it is normal to be Jewish. In his sameness with others, the child begins to build a wholesome sense of Jewish identity which is secure. He is not made to feel

self-consciously different and he is not faced with the dilemmas of why he doesn't celebrate Christmas and Easter, or why his name might not be the same as most. Ethnic identification helps the child to extend his self concept, to round it out, to make it more complete. He knows that he is Jewish and what is more, he recognizes that it is all right to be Jewish; it is special, it is fun and it is good. As the preschooler internalizes his Jewish identity he can feel confident, because his simple concepts are not threatened by conflicting values.

It is the family, of course, which remains the central agency of Jewish experience. Sklare maintains that "indeed it is dubious whether identity can be manufactured . . . in the classroom."² It is the home which must provide the "learning experience where love and growth can come together in constantly expanding Jewishness."³ The family and school must agree upon ultimate goals for the children they share. Parents need to take an active interest in Jewish curriculum at school. Children must celebrate at home in the family circle the same holidays they have enjoyed at school. The home and the school must work as partners, complementing each other's abilities to transmit Judaism if Jewish commitment is to have any lasting meaning.

If it is relatively easy to justify a Jewish preschool, it may be more difficult to justify a Jewish preschool in a Jewish community center. This issue has gained currency in recent years as a growing number of synagogues are sponsoring Jewish oriented preschools and all day Jewish day schools. Certainly the synagogue nurseries are popular and appropriate. If the synagogues can do the job, why should we continue to have preschools in Jewish community centers? The synagogue schools do have a valid and valuable function. They do not, however, offer the same kinds of experiences and opportunities which Center preschools can provide because they are

² Marshall Sklare, *America's Jews*, Random House, 1971, p. 161.

³ Dennis Prager, address delivered at the Jewish Community Center of Denver, November 16, 1976.

identified with specific denominations of Judaism. Jewish community centers are eclectically Jewish. Offering an opportunity even to those who are struggling with their commitment to Judaism, the Center may in fact serve as a half-way house for young parents to come and explore the possibilities and ways of being Jewish. To borrow Dennis Prager's term, J.C.C.'s are "reservadox." There is no internal Jewish ax to grind. The Center serves the entire Jewish community and is often a crossroads, where Jews from every persuasion, every life style and every country can meet. It is the function of this communal agency to create a mechanism for the involvement of Jews and to make participation equally comfortable and possible for all Jews. It is perhaps this eclectic acceptance of Judaism as well as the Center's function as a community organization which enables a J.C.C. preschool to attract children from a diversity of Jewish backgrounds and to offer a wider variety of experiences in Judaism for Jewish children. When a child attends a Center preschool, he enters into many activities of the Jewish community with no age, sex or denominational segregation. In the Denver Center (which I am sure is not unique), preschoolers have the opportunity of sharing their Chanukah celebration with the senior adults or participating in Jewish Book Month by making their own books to be displayed at the Book Fair. They have explained their masterpieces at the Fair to relatives or an unsuspecting passerby on the way to Jewish Story Hour. Children are frequent spectators in the art gallery, discussing, on occasion, the Jewish subject matter of the pieces. They are delighted to fill the preschool wing with their own art in conjunction with the prestigious Collector's Mart in the main gallery. It is not uncommon to see adults that week (including some of the artists) walk through our halls and chatter with the children about both exhibits.

The Center at large and its preschool component provide opportunities for families to explore and enjoy the totality of Jewish life. All age groups enjoy Jewish theatre for

children and Israeli folk concerts. At Chanukah, families share an evening meal, make menorahs and play dreidle together at a Sunday afternoon fair. They dance and party together for Israel 29. Both parents and children have an opportunity to participate in individual and group activities on an ongoing daily basis, while in a synagogue full communal activity exists only two days a week.

The preschool exists not only for the children but also for direct benefit to the parents. One mother with strong Jewish convictions told me recently that she felt her child would have little trouble feeling comfortable as a Jew in the Christian community. She suggested that the preschool had helped him feel secure, even enthusiastic about being Jewish. As a by product of the preschool experience, the mother's fear of her child's assimilation into the secular society seems to have been assuaged. Her own involvement with her child's preschool experience has allowed her, as Isaac Fine explains, "the right to be different and the pleasure of being the same."⁴ Perhaps both mother and child reaped similar benefits from preschool, as together they feel comfortable and confident in their Jewishness, ready as a family to face the struggles of a minority group.

