

# PUBLIC POLICY AND JEWISH NEEDS

FELICE DAVIDSON PERLMUTTER, M.S.W., PH.D.

*Professor Emeritus, Temple University*

JAY SPECTOR, M.R.P.

*President and CEO, Jewish Employment and Vocational Service of Philadelphia*

ELINOR HEWITT, ED.D.

*Director of Research, Jewish Employment and Vocational Service of Philadelphia*

and

EVE GOTTESMAN, M.S.S.

*Senior Planning Associate, Retired, Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia*

*When you reap the harvest of your land,  
you shall not reap all the way to the edges  
of your field, or gather the gleanings of  
your harvest. You shall not pick your  
vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit  
of your vineyard; you shall leave them  
for the poor and the stranger:  
I am the Lord your God.*

Leviticus 19:9

**W**e are living in a complex society; the needs of the poor and the stranger are more acute today than ever before. We in the Jewish community are facing increasing demands for social service and economic supports in our local communities, in Israel, and in countries around the world.

We have always faced a duality in our identity as Jews and as Americans. We continue to attend to our communal needs, but we also continue to attend to the needs of others. Nowhere is this duality more clearly evident than in the complex relationship between our nonprofit social agencies and the public sector, where our responsibilities as citizens in the broader community are lodged.

This article identifies the evolving relationship and changes that have arisen as a result of the interdependence between the private and the public sectors. It also discusses some of the tensions that have emerged in this relationship.

The experience of a selected group of

Jewish social service agencies in Philadelphia provides the data for this discussion. These agencies were selected not only for their accessibility but also because their experience is representative of those in the broader social service community. The agencies are the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Philadelphia (JCC), Jewish Family and Children's Service (JFCS), Jewish Employment and Vocational Service (JEVS), and Moss Rehabilitation Hospital (MossRehab).

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CONTINUITY

The relationship between the public and the private sectors has an interesting and long history in our country. When the federal poverty program was started in the 1960s, there was great concern about the effect of public funds on nonprofit agencies in general and on sectarian services in particular. The issues raised in the 1960s are still relevant today.

The field of Jewish communal service was articulate in identifying several issues of concern.<sup>1</sup> The most detailed discussion and analysis was offered by Martha Selig in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* in 1963. Selig clarified the various types of

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<sup>1</sup>The critical issue concerning the separation of church and state is not addressed in this article, although it was an issue in the 1960s and remains one today.

fiscal arrangements that could be made with the public sector at that time, including lump sum grants for research, special services, and capital construction; payments for services to specific individuals; and underwriting of the cost of services. She proceeded to identify the major substantive question to be answered: Can the voluntary agency retain its autonomy, or will policy be determined by the government because of its financial and other stipulations?

Kramer (1966), a respected social policy analyst, raised a second question: Is there a relationship between the amount of money accepted and agency policy formation? Must one limit the amount of public money accepted by an agency in order to retain the agency's Jewish identity? He cited two suggested solutions: (1) that an agency set a 20 percent limit on the funds it would accept in relation to its total budget in contrast to (2) a maximum of 50 percent proposed in public hearings on the 1962 Public Welfare amendments.

A broader issue was identified by Berkowitz (1963), who focused on Jewish communal planning designed to meet Jewish communal needs. What is the effect of the availability of public funds on agency and communal planning if public money is increasingly used by nonprofit agencies as private sources of money are diminishing? Is the agency willing to abandon its planning function in regard to the Jewish community in order to obtain public funding when its financial base is in jeopardy?

A study of Jewish Vocational Services in the United States conducted in the late 1960s is instructive; these agencies were in the unique position of having a history of the use of public funds (Perlmutter, 1968). The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1954 allowed public funds to be given to nonprofit agencies, and these vocational services had been actively involved with the public sector for more than a decade.

The findings of that study were important ones and are still relevant today. It found that the mission of the agency was central in

determining the extent of the use of public funds and ensuring that agency autonomy was not threatened (Perlmutter, 1969). There was selectivity in the relationship with the public sector.

Those agencies that chose to serve only the Jewish community elected not to accept public dollars; those agencies that wanted to broaden and deepen their ability to meet particular needs of their Jewish clients (e.g., working with deaf people) but, in addition, were ready to open their doors to the total community, accepted money from government programs that were responsive to these specific needs, e.g., National Institute of Mental Health, Vocational Rehabilitation Administration. Those agencies that broadened their mission to serve both Jewish communal needs and those of the broader community responded to initiatives of the federal poverty program and the U.S. Department of Labor.

