

# TESTING PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

By JULIAN G. STONE  
*Jewish Community Council,  
Toledo, Ohio*

IT is only in very recent times that the community organization process has come to be recognized as a basic skill in the field of social welfare. It is just beginning to achieve the same professional status as social case work and social group work. It is just beginning to develop comparable scientific data and knowledge as is the case in the latter two processes.

One of the great lacks in the development of the community organization process is the paucity of case material available for analysis and learning. Among other reasons, the lack of case material is due to the fact that professional persons engaged in the community organization process have not achieved the discipline of the case worker in keeping records. Also, persons doing community organization are under such great pressure that it is impossible to find time to keep a case record of their activities.

Professionals have a responsibility to accumulate such material in order clearly to show the step by step developments which express technique and process. Only then can presently accepted principles of the community organization process be properly evaluated and, perhaps as a result, arrive at new and improved concepts. The purpose of this paper is to show how some of the accepted principles in community organization have been applied in a real situation, and to indicate the soundness of

these principles as a result of the application. For demonstration purposes, two situations which took place in an intermediate size community are summarized to indicate how some of the basic skills and techniques in the community organization process have been applied in order to bring about some basic changes in the structure of some of the social agencies of the Jewish community. For the sake of clarity, the following three principles were selected for special focus in connection with these two situations:

1. Timing.
2. Democratic practices in community organization.
3. Broad community participation.

In addition, an attempt will be made in this paper to show the role of the professional in the community organization process.

Before going into the specific situations, some general background of the community would be helpful. It is a metropolitan area with a population of approximately 400,000 and has a Jewish population of about 6,500. It has a Jewish Community Council, United Jewish Fund, Jewish Community Center, Home for the Aged, Family Service, and Bureau of Jewish Education. Upon arrival in this community just about three years ago, the Jewish Community Council and United Jewish Fund had been without a Director for over five years.

## TESTING PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Only the Community Center had a professional person and the Family Service was part of the Center, administratively as well as physically.

The professional was employed as the Director of the United Jewish Fund and shortly after was appointed Director of the Jewish Community Council. The United Jewish Fund is not a sub-committee of the Jewish Community Council as is the case in some communities. Although, technically, it is part of the Jewish Community Council, it is in reality a separate corporation and practically autonomous. As a matter of fact, the Board of the United Jewish Fund consists of the big contributors and persons with prestige in the community and, consequently, has a tendency to dominate the Jewish Community Council instead of vice versa as is the case in many communities.

It was the opinion of most people, upon arrival in the community, that it was sole duty of the executive to raise money. Very few persons understood the need for social planning or of other functions besides fund raising. It was obvious as a professional that there was much to do in other areas outside of fund raising, and that it was necessary to impress upon the community the need of evaluating existing structures. However, this had to be done gradually and at the proper time.

Not only was the executive new to the community, but the functions of the Director of the Jewish Community Council and United Jewish Fund was by no means clearly understood. Before attempting to become involved in any area outside of fund raising, it was necessary to gain the confidence of the community leaders, to point out to them that other areas required attention, and that the Director was properly equipped because

of professional training and experience to prepare the community to meet its problems.

Prior to this time, the focal point of professional activity was the Community Center. In public relations, fund raising, Jewish education, social services, the lay people did most of the job. There was no pattern of central planning, there was no professional person to whom they could turn for direction.

It was clear that an evaluation of the social agency structure was required. If the Family Service was to provide the proper standards of service, it had to be completely reorganized. If the over-all communal program was to develop in accordance with acceptable standards, the leadership must have the necessary information and stimulation.

In order to gain the confidence of the leadership, success in an early project was important. Therefore concentration was placed on fund raising and, by two successful campaigns, was able to obtain this confidence. In the process, it was possible to engage the interest of the leaders of the Jewish community and then felt it was time to raise questions about some of the agencies without encountering extremely negative reactions.

The Family Service considered first. It had one case worker who had been with the agency for almost thirty years, was untrained and unqualified for the position. Its case load up until that time consisted of a few families who were receiving only financial assistance. A large number of Displaced Persons began to arrive in the community, and many volunteers became active in the resettlement of the DP's. It became obvious to most of the lay people relating to the DP's that the existing structure was inadequate to meet effectively and

efficiently the Family Service requirements in the community.

