

FUNCTION OF A HOME FOR THE AGED

In general, the administrator sets the tone for and personifies the multi-discipline, multi-service approach of the home to the problems of those aged men and women who need the protective services of the agency. Recognizing the

Gestalt of group living, he implements and integrates all aspects of the institution towards a meaningful experience for the resident which helps him live as full a life as possible within the limits of his disability.

THE RESIDENT'S ROLE IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS OF A HOME FOR THE AGED *

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THE premise of this paper is that the residents of a home for the aged have an important role to play in the administration of services in the home. Such a role should be given them not merely as a concession. Without their participation in the administrative process, the administrator cannot do his work as efficiently. Furthermore, an analysis of the situation of the resident both prior to and following his admission into the home points inexorably to his participation in the administrative process as a basic condition for his peace of mind and fulfillment as a human being.

The beginning of the administrative process is knowledge of the facts. What are the residents' needs? Are they all being met? Are the means which are being used to meet them adequate? To secure information, the administrator must communicate with people and encourage them to communicate with each other. These people include staff, relatives, board *and* residents. Who better than the residents themselves can tell the administrator what they want and how they feel about the manner in which services are being given to them? They live in the home twenty-four hours a day.

Once the facts are known, problems become clarified. Planning can then take place. What goals shall be established? What resources of staff, equipment, space and time are required to accomplish these goals? The residents constitute a fine resource for planning. Their brain power should be tapped for their benefit and that of the administrator himself.

Why Resident Participation?

Before venturing into the specifics of *how* the residents may be involved in the administrative process, let us first examine *why* this involvement is of such vital importance to them. Before his admission into the home, the resident lived in the general community. Within the community many groups exist, whose members communicate with each other on specific planes or fields of interest such as business, religion, recreation, family life and education. Within each field of interest, purposes emerge which the group pursues. In order to achieve these purposes, each individual assumes certain duties and is granted specific privileges. He performs his duties and uses his privileges in relation to other people so that the group goal may be reached. In other words he plays a role. How well he plays it, depends on what decisions he makes. If he makes the

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proper decisions, he helps the group achieve its goal. His importance or status within the group is then established. In other words, the status of a person is inextricably entwined with the role he plays. It follows therefore that the greater the number of his roles, the greater will be his status. The greater the number of groups within which he assumes roles, the greater will his importance be.¹

The process of aging in our society however, is one of diminution of number of roles played, hence of number and variety of decisions made. The applicant for admission into a home used to be a parent in the sense of feeding, clothing, educating and guiding his growing children. Now these children are married, out of his home and on their own. They may love him, they may respect him, but they do not need him in the same way that they at one time did.

The applicant once held a job. He produced either goods or services. Now he no longer holds a job.

The applicant once was a householder. He owned his own home or lived in his own apartment. He did his own cleaning and shopping, decided what he would eat, when and how he would eat, bathe, sleep and have recreation. Now, specific factors in his situation have reduced his capacity to be a householder in lesser or greater degree.

The aging applicant questions what role is left for him to play in life; for without role there is no status and without either role or status there is no purpose in living. Immediately prior to his admission into the home therefore, the resident's activity in roles and making decisions usually has reached its lowest ebb. He frequently lives in the home of one of his children where he is not the

master of the household. He frequently suffers from physical incapacity which makes it necessary for him, even when he occupies his own apartment, to depend upon others for the daily needs of life that are usually taken for granted. As he contemplates his imminent admission into the home, he fears that opportunities for playing any role whatsoever will be reduced even further. In the general community, people know at least what role he once played in life. This knowledge by others and the prestige which accompanies it, have sustained the applicant. In the home, who will know what he once was or did? Bereft of his past roles, he ponders what role he will play upon entering the home. Will he have any opportunity to make decisions within any vital field of interest? Usually the applicant feels that such opportunities will be denied him. Bereft of role in the present, and the prestige which accompanies it, he feels that he is coming into the home just to die.

