

NATIONAL AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES COOPERATE FOR BETTER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

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THE field service programs of many of our national and overseas Jewish agencies are here to stay. It is true that some of these programs are regarded with mixed emotions by community lay leaders and professional executives because of the pressures which come from without and the "lining up" with one agency or cause as compared with another. This has inevitably resulted in a highly competitive situation, not only among the agencies on the national level, but also within the geographical areas which are assigned to field representatives of different agencies. National agencies have not encouraged their field staffs to come together with other field professionals because of the competitive spirit existing at the national level.

Because of that fact, this account of how a group of field representatives of various national and overseas agencies and institutions in the Midwest or "West Central" region voluntarily came together on an informal basis, for the good of the group and the general community, may have some interest for practitioners and others interested in community organization.

In order to get the background setting and to indicate the unique nature of the project, let us look at the national scene and observe the situation existing with

regard to the numbers and types of agencies and the financial aspects of the picture.

American Jewish communal life has grown by leaps and bounds in the last ten years, not only because of the stimulation from the overseas problems and programs of the war and post-war periods, but also because of changes within the local Jewish communities. Many communities felt the need to expand into the various areas of Jewish communal activity. As a result, national "service" and "promotional" agencies have been organized and reorganized to keep up with this expansion and in some cases, to initiate and stimulate such expansion.

That "thar's gold in them thar hills" is proven by the results of a survey made by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds last year, showing that in 1946, 160 CJFWF member agencies (Federations, Welfare Funds, Community Councils, etc.) raised a total of \$105,000,000 for all causes, 77% of the estimated total raised by all Welfare Funds. In 1942, these same communities raised \$24,620,000. The increase is accounted for partly by increased needs and partly by expanded programs calling for larger budgets.

It would be difficult to determine exactly how many national and overseas

agencies, organizations and institutions are soliciting community support, but CJFWF in its 1948 series of "Budget Digests" prepared by its Budget Research Department, for the information and use of its member agencies, has compiled reports on 100 different agencies in the Jewish field operating in at least 14 separate areas of activity. These include agriculture, civic protection, coordination, culture, education, health, overseas relief and rehabilitation, recreation, religious organizations and institutions, research, science and welfare.

Because of the keen competition among these agencies, comprising the more or less better known ones, for Welfare Fund allocations, many of them have developed or augmented promotional services as integral parts of their programs for the purpose of interpreting to local Budget Committees and communities their programs and budgets.

These agencies are divided into the aforementioned two categories of "service" and "promotional" with the former including the latter but not always vice versa. The "service" group may render functional services directly to the local communities or on behalf of the latter, perform services nationally or overseas. The "promotional" group are those which usually only do a "selling" job, i.e., publicize their programs and seek local community support on the basis of the ideological appeals they may have.

The more important agencies as part of their augmented promotional and service programs, usually have regional field representatives who serve as "trouble shooters" and liaison between their respective agencies and the communities in the specific territory to which they are assigned. Chicago, for example, serves as Regional headquarters for about 20 national agencies with other agencies

sending their representatives out of New York.

The story of this project in group relations began in the middle of 1946 when the writer came into Chicago as Regional Director for the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. He conceived the idea that it might be helpful to field professionals, their agencies, and not least of all, the communities served by these professionals, for them to come together on an informal basis and get to know one another personally and professionally. He thereupon discussed this idea with some of his colleagues and they thought it worth while exploring. The first meeting was held in March, 1947, in Chicago and 15 representatives from 14 agencies attended the meeting. In addition to CJFWF, the agencies were: American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, Joint Distribution Committee, the SOS program of the JDC, Jewish Agricultural Society, National Jewish Hospital, Jewish Consumptive Relief Society, Jewish Consumptive Relief Association, ORT, United Service for New Americans, Joint Defense Appeal and Bellefaire. The program of the first meeting consisted of a "getting acquainted" process, and securing suggestions for future programs. This group work process has been part of each of the eight meetings which have been held (all in Chicago) since that first meeting.

