THE ARMED SERVICES AREA WORKER*

by CHARLES S. LEVY

National Jewish Welfare Board, New York, N. Y.

THE armed services worker is a familiar species of social worker, but his job description is cast in a new context. In time of relative peace it is necessary to emphasize this fact. The glamour of warfare having been dissipated, and large segments of the community having become disinterested, if not apathetic about the lot of men and women in the armed forces, it seems essential for the social work profession itself to recognize the professional implications of armed services work and to interpret its significance to the community at large.

It is the purpose of this paper to examine the job of the armed services area worker as an illustrative analysis of the responsibilities and requirements of at least one type of armed services social work assignment. It should become evident that the skills and knowledge required for competent practice in this sphere of social work call for a maximum of social work training and experience. If this is the inescapable conclusion of our present brief, then it would seem that the profession as a whole shares responsibility for its interpretation to the community at large, and to prospective practitioners in particular.

The armed services area worker is not the only social worker serving members of the armed forces and their dependents. However, his job responsibilities represent the range of social work methodology. For that reason we have selected the armed services area worker's job description as a basis for discussion. It is a composite but not atypical representation of the armed services worker as employed by the National Jewish Welfare Board and other USO member agencies, as well as other informal education and recreation agencies which concentrate on service to military personnel and their families.

The armed services area worker is one of the professional people responsible for meeting the religious, recreational and many personal needs of servicemen and women and of their dependents. In addition, he is expected to provide assistance, counsel and referral services in matters affecting the inter-personal and adjustmental relationships of service personnel.

Implicit in these fundamental objectives is the gamut of responsibilities pertaining to the operation of an agency

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organized to fulfill them. These responsibilities include supervision of staff and volunteers engaged in the conduct of programs and the provision of services, leadership of small and large groups which participate in the program planning and in the programs themselves, work with lay boards and committees, and relationships with social agencies, community organizations and military authorities. The job responsibilities of the armed services area worker are further complicated by the fact that they cover a number of communities.

A day in the life of the armed services worker is apt to look something like the following: He reports to his office at 9:00 a.m., and after the usual amenities, reads the in-coming mail, dictates a few letters, peruses the transcript of his latest narrative and statistical reports, calls the board chairman about the agenda for the executive meeting the following day, arranges an appointment with the commanding officer of one of the five military installations for which he is responsible, drafts a newspaper release on the weekend program at the servicemen's lounge, and gives his secretary instructions on procedures during his absence. In the afternoon, he lunches with the executive of the local welfare fund during which time he acquires an understanding about allocation procedures, and paves the way for participation by the lay committee which has been appointed to make a presentation on behalf of his agency.

He goes on to meet with the post chaplain in one of the larger installations about plans for forthcoming religious holidays and hurries back to his office to sign the transcribed mail. He answers an irate telephone call from the president of one of the community groups who complains of the inadequacy of the junior hostesses assigned to a program the previous evening. He also learns from a telephone message that men at one installation are to be restricted to the post on weekdays until further notice. A transportation problem emerges and the worker calls his wife to say that he will not be able to have dinner at home, for the problem must be resolved through personal intervention. The refreshments and the enthusiasm of volunteers scheduled for the event are perishable and the failure of the hostesses and servicemen to attend it accelerates the process.

The problem resolved, after a few calls and a personal visit, the worker manages to return in time for a planning meeting of the junior hostess training committee. Remembering the remittance checks which he had thrust into his desk drawer, he signs them and prepares them for further processing by his secretary. Although it is late and he is tired, he thinks about the consultation scheduled for the next day in connection with the request for a compassionate discharge made by a young soldier who is eager to be stationed nearer to his home so that he can visit his hospitalized mother whenever he is free.

As he nibbles at his midnight snack, from out of the recesses of his tired brain emerges the recollection of a young sailor who expressed intense resentment over the failure of his parents to equip him for the kinds of responsibility he was required to carry in military service, and he decides to suggest to the program committee of the board the consideration of a community-wide program of pre-induction orientation.