The Denver Center preschool—as it requires family membership and invites parent involvement in either Center or preschool activities—offers opportunities to integrate parents into the Jewish community. Parents are encouraged to participate on volunteer committees and become lay leaders of various departments. Often friendships are formed, values clarified and commitments solidified. The Jewish Community Center is indeed a place where all Jews may come and be exposed to all kinds of Judaism. The Center may also be the only place where Jews in lower income brackets may be insured of a Jewish preschool

⁴ Isaac Fine, "The Jewish Community: In Search of Our Roots," address delivered at the Center for Judaic Studies, University of Denver, January 17, 1977.

experience for their children. Support from the Allied Jewish Federation and the United Way make available scholarships, providing the Center with funds not often accessible to synagogues. With monies available for tuition when needed, Jewish Centers can provide choices for all Jews who may wish to build on basic Jewish experiences and early Jewish identification for their children.

The early childhood staff is often aware (as is true in all departments) that preschool is not only one of many programs which make up the total agency. The preschool not only deserves, but requires, the respect of the executive staff in order to integrate the program into the total agency. It is only through interdepartmental efforts that the preschool can capitalize on the full benefits of the Center and thereby preserve

the unique quality of early Jewish education that can be found only in a J.C.C. preschool. Early childhood services are essential to the Center if it is to continue to serve the entire community. To exclude the preschoolers is to exclude a part of that community. The preschool encompasses the young children and the young parents of the Jewish community. It may well be in the preschool that parents begin to reaffirm their Jewish commitment, begin to remedy deficiencies in their Jewish education and begin to identify themselves with their children as a Jewish family within the Jewish community. Preschool in a Jewish community center can offer a beginning. It was a great Jewish sage who said, "a good beginning has no end."

The Changing Family: Its Implications for Early Childhood Centers*

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One of the challenges facing teachers today is to broaden children's understanding in a way that can encompass the complicated family life styles in which many of our children are now living. We must present the concept of "family" in a way in which all the children can contribute and feel worthwhile.

Recently, I found a 25-year-old book on fingerplays, published in 1958 by our local professional early childhood association. Some of the fingerplays went like this:

I have a small family here
A family full of good cheer
A father — a mother
A sister — a brother
A baby so sunny and dear.
Here's my mommy
Here's my brother, see?
Here's my sister
And Here is little me!

and

This is the mother so kind and good
This is the father who buys our food
This is the brother so big and tall
This is the sister who loves her doll
This is the baby so little you see
Short and tall is this family.

These words were probably appropriate in 1958. However, when I discovered the same poems in a 1974-75 edition of the same publication I wondered about the appropriateness of the message for today's children. I did some research, and here are the statistics I found. According to recent estimates, some 14 million women, with children, are working. This figure includes four out of ten mothers of children under six years old, and more than half of all mothers of school age children.¹ The great majority of these working women

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¹ Margaret Mead, "Can the American Family Survive?" *Redbook Magazine*, Feb. 1977, p. 91

are in full time jobs. A large proportion of these women are the sole family support.

Because of soaring divorce rates, and a rise in illegitimacy, it is estimated that ten million children (one in every six), now live apart from their fathers, and 40 percent of all divorced, separated or single women do not even receive any financial assistance from the fathers of their children.²

Jewish school can no longer claim immunity to these conditions because more and more, we are serving the child of the single-parent family. At the Jewish Day Nursery in Cleveland, 55 percent of our students are from single-parent family homes. In Denver, at the Jewish Community Center day care, the figure is 70 percent.

A survey of 12 representative day camps sponsored by J.C.C.'s and Federations³ throughout the country, revealed that, on the average, 12 percent of those served were from single-parent families, and, in the New York area where 14 representative camps were surveyed, the children from single-parent families represented close to 30 percent. The high was 66 percent, the low was six percent.

Today, these statistics and our own personal experiences tell us that, for many children, those old fingerplays might well have referred to "Mommy and her friend" and "Daddy on the weekend." They could mention several sets of grandparents, or none at all—for today's family is mobile and often isolated from relatives.

² *Cleveland Plain Dealer*—April 22, 1977.

³ Sherwood Epstein, "Survey of Single Parent Families, and Resident Camping" Jewish Welfare Board, New York, 1975.