

**Jewish Grandparenting
and the
Intergenerational Connection
Summary of Proceedings**

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Jewish Family
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THE WILLIAM PETSCHKE NATIONAL JEWISH FAMILY CENTER

E. Robert Goodkind, Chairman Yehuda Rosenman, Director

The William Petschek National Jewish Family Center was created by the American Jewish Committee in 1979 as an expression of its commitment to the family as the indispensable social institution for maintaining and enhancing Jewish identity, communal stability and human fulfillment. Its goal is to promote research on family problems, help clarify family values and stimulate the development of innovative programs to help meet the needs of parents, would-be parents and their children. It also strives to encourage an awareness and responsiveness to those needs in the Jewish and general community.

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**JEWISH GRANDPARENTING
AND THE
INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTION**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

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INTRODUCTION

Aware of the importance of grandparents as a link to the Jewish past and also as a factor in the Jewish identity formation of their grandchildren, the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center joined with the National Institute for Families in co-sponsoring a scholarly conference on Grandparenting in November 1983 at Wingspread in Racine, Wisconsin. The research and findings presented at that conference made it clear that increased longevity had made grandparenting a mass experience with special implications for a Jewish community that is aging.

Moving beyond theory and research, the Center organized a conference on Jewish Grandparenting and the Family Connection to address the practical implications of the earlier discussions from the perspectives of Jewish professionals including rabbis, educators, social workers, psychologists and gerontologists, as well as those most immediately concerned: grandparents and grandchildren. It is our hope that the papers and discussions summarized in these proceedings will help sensitize the American Jewish community to the vital importance of the intergenerational connection and lead to the establishment of a communal network for sharing ideas and programs that will benefit grandparents, parents and grandchildren.

Yehuda Rosenman, Director
William Petschek National Jewish Family Center

Gladys Rosen
Conference Coordinator

THE WILLIAM PETSCHKE NATIONAL JEWISH FAMILY CENTER

Conference on Jewish Grandparenting and the Intergenerational Connection

November 7, 1984

AGENDA

MORNING SESSION

GREETINGS: Yehuda Rosenman, Director, WPNJFC

Chair: Elaine Petschek, Board of Governors, A.J.C.

Grandparents, Parents and Grandchildren: Relationships and Roles

PRESENTATIONS:

The Jewish Tradition and Contemporary Reality
Rabbi Harlan Wechsler, Park Avenue Synagogue

Strengthening the "Vital Connection"
Arthur Kornhaber, M.D., Child and Family Psychiatrist

RESPONSES:

Abraham Monk, Professor of Gerontology, Columbia University
Charlotte G. Holstein, AJC Board of Governors, A Grandmother
David Morris, First Year Law Student, A Grandchild

General Discussion

LUNCH

AFTERNOON SESSION

Chair: Yehuda Rosenman

PRESENTATION:

Strengthening the Intergenerational Connections -
A Challenge to the Jewish Community
Janet S. Sainer, Commissioner for the Aging, N.Y.C.

Programming for Intergenerational Families

Chair: Gladys Rosen, Program Associate, Jewish Communal Affairs Department

FILM: Close Harmony National Council of Jewish Women

SIMULTANEOUS WORKSHOPS:

Workshop Leaders:

Harry Berke, Executive Director, Council Center for Senior Citizens
Rose Dobrof, Director, Brookdale/Hunter Center for the Aging
Celia Weisman, Director, Yeshiva University Gerontological Institute

Workshop Reports and Recommendations

MORNING SESSION

Grandparents and Grandchildren: Relationships and Roles

The conference was opened by Yehuda Rosenman, Director of the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center. After welcoming the participants, Mr. Rosenman noted that this conference, like the Center's other activities, expresses the American Jewish Committee's commitment to the institution of the family as essential for shaping Jewish identity and guaranteeing Jewish continuity. In 1983, as part of its multi-faceted activities related to the family, the Center, together with the Catholic sponsored National Institute for the Family, convened a scholarly conference on Grandparenting and Family Connections at Wingspread in Racine, Wisconsin. The research papers presented there on the functions and experiences of grandparenting, soon to be published, will contribute to our understanding of this relatively new area of inquiry and serve as an incentive to further research and activity.

This Conference on Jewish Grandparenting sponsored by the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center is a follow-up to the Wingspread conference. It is our hope, said Mr. Rosenman, that this select group of teachers, thinkers and practitioners will be able to apply some of the insights and observations of the scholarly research and arrive at creative, innovative programs that will link the generations and enhance Jewish family life. Furthermore, he added, the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center will be pleased to serve as the clearing-house for information about intergenerational programs and resources. Mr. Rosenman went on to introduce Mrs. Elaine Petschek, the chair of the morning session. She is a member of the American Jewish Committee's Board of Governors as well as its Women's Campaign Board and of AJC's Jewish Communal Affairs Commission.