This has been an unusually long day, but in it the armed services worker has experienced the usual range of personal activity which his job requires.

The talent for the effective consummation of the enumerated pursuits is not generated casually. It can only result from intensive preparation. Preferably, it is derived from a well-integrated program of social work training which emphasizes the common foundations of

the various social work specializations, and which provides considerable opportunity for personal practice in each of the specializations. This is self-evident, for the job description of the armed services worker calls for the constant and daily use of all of the social work methods as they are currently constituted. A brief analysis of the specific applicability of each method to the job description components will make this additionally apparent.

Social Case Work

The armed services area worker serves as a link between the serviceman and the community and this link is activated when the individual faces problems in adjustment, relationships, subsistence, or tension which cannot be satisfactorily reached through the use of normal military channels alone. Nor is casual referral sufficient, although referral is the principal medium of service, since the armed services worker has at his immediate disposal, aside from his own skill and knowledge, a minimum of resources applicable to these problems. As intake interviewer and channeler he generally spends considerable time in counseling individuals and families, in contacting social agencies within the immediate community and outside of it, in drawing in professional colleagues in other areas where efforts towards the resolution of the problem may be complemented and supplemented, and in doing a multitude of other things which bear upon the situation requiring treatment. Except for simple and transitory problems, even in cases of direct referral to other agencies, the armed services worker sustains his responsibility and his relationship to the case until it is completely closed.

A broad knowledge of the social welfare structure in the entire country is necessary for effective social work functioning in this kind of operation. This includes complete comprehension of social legislation and the military structure in relation to which problems arise. For example, our experience indicates a high incidence of cases involving courts martial, allotment and subsistence issues, and discharge processing. A large proportion of the cases calls for speedy consummation on a short contact basis, and the readier the resources, the more feasible is the rapid solution of many of the problems which are presented.

In addition to the substantive content of social casework education, as acquired in field work and courses, the specific content pertaining to the military structure and military relationships must be absorbed and made ready for use. This picture of needed knowledge is further complicated by the fact that the National Jewish Welfare Board worker, as an example, shares in the meeting of needs of individuals anticipating induction, and of veterans after their discharge. He is expected to fulfill his professional responsibility at the military installation, in the community, in military and Veterans Administration hospitals. All this expands considerably the body of information on which he must draw.

As a member of the social work profession, moreover, and one with precise responsibility for social welfare needs which emerge out of the entire defense and security situation, the armed services worker must in some manner serve individuals in the community who are affected by that situation. This includes needs of dependent and difficulties of families which arise from the prospect or fact of military service, and implies guidance needs of young people prior to induction.

Needless to say, knowledge about and understanding of individual behavior and development as derived from social casework training are fundamental in all of the armed services area worker's practice. To serve individuals effectively, general knowledge about individuals must be supplemented by specific knowledge about the individual in uniform and in our defense-conscious culture.

Community Organization

The armed services area worker operates within the context of community mores and dynamics, and deals with communities which are, sometimes in spite of themselves, asked to serve, accommodate and—as they sometimes see it—cope with, a mass of people and institutions completely foreign to them.

In order to organize local resources to meet the educational, recreational and welfare needs of service personnel and their dependents, he must help coordinate both community groups and community efforts, through work with individuals, organizations, and committees. Since these represent people, he draws on an understanding of the attitudes and motivations of people, of the meaning of their behavior and of the nature of their inter-personal relationships, and uses it to help subordinate individual impulses to the agency's service goals. He must help relate them to the military structure, local and national, and the agency structure and relationships.

Recently, moreover, the armed services area worker has been engaged in fund-raising, which is a field of competence in itself requiring not only skill in interpretation but also extraordinary knowledge about the community, its culture, its attitudes toward social services and towards the financing of social agencies.

To stimulate the support of the community, the worker employs many communicative skills and media, and to maintain and enlarge it, he must be inordinately scrupulous about reporting, to the community, both progress and needs.

