

# Amplifying Jewish Vocational Services Through Publicly Funded Programs\*

RONALD I. COUN

*Assistant Executive Director, Jewish Vocational Service, East Orange, New Jersey*

*The JVS field has long navigated the shoals of using public funds while still maintaining its basic mission to the Jewish community. Besides receiving needed dollars for programs which benefit Jewish clients, the community relations assets which accrue from giving services to the general community should not be overlooked.*

THE concept of Jewish philanthropic efforts, *tsedakah*, and its relationship to the community at large, has its antecedence in Judaism's early history and was carried forward into the ages of the great Jewish thinkers of early modern times. Many of our JVS agencies have adapted as their credo the teachings of Moses Maimonides which direct Jews to find employment for the downtrodden. In Maimonides's stages of Charity he cites helping a man, who is crushed, to find work so that he need not be dependent on his fellow man as the "Highest Degree of Charity". Maimonides also states that as an obligation Jews must be involved with the general welfare of the total community in which they reside. He refers to the Book of Psalms (74:21) "Let not the downtrodden turn from you disappointed" while being mindful of a minority's need for community good will when he writes "the non-Jewish poor should be maintained and clothed along with the Jewish poor for the sake of peaceful relations".

The *Talmud* has developed a priority list on the giving of *tsedakah*. It describes a progression of interrelated obligations viewed as a series of concentric circles with one's self at the center extending out to one's family, Jewish

community, Jewish homeland (Israel), World Jewry and humankind in the outer circle. One's responsibility to the act of *tsedaka* is not fulfilled until all obligations are met based on the individual's capacity to help. Following this dictum many JVS agencies have stated as their mission, "to serve the Jewish community and where possible the community-at-large".

While JVS agencies have a lengthy and distinguished record of public service, which grew out of basic Jewish programs (usually sectarian employment and career counseling programs), the image of "unrestrained" use of public funds has periodically given us a bad Jewish press despite the benefits such relationships have brought to Jewish clients in need. The Jewish community's view has dramatically altered in the recent past due to several factors:

1. The increasing prohibitive costs of service delivery to special Jewish need groups such as the aging and handicapped.
2. The sudden financial burden of Soviet Jewish immigration in the late '70s,
3. The program income for indirect costs that revert to agency budgets for administering public programs.

The current economic recession (depression) and its effect on the Jewish philanthropic dollar has made this latter point particularly attractive as a legiti-

---

\* Presented at the National Association of Jewish Vocational Services Symposium Forum III: "Marketing JVS in the Jewish Community", Lake Buena Vista, Florida, Dec. 6, 1982.

mate deficit reducer. (The computing of indirect costing is well worth looking into and can be learned from some of our larger JVS agencies).

I will briefly discuss two program concepts in my own community which illustrate how compatible public programming related directly to unmet Jewish needs. To provide a necessary background, JVS of Metropolitan N.J. (greater Essex County) serves a community of 90,000 Jews (30% estimated as UJA supporters) and has a budget of 1.3 million dollars. The agency has had an early history of multiple funding from the government in support of its rehabilitation workshop services. These programs include the standard repertoire of rehab. services from evaluation to jobs' skills-training and placement. The programs are financed by state dollars and program expansion grant monies and serve significant numbers of Jewish disabled. These programs are conducted along with the agency's sectarian Jewish services of placement and career counseling which are funded through UJA allocation.

In addition to these in-house services the agency administered several community based programs for specifically defined public needs. These were manpower programs during the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) era of the '60s and the Vocational Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers in the '70s. Currently the agency still maintains an active vocational assessment service for the County Division of Employment Training (CETA) for which new funding was just awarded.

These programs were successful in terms of job placements and training. After the grant period achieved the program objectives, the O.E.O. and Drug Abuse projects were turned completely over to the local community to administer. A track record of performance was established by JVS as a com-

munity provider which cares for its own constituency while sharing its expertise for the general welfare. This record of performance, which included very solid relationships with the public funding sources, enabled the agency to gain favorable consideration when programs closer to the heart of the Jewish community were developed.

In the late 1960s the Jewish Federation of Metro N.J. appointed a task force to study the needs of the urban based Jewish aging. The Federation study revealed a pressing need for survival services to aging Jewish residents residing in public housing projects as well as to those living on the periphery of the more affluent Jewish suburbs. Among the multitude of needs identified was a means for older workers to obtain earned income (employment and/or remunerative workshop activity) to supplement their shrinking old age benefits. In addition such employment services would meet a therapeutic need to enhance the aging person's self image and sustain him or her in independent living. The Jewish Federation, using a JVS professional, identified those in need of such vocational help resulting in a proposal for a work center on aging based on a vocational rehabilitation model. Drawing on its past track record of community service, JVS obtained grant funds and fee for services income from a combination of government resources to initiate a non-sectarian program for older disabled workers. This program absorbed all those Jewish clients who were seeking employment as determined in the Federation survey. The costs for such a service in 1973 were in excess of \$200,000. and could not have been met solely with Jewish campaign funds. Today this program is one of the major agency departments serving both the needs of the disabled aging (including older Soviet Jews) with expanded job placement services to the

non-disabled aging (County funded in 1982).

When thousands of Soviet Jews had to be quickly absorbed into the labor market, the local CETA administration, managed by individuals who had their roots in the O.E.O. days, responded to the need of the Jewish community as presented by JVS. Through a non-financial agreement, CETA provided stipends to Soviet Jews attending the Federation ESL (English as a Second Language) program and sponsored them in Skills Training Programs. In addition, during the funding for Public Service Employment, CETA paid the salaries of staff who were being trained as placement counselors working in the agency's Soviet emigre program. The Jewish community saved several hundred thousand dollars in client maintenance and staff costs. JVS performed the vocational development and placement part of the Federation program resulting in employment for 1200 emigres in a five-year period. During the preliminary negotiations with CETA, JVS administrative staff invited the participation of the Federation Director of Social Planning who was newly experienced with public funding in our community. While JVS handled the initial negotiations (which included also support of services being performed by the family service and Y), the Federation administrator was included in the process and reinforced JVS's role to the Federation leadership. Subsequently, when the local Federation agencies had to write a grant proposal to receive funding from the Council of Jewish Federation's (CJF) emigre block grant, the JVS, as the only experienced government grant developer, was requested to assist the other Federation agencies in writing the community's

proposal. This request was repeated in other Jewish communities in the U.S. where there were JVS agencies with public program experience.

Today, the federal government's largesse, with its sophisticated system of service delivery, has ended. New and disparate sources of service delivery—some in conflict, some in great states of confusion—have evolved out of the "New Federalism". "Less for local" is the theme as states, counties and community units become the dispensers of attenuated funds which cover areas affecting all Jewish health care services, e.g., nursing homes, home care, mental health counseling, child care, services to aging and employment training.

As a consequence of JVS's public involvement, agency staff were invited on to the various local planning councils which influence the policies affecting service disbursement. JVS has staff on the County Aging Council, Community Mental Health Board and Employment Training Council (PIC). The agency has invited and received visits from the new political administrators such as the State Commissioner of Labor and the Essex County Executive. Through this type of representation JVS administrative staff can directly advocate for the interests of the Jewish community while also lending their program planning expertise to the community-at-large. While for some of us it's a new role (pro-active service deliverers)—it rather fits comfortably.

In summary, the JVS field has long navigated the shoals of using public funds while still maintaining its basic mission to the Jewish community. Besides receiving needed dollars for programs which benefit Jewish clients, the community relations assets which accrue from giving services to the general community should not be overlooked.