Mrs. Petschek expressed delight at the opportunity to participate in this conference, especially since the Center's sponsor, in whose honor it was named was her husband's uncle, William Petschek. She implied that the conference on Jewish Grandparenting was conceived to meet the challenge of the special intergenerational concerns of our "graying" Jewish community. As the proportion of the elderly increases and the median age rises, new services and resources as well as more creative efforts, are required to strengthen the vital link between the generations. The morning session will focus on the intergenerational connections within the context of Jewish traditions and contemporary reality. We will hear from a Jewish scholar and a child psychiatrist with comments by a gerontologist, a grandparent and a grandchild.

Mrs. Petschek introduced Dr. Harlan Wechsler to speak on the Jewish tradition and contemporary reality. Associate Rabbi of the Park Avenue Synagogue, Dr. Wechsler received his rabbinic degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America where he served as Visiting Assistant Professor of Jewish Philosophy. Author of many articles on ethics and philosophy, Dr. Wechsler is currently at work on a book entitled, Broken Tablets in the Ark: Ideas of Aging in Rabbinic Literature. In this presentation, Dr. Wechsler will explore what the Jewish tradition has to say about the relationship among grandparents, parents and grandchildren.

The Jewish Tradition and Contemporary Reality

For a Judaic perspective on grandparenting, we first turn to the classical literary sources of the Jewish tradition: the Bible and the writings of the Talmud. Two biblical grandparents, the patriarch Jacob and Naomi in the Book of Ruth, are described as finding joy in their old age from a grandchild. Indeed, Jacob alone among the patriarchs has the good fortune of blessing his grandchildren, who gave an added dimension to a life saddened by personal loss and mishap. They also afforded him a sense of continuity and a certainty of his own eternity. For Naomi, who had lost her own sons, her grandchild, born to her daughter-in-law Ruth, gave the assurance of support in her old age.

Elsewhere, Scriptures assert that solace, joy and hope for the future are the reward of grandparents. In Psalm 128 for example, one of the great rewards for obeying the Lord is "That you shall see your children's children, and peace on Israel." Similarly, Proverbs 17 states: "Grandsons are the garlands of old men, and fathers are the pride of their sons." Although the Bible does not specifically command reverence for grandparents, the general injunction (Lev. 19:32): "You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God....." includes grandparents.

From a linguistic point of view it is interesting that there is no Hebrew word for grandparent in the Bible or the Talmud: the Bible renders grandfather as "Father of his father" while rabbinic literature uses the term Zaqen for grandfather and Zegenah for grandmother. The very same terms are used for old persons in general and Zaqen also connotes sage, wise man, judge, elder, head of the academy. Thus, it is a value-laden concept which implies respect and recognition for the old in general and the grandparent in particular.

Rabbinic literature does not idealize old age. We find many realistic descriptions of the infirmities and inconveniences of old age with its loss of physical vigor and psychological self-respect. At the same time, though, the rabbinic tradition also regarded old age as a gift both from a practical and theological point of view. Since life is a known good, living long preserves the blessed state. Furthermore, living long affords the opportunity to accrue great knowledge from the study of Torah which, in turn, increases the quality of life of the aging. And in recognition of the wisdom accrued from life's experiences, even the ignorant aged are included in the commandment to rise before the aged.

How does Judaism deal with the paradox that old age is considered a blessing and a reward despite physically debilitating and demeaning aspects? It does so by sustaining the values that support the individual aged person and counter the natural loss of self-esteem. Specifically, the Torah contains two commandments which cushion the negative aspects of aging by placing the aged on a pedestal rather than on the ash heap. The first, as noted previously, states that "You shall rise up before the hoary head and honor the face of the old." This implies a public expression of respect reflecting the social conventions of

the time. The second goes beyond the reverence due old people in general and delineates the duties children owe their elderly parents. These are derived from the fifth commandment in the Decalogue, "Honor your father and your mother." (Exod. 20:12; Lev. 19:3) Honoring a parent requires positive actions such as: "Giving him/her food and drink; clothing him/her; leading him/her in and out." (Kiddushin 31b). Debating as to whether the Torah means to require personal service or financial responsibility, the Talmud decides that it is personal service that is demanded. This emphasis on personal action makes the recipient of the service an important individual rather than a mere object of charity.

It is here that we can see the importance of the grandchild in restoring Naomi's soul and assuring Jacob's immortality. The old need the same things which restore anyone's soul: respect and honor which is personally and publicly expressed, and grandchildren are perhaps the only group that need no laws to tell them what has to be done. They naturally respect an experience and an authority which do not conflict with their priorities but rather serve as models deserving respect. Perhaps they mean so much to their grandparents because they naturally put them on a pedestal and restore their souls. Moreover, the interpersonal structure provided by religious tradition can strengthen family ties and intergenerational relations by making old and young into a unit which enhances the life of both of them.