Because of the limitations of this service, cases requiring intensive case work service, child placement, etc., were referred to the non-sectarian agency. Most of the people in the Jewish community would not think of going to the Jewish Family Service for help with their personal problems.

Questions in relation to these problems were discussed with only a few people who had some understanding of standards and types of services a Family Agency should meet. Some of them had seen the need for reorganization prior to the arrival of the professional and discussions with them seemed to clarify and stimulate their thinking.

Although there were a few of the leaders who saw the need for a change, several of the leaders, who had been associated with the Community Center and Family Service for many years, displayed real resistance when questions were first raised by the executive. Any attempt at that particular time to bring pressure to bear to effect the change undoubtedly would have precipitated a great deal of conflict. Therefore, no further attempt was made to press the matter at this juncture. However, two subsequent major developments which took place in the community facilitated the reorganization process. The first development was in relation to the Old Folks Home which had requested permission to raise money to expand its facilities. Without going into details at this point, this request resulted in a survey to determine if the expansion was necessary. Amongst other things, the survey brought out the need for professional intake services for the Home, as well as case work services for the residents of the Home. During the survey, this need became quite clear

to the officers of the Home. It was apparent they were doing the applicants, the residents of the Home, as well as the community, an injustice because of the lack of services of a qualified case worker.

Another factor played an important role in influencing the thinking of the leadership. For several years, the community wished for a new Center. They wanted to embark upon a fund raising campaign and decided to obtain data regarding the program and size of the proposed Center. A specialist was called in to conduct this survey. In the process, he was able to clarify to some other community leaders, in addition to the ones concerned with the Home, the need for the separation of the Family Service from the Community Center, and to provide accepted standards of case work service.

While all of this was taking place, several discussions were held with the Director of the Community Center about the Family Agency. He was the first to recognize that the Family Service was not part of the function of a Community Center. In addition, he felt that it was taking a great deal of his time from the activities of the Community Center, which was suffering as a result. Subsequently, meetings were held with the Presidents of the Community Council and the Community Center, and all were in agreement that the change was desirable. As a result of this series of incidents, the Board of the Jewish Community Center requested that the Community Council study the Family Service and make its recommendations to them. A special committee was appointed to make the study and information was obtained regarding Family Agency structure in communities of comparable size. Several meetings were held and the sub-

ject thoroughly discussed, which resulted in the following recommendations:

1. That the Family Service be separated from the Center and placed under the aegis of the Council.
2. That the case worker be retired and a qualified person be employed.
3. That additional funds be allocated to meet the increased needs of a professional Family Agency.

These recommendations were accepted without question by the Center Board and immediately put into effect.

The second situation to be described is in connection with the Home for the Aged. Previously, it was stated that a study was made of the institution. The survey resulted from the request on the part of the Home for permission to conduct a campaign for funds to meet their needs for capital expansion.

This home was established three years prior to the executive's appearance on the scene, and contrary to the recommendations of the Community Council. It began as a small institution supported by membership dues and resident fees. The officers of the Home, because of the lack of experience and professional direction, did not have well defined policies and admission criteria. As a result, the Home was soon filled to capacity. The Board, therefore, decided that it required additional space and wanted to add a wing to its existing institution.

It was obvious, even before the request was made to the Community Council, that the Home required clarification of its policies, a program for the residents and definition of its relationship to other agencies. Several attempts were made prior to the time of the request to discuss these problems with the President and some of the officers of the Home and were met with real resistance. Although

they did not say so in so many words, the executive was given the impression that the Home was not properly his concern. Therefore, no effort was made to pursue the matter.

However, when the request was made for permission to raise money for expansion before the Community Council, the opportunity presented itself to raise a number of questions, such as: how large an institution was required for a community of this size, what data did they have for determining the needs for their expansion, what were the admissions criteria, etc. Since these questions obviously could not be answered, and as other questions were raised as a result of the discussion, the Community Council took the position that the request could not be granted until substantive data were obtained.

The Community Council, upon agreement with the Home, decided to conduct a survey to determine needs for the Aged. A special committee was appointed consisting of representatives of the Home, the Family Service, as well as the Community Council, and a specialist was called in to conduct a survey.

There was a considerable amount of resistance on the part of the officers of the Home to the survey. They agreed to it primarily because they wanted the blessings of the central body for their fund raising campaign. Also, up until that time, they received their total funds from their membership and resident fees, but they now were approaching the point where they would require deficit financing from the United Jewish Fund.

