## An Experience with the Aged in Two Poverty Areas in Pittsburgh\*

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DRACTITIONERS working with the aged have long been concerned with the isolation and alienation of their elderly clients. We have seen this as a many faceted problem deriving from a variety of causes. We all know the psychological isolation of the depressed client. Equally familiar are the clients removed from social interaction as a result of physical problems including sensory impairment. And even those not so afflicted can feel isolated within the family because of changing cultural attitudes toward the position of the elderly adult. These are only a few examples of what could be a long catalogue of causes familiar doubtless in all their pathos to every reader. This paper, however, is addressed to a particular phenomenon of the late 1960's, notably the problems created for the Jewish aged by changing population patterns and racial unrest within large urban centers.

To set the stage for a description of what we have observed regarding aged Jews living in integrated settings I would like to say a word about general population movements in Pittsburgh in the Twentieth Century. At the turn of the century and until the twenties and early thirties the largest concentration of Jewish population resided in the Hill, now almost 100 percent black. This is an area adjacent to the downtown business district of Pittsburgh from which the exodus of Jews was practically com-

pleted by the 1940's. Jewish Family & Children's Service (which has always served older Jews as part of its total family service program) began a special project of departmentalized services to the elderly in 1959. In the eleven subsequent years we have served approximately 1,000 families. Of this number there have been only about ten who lived in the Hill District. Since the mid-1960's, only one new application has been brought to our attention from this The three major institutions under Jewish sponsorship have long since departed from the Hill. The Montefiore Hospital moved in 1929 and the Jewish Home for Aged in the early thirties. The Irene Kaufman Center remained longer to serve the changing neighborhood but by the early fifties had established two branches which followed the movement of the Jewish population. The movement has been not so much to the suburbs (although latterly there has been some of that) as to other areas of the city, notably Squirrel Hill, East End-Stanton Heights and Oakland. In the first two of these there has remained a thriving and growing Jewish population; only in the Oakland area which is now dominated largely by the University of Pittsburgh do we observe a diminution of the Jewish group.

The Hill District is the largest but not the only area of black concentration in Pittsburgh. There are at least three others,—North Side, Homewood-Brushton and East Liberty-Garfield. Unlike the Hill, these areas never had any substantial numbers of Jewish residents

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so that with rare exception we have not been confronted with the problem of aged Jews remaining in a black enclave. The people whose experience we are describing today might be labeled "newcomers" to the East Liberty-Garfield areas, having been attracted there within the past six years by the opening of two public housing facilities for the elderly, Auburn Towers and Garfield Heights.

Unless good housing at a price that old people can afford on Social Security or Old Age Assistance income is more available elsewhere in Pittsburgh it should come as no surprise that what originally attracted Jewish tenants to these public projects was the prospect of clean, new living quarters at a rental they could afford. Yet the anticipation of such a bonanza, prior to the completion of these buildings, by no means created a rush of applicants from the Jewish aged.

Auburn Towers is located in a section of East Liberty that was until the last decade almost completely Italian. It is now predominantly black but with many Italians remaining. Garfield Heights is situated in a deteriorating, integrated area the white residents of which do not, as in East Liberty, come from any particular nationality back-The economic level of these two communities is such that they were designated as poverty areas by the Pittsburgh Office of Economic Opportunity at the inception of its neighborhood programs in 1965. Yet, at the same time East Liberty and Garfield are peripheral to East End and Stanton Heights, centers of Jewish population which remain quite stable. The result is two public high-rise facilities for the aged situated in integrated poverty areas but almost within walking distance of synagogues and the new East End branch of the Irene Kaufman Center.

In the early sixties, while Auburn Towers and Garfield Heights were still

on the drawing boards, the East End Irene Kaufman Center and Jewish Family & Children's Service attempted to encourage applications, both in our work with individual clients and in group meetings of older adults at the Center. We invited staff members of the Pittsburgh Housing Authority and of Action Housing, Inc. to address meetings of older adults so that they could describe the proposed housing projects and take applications. Essentially the reaction of the groups was apathetic. While a few individuals welcomed this opportunity to better their living conditions, there were many others who expressed concern about living in integrated apartments. It seemed at that time that they preferred to remain in their drafty, overpriced third floors. The few Jewish applicants who filed in advance for Auburn Towers were all accepted and moved in when the building opened in 1964. They were eleven in all, seven individuals and two couples representing about 3 percent of the total tenant group.