The programs have varied as the group determined it. Since the group had come together of its own free will and without any commitments (although perhaps with reservations), the emphasis was always placed on knowing each other better as individuals and broadening their knowledge and understanding concerning the individual agency programs and professional responsibilities. To this end, part of each meeting for the first few times, was taken up with descrip-

tions of the programs of the lesser known agencies represented in the group. Descriptive literature relating to each agency was circulated among the group. As a formal or informal part of each meeting, those present would discuss their activities and exchange notes on community reactions, changes in leadership and other items of information of common interest to all. A more or less permanent small group, including representatives of Joint Distribution Committee, American Jewish Committee, Jewish Agricultural Society, Jewish Welfare Board and the CJFWF, constituted itself as a program committee. However, efforts were made to have the total group, whenever possible, decide on the subject and content of discussion at each meeting.

Following the first stage of "getting to know each other" came the second phase of the group's discussion—examination of trends in American Jewish life. To open the series of discussions on this general topic, the writer gave an overall presentation of the history of American Jewish community life, leading up to the present day. This introduction was followed by specific discussions on "Present Trends in Jewish Education" (given by the Director of Chicago's Board of Jewish Education and College of Jewish Studies); "Minorities and the President's Civil Rights Committee Report" (a panel discussion with participants from American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress and Anti-Defamation League); "Cultural and Recreational Trends in American Jewish Life" (a round table by representatives of JWB and based on the Janowsky survey). Each of these meetings was held in the office of an agency concerned with the problem under discussion. The chairmanship of each meeting was rotated among the group according to the subject.

The group then moved into the area of community organization techniques as carried out in the field. It was decided to take a large community with which several of the agencies had contact, program-wise. As a basis for a discussion of how these and possibly other agencies related to each other and to the community, a broad picture of that community's organization was given by the writer, since CJFWF had an overall relationship to the total Jewish community and specifically to its member organization, the Jewish Federation. Each of the other representatives then described his own agency's program and relationships to the community.

Out of this discussion on field techniques in a specific situation came the next topic, a consideration of field work practices in general and how field service professionals could work together for the benefit of the community. This was discussed at the last meeting held in April. It also took up the subject of the problems facing national agencies in their relationships to, and contacts with, local communities. It was pointed out that field representatives had a primary responsibility for serving as effective liaison between agencies and communities to the end that the standards of work of both would be improved. As practitioners of community organization, regardless of the specific agency program, field professionals had to work together.

This was a reaffirmation of the original view expressed by those who helped create the larger group, but it came with greater validity after the eight meetings of the group, plus discussions between individuals in the group, either in Chicago or as they met one another in the field.

This last discussion also brought out that since the group felt it had made a

fair start in its objective of achieving better understanding among themselves, a more permanent type of organization should be fostered, retaining however, the original concept of informality. To this end, it was suggested that in addition to the agencies' representatives attending more or less regularly, other agency professionals should be invited to the next meeting so as to have a group which would include representatives of all national agencies serving the Chicago area proper as well as the region outside of Chicago.

This was held as a dinner meeting and 28 representatives of 18 national agencies attended. The guest speaker was Samuel A. Goldsmith, Executive Director of the Jewish Charities and Welfare Fund of Chicago, whose topic was "National Agencies and the Local Communities." After group discussion, the decision was made to organize on a permanent but still informal basis. The group will have three purposes: social, greater knowledge and understanding of each other's agencies and programs, and lastly, a continuing analysis of the place of professionals

in agencies dealing with the national-local Jewish scene.

And so we come to the end of a story—an unfinished story. As an experiment in "free association" of professionals representing national agencies in a given geographical area, this group project has already shown some tangible results. Various members of the group have consulted with each other on occasion, itineraries are being exchanged in some cases and a better personal feeling is manifested when the group gets together. As to the tangible effects on the communities, there are probably none, because of the varying programs and demands of the agencies on their field staffs. But what has been slowly developing from these group meetings and individual contacts is a better understanding of the programs of agencies other than one's own, and a greater professional appreciation of field work in general as a means of strengthening local community organization. Whether it can go any farther than that is conjectural. What is fairly certain is that the group will continue its existence, if only to reinforce the results already achieved.

A CENTRAL PURCHASING PLAN IN A FEDERATION

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THE two general hospitals, one special hospital, two Homes for Aged, and the Child Care Institution affiliated with The Jewish Charities of Chicago use during the course of the year a very substantial quantity of food, maintenance, medical, institutional, and other supplies. For a number of years a single contract for the supply of coal

and a similar contract for the supply of milk had been arranged centrally for all the institutions, and the success of these two single projects had stimulated discussion as to the advisability of extending central purchasing. A Committee was therefore established by The Jewish Charities to consider a central purchasing program.