The protection of agency autonomy can be illustrated by the experience of the Jewish Employment and Vocational Service (JEVS) of Philadelphia. In the 1960s the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare was eager to have JEVS receive state grants to meet client needs, but it required that JEVS change its name (i.e., drop "Jewish") and include non-Jews on its board. According to board minutes (September, 1966), "There was a general consensus that no effort should be made to change the name or Board composition."

JEVS did develop extensive new fiscal relationships with other public funding sources and demonstrated that the amount of money accepted from public sources did not affect agency autonomy. The allocations from public sources quadrupled in a four-year period from \$150,000 in 1962 to \$674,520 in 1966, in contrast to the relatively stable allocations from the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia, which increased from \$87,000 in 1962 to \$105,000 in 1966. Clearly, the proportion of public money did not deflect the agency's mission.

The JEVS minutes also confirm the

board's retention of the planning function. Many meetings and many hours were devoted to policy concerns in relation to the funding opportunities. The minutes offer evidence that the agency controlled its destiny and would use outside funds only if the agency mission was supported (Perlmutter, 1972).

The picture has dramatically changed today in relation to such external factors as the economy, welfare policy, and immigration. Consequently many of our Jewish social service agencies are involved extensively with the public sector. However, the issues remain the same, as elucidated by the experience of the sample of four Philadelphia agencies.

### **CURRENT AGENCY MISSION STATEMENTS AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY**

While all four agencies consider themselves to be part of the Jewish network of services, there is a dichotomy in how they operationalize this relationship. Whereas serving the Jewish community is the primary mission of JCC and JFCS, both JEVS and MossRehab have a dual thrust. This dichotomy is illustrated in the agencies' mission statements.

Consider the mission of the Jewish Family and Children's Service.

We are the Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia....JFCS works with individuals, couples and families to develop better ways of understanding and coping with life's challenges. And we are dedicated to preventive strategies—strengthening and enriching Jewish family life through educational programs, seminars and discussion groups (JFCS Directory of Services, 2000).

The JCC mission statement is similarly focused on the Jewish community.

The Jewish Community Centers of Greater Philadelphia exists to ensure the continuity and vibrancy of the entire Jewish community and its heritage (JCC Annual Report, 2000–2001).

It is important to point out that many of the programs of these two agencies are supported by the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia, and so these agencies are less dependent on public funds than JEVS or MossRehab.

The spirit of Leviticus 19:9, quoted above, is represented in the missions of both JEVS and MossRehab. MossRehab is part of the Albert Einstein Healthcare Network and has the following mission:

We have, as our principal purpose, the provision of compassionate, high-quality healthcare in order to elevate the health status of the Greater Philadelphia region. Einstein serves people living in the region and others with healthcare programs and services....We enthusiastically embrace our special responsibility to the most vulnerable residents in our primary service area, and to the members of the Jewish community. Einstein reflects the values of the Jewish community by caring for each person regardless of race, religion, national origin or the ability to pay ([www.einstein.edu](http://www.einstein.edu)).

By contrast, the mission statement of JEVS states that it is

a not-for-profit social service agency committed to serving the greater Philadelphia community by enhancing the employability and self-sufficiency of the people it serves through a broad range of education, training, health, and rehabilitation programs. JEVS is guided by the [Jewish] traditional value that the greatest social good is assisting individuals to become self-reliant (JEVS Annual Report, 2001).

JEVS retains its commitment to the Jewish community through programs that meet specific Jewish needs; for example, the Resettlement Program for Jews from the former Soviet Union (FSU), as well as other specialized efforts sponsored by the Philadelphia Federation, including career counseling for low-income Jews, a mentoring program for Russian professionals, computer skills training for abused Jewish women, business skills

training for Jewish women returning to work and college internships for placements in Jewish communal agencies. In addition, JEVS participates in a professional exchange program with Israel Elwyn and is a leading member of the International Association of Jewish Vocational Services (IAJVS).

### **THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC POLICIES**

The relationship between the agencies and the public sector remains a complex one and reflects changes in philosophy in regard to human services. In some instances the agencies started services and then sought government funding to support or expand them; in other cases the government recognized a need and stimulated agency response through requests for proposals (RFPs).

An example of the first instance is in the services developed for refugees from the FSU. JEVS became a major provider of such services by creating English language and skills training programs, programs originally funded by local Federation dollars. Since the end of the 1970s, the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement has provided matching funding for these efforts through the Matching Grant Program. As with other JEVS services, those programs originally designed to meet Jewish needs were expanded to serve broader populations.