When Garfield Heights opened in 1966 it was with a higher proportion of Jewish tenants, approximately 10 percent. We can only conjecture about the reasons for this higher percentage. First, the cost of living had continued to rise and the housing situation to worsen. Secondly, Garfield is located somewhat, but not really substantially, nearer the Jewish communities of East End and Stanton Heights. Finally, there was the enviable experience of the few Jewish tenants in Auburn. The first week that Auburn Towers was opened we began to receive calls from people who had visited their friends in the new project. Having seen how desirable it was, they were already regretting their earlier decision not to apply and were hoping that we could intercede on their behalf with the Housing Authority. It was however too late for Auburn but there was at least a prospect of their being accepted at Garfield which was still under construction.

The opportunity to observe these two groups of aged Jewish residents in their non-Jewish milieu was afforded Jewish Family & Children's Service through our participation in an OEO funded special project for the aged, sponsored by Kingsley Association, an East Liberty neighborhood center and recreation agency. This project, known as the Kingsley Ancillary Services for the Aged, is a multidisciplinary program offering under a single administration, public health nursing, casework, recreation and geriatric aide service. It got started in the spring of 1966 almost simultaneously with the opening of Garfield Heights. There is one unit of service based in Auburn Towers and one in Garfield Heights but services are available to all residents of both areas who qualify by reason of age and income. Each unit is staffed by a public health nurse, one more caseworkers, a recreation worker and about five aides who in addition to performing some housekeeping duties assist the professionals in carrying out their various services.

Auburn Towers had been opened for two years prior to the inception of the Ancillary Service. Kingsley Association located directly across the street from the high-rise had during this two year period expanded its pre-existing recreation program for the aged and moved it into the very attractive and spacious meeting rooms located on the first floor of the high-rise. The conception of the Ancillary Program grew at least in part out of Kingsley's observations that many of these older adults had needs in addition to those which were being met by good housing and pleasurable recreation. The final design for the program was created by the Health & Welfare Association of Allegheny County but for

lack of funding it remained in a file drawer until accepted by OEO.

For the first twenty-eight months of the Ancillary Program, Jewish Family & Children's Service, on a sub-contract arrangement with Kingsley Association, was responsible for the administration of the casework service. Subsequently we have served as casework consultants. Thus, for over two years, JFCS offered casework to both Jewish and non-Jewish aged clients in these two areas.

What we had learned about old people in our earlier exclusively Jewish experience proved to be readily transferrable to our new clients. They manifested all the same problems of loneliness, low income, declining physical and mental health, and poor self-image, and they responded as had our Jewish clientele to our interest and support. However, in the new program we found ourselves at an advantage which exceeded our expectations. This advantage stemmed from the readily available services of our professional and non-professional colleagues serving with us on the Ancillary team. To cite a few examples: with the increasing non-availability of home-visiting physicians what a comfort to the caseworker, (not to mention the client) to have the help of a skilled nurse in appraising whether a cry of distress is indeed a medical emergency. And when as often happens this proves to be the case, the emergency can certainly be met more effectively through the conjoint efforts of the two profes-Similarly the psychological insights of the caseworker have helped the nurse to understand her patient and both nurse and caseworker have welcomed the availability of the recreation worker to clients who might otherwise have had difficulty on their own in finding a place in the group. In a word, we found that the total was indeed greater than the sum of its parts and that clients were being served better than in our earlier experience at JFCS when we had to depend on referral to separate nursing and recreation agencies.

Since Ancillary has been only a service program and unfortunately has had no research component we have had to rely in part on these kinds of informal comparative observations to appraise its effectiveness. We have also had the reactions of our clients and our "non-clients." For example, there was the request received from an Auburn resident during one of the many periods when Ancillary was under threat of extinction because employment and youth services were scheduled to receive funding priority from OEO. Miss O'Neill, a retired teacher, asked the help of the caseworker in applying to a sectarian home for the aged. She appeared to be functioning well and except for the recreation program had never availed herself of any of the Ancillary services. But, she stated, the knowledge of their availability made her feel secure and without this security she would not be comfortable continuing to live alone. Therefore she wished our help in applying to the Home for Aged.

The most conclusive evidence of the success of this pilot project has been the recent decision of the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, following discontinuance of OEO funding, to act as the local sponsoring agency so that Ancillary Services can be extended to all seven of the aged communities of the Housing Authority. At this point, they are finalizing their arrangements for shared funding with the State Department of Welfare.