Confining Factors in the Home

How true is the applicant's evaluation of his situation in the home? Unfortunately, it must be admitted that the tendency towards role reduction is not only not diminished but is actually strengthened there. Several factors are responsible for this. Housing residents in multi-bed rooms is one such factor. In many, if not in most instances, the applicant has enjoyed privacy either in his own apartment or in a room set aside for him in the home of one of his children. He could decide whether the door and window were to remain open or closed; at what temperature the room should be maintained; whether a night light should be used or not; what time he retired at night; what time he arose in the morning; how often he used the toilet particularly during the night; how late he would read or play his radio and

television set. With so many roles having been given up he was still a householder, retaining the right of making decisions reserved for the householder. Now the right to make such decisions independently are sharply curtailed by the presence and will of a room partner.

Another factor which reduces the resident's range of decision-making in the home is the presence of a large resident body which must be served by a staff. Routines and specific procedures are urged upon the resident to be followed by him unquestioningly. In his own apartment the resident could decide what time during the day or night he bathed; what time he ate; what ingredients his menu contained; how his room was furnished; whether he would keep food on the window sill. Considerations such as staff responsibility for resident safety, standards of cleanliness and budget limitations on the number of staff that may be employed, make necessary the establishment of routines and procedures which limit the residents' range of free action.

A third factor which discourages the resident from playing any meaningful role is the attitude of some board and Ladies' Auxiliary members, particularly in smaller communities where these well-meaning people have very close contact with the inner administration of the home, that "to be good" to the resident one must remove responsibility from him. Such an attitude, especially when held by influential individuals whose positions are powerfully entrenched and who need time to learn from the administrator a different point of view, influences residents meanwhile to regress to a child-like often rebellious dependence.

A fourth factor which denies to the resident the right and opportunity of making decisions within a significant field of interest, is the attitude of staff members. Department heads as the ex-

ecutive housekeeper, the dietitian and the director of nursing often express the fear that to give the resident a voice in how the home shall be conducted, would lead to chaos. The administrator, in order to offset such an attitude, must have developed a philosophy of his own as to the role of the resident in the home and must possess the courage of conviction which enables him to lead and direct staff along wiser paths.

A fifth factor acting to deny a role and decision-making to the resident is the attitude of the resident himself. Having suffered a progressive diminution of role over a period of time, with its attendant reduction of status, the resident will guard jealously against any attempt on the part of another resident to assume a role and make decisions which may limit his rights yet further. This is seen in the wall of anger which rises against the resident who attempts to adjust the television set in the common living room or is bold enough to make genuinely helpful suggestions. He is likely to have quoted at him the admonition of the Jewish slave to Moses during the period of Egyptian bondage, "Who made thee for a ruler and judge over us?"

It becomes the responsibility of the administrator, mindful of the residents' needs for role, decision-making and status and of all the factors mentioned above which militate against the satisfaction of these needs, to create the means and the milieu whereby and wherein the resident may again feel that he is a useful and respected human being.

Measures for Expanding Residents' Activities

In most homes, recreation has been chosen as the field of interest within which the resident might find renewed meaning in living. Residents' clubs and

¹ Carl A. Dawson and Warner E. Gettys, *An Introduction to Sociology*, The Ronald Press, New York, 1939.

residents' committees have been organized, helped by professional group workers, through which group purposes related to leisure-time activities have been clarified, officers elected, duties of members defined, regular meetings held, dues paid and various projects such as birthday parties, picnics, bingo games, home newspaper, movies, lectures, music sessions and discussions successfully planned and executed. Certainly within the field of interest which encompasses these manifold activities, each resident, according to his ability and interest, plays a role and helps in making decisions. Yet the field of interest, leisure time, in itself is not sufficient to give the resident the sense of importance he once enjoyed as one who controlled his destiny. Living in the home community, he needs a more vital field of interest within which he can exercise control over his situation before he can again feel like a respected adult citizen.

In most homes too, the attempt has been made to restore to the resident his role as a creator of goods and services by encouraging him to participate in occupational therapy activities. Some have gone so far as to establish sheltered workshops paying residents from four to ten dollars per month. A good many homes place residents on a paid basis in such useful positions as minor office-clerks, synagogue sextons, kitchen helpers and messenger boys. In addition, the genuinely creative work done in the arts and crafts, particularly when accorded the recognition it deserves, heightens the residents' status. Frequently, however, this latter area of activity is relegated by the resident to the realm of "kinderspiel" reflecting the attitude that the field of interest involved is not invested with sufficient status value. Generally speaking, the paid work mentioned above is regarded as representing a more respected role, though one whose status is necessarily

limited because of the fairly insignificant remuneration given.

