

## COLLECTING NATIONAL STATISTICS OF JEWISH SOCIAL WORK

Census Bureau is now and has for some time been actively working at methods and plans for the 1950 census. Careful investigation is being made to determine what type of information is likely to be needed, what use will be made of it and how best technically to obtain it. Each successive census requires replanning, notwithstanding the work that went into the previous plans.

The Council too, has been replanning its statistics collecting system this year in order to serve two purposes: *First*; to obtain additional information regarding several important subjects: (a) service to refugees (already referred to); (b) information on staff of family and child care agencies; (c) information about provisions of foster care by family and multi-functional agencies; (d) additional information about foster care in child-caring agencies. *Second*: To provide a monthly work sheet form for the facilitation of annual compilations of statistics. The forms and definitions have been revised in consultation with a number of agency executives to insure maximum

clarity. The new report forms for 1947 statistics are being sent to reporting agencies.

To recapitulate: the first conclusion that we must draw is that continuous planning is necessary for good statistics.

Secondly: coordination and joint thinking-through of objectives, definitions and methods are needed between the central agency collecting and analyzing the facts and the reporting agencies which supply and use them.

The emphasis on useful statistics seems to be desirable because we can all think of the uses to which statistics can be put for purposes of interpretation of our work to the community, for administration of the agency itself, for social planning and for scientific analysis to add to the sum total of knowledge about social work. If the final aim is to collect useful statistics, then the method must be to collect good statistics and then to use them to the fullest extent that we can, guided by our knowledge, skill and imagination.

## SOCIAL RESEARCH HAS A PLACE IN SOCIAL WORK

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WHEN this meeting was planned we wondered whether more than a handful of participants would be present. That so many of you attend this session leads me to think that the topic of our discussion must have a place at this conference.

Let me be very frank and tell you that the idea of calling this meeting grew out of our desire to share with you some of the problems and difficulties we face in the preparation of the Yearbook of Jewish Social Work published annually by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, particularly as regards the structure of the statistical report forms and the analysis of the data received. As statistical reports go, this Yearbook has filled a gap in the field of Jewish social welfare, presenting data reported by the majority of Jewish social welfare agencies and analyzing movements and trends from year to year or over a period of several years. To consult such an analysis may be a good thing for national agencies and administrators of local social and health agencies. But I doubt whether too many social work practitioners have ever consulted this book. If they should have done so by some chance, I wonder whether they did not put it aside as a compilation of dead figures unrelated to the very problems they have to handle in their daily work. And I would not blame them for such an attitude. True, social workers, and

case workers in particular, seem to dislike statistics because they are remote from individualized situations. Maybe the fault is with us; we have not been prepared to give an analysis that proved decisively that generalization does not exclude individualization. Qualitative aspects of unique situations have to be subsumed under classifications derived from quantitative methods of research whenever the interpretation of a total order involves a range of numerous individual situations.

Thus the mere fact that we provided a service does not justify the assumption that this service has been adequate and that the Yearbook has been a perfect example of statistical presentation and analysis. Far from it—the members of the Social Planning Department of the CJFWF are more than ever aware of its serious shortcomings. To mention a few of them: he who studies the Yearbook must conclude that there exists in the United States something like Jewish social work that operates in a more or less isolated fashion. He will not find much evidence that Jewish social services represent but a segment of the total American welfare picture and that they cannot but reflect the development in the total field. He will find very little reference to the growth of public social services, the influence of social legislation on changing responsibilities in the public and private field both in its posi-

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tive and negative aspects, and he will find nothing whatsoever that may give an indication of the quality of the services rendered.

Some may ask: is there any good reason for being so critical and so ambitious; compare other statistical reports and you will realize that there is no difference between them and your Yearbook in its present form. Quite so, but should this warrant a neglect on our part? Fortunately, I may say, the members of the Social Planning Department are not only statisticians but social workers as well and this determines the focus of their interest and attention.

Data as such represent merely a catalogue of factual material. They assume significance if related to a system of values. In the field of social welfare we are concerned with the needs of individuals and groups and with the services provided or required to meet these needs. The culture of a given society determines what we may call group needs and influences the measure of individual needs. On this basis our data become meaningful if they are related to the characteristics of our American culture as they influence the various aspects of social welfare. Only thus can we understand the attitudes toward social needs prevailing in our communities, can we gauge the future development in public and private welfare, can we plan for adequate services and develop programs that may prompt social legislation, can we social workers see the deeper implications of our profession.

In other words, we would like to make the Yearbook one of the instruments of social planning, a kind of inventory containing not only facts but a system of significant relations between needs, services and resources in the field of Jewish social welfare as an integral part of the general welfare picture which in turn

is a reflection of the changes in our social institutions.

I regret to admit that we have a long way to go to reach this goal. We are in a very preliminary stage of using available information for this purpose. We have the feeling that many an agency using our statistics is not adequately rewarded for its efforts in providing its data for us. And we also believe that social agencies should be concerned about this state of affairs.

We have just begun to mail out revised report forms for the statistics to be used in the 1947 Yearbook. They will allow for monthly entries of all items requested thus replacing the former annual report sheets. This will not only facilitate the entry of the data but it will also provide information that lends itself to the analysis of significant trends during the year.

A section for reporting the number and classification of the professional staff has been added. This should help us in assessing to some degree the quality of agency services. There will also be—as in previous years—sections on group work, vocational services and Jewish education. For this information we have to depend upon the reporting systems of the national agencies in the respective fields. But we hope to work out with them an approach to their problems along the lines on which we are proceeding.

Furthermore, we are discussing a basic revision of the financial reporting system that will yield useful and valuable information.

This is only a beginning and we hope that with the cooperation of all agencies concerned we will be able eventually to cover the field more adequately and meaningfully. The best test of the Yearbook's usefulness will be the degree of its indispensability.

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If the Yearbook should thus prove its usefulness, it might become more popular among social work practitioners. The present trend toward research in social work virtually places the main emphasis on the practitioner although in many instances merely his case records or reports are being used without having him actively participate in research projects. Social agencies have already encouraged their social workers to interpret agency function and services to the community. I believe that it would give the total field a greater impetus and widen our perspective if agencies would also foster their workers' interest in social research.

On such a broader basis social work as a profession could gain momentum as a part of those social forces that strive for a better future. If our efforts at interpretation and social planning help community leaders in assuming their obligations to provide better resources and support better services, and if we play some part in changing social attitudes, not as individuals but as a profession, we might contribute our share in saving America from a fate so aptly described by R. H. Tawney when he characterizes the ruling class in Europe after the French Revolution: ". . . they walked reluctantly backwards into the future, lest a worse thing should befall them."