If we extend the area of the armed services worker's concern to pre-induction guidance then skilled and knowledgeable performance is necessary for the organization of community resources and talent to render this service. It means taking the initiative in organizing all agencies and institutions which serve young people and families, and all parents groups, and associations whose memberships include parents.

If we agree that responsibility of the social worker forks into two directions, namely, the treatment of problems stemming from social conditions and the prevention of social conditions which make treatment necessary, then we find in the armed services worker's professional agenda the stimulus for operation in both directions within the community and social welfare framework. Military service—or its requirement at least—can be viewed as a social condition in which the young citizen finds himself involuntarily enmeshed. The social worker, and the community in which he practices, have a responsibility to that citizen to help him deal with problems caused by that social condition. The social worker, moreover, carries the additional responsibility of encouraging and assisting the community, and all its constituent groups and citizens, in making every affirmative gesture possible, within their immediate resources and through participation in the political and international scene, to avert this social condition. This is a tall order, especially when the solution rests within the purview of other nations, but we all have a role to play within our nation which may have more of an influence towards a constructive fulfillment of peace efforts than may be immediately apparent.

Social Group Work

The armed services worker helps in the development of an educational-recreational program akin to that in traditional group work settings. This demands all of the pre-requisite knowledge and skills

necessary to take into account the varying needs and capacities of different age and cultural groups, and the varying capacities of individuals, to insure the participation of constituents in the planning, execution and evaluation of programs, to provide for the adjustmental and social relationship needs of individuals, to develop democratic behavior and philosophy, and to implement appropriate social goals. In addition to expediting the meeting of social and recreational needs of individuals and of groups, within the context of a democratic social structure, the armed services worker renders direct service as a group worker. He leads groups in singing, and consciously contributes toward the creation of a wholesome atmosphere; he helps in the development and expansion of interests. He develops mass activities and, to the extent that he is successful, he uses the setting of the mass program to help develop effective inter-personal relationships, and to respond to individual and small group needs and interests. The use of mass activities as a tool in meeting individualized needs, in fact, presents a special challenge since mass programs are often the chief program media which can be realistically employed.

The armed services worker also supervises paid and volunteer staff who aid in these endeavors, a function which necessitates a maximum amount of skill and maturity.

Implicit in all the worker's activities is the importance of self-awareness, a well-integrated and well-internalized social work philosophy, interest in people and insight into the meaning of behavior. All of these and the other components of social work in general and of each of the social work methods in particular, are constantly in use if the armed services worker performs effectively. None of them is a mere incident to a primary job; each of them is an integral part of the primary job.

Administration and Research

Whether or not administration and research are to be considered specializations in social work practice need not detain us here. Both, however, are integral constituents of the armed services area worker's job. He trains and supervises personnel, both paid and volunteer; he prepares and administers a budget. He is constantly engaged in an intensive program of public relations and interpretation. He plans; he organizes; he coordinates.

He gathers facts—facts which contribute to the basis for administrative and policy decisions, and facts which contribute to national research findings. These facts range from statistical summations of services rendered and people served, to attitude interviews and program analyses.

This account is not based on hypothetical job situations but is derived from actual field experiences. If we cannot say with confidence that all the skills and knowledge mentioned are currently finding expression in every area of practice in armed services work, we can say with complete conviction that for the satisfactory achievement of armed services work objectives, they must somehow find such expression. This means starting with well-trained social workers who have had a rich background and a variety of social work experiences. It means also the use in social work education of case material from the armed services field and, further, the provision of intensive in-service training programs within the armed services agencies. And, of course, it means setting up a salary and personnel schedule commensurate with all that he would like to expect from people recruited for professional responsibility in this field of social work. Perhaps that is where we should begin—in the identification of this as a field of social work, and in the acknowledgment

of the high degree of competence in all of the methods of social work which satisfactory performance in it requires.

To begin at such point, however, it would be well to consider the personnel situation in social work generally, the developments which have contributed to it, and the relative status of armed services social work. This would certainly indicate the scope of the job cut out for the social work profession.