Encouraging Residents' Participation

Though all the activities already mentioned have significance, what the resident ultimately seeks is genuine participation in the control of his total living situation. What does it avail him that he is president of the residents' club if he cannot have a voice in determining what time he shall eat his lunch? The writer contends that opportunities for such participation can be given to the resident body so that it functions as an important partner in the administration of home services, together with staff and board, to the mutual benefit of all concerned. It is precisely within this field of interest, the total living situation of the home, that the resident must be given a role as a discoverer and diagnoser of facts, evaluator of program and planner of changes and innovations in program. It becomes the responsibility of the administrator to help the residents create the social institutions through which they can act constructively, in conjunction with others, to improve their situation; and to teach and direct the staff and board concerning the importance of permitting and welcoming the coordination of their efforts with those of the residents in developing a better home.

Self-Governing Structures

How can the residents be helped to play such a role? What social institutions are required for them to do this? Fourteen months ago, at the Montreal Hebrew Old People's Home, there were created, with the cooperation of residents and staff, a Residents' Executive Committee and a Residents' Assembly. The Executive Committee was to consist of the most able residents, elected by the Residents' Assembly, which constituted the total resident body. Its function

would be to bring recommendations to the administrator for the improvement of current services and the innovation of new ones. No recommendation of the Executive Committee could be adopted without its having been put to vote within, and approved by, the Assembly. The committee would meet at least once per month with the administrator and whatever department head the latter deemed it necessary to have present. At times, a member of the Board of Directors might have to be present too. The Assembly would meet once each month to review the results of the Executive Committee's deliberations. Within the Executive Committee, specific residents would be elected by popular vote of the Assembly as president, vice-president and secretary.

Through these institutions, every resident would have an important role to play within the limitations of his abilities. Those with the least ability could still express their point of view at Assembly meetings and decide whether they vote for or against a motion.

The administrator reserved the right to reject recommendations made by the committee and Assembly. However in so doing he would interpret to them the reasons for his action. This alone would give the residents a sense of participation in determining the nature of their environment. Hopefully, they would in such an instance accept the validity of the administrator's interpretation, thus making this thinking their own.

On the staff level, there was to be a division of labor between the administrator and the social group worker vis-a-vis the Assembly and Executive Committee. In all matters having to do with recreation, the group worker alone would involve himself directly with these bodies. Where the services of other departments were concerned however, the administrator and other department

heads would be involved though the group worker, in these instances too, was to be present at meetings. At all times, the president of the Assembly was to act as chairman of the meetings.

In matters having to do with recreation, the Assembly would function as a Residents' Club with the Executive Committee as its planning arm. The club aims were considered as recreational and mutual-aid in nature. Its activities would include various recreational undertakings, visiting and helping the sick. As members of the club, residents would pay dues. However any resident who did not pay dues to the club was fully entitled to participate in the deliberations of the Assembly where problems having to do with the total living situation were considered.

Illustrations of Resident Participation

One of the first problems brought to the attention of the administrator by the Executive Committee, was that of the lunch hour. Lunch was being served at 11:00 A.M. This was necessary in order that supper be served at 5:30 P.M., by which time six hours would have elapsed between the termination of the meat meal and the commencement of the dairy supper meal. Any extension of the lunch hour would result in a delay of the supper hour, something that was not possible in view of the staff schedule. Yet having completed their breakfast at 8:15 A.M., the residents had no appetite for lunch at 11:00 A.M.

The kitchen manager had approached this meeting with fear and trepidation. She was concerned about the consequences. The administrator helped her realize the consequences of resident dissatisfaction which was not aired openly could be infinitely worse.

The administrator suggested that the Montreal Board of Rabbis be asked to examine the situation in view of the fact

that sick residents, many of them diabetic, were endangering themselves by not eating lunch. This suggestion was accepted by the committee which then met with the rabbinical representative. The rabbi pointed out to them that in view of their sickness, the residents were permitted to wait only five hours and five minutes between meat and dairy meals. Thus they could eat lunch at 12:00 P.M. and supper at 5:35 P.M.