After thanking Dr. Wechsler, Mrs. Petchek introduced Dr. Arthur Kornhaber, a child psychologist and an activist on behalf of grandparenting. His experience as Medical Director of Pediatrics at Neuro-Psychiatric Associates in Mount Kisco, New York, led Dr. Kornhaber to write, Grandparents and Grandchildren: The Vital Connection, and to create the Foundation for Grandparenting which seeks to sensitize all Americans to the rights of grandparents and to the importance of intergenerational linkages.

Strengthening the "Vital Connection"

Expressing concern over what he regards as the "wounded Jewish family" and the tendency for people to define themselves in terms of work and individual self-realization instead of their family roles, Kornhaber supported Dr. Wechsler's emphasis on Jewish values as a source of family strength and as a healthy basis for the bond between young and old. His ten years of professional experience treating children have convinced him that "children with close grandparents are different from other children. They are more rooted and more secure because they have a place to go if they have problems. They have emotional sanctuary and at the same time are better socialized. Such children have a real sense of belonging to something powerful." Dr. Kornhaber believes that grandparenting is a biological instinct, for "every time a child is born, a grandparent is born." Yet, the way that a grandparent acts depends on many

factors: how he/she was grandparented, society's treatment of grandparents, the way ones parents acted as grandparents, and the nature and temperament of the person.

For children, the grandparent by his/her very presence, is seen as a powerful person with magical qualities. The grandparent plays various roles; first as the family historian, the repository of family stories and connections. Religious values are often transmitted through such tales. Second, the grandparent of a non-judgmental mentor whose teaching is wholeheartedly accepted because love and approval are unconditional. In addition, grandparents play a magical role, very like the Wizard of Oz. Such simple acts as baking bread or taking out false teeth are magic to a child. The grandparent can also be a hero figure by virtue of a story he/she tells. And finally, grandparents offer a role model for what it means to grow old and how an old person behaves.

Dr. Kornhaber was dismayed when he discovered that 85 percent of grandparents really "grandorphaned" the children. Close and vital attachments with grandparents exist only for 10-15 percent of grandchildren. He is particularly concerned about the current trend toward retiring away from the family. The infrequency of contact in such situations make a child feel like an object -- "a charm on grandma's bracelet," as one put it.

Ironically, there are many grandparents anxious to be with their grandchildren, but barred from access as a result of divorce or death, followed by remarriage. The situation has been alleviated somewhat by the fact that 49 states have passed laws saying that grandparents can go to court to gain visitation rights. It is to be hoped that the availability of mediation procedures will eventually make resort to judges and lawyers unnecessary for grandparents of divorce who want to visit their grandchildren.

Demographic reality indicates that the proportion of older people will continue to rise. At the same time young people are yearning for the security of traditional values. The groundwork is now being laid to plug the generations into one another.

Responses

After thanking Dr. Kornhaber, Mrs. Petschek introduced Dr. Abraham Monk, first respondent to the two presentations. Dr. Monk is Brookdale Professor of Gerontology at the Columbia University School of Social Work and Director of the university's Brookdale Institute on Aging and Adult Human Development. He has spoken and written widely about aging social planning and has conducted workshops on these subjects in many countries including Israel.

1. Dr. Abraham Monk

Noting that he had no quarrel with Dr. Wechsler's traditional perspective on grandparenting nor with Dr. Kornhaber's courageous prescription for social reconstruction, Professor Monk nevertheless urged a more realistic approach. First of all, the romanticized image of the extended family, with three generations under the same roof, probably never existed for very many people. Furthermore, with life expectancy already at 75 and continuing to rise, we must contend with four and five generation families in which the practical problems of determining who cares for whom and how responsibilities are to be allocated will be mind-boggling. The grandparental role today is influenced by some sociological facts:

1) Grandparenting is a phenomenon of middle-age rather than old-age; many grandparents are youthful, and so involved with self-fulfillment that they will not represent the "granny" stereotype until long after they have become grandparents.

2) 40% of all people over 65 are already grandparents, with concomitant problems of the four generational family.

3) When grandparents involve themselves in the lives of grandchildren, they may be looking at intergenerational conflict: their children welcome help in babysitting, but they do not enjoy the directions and advice which accompany the assistance.

4) In turn, grandparents may resent being taken for granted as helpers, especially if they perceive the empty nest state as a burst of newly gained freedom, rather than loss.

5) Because many "baby boomers" tend to marry late, their parents may fear they may never become grandparents. They resent what they see as the hedonism and self-centeredness of their children and regard the potential breakdown in the chain of generations as a negative reflection on their own job as parents.

