

PRIORITIES OF SERVICES *

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THERE has been much talk over the years about the desirability of establishing priorities—the ranking of needs in accordance with their claim on community resources and attention. We in Federations cope with the problem of establishing priorities between fields of service. Many have had to cope with priority decisions within a field of service or within an individual agency. Although I do not know of any objective or scientific approach to the subject, I submit that priority decisions are being made all the time. Every central communal agency and every direct service agency wrestles with priorities constantly—in the budgeting process if nowhere else. When “x” number of dollars are made available to one agency, and “y” number of dollars to another agency, priority factors are operating. Also a factor in priority decisions is the *status quo* element, which has carry-over value from year to year. Budget committees, planning committees and agency boards make priority decisions regularly, consciously or unconsciously.

Subjective factors, judgments and ideologies are always at work. Several years ago, Mr. Edwin Wolf II, a promi-

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nent lay leader in Philadelphia, presented a provocative paper at one of the national meetings. He stated that if we were to have a Jewish community in the future, if we were to meet our needs at home, if we were to be in a position to assist Jews who need help in Israel and other parts of the world, we need Jews! Mr. Wolf would give the highest priority to those agencies and institutions which would help to assure an active Jewish community a generation from now. He had in mind Jewish education and Jewish cultural agencies. His next priority would lie with those agencies which have Jewish content, for they receive support from a sectarian fund only. He adds that as American Jews we should also support adequately health, family, child care, and other services, but in his judgment these services have a lesser claim upon the organized Jewish community. In all of our communities there are some lay and professional leaders who subscribe to the above judgments. On the other hand, there are many leaders with different points of view.

Those of us who have conviction about family casework emphasize that the family is the basic unit in our civilization that has the major responsibility for child rearing and for preparing its mem-

bers to fulfill their role in society. The basic purpose of the family agency is to contribute to harmonious family inter-relationships. It seeks to strengthen the positive values in family life, to promote healthy personality development and satisfactory social functioning of various family members. From their perspective, family agency lay and professional leaders would therefore place a high priority on family casework services.

The recent General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds adopted a resolution, which in effect stated that the needs of the chronically ill represent the number one problem facing communities, insofar as local needs are concerned. Community planning and action by communities were urged. We in Cleveland have given a high priority this past year to strengthening and adding to our Jewish community resources for persons with long-term illness.

Leaders in the field of care for the aged point to the ever increasing numbers of aged in the population and the need to strengthen and expand our non-institutional and institutional services for older persons. Homes for the aged are emerging as modern social agencies and make legitimate claims upon budget committees for increased expenditures as they add to and professionalize their various services. A case could also be made for health services, child care services, vocational services, and community relations. Indeed, I believe I could develop a rationale for a high priority for every field of service. Leaders in each field would rate their own field high on a priority scale.

Ideally, each community should define its objectives for each area of service. All the pertinent facts need to be gathered. This is never easy because there are no precise measurements of community needs. We would all agree,

that more research is needed by Federations and agencies in this area. There should be recognition, however, that no community is able to meet the total needs of its citizens. Inherent, therefore, in any effort to deal with priorities is a careful examination of the services under Jewish auspices against a background of all health and social welfare services of public, as well as private non-sectarian agencies. This leads to two considerations: (1) The relationship between public and private agencies; and (2) the specific role and “reason for being” of the sectarian agency. The answers to these questions have varied through the years. I should like to avoid discussing them this afternoon, because we could literally spend days on them. Each community must deal with these questions, however.

The central communal agency must provide an instrument for overall planning which will make it possible for persons with various points of view to participate in the process. Planning and budgeting are usually the end result of the impact on each other of a number of forces in the community. Thus, leaders of service agencies, fund raisers, social planners, and other leaders in the community, with all their differences in viewpoint, can, through the social planning and budgeting processes, arrive at enough agreement to permit the community to proceed toward objectives which are sometimes the result of constructive compromise.

I should like to make brief reference to our social planning machinery in Cleveland. The Social Agency Committee, organized in 1943, is the on-going social planning arm of the Jewish Community Federation. The Committee is made up of representative members, lay and professional, named by each of the local agencies of the Federation. Eighteen members of the community-at-

large are on the SAC, on which the Federation officers also serve. It has emerged as a force for community unity and progress. Operating on a year-round basis, with regular meetings, and with a staff person devoting full time to its activities, the SAC has helped considerably to attain the dual result of real progress in each field of work and a careful balance of development among the various fields. The agencies and the Federation are joined together in the social planning process from the beginning to the end.

