

JEWISH EDUCATION IN A FOSTER HOME AGENCY

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THE Foster Home Department of the Jewish Child Care Association always did make Jewish education available to its children. It was not until recently, however, after the agency had examined its practices in this area, that Jewish education became more integrated into the case work process of foster home placement, and something for which the agency and workers took more direct responsibility and initiative.

Unlike other agencies, the Foster Home Department of the JCCA does not have on its staff a person directly responsible for the program or for consultation purposes. Briefly, the structure for the program is concentrated in an agency committee on Jewish education. This is a committee of four, each person representing one of the four districts of the Foster Home Department.

This committee has met on the average of once in six weeks to discuss methods of keeping the staff informed of trends in Jewish education, to plan surveys, and to serve as a clearing house for matters of procedure and policy. This group discusses likewise the various aspects and philosophies of Jewish education in an effort both at self-education and to convey to their district staffs the newer thinking in the field. Occasionally, the whole committee or the chairman have met with the Jewish Education Committee of New York for discussion purposes. The committee

representative has the responsibility of reporting back to his individual district the thinking of the committee as well as concrete suggestions, etc.

It should be pointed out that the greater part of the committee's discussions have been geared to case work content—namely, how Jewish education can become a dynamic part of our case work with children. This has been an important focus of our program. Unless we could see Jewish education coming within the framework of our day to day job with children it could hardly be considered to be within the province of the case worker.

In terms of practice the following concrete developments have become part and parcel of agency functioning:

1. The agency considers it to be its policy to initiate a discussion of Jewish education with children and foster parents and to play an active role in the Jewish education of its children. In considering the type of Jewish education a child is to receive the parents as well as foster parents and children are consulted.
2. Once the type of education has been decided upon, the agency assumes the responsibility for the choice of school. In this way children have been referred to the better schools in the community.

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3. The case worker maintains active contact with the school once a child has been admitted and the child's progress, attitude, and feelings become part of the worker's discussion with the child.

The agency committee has also been active in providing holiday materials for workers and children. Likewise, the committee has the obligation of providing workers with statements concerning the significance of pending holidays for the workers' use and information. At the initiative of the committee the agency has found it possible recently to increase the rates of payment to Jewish schools. This increase, incidentally, has been used by most workers as a way of establishing a meaningful contact with schools—schools were informed of this through personal visit of worker rather than by letter.

The committee also conducted surveys on school attendance of agency children in 1944 and 1945. These studies indicated that an average of 30% of school age children received some form of Jewish education. Although we do not have an up-to-date picture for 1946 the indication is that the percentage of attendance is even higher now.

An interesting aspect of the set-up we have has been the conviction and education gained by the members of the committee themselves. Their own development has helped them convey interest to the staff. The potentialities of committee membership have thus led us to the value of rotating membership on this committee among the staff.

An obvious result of our program has been the community's greater awareness of the agency and its work. In maintaining more meaningful contact with Jewish schools and community resources, workers have been able to interpret the work of the agency. This has led to greater understanding of our function with children. These resources have been helpful, likewise, as potential sources for foster homes—the need for which has been so acute.

In looking ahead to the future, we see room for further development of thinking on Jewish education as an important aspect in the personality development and adjustment of our children. As we gain more insight and conviction in the constructive developmental qualities inherent in all aspects of positive Jewish living for our children, our whole program will gain added significance.