In addition to the grandparental functions as head of family, whether symbolic or real, and transmitter of family history and values, there are several others which are increasing in frequency: funseeker who entertains and indulges the grandchild by relaxing stringent parental codes of behavior; surrogate parent, especially where the mother is incapacitated, works, or is divorced; and finally, distant grandparent who visits infrequently, brings presents, and calls on the phone.

The age of the grandchild is likely to determine which grandparental roles work best. Grandparents are appreciated most between the ages of 4 and 12. Up to 8 the indulging functions fare best; for those between 8 and 10, funsharing is most appreciated. Few children look to grandparents for guidance. Adult grandchildren, while they may have profound feeling for their grandparents, do

not select them as role models, advice givers or problem solvers, and not even as mediators between themselves and their parents. "Ours is a society which is not particularly enthusiastic over intergenerational transactions."

Although grandparenting is losing ground in our society, we can still encourage certain activities that benefit the intergenerational connection. Cooperative care networks organized by grandmothers for grandchildren not necessarily related by blood ties, could ease the lives of young mothers. Also, grandparents can be introduced into school settings, clubs, family encounter centers, hospitals, correction centers, sport events. In such settings they might teach skills, help resolve problems, assist with remedial teaching, or just chat. Thus grandparenting can become a marketable, socially desirable commodity. Since the growing divorce rate means more and more step-parents anyway, we should consider promoting grandparenthood or foster grandparenthood as an expression of voluntarism and community service for those who want to and can do it. With proper training, these volunteers may produce a bandwagon effect, as real grandparents join in taking grandparenting more seriously.

The second respondent, Charlotte G. Holstein, currently a member AJC's policy-making Board of Governors, has also served as chairperson of the AJC National Committee on Women and its Task Force on Family Policies for the 80s. Mrs. Holstein, who was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the National Advisory Committee for the White House Conference on Families, is chair of the Loretto Geriatric Center, a unique care center for elderly persons.

2. Charlotte G. Holstein

In view of the diversity among grandparents today, I would like to begin with a description of my family and my grandparental status. I consider myself a young grandparent, healthy, busy, and involved in community activities. My husband and I have been married for 38 years; we have four children, three of whom are married, and four grandchildren with another on the way. We also serve as surrogate grandparents for three young couples. I have both a strong need to live my own life and a deep desire to have a positive relationship with my grandchildren and my own children. To help me delineate the roles and functions of grandparents, I conducted an informal poll among the members of my family and came up with the following:

1) All agreed that the role of the grandparent is to give and receive pleasure.

2) Grandparents are friends who transmit love and warmth, who listen and are listened to.

3) By sharing family history, cultural and religious traditions and one's personal life story, grandparents provide linkages to the past together with a sense of continuity and a feeling of belonging.

4) Grandparents transmit values and act as models for communal involvement. We take our grandchildren with us to appropriate activities and help them understand "tsedakah", (charity) compassion, loyalty and respect.

5) Grandparents provide safe harbor during stressful times.

6) Grandparents should babysit on occasion: it is a special opportunity to get close to grandchildren. Geographically distant grandparents, especially, should try to make frequent contact by spending vacations, weekends and holidays together.

7) Grandparents should share experiences with grandchildren through various forms of mutual enrichment: learning Jewishly from one another; watching the same television programs; attending cultural events, sporting events, cooking, gardening. Geographically distant grandparents, in addition to writing letters, exchange tape recordings. Family albums also help to create linkages.

I keep a file for each child containing letters, cards, drawings, etc. to show how much we value their communications. I would suggest that we consider the possibility of producing a "grandparent catalogue" which would serve a multiplicity of needs.

Another suggestion: perhaps one of the reasons retirees move south and west is the absence of retirement communities in the northeast. My agency, the Loretto Geriatric Center, is in the process of building such a community in Syracuse, New York, with provision for intergenerational activities and visits by children and grandchildren. Finally, it is important to make grandparenting more popular and more important. We should emphasize the positive, lively new styles of grandparenting and eliminate stereotypes of doddering oldsters. The media should be urged to depict grandparents in more positive ways. But ultimately, it is up to us to maintain close relationships with our children and our grandchildren. Grandchildren mean a lot to me for, as Rabbi Wechsler said: "They restore my soul."

Mrs. Petschek introduced the third respondent, David Morris, to present a grandchild's perspective. David, a first year student at Columbia University Law School, attended the Prozdor, a Hebrew high school program, at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America while he was a student at Horace Mann High School. He is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Harvard where he was active in Hillel. David's Jewish connection was strengthened over the years by summers at Camp Ramah and a home in which Jewish values and traditions are taken seriously. As an intern for the Jewish Association of College Youth last summer, David spent two months working for the Jewish Communal Affairs Department. Among other assignments, he did special research and writing on grandparenting and Jewish grandparenting in particular.