The Jewish residents appear to have benefited from the Ancillary Program in the same way as all the other tenants. The fact of their Jewishness has created no special problems for them, vis-a-vis their black and white non-Jewish neigh-

In Garfield as with the smaller group in Auburn the Jewish tenants have remained pleased with their new environment and are on congenial terms with their neighbors. Some participate fully in group activities, some minimally, some not at all, but the degree of participation clearly seems to be a function of individual tendencies to gregariousness or solitariness and to be entirely unrelated to Jewishness. We think it is not presumptuousness to assume that the presence of the Ancillary Team has been a considerable factor in helping to maintain good relationships among all the members of these two communities of the aged and could cite instances of how minor difficulties were handled in their incipient Anti-semitism stages. scarcely been in evidence though it doubtless exists among these elderly non-Jews to much the same extent as in the rest of the gentile world. Attitudes regarding race as expressed by the aged blacks clearly do not reflect the aggressive views of their children and grand-One black lady feeling unjustifiably that she was being excluded from a committee preparing for a party at Garfield commented defensively to the caseworker that she "didn't like what Adam Clayton Powell was doing any better than they did." The argument as to whether such long standing submissive racial attitudes are psychologically wholesome is not the purpose of this dis-Rather I wish simply to observe that both in the one-to-one relationships of neighbors and in the group experiences there was no overt indication of racial tension even during the tense days following the King assassination when East Liberty was one of the storm centers of civil disturbance in Pittsburgh. There has not been a single instance of a Jewish resident of Auburn or Garfield asking for help in moving to a more Jewish environment.

What has happened one might well ask to the concern about living in integrated housing which was expressed by the members of the East End Irene Kaufman Center in those early days when we were begging them to apply for this public housing? It is too much to hope that substantial modifications in attitude have taken place. Doubtless there was a certain amount of natural selection in that those with the strongest prejudices did not apply. Yet this is not entirely so. Mr. Landy, one of the "charter tenants" in Auburn, has such negative feelings that it is nothing short of miraculous that he has not gotten himself in trouble during his six years His judgment in many of residence. areas is impaired but he still recognizes a bargain when he sees it. Where else could he have elevator service, an apartment that is cozy in the winter, delightfully cool in the summer with a private balcony, a nurse to check his pressure when necessary and many other benefits all for \$32.80 a month? A similar example of controlling one's feelings in order to benefit from low cost housing has to do with one lady's application to Tubman Terrace. This is a fifty-five unit facility for the aged which opened in recent months a block from Auburn Towers in East Liberty. It is sponsored by a black ladies aid society and is federally funded. Miss Adler, an eightyfive-year-old Jewish spinster, born and reared in a small South Carolina town has brought with her across the Mason-Dixon Line all the traditional racial attitudes of her childhood community. But after years of living on an Old Age Assistance budget, sleeping, cooking and eating in one cold damp room, washing dishes in a shared bathroom, she decided that her physical needs outweighed her prejudices. Her spontaneous comment after four months of residence in Tubman Terrace was that this was the first winter in many years that she had been

warm. Unlike Mr. Landy whose bias remains firmly fixed, Miss Adler is now spontaneously relating instances of amicable relationships with her black neighbors.

Though willing to live in an integrated situation Miss Adler had not felt comfortable to apply for a high-rise for the elderly, architecturally similar to Auburn and Garfield, but located in Homewood which like the Hill is totally black. We had similar reactions from the few other Jewish clients with whom Homewood was discussed.

I said at the outset that I think we have been fortunate in Pittsburgh, primarily because the population movement is such that we were not confronted to any appreciable extent with the problem of a remnant of Jewish individuals or institutions left isolated in alien surroundings. Our experience has been instead with the movement of a Jewish minority into a protective, integrated environment well supported by community services. What we have learned from this experience is that the elderly Jews whom we know will not move into a totally black environment in order to obtain good low-cost housing. However, they now welcome the chance to move into integrated areas. who have made this move have adjusted well and have interacted positively with their black and white non-Jewish neigh-This favorable adjustment may be attributable at least in part to the supportive services available to all the residents in the two aged communities which we have observed. It may also be due in part to the non-aggressive attitudes of their elderly black neighors. Finally we have observed over a fouryear period that (even during the time of severe civil disturbance) these aged Jews have given no indication of contemplating or desiring a move to a more Tewish environment.