Prior to the time that the Home had made the request, the problems of the Home were discussed with the President of the Jewish Community Council, who was a very understanding person and recognized the need for examining and

evaluating the policies of the Home as well as its practices. Consequently, at the time that the request was made, he was in the position to follow through in a clear and positive manner on the questions which were raised in the course of the meeting.

Meetings were held with the officers and board members of the Home in the course of the survey. It stimulated visits on their part to other Homes in the area. They were able to get information on the admission policies of established aged institutions as well as their programs within the Home and also their practices in regard to the acceptance of the well aged and chronically ill. The survey was of great practical value to them in terms of being able to clarify their own policies on the basis of information they obtained in regard to other Homes and in relation to established practices in other communities. They developed a much greater understanding as to policies and efficient administration of the Home, and their negative feelings were largely replaced by positive attitudes toward the survey and the executive.

As a result, the Board was able to clarify its policies, its program, its admission criteria and its relationship with other social agencies. In addition, it was recommended that nothing be done temporarily in relation to the expansion program, and then at the end of one year, they would be able to determine, in view of the new admission policies, whether or not increased facilities were warranted. It was agreed that the Family Service should assume full responsibility for intake and personal services for the residents of the Home.

In the light of the two situations described, it is possible to discuss the principle mentioned in the beginning. The

concept of gearing the community organization process to the level of the community's acceptance, that is timing, was indicated. Trial balloons were sent out in the form of informal discussions with some key people, to get some idea of their feeling in relation to these situations. When too much resistance was shown, then the professional withdrew temporarily but brought other forces into action to influence their thinking.

A lack of awareness of proper timing in these two instances would have delayed the process to a great extent, or if it had been achieved, it would have left in its wake a tremendous amount of antagonism and resentment which would have vitiated the positive effects of the changes and would have been harmful to the relationship of the executive to some of the important community leaders. Preparatory to the reorganization, multiple forces were consciously put into action, such as: discussion with community leaders, surveys, and visits to other communities, etc. When all these forces had an opportunity to effect the thinking of the leadership in such a way as to make the changes understandable, acceptable and desirable to them, then final action was taken. Great care was exercised in giving them only as much as they were able to accept.

In some ways the community is comparable to the client and when judicious, one should relate to it in the same professional manner. Just as a case worker cannot successfully impose his own ideas on a client, so an executive cannot successfully impose his own ideas on the community. The leadership must arrive at the point where they can accept the change. The concern in these processes was the community itself, the improvement of the agencies concerned,

and with the individuals and groups interested in them. Extreme care was taken to bring the leadership along step by step. Impatience, impulsiveness, and lack of understanding of the personalities involved would undoubtedly have resulted in limited success, if any.

The democratic approach was used in resolving the two problems discussed. Representatives from all organizations concerned were involved in the discussion and planning from the very beginning. The special committees, which were established to consider and study the problems, represented persons from the Family Agency, the Community Center, and the Jewish Community Council as well as the Old Folks Home, the four organizations directly concerned with the reorganization. Also included were special persons who were particularly interested in these agencies. The time involved was about eighteen months and this time element was necessary to make certain that everyone who was interested had an opportunity to discuss, think about, and agree on the objective.

In neither of the two cases described above was it necessary to have broad community participation because the situations did not call for it. The organizations concerned were adequately represented.

However, in another connection, that is in relation to the building of a new Community Center, a survey was held which involved a very large group of people as well as every single Jewish organization in the community. In the first place, there was a large survey committee consisting of over two hundred people, questionnaires were sent to all of the organizations in the community, a population study was made, organizations were contacted in order to obtain information regarding their program

and their suggestions and recommendations as to what facilities should be included in the new building. It resulted in a great deal of interest and activity and much discussion throughout the entire community. There was broad community participation in a real sense. It was extremely expensive in terms of time, effort, and money, but was fully justified for it represented a major project involving some \$750,000.