3. David Morris

I have three grandparents who are living now. My mother's mother worked all her life. She has relatively little education and never went to college. Now she is retired and lives in Florida. My father's parents also live in Florida. My father's father was an accountant, and my father's mother was a housewife and a mother. Both sets of my grandparents moved to Florida when I was in elementary school.

My relationship with my grandparents is best when they talk to me about themselves or about the things they know, or else when we talk about what I am doing. When they try to give me advice -- like helping me choose which college or graduate school to attend, for example, we have problems. They have really only heard of one university, the one they went to. Any other possibility they call "the other school."

It is very embarrassing when they give me advice about when to get married or what profession to follow, since they have such limited experience compared to my own. On the other hand, I love to hear about their world. Understanding where my family came from gives me a sense of continuity and helps me understand my parents. Our relationship is strengthened when we have mutual interests to discuss. For instance, when my grandfather retired, he started taking Hebrew classes, which he never took before, and now we have something to talk about; we're both students. We can study Jewish things together or I can do my own work and he can do his own work. I don't have to feel that he's living his life off of me which is how I sometimes feel about my grandmother who was a housewife and doesn't have outside interests. When she tells me to be the best that I can be, I feel sometimes that she is really trying to live my life and isn't trying to share her life with me.

I think that it is not true that older grandparents are better grandparents because they have more time. It may be that older grandparents who continue to study and continue to have the things they can share are better grandparents because they have more time. I think the more self-actualized the grandparents are, the better it is for the relationship with their grandchild. On the other hand there is a very big difference, I think, between self-actualization and hedonism which characterizes the Florida phenomenon.

The Florida phenomenon includes several issues other than those of geographical distance which is not the key issue. Low air fares and the financial security of my family make trips something we can afford to do.

Part of the problem is structural. My grandparents live in a retirement community which imposes restrictions as to age. Children are not allowed to live there. As a result Florida is a very boring place for a grandchild to go. In Boston there were people on my grandmother's street with whom I became friendly and whom I could see when I was with my grandmother. It diminished the intensity of our relationship and made it real. We continued to live our normal lives while we were communicating with one another.

In Florida, on the other hand, there is no one to see but older people and I must spend all of my time in an intergenerational relationship which becomes too intense. We get tired of one another, and by the time I'm ready to leave, we both need a vacation. So I think that it is not only geography but the age segregation which creates problems. Unless you can drive there is no way to get out of that community.

Another aspect of retirement communities is the way all activities center on the clubhouse. The clubhouse with its shuffleboard courts, swimming pools, classrooms and libraries is where people go for activity. Yet, children under the age of 19 are never allowed into the clubhouse, which means that I have no way of sharing in my grandparents lives. I can't see the things they do. I couldn't go to my grandfather's Hebrew class with him. I can't see him in the billiard room where he is making friends that he never had before. I can't see my grandmother when she teaches her defensive driving course. To me, the clubhouse is a place that people go to have fun which is provided by younger people. It may not be as hedonistic as it seems, but I really don't know because I've never been inside.

Of course, I understand that life is easier for older people in Florida where they don't have to battle the ice and snow and subways. On the other hand, there isn't much stimulation and there isn't a lot to talk about. People in retirement communities tend to be isolated from the outside world and suspicious of those who differ from themselves. As a result, my grandparents and I don't live in the same world anymore. The isolation of the Florida community has cut off a lot of our contact. In addition, as a result of the isolation, I often disagree with my grandparent's values and social understanding, particularly in regard to racism, ageism and sexism.

I believe that the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren lies not in concrete advice but in emotional, non-tangible aspects. I like talking to my grandparents but it seems to me that they are much more interested in talking to me than I am in talking to them because they like the stimulation of outside contact. I think our relationship has really changed since they moved to Florida, in part because I got older but also because they have separated themselves from the world I live in now.

They are unhappy with the isolation but moving back north would be too much of a trauma. Still, we are trying to keep a relationship with my family. This sad situation raises several questions in relation to Jewish values. If grandparents have chosen to move away, do grandchildren still have the obligation to go to provide personal services to them? What is the nature of value transmission when grandparental values are objectively negative and grandparents know less about Jewish things than parents or grandchildren as in the case of my family? Who should be teaching what to whom and how can we control what we learn from one another?

DISCUSSION

Following the panelists' presentations there was a brief discussion of the impact of social change on the grandparental role. At a time when life expectancy is 75 and marriage is postponed, it is less and less likely that people will become grandparents in their 40s as in past generations. Many will have their own agendas which rightly or wrongly, may distance them from their families. The nostalgia and even resentment expressed by David Morris toward his grandparents who chose to move south, will no doubt be repeated by others.

Yet the importance of the intergenerational connections was emphasized even where parents and grandparents are not in perfect agreement. As long as grandparents do not undercut parents, proffer love and learning rather than discipline and criticism of behavior, the child's life is enriched and made more secure.