It will be remembered that World War II invaded the world scene upon the heels of a period of expanding social welfare programs prompted by the depression and its attendant developments. There was already in existence at that time a serious deficiency in the number of personnel available to man the services which came into being as a result of the Social Security Act, and other legislation oriented to a philosophy of governmental responsibility for the general well-being of all the inhabitants of a nation.

The war enlarged this gap by increasing the demand for social workers who were desperately needed to fill vacancies arising as a result of the wartime drain on manpower. The problem was further intensified by the new agencies and the new services which sprang up to meet the new needs of the ten per cent or more of our population who found their way into military uniform, and the even larger number whom their induction affected in one way or another.

By virtue of sheer numbers alone, the impact of the military situation on the total community was such that the citizen who did not roll up his sleeves and contribute his measure of skill, service and sympathy to meeting the new and intensified demands was counted a deviate. The atmosphere and the rhythm of community activity swept every American man, woman and child into their wake. Everything in our society was geared to the war effort. A sermon about the validity of this state of affairs was almost unnecessary. If one was necessary in the selling of bonds, or in the interpretation of rationing, or in the promotion of defense jobs, it was more an *a fortiori* argument than a justification. Professional social work associations were also affected by these developments and were very active in such projects as a committee on wartime personnel designed to safeguard a supply of social workers in the emergency.

In spite of the competition for personnel, a large group of workers was recruited for such agencies as the USO and the Red Cross, which needed relatively little selling except insofar as there was as much a shortage of the kind of workers needed for these agencies as there was for all other agencies. Naturally, too, the proportion of trained social workers in these services was as discouraging as it was and has continued to be for the entire field of social work. The fact that enrollments in schools of social work skyrocketed toward the end and immediately after the war did not alleviate the whole personnel problem appreciably again, not merely because of the shortage *ab initio,* but because of the need for social work training.

If the problem of personnel supply in social work services for members of the armed forces and their dependents was great during the war period, it is obviously greater in these days of relative peace. Emphasis must be placed on the use of the word relative, for, to a great extent, the reverberations from sensitive areas around the globe are reaching down into every cranny of our country and they must necessarily affect the state of mind and the state of well-being of every last human being in the nation. The absence of open warfare notwithstanding, the effects of our military program are clearly perceivable and every community agency has a role to play in helping individuals to resolve problems

in social relationships and personal productiveness which are provoked by current tensions and the current struggle for security.

It goes without saying that adequate service to members of the armed forces is the responsibility of the community at large and while three millions are not as impressive quantitatively as 17 millions, three millions are a sufficient number to give social workers pause, the more so when we realize the effects that three millions have on millions of parents, relatives, friends and others.

All this adds up to a justification for the recruitment, and training where necessary and advisable, of social workers for service to members of the armed forces and their dependents. The task of interpretation is difficult, but necessary.

It is interesting that what has been primarily a theoretical consideration in schools of social work is a realistic problem in the recruitment and preparation of armed services agency staffs. Social work educators have debated the whys, wherefores and means of a basic social work education which would equip all trained social workers, at least to start operating in any social work setting, and to utilize all the social work methods in greater or lesser degree some time within the course of specialized social work experience, but chiefly as ancillary to their specializations. No one has suggested convincingly that there should be no specialized training. On the contrary, emphasis has continued to be placed on the need for field practice in one or more of the several work methods. Differences of view have arisen chiefly in relation to what should precede specialization, how much there should be of it, and what form it should take.

On the other hand, there has been real concern about defining the common elements among the social work methods and identifying them clearly in every phase of an integrated social work education program.

We have seen that the armed services worker is required to be equally versed in each of the social work methods, because his day to day operation calls for concentrated use of all of them. The so-called generic approach, therefore, is especially applicable to him.

In view of the enduring prospect of the need for this type of operation, it would seem appropriate to design social work curricula, and to provide opportunities for supervised field work with this aspect of social work practice in mind.

Through a revised program of education, interpretation and recruitment, it may be possible to produce the reservoir of skills, knowledge, personnel and attitudes essential to this most vital of modern social welfare areas.