An example of the RFP process is in the field of disabilities, where the government clearly defined how business was to be conducted. The government recognized a need and issued RFPs to get vendors to supply the services it required.

Since the 1990s a major shift has occurred as attention is increasingly paid to consumer choice and preferences. Consumers now influence program design and implementation, a shift in public policy that is having a great impact on Jewish service providers.

Yet, the major finding of this research is that regardless of the mission of the agency, all of the four Philadelphia agencies are deeply affected by public policy. Thus, JFCS has contracted for years with the City of Philadelphia to provide child welfare ser-

vices; under this contract the program serves non-Jewish children almost exclusively. The agency has always been committed to serving the general public in addition to the Jewish community, but the current balance may be an issue of concern. Furthermore, primarily minority personnel staff this program, and 50 percent of the staff throughout the agency are non-Jewish. The agency has also considered whether the board should reflect the service population; this question has been raised by some funders because the trend in nonprofits has been to have client representation on the board. These issues strike at the core of agency identity.

JCC's dependence on government is illustrated by its senior services. Its contracts, which support many senior services, also place some restrictions on the agency and prevent it from providing some services it would choose to offer. For example, until fairly recently, long waiting lists for Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) home care services left some needy, impaired elderly without services during the waiting period. JCC would have provided interim services, but the PCA contract did not support this. Another concern of the agency is its difficulty, due to inadequate funding, in maintaining the level of skilled, well-trained staff it feels is needed. Demands for greater professionalism and accountability are impossible to meet due to limited funding.

MossRehab identifies the lack of transportation as a major impediment for its client population, holding people back from obtaining employment. It is hoped that the situation will improve because of the recent Federal District Court mandate that upheld the U.S. Department of Transportation's regulation that a public transportation system provide "next-day paratransit service" to persons with disabilities.

### **PLANNING TO MEET UNMET NEEDS**

The list of unmet needs identified by each of the agencies is dramatic and depressing, and offers clear evidence of the interdependence between the public and the private

sectors. Interestingly, the four agencies have many overlapping or similar items on their list.

JCC identifies three major areas of concern. For seniors, there are insufficient affordable housing units; limited availability of managed care; inadequate mental health services; insufficient assisted living for those who cannot afford high private rates; and insufficient funds for pharmaceuticals, hearing aids, glasses, and dentures. The second identified area is inadequate health insurance for children, as the economy worsens and layoffs increase. The final area is the agency's limited ability to provide services to the poor and the marginally poor whose incomes are just above the poverty line and who are therefore ineligible for public assistance. The need exceeds the agency's ability to provide services, especially Jewish services.

JFCS identifies increasing Jewish homelessness, primarily due to changes in mental health policy. Affordable housing is an important unmet need among the poor elderly as well as the chronically mentally ill. JFCS identifies another issue: the increasing costs of the infrastructure necessary to meet the requirements of accountability, internal reporting, quality standards, and improvements. Funders are unwilling to meet these costs, which the agency must then bear. This is also an issue for JEVS.

JEVS identifies under-funding for housing for people with developmental disabilities as a major problem. People with mental retardation are under-served and on long waiting lists for residential services.

MossRehab notes that unmet needs surface when the patients leave the facility, because community resources are lacking in the areas of accessible housing and transportation. Transportation is a major issue for MossRehab's population in that it provides mobility and mobility fosters independence.

The variations on a theme are telling and certainly indicate that, regardless of focus, be it on the Jewish community primarily or on the general community, meeting unmet needs is above and beyond the capacity of

any voluntary agency, regardless of field, size, or focus. And all the needs are public policy agenda items.

### **PROPORTION OF PUBLIC FUNDS IN THE AGENCIES' BUDGETS**

A major question in the 1960s concerned the percentage of the agency budget from public sources. This percentage varies greatly among the four agencies, and, not surprisingly, reflects each one's mission.

JCC, the agency serving the Jewish community primarily, has an annual budget of almost \$6 million: 44 percent comes from the Federation and 22 percent from public sources, including the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA). These monies support core agency services. JCC's two senior centers receive 60 percent of their support from PCA. Its two satellite meal sites receive 100 percent of their support from federal funds, its Neuman Center's In-Home program receives 90 percent of its budget from public funds, and the Retired Senior and Volunteer Program (RSVP) receives 90 percent direct federal funding.

The single greatest proportion of JFCS's \$11,630,000 budget comes from public sources (almost \$4 million), and this money largely supports programs that serve a primarily non-Jewish population. It is almost twice the money provided by the Federation.