AFTERNOON SESSION

Strengthening the Intergenerational Connection: A Challenge to the Jewish Community

The luncheon speaker, Janet S. Sainer, Commissioner of the New York City Department for the Aging, was introduced by Yehuda Roseman. Mrs. Sainer has had 25 years of experience in the field of aging and in her current position continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to productive roles for older people, community based planning and coordination of services. She is the author of many articles and the book, "Older Volunteers in Community Services."

Mrs. Sainer addressed the problems of age discrimination in America in general and pointed out the resources and publications available through the New York City Department on Aging. Before turning to the specific needs and opportunities for programming in the Jewish community, she listed various compelling factors which mandate communal and official attention. These include the changing demographics of the aging as people live longer and the number of frail elderly grows -- there has been a 38% increase in those over 85; increased mobility and geographical distance between the generations weakens family linkages. More than a million individuals over 65 live alone in New York with no family supports. Neighborhood support systems have disappeared and it has become increasingly difficult to transmit a traditional cultural heritage. The need to develop a sense of belonging through intergenerational connections is hampered by the ageism which prevails in our society. Further exacerbating the situation is the lack of a real and defined role for older people in our society after they retire. Since many connections and often self-definition depend upon a job, developing new roles and changed roles for the elderly is critical.

Demographic changes and the nature of our about-to-be-retired senior population makes it essential to recognize and deal with the heterogeneity of our older population. There are two main groups which have very different needs: the young old, healthy energetic 60 and 70-year-olds and the frail elderly, those over 80 who may be in need of special services and individual help, an area in which the intergenerational connection can play a major role.

I believe that responding to the needs of the elderly and strengthening the intergenerational connection is not only a challenge but an opportunity for the Jewish community. Many Jewish agencies already responded to some of the concerns previously expressed. However, we must place intergenerational programming high on the agenda of every Jewish institution, not just Senior Centers but synagogues, rabbinical associations, Jewish schools, boards of Jewish education, federations, national Jewish agencies, museums, Jewish cultural resources and even public schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, and nursing homes both sectarian and nonsectarian. I believe that if each agency takes one selected piece of the intergenerational agenda and organizes a creative response, we can make a major dent in the challenge which confronts us.

For convenience, requisite activities can be divided into three groupings: 1) activities for seniors by youths, 2) activities by seniors for youths and 3) joint activities. Just a few of the possibilities in the first category include in-home services which involve young people in providing escort, shopping and letter writing services as well as in-home visits to frail elderly. Similar individualized programs can be conducted for the institutionalized elderly. The Riverdale Home for the Aged has been observing a Grandparent's Day which brings young people into the home whether they have grandparents there or not. Young people can serve as teachers and can be trained for occupational and even physical therapy. Intergenerational projects can be organized as school projects which enable young people to work with seniors. This type of activity is particularly appropriate for students in Jewish day schools and supplementary schools and should be supported by boards of Jewish education. Other projects which can be conducted by youths for seniors include health promotion activities, crime prevention programs, help with home repairs, telephone reassurance calls especially for home bound elderly and home visits on an organized regular basis.

Involving seniors in providing volunteer services for youths as well as other older people would offer a needed social service and also help mitigate stereotypical images of the aging as helpless and useless. The Foster Grandparent Program is another service by seniors for the young which benefits both the givers and receivers. Similarly, utilizing the talent and free time of older people as tutors and school volunteers helps children who require tutoring and provides a sense of purpose to the seniors who are seeking a new self-image.

Joint activities which are mutually beneficial include oral history programs which preserve the past and help transmit it from generation to generation. Career training for the field of aging makes it possible to involve young people in the activities of the aged. It is to be hoped that more schools which offer related courses will focus on the aging process, the social impact of aging and the career opportunities which are available in the field as well as its inter-relatedness with other areas of health and social service. Students should be offered field placement in senior centers as well as nursing homes to afford them an opportunity to work with the healthy aged. Regular college courses which are open to retirees, intergenerational rap sessions and other joint programs at libraries and community centers offer natural opportunities for intergenerational linkages.

Mrs. Sainer closed her remarks with a call for a national effort by the Jewish community to strengthen the intergenerational connection by 1) collecting and sharing programs, 2) developing guidelines for Jewish communal agencies and organizations and 3) sensitizing all Jewish organizations to the importance of programming in this area today.

Programming for Intergenerational Families

Mrs. Sainer's presentation served as an introduction to the practical programmatic aspects of the conference. The prize winning film Close Harmony, produced by the National Council of Jewish Women, Brooklyn Section, and its Council Center for Senior Citizens, was shown as a demonstration of an intergenerational program which succeeded on many levels. The joint choral program for school children and older adults enriched the lives of both groups by means of a meaningful, enjoyable learning and doing experience. The film served as an inspiration and a point of departure for three concurrent workshops based on the following formulation of the issues and questions for discussion.