Agency representatives and other interested people have been helped toward a more united approach in dealing with community needs. Without any impairment of agency loyalties, leaders have developed a broader understanding of needs, gained greater perspective and balance. Leaders in Jewish education, for example, now have a better understanding of our health and welfare agencies, while leaders of these latter agencies have come to recognize the community's responsibility for Jewish education. Many individuals came on the SAC as "special interest" people. Today they comprise a growing body of community-minded people—people with knowledge about all the agencies and with concern for their continued and improved service to the community.

I should like to say a word at this point about pressures. Pressures are a reality for all of us. They do affect priority decisions. I do not consider pressure a "nasty" word. When a voluntary agency has developed loyal and devoted lay leadership, the agency has "sold" itself to these supporters. The biases of important leaders do count in the planning and budgeting of our voluntary services. I sometimes wish that some of our so-called "weaker" agencies had stronger and more devoted lay leadership. Active, on-going social planning activity will tend to reduce,

though it may not eliminate, pressure in community planning and budgeting. But in the process of gathering information, considering needs in relation to other needs, learning more about the community, committees are able to deal more effectively with pressures.

I want to emphasize that agencies, as well as Federations, have a responsibility to develop strong and influential leaders who are knowledgeable about community needs and agency services. We should be developing lay leaders from all segments of the community. The central agency depends on the strength of agency boards and their recognition of the importance of social planning. Agency executives should play an important role in developing these lay leaders.

Many of you will recall Charles Miller's excellent paper presented at last year's Conference on the "Problem of Budgeting Priorities." It was published in the Winter 1955 issue of the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*. I commend the article to you. Mr. Miller vividly described how Newark, faced with a disastrous campaign result, went about the difficult job of cutting services to fit the new pocketbook situation.

We in Cleveland, in contrast to Newark, would have put much more responsibility on the agencies in getting them to recommend priorities for their own field of service. Within an agency program, are not the staff and board in a better position to make recommendations as to a balance of services—where they should be expanded—where retrenched? Obviously, an agency must take into account that it does not exist in isolation, but is part of a network of community services. Its recommendations would then carry considerable weight with our planning committee.

We would all agree that this liaison between the direct service agency and

the Federation must be a continuous and on-going process. Priority decisions cannot be made during crisis periods only. The degree to which agencies work together regularly on everyday problems will enhance the opportunities for resolving the larger issues which arise. When this liaison is sustained over the years, there is the opportunity to develop an *esprit de corps* and mutual respect.

In looking carefully at its own operation, an agency will insist on maintaining standards—of not sacrificing quality to quantity. We would agree. Unfortunately, we do not have generally accepted objective criteria with regard to many of the so called "standards." As Charles Miller pointed out in his paper, there are differences of opinion as to whether three or four casework interviews per day are a good standard. This difference could mean thousands of dollars annually in a large urban casework agency. Yet we all know that quantitative standards can be misleading. An eager beginning worker may have the highest interview count during a particular month, but the director and the supervisor know that another worker, with fewer interviews, is doing a far better qualitative job, is continuing with his treatment cases, whereas the beginning worker may be "losing" his cases and seeing a succession of newly assigned clients. I am suggesting, however, that the direct service agency must be conscious of increasing efficiency which will make it possible to devote more of its time to contact with clients. This is a high priority.

In summary, I should like to emphasize the following points:

1. Priorities between fields of service are difficult to establish and involve value judgments. Priorities within a field of service or within an agency are relatively easier to establish.

The functional agencies are in the best position of knowing intimately the needs in their area of service. A Federation, in spite of its overview of the community, must have respect for the opinions of the direct service agency as to the best way of meeting these needs within the resources available.

2. In order to contribute to a more positive atmosphere when dealing with priority matters, the emphasis in Federations or in agencies should be on trying to achieve a balanced program, rather than on seeking ways to restrict programs or to save money. It is almost impossible to create such a positive atmosphere during a crisis situation.
3. There is no substitute for the committee process which involves the broadest kind of lay and professional participation. All the pertinent facts must be presented. Only after the facts are digested can there be evaluation and recommendation. The provision of strong professional direction during the process will help the committee arrive at judgments based on sound social welfare principles.
4. There must be close and continuing liaison between direct service agencies and social planning and budgeting committees of Federations.
5. Planning in the Jewish community must be related to the general community planning of all health and welfare agencies, public and non-sectarian.
6. Much more needs to be done to develop sharper criteria for establishing priorities.

Finally, I should like to emphasize that human needs are not static. Conditions are constantly changing. Therefore, continuous review and re-appraisal are necessary.