JEVS, the agency that serves the broader community, receives 83 percent of its \$40 million budget from public funds. The following list of some of the programs and services demonstrates the nature and amount of the support.

One hundred percent public support makes possible the following programs: the Refugee Assistance Program, Welfare-to-Work, Career Strategies for 55+, and the Philadelphia Prison Program. These JEVS programs receive 50% or more of their funding from public sources: Orleans Technical Institute Northeast, the Customer Service Training Collaborative, Orleans Industries, and the Center for New Americans, among others.

The mix of programs receiving large financial support from public sources demonstrates JEVS' dual mission, as the programs serve both the Jewish and the broader community.

MossRehab's situation is completely different. Much of its funding is public—including Medicare reimbursements, Medicaid and state Medical Assistance program payments, and government research grants—and its relationship to the Jewish community stems both from its historical origins and its relationship to the Einstein Healthcare Network.

It is not surprising that the contrast in mission between JCC and JFCS on the one hand, and MossRehab and JEVS on the other, is supported by the difference in funding sources. All four agencies, regardless of mission, have clearly moved away from their reliance on Jewish funding, a trend that will continue since the Jewish community cannot fully support all of its unmet domestic needs. In fact, the Philadelphia Federation's Executive Committee's minutes of April 29, 1977, note that government funds are available to the Association for Jewish Children, Federation Day Care Services, and JEVS. The minutes present the government support in a positive light as ameliorating any impact of inadequate allocations to those agencies.

#### **ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC POLICY**

Advocacy is viewed by all four agencies as part of their mandate. There is a growing recognition that social agencies need to become more active in the public policy arena.

JCC has used an array of advocacy strategies, including testimony at public hearings, participation in demonstrations protesting local transit authority fare increases, letters and petitions, attending summits in the state capitol Harrisburg and in Washington, and meeting with individual legislators, since the agency is well connected with the legislators.

The president of JFCS has always played a strong advocacy role, and the board has recently instituted an advocacy committee to make this a more prominent activity in the

agency. The board has developed increasing expertise, especially with the recent attention to faith-based services, and the agency expects to initiate meetings with other human service organizations around this issue. The board also selects issues to work on based on their importance to clients.

JEVS also advocates through associations and coalitions, including the Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition, MH/MR Coalition, and Pennsylvania Association of Resources for People with Mental Retardation (PAR). It has paid special attention to personnel recruitment, because of the problem of vacancy rates in staffing, as well as the potential danger of being held liable for the lack of quality care. As a result of the advocacy efforts, the Governor's budget is addressing the problem. JEVS has also instituted a Public Policy Committee to focus on policy issues and to bring these to the larger Jewish community. To date, its annual public policy forums have focused on welfare reform and disabilities, with special attention paid to the Jewish aspect of these topics.

MossRehab advocates for fair treatment for patients through several organizations in which it is active, including the American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association at the national level, the Hospital Association of Pennsylvania at the state level, and the Delaware Valley Hospital Health Care Council at the local level. These all provide a systematic way of getting the hospital's and the patients' voices heard and of providing feedback to proposed rules.

Thus, all four agencies recognize that advocacy is an essential part of their activity, and their focus is on public sector policies and programs. This is clearly related to the interdependence between the public and private nonprofit programs.

#### **INTERPRETATIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Jewish social service agencies face many complex challenges in today's rapidly changing environment. The dual identity of being American Jews and Jewish Americans

requires constant review and reexamination of agency purpose. The Jewish agencies have been most effective in examining their missions, redefining their mission statements, and seeking funding that supports their identity. But this is not a clear-cut or simple process, since it can be all too seductive to accept all the public monies offered at the expense of retaining or cost of losing a unique identity.

Thus the clarification of mission remains central to the discussion of the use of public funds by all the agencies. It serves as a beacon as the agencies travel down the public funding avenue and as the agencies serve the broader community while serving the Jewish community.

As the government has sought to divest itself of human service programs, it has attempted to replace its services with those provided by agencies in the nonprofit sector. At the same time, the voluntary sector's capacity to meet unmet needs is limited to the coverage provided by public policies, programs, and funds.

We have shown that regardless of the 20 percent or 50 percent or even 80 percent of government funds utilized by the Jewish agencies, they can still maintain their identity and values. The key is being mission-driven and retaining the ability not to be seduced by the available monies.

Consequently these agencies must be clear that they are not public agencies and

that they cannot replace government programs; they also must constantly be on guard to retain their identity. This is the essence of pluralism in our society, one that we all treasure and must seek to protect!

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