1. Issue

Sensitivity to the variety of grandparents and grandparenting styles in terms of age, interest, background, resources in order to avoid and eliminate stereotypes and avoid romanticizing the past.

In view of the spectrum of needs and interests among grandparents, what kinds of programs will attract young working grandparents, older grandparents seeking to fill empty time, retired grandparents who see themselves with the leisure for "self-actualization" and those who refuse to be imposed on as "baby sitters?" Is it necessary to program separately for each group? Why? What programs would help grandparents balance their need for independence with effective time spent with grandchildren?

2. Issue

Geographic mobility which carries grandparents to retirement communities and encourages children to move to new areas of economic opportunity.

Assuming the reality of the strains of geographical distance, what kinds of programs can Jewish agencies offer to bridge the geographic gap and strengthen the vital connection? Current efforts include telephone networks, special travel arrangements, letter writing, sharing videotapes, etc. What approaches have been most successful? What is the track record of surrogate grandparenting programs in creating bonds between older adults and children who are not related? How do we deal with children of the Holocaust who never knew their grandparents? Recommendations for Jewish agencies -- service, educational and religious -- for developing innovative interaction programs.

3. Issue

Intergenerational responsibilities and rights: grandparents can make a significant contribution to the young but they may also use the grandchildren to meet their own needs.

What roles can grandparents play vis a vis their children and their grandchildren? Which do you regard as most effective? What responsibility do children, i.e., the generation in the middle, and grandchildren have for grandparents? What can the parental generation do to strengthen the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren? What special problems does the generation in the middle face? How can agencies and institutions help to maintain a balance between rights and responsibilities of the respective generations?

4. Issue

The impact of divorce, remarriage and intermarriage on the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren.

In case of divorce, how can grandparental rights to maintain a relationship with grandchildren who are children of the non-custodial parent be protected? What new roles may grandparents be called upon to assume for grandchildren living in a single parent household? What kind of help can Jewish agencies offer in the form of support groups, educational and recreational programs?

In cases of intermarriage, what role can a Jewish grandparent play in relation to grandchildren who are not halachically Jewish or where the child may be considered Jewish but parents are indifferent to Jewishness? What kinds of programs can help such grandparents maintain an intimate relationship based on the Jewish factor?

5. Issue

What role can Jewish culture and tradition play in strengthening the intergenerational connection?

How does the Jewish view of the relationship between grandparents, parents and children serve as a positive reinforcement?

Conversely, in what ways can the connections between the generations serve to strengthen Jewish identity and guarantee the Jewish future? What role can grandparents play vis a vis their grandchildren and how can grandchildren have a positive impact on grandparents?

What kinds of programs can help to achieve these goals? How have oral history, holiday celebrations, the involvement of grandparents as teachers and story tellers helped to bring the generations closer together?

Workshop Leaders

Mr. Harry Berke is the Executive Director of the Council Center for Senior Citizens of the National Council of Jewish Women, Brooklyn Section, sponsor of the film, Close Harmony. A graduate of Western Reserve School of Social Work, Mr. Berke has worked at Jewish community centers from Cleveland to Boro Park and for the last 13 years has directed the Council Center, probably the largest and most multi-faceted program for seniors in the country.

Dr. Rose Dobroff serves as Executive Director of Brookdale Center on the Aging at Hunter College, City University of New York. Dr. Dobroff, who teaches at the Hunter College School of Social Work, received her M.S.W. from the Pittsburgh School of Social Work and her doctorate from the School of Social Work at Columbia University. In addition to research and writing and consulting commitments, Dr. Dobroff is editor of the Journal of Gerontological Social Work and co-chair of the Committee on Aging of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.

Dr. Celia B. Weisman, Director of the Gerontological Institute at the Wurzwiler School of Social Work since 1976, earned an M.S.W. at the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh and a Doctorate of Social Welfare from Columbia University's School of Social Work. Dr. Weisman's various research and advisory responsibilities include her position as staff consultant for the National Jewish Welfare Board's project on Differential Programming for Differential Needs for Older Adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations and suggestions which emerged from the three workshops in response to the previously listed issues are summarized below.

1. There is a need to raise the consciousness of the Jewish community to the problems and potential of the rapidly growing number of grandparents in the Jewish community. Local agencies, fundraising organizations, synagogues, schools and centers must be sensitized to the need for developing and supporting programs for grandparents. Toward this end, local conferences on the intergenerational connection should be encouraged in order to determine specific local needs and interests. In addition, grandparental concerns should be placed on the agenda of the national meetings of Jewish organizations and professional associations. It was recognized that there are different sub-populations among grandparents which may have varying needs and which would respond to different kinds of programs. For example, because of differences in age cohort, in education and place of birth, the immigrant grandparent may feel set apart. At the same time, rapid social change and family break down has made it difficult to define appropriate contemporary roles for grandparents.