A meeting of the Assembly then was called at which were present the rabbi, administrator and kitchen manager. The president of the Assembly presented the recommendation of the Executive Committee while the rabbi interpreted the law again for the entire group. Individuals who were deeply concerned because, aside from the purely religious law involved, they had during a long lifetime developed a feeling of devotion to a pattern of conduct, were urged to express themselves. Even these felt, however, that if the worthy rabbi, who was the spokesman for the Montreal Rabbinical body, permitted it, and the residents as a group voted for it, they were prepared to wait a lesser time between meals. The vote that followed was unanimously in favor of the Executive Committee's recommendation.

The sense of pride of all the residents was something to behold. In an important area of their life in the Home, they had played a strong part in determining how things were to be done. They had an important role to play in controlling their living situation.

Another situation brought to the administrator's attention by the Executive Committee was that of the lack of nursing service for certain residents during the night. The administrator asked for time to explore the facts himself. An analysis made by the resident physician and director of nursing revealed that scattered throughout the home were residents who, while able to care inde-

pendently for most of their needs of daily living, required the watchful supervision of one nurse on a twenty-four hour basis on the floor where they lived. However to place them on one floor would mean moving almost fifty residents. A task of such magnitude would inevitably arouse many resentments, emphasizing as it would the altered role of the householder whose apartment used to be his castle. The Executive Committee itself however had brought the problem to the administrator. It was asked now to study the facts, as a participating equal, in solving a problem which it had directly helped to bring to light. It decided to recommend to the Assembly that the moves be made. The Assembly voted to accept the recommendation.

Feeling that moving was their own decision, and not a step dictated from above, the residents accepted their new rooms with far more grace than ordinarily could be expected. The moves were made with extraordinary smoothness, thanks to the direct and extensive intercommunication as working equals between the residents and the staff which in this case included social caseworker, doctor, director of nursing and executive housekeeper.

In a third instance the Executive Committee and Assembly recommended that a Torah scroll be presented to a local yeshiva whose own scrolls had been destroyed by fire. The home possessed twelve scrolls, many more than were actually needed. However, a scroll has a monetary value of between \$2,000-\$3,000. The residents felt that this problem legitimately concerned the entire community since ultimately Jewish values, without education in such values, could not continue to exist. In making their recommendation they were expressing their conviction as to what the responsibility of one segment of the Jewish community to another ought to be.

Powerful tradition sustained them. "All of Israel are responsible one for the other."

The administrator brought the matter to the attention of the board. The board president met with the Executive Committee. Following this, he himself urged the board to accept the residents' recommendation. In the ceremony of presenting the Torah scroll to the yeshiva, which subsequently followed in the home's auditorium in the presence of all the residents, the officers of the Assembly shared the head table with board, staff and general community officials.

In a fourth instance, the issue involved was whether the new kitchen manager, recently hired, who is not Jewish, was competent to supervise the kosher kitchen of the home. Since this issue was presented by the Executive Committee immediately preceding the Passover holiday, the administrator suggested to the kitchen manager, who had years of experience in administering kosher kitchens in large institutions, and to the committee that she advise them how she planned to prepare the home for the holiday. So amazed were they at the wealth of detailed knowledge that she brought forth, that their fears evaporated. When the kitchen manager pointed out to the committee that the greatest obstacle in keeping unleavened food out of the home was presented by residents' families, the committee agreed to accept her recommendation that appropriate signs be posted at key points throughout the home, urging the chil-

dren's cooperation. The Assembly voted unanimously for this recommendation. The kitchen manager who had expressed anxiety before the meeting started now enjoys an increasingly warm relationship with the residents.

In the fourteen months of its existence, the Executive Committee and Assembly have been responsible for the installation of water coolers on each floor and paper towel boxes in each toilet, altering the menus, eliminating spittoons and changing the baker from whom bread is purchased. The residents, staff and board all know that the residents play an important role in administering services in the home.

As the home contemplates moving to a new site where a 300-bed facility will be erected, the request of the Assembly that most rooms house only one resident has been accepted by building committee, board, architect and staff. Two hundred and thirty residents will be housed in single rooms in the new facility while 35 double rooms will be set aside for married couples.

The Hebrew word for "honor" is "kaved," which comes from the root "kaved" meaning weighty. "Honor your father and your mother" means literally that one should add weight to them. The Torah obviously intends that we lend weight to their opinions. In a home for the aged this can be done by first creating the social institutions within which the residents can offer opinions and play significant roles to their benefit and the benefit of others.