There was one phase in the process of the survey of the Home for the Aged which was neglected and resulted in some repercussions. There was not sufficient representation from the Budget Committee on the Survey Committee for the Aged. As a result, when the Home for the Aged made application to the Budget Committee of the Welfare Fund for deficit financing, there was a great deal of unfavorable reaction. They raised many questions which had been answered in the process of the survey but it was necessary to have a rather full and lengthy discussion about the program of the Home and to delay the allocation until they achieved a full understanding of its program and then were willing to agree to assume responsibility for deficit financing. In this instance, the negligence boomeranged because consideration was not given to the need for representing, on the Survey Committee, a sufficient number of people who have budgetary responsibility.

What concretely was the role of the executive in these particular situations? Although the role was indicated to some extent in both instances, it should be analyzed more specifically.

1. It was necessary for the executive to be completely aware of the needs of the community and of the professional in relation to the community.

2. The executive was careful to stimulate and facilitate initiative on the part of the layman and exercise great care not to stifle this initiative. No effort was made to manipulate the leadership. At the proper time, questions were raised which started a chain reaction in the minds of the lay leadership. This resulted in meetings, obtaining of information, and discussion which brought about the desired change. The executive was the enabler who assisted individuals and groups in the community to understand the problems and to participate in the solution of the problems.
3. The executive served as a fact finder and helped the leadership to articulate their thinking and to focus properly on their course of action.
4. The executive was careful not to put himself in the position where these matters became his problem. At all times they were discussed in terms of what was best for the community.
5. The executive never depended upon one situation or one item to affect the thinking of the lay leadership. All possible resources were brought to bear in a given situation and there was always multiple factors at play in guiding the thinking of persons involved.

The professional is the catalyst between the layman and the problem un-

der consideration. There should exist a two-way communication system between the layman and the professional. The layman contributes his understanding of community need and community reaction, the professional must channel this sense of need in the proper direction at the proper time toward the desired goal. The professional should not assume the role of deciding what is good for the community and then try to manipulate certain key people to go along with his thinking and use them as a "battering ram" to achieve his objectives. The average layman is a mature, intelligent individual who can make sound decisions given adequate data. It is important that he be treated on that level.

In this paper, an effort was made to show the validity of some principles in the community organization process. No attempt was made to become involved in a comprehensive discussion.

It is hoped that this paper would stimulate the development of case material in the community organization process. Like many community executives, the author was originally trained as a case worker, and it was very difficult for him to grasp the real meaning of the community organization process without having case material comparable to the material available to a trainee in the field of case work. Professionals have a responsibility to develop a body of case materials illustrating the community organization process which can be used to teach, refine, improve, and develop sound methods in community organization.

## DISCUSSION OF MR. STONE'S PAPER

By BERNARD DUBIN  
Jewish Federation,  
Camden, N. J.

MR. Stone speaks of the paucity of case material in the field of community organization. Actually, the problem is deeper—there is lacking an organized medium for stimulating creative thinking and the development of the science of Jewish community organization. The practitioner in the field of Jewish community organization is left, in large measure, on his own resources in developing his skill. And, though courses of study in schools of social work are available, in the general field of administration and community organization, there is no such medium today for teaching Jewish community organization. Within our experience, the field of Jewish community organization has taken on a new meaning to such a degree that general courses are not adequate. The Jewish Conference in the last two years, through its programming, is attempting to fill the gap.

Thus, we are constantly on the alert for new ideas, experiences and developments in other communities to advance our objectives in building an organized Jewish community. Actually, at the core of our problem is a need to define and understand certain basics:

1. What is the function of the Jewish community organization?
2. What are its objectives?
3. What is the function of the Executive of the Jewish community organization vis a vis the community,

the Board and Executives of the functional agencies?

It seems to me that testing any principle has to be in relationship to our function and the structure of our community organization. At this point, I might indicate, my beginning too, in social work was the field of case work. I feel that some of the principles applicable in case work are equally fundamental concepts in community organization. Surely, they apply to group work. I feel we would do well to examine the common principles in all areas of social work.

Mr. Stone, in discussing his actual experiences in Toledo, has described the developments in fields of group work, case work and the care of the aged, and finally his own role in each of these situations. To produce the changes he felt desirable for the welfare of the community, various methods were used. He calls them trial balloons, talking to influential people, surveys, etc. Yet, if we examine each closely in terms of its objective, we discern a common thread—namely, to develop a fuller *understanding* in the community in order to condition the attitude of its membership so that they could accept, as basic in their own conviction, the validity of social change. Actually, the processes utilized by Mr. Stone were primarily *methods*. The objective was to develop the quality of understanding needed for change.