It was suggested that there is a need for a set of guidelines to help grandparents to understand and implement their roles in today's society. This reinforced Mrs. Chuckie Holstein's concept of a Jewish grandparent's catalogue. Programs, whether geared to a specific population or designed for intergenerational participation, should be developed with an eye to steady and meaningful continuity between the generations.

2. In today's mobile society, "distance grandparenting" places a special strain on the intergenerational connection. Judaism and the Jewish calendar can provide a means of bridging the geographic gap. For example:

(a) Grandparents should subscribe to Judaic book clubs and magazines for grandchildren to help keep them abreast of Jewish issues.

(b) Exchange of audio or video tapes of family and individual history, interviews, Jewish stories, Jewish values help to maintain the connection.

(c) Regular phone calls before holidays, Shabbat and family occasions keep the relationship between parents, grandparents and children fresh and alive.

(d) Write letters and cards for special occasions especially at the Jewish holiday times enclosing special items as a basis for future communication and connections.

(e) Develop a file of letters, drawings, cards received from grandchildren to demonstrate to them when they come to visit how important they are.

3. To strengthen intergenerational bonds, programs must include not only grandparents and grandchildren but the generation in the middle as well. In addition, intergenerational rights and responsibilities can be conveyed through surrogate relationships and volunteer services. This is especially helpful when grandparents live far away from their family.

The following sample suggestions were culled from workshop discussions dealing with intergenerational bonds:

(a) Using the model of New York City's Project Ezra and Project Dorot, organize college students to visit elderly shut-ins and develop a one-to-one relationship with the senior citizens.

(b) Encourage the healthy aged to serve as Jewish resources for young couples exploring the introduction of a Jewish component into their families on Shabbat or at holiday time.

(c) Organize volunteers to serve as surrogate grandparents for youngsters who do not have grandparents or whose grandparents are geographically distant. This can be arranged on a one-to-one basis or through group programs in the arts modeled on "Close Harmony."

(d) Parents can bring children to programs featuring the works of senior citizens or performances in which they participate. It is important to show how grandparents and grandchildren can interact in areas of mutual interest.

(e) Organize forums which deal with the role of grandparents in terms of their positive influence rather than concentrating on intergenerational problems.

(f) Institute an updated "Bintel Brief" (Dear Abby) column in the local Jewish press to respond to questions related to intergenerational problems.

(g) We should be more sensitive to how the elderly are portrayed by the media and try to eliminate stereotypes by bringing them to the attention of radio or television personnel.

4. The impact of the contemporary reality of divorce, intermarriage and remarriage, often gives additional responsibilities and new opportunities to grandparents particularly in regard to the Jewish component of family life. There is a need for programs directed to grandparents whose children divorce since they may have to deal with grandparental visitation rights, help with child care, etc.

Grandparents can have an important impact on grandchildren whose parents are intermarried. Dissemination of specific programs in this regard under the auspices of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, a program in Washington, D.C. designed for parents of intermarried couples and joint classes for grandparents and their intermarried children can serve as guides to strengthening the Jewish component for the children of intermarriage through grandparental involvement.

5. Synagogues and other agencies should develop programs for grandparents and grandchildren built around Jewish celebrations and Jewish history. For example:

(a) A special grandparent's Shabbat can be jointly sponsored by a family service agency and a synagogue to encourage grandparents to speak out and communicate with their children and grandchildren.

(b) An Adopt a Grandparent for the Holidays program can be instituted in order to bring an older person into direct contact with the younger generation.

(c) Youth groups should be encouraged to interview and share experiences with senior citizens in relation to such mutual concerns as Zionist activities, Jewish education, work history and so forth.

(d) The middle generation should be involved and consulted in the planning and implementation of intergenerational programs.

All of the workshops concluded their discussions with a general recommendation that the American Jewish Committee should serve as a clearing-house for the exchange of information regarding programs for grandparents and grandchildren. An annual roundup of successful intergenerational projects might be published and distributed by the American Jewish Committee for the benefit of communities across the country.

Dr. Gladys Rosen thanked conference participants for their interest and cooperation. She noted that the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center was planning to facilitate an exchange of effective programs by developing a communications network for all those groups concerned with intergenerational connections and the needs of grandparents and grandchildren. To initiate this effort an announcement will be made in the newsletter of the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center soliciting outlines of programs which have been successful in communities in various parts of the country.

WILLIAM PETSCHKE NATIONAL JEWISH FAMILY CENTER
 CONFERENCE ON
 JEWISH GRANDPARENTING AND THE INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTION

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