

STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY ACTION AND INTER-COMMUNITY COOPERATION

Report of the WCJCS Seminar June 2002

Participants and Respondents:

Co-Chairmen:

Max Kleinman, Executive Vice President,
MetroWest Federation of New Jersey
Jeff Kaye, Director, The Unit for FRD
Coordination and the Israel Education
Fund, JAFI

Panelists:

Steve Hoffman, President and CEO,
United Jewish Communities
Dr. John Ruskay, Executive Vice-Presi-
dent and CEO, UJA-Federation of New
York
Dr. Michael Ganor, Organizational Con-
sultant, the Jerusalem Association of
Community Centers and Councils
Dr. Yitzhak Brick, Director, Eshel-JDC
Association for Services to the Aged
Damon Rose, Hadera-Eiron Regional Di-
rector, JAFI

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AMERICAN RESPONDENTS

STEVE HOFFMAN responded to his intro-
duction by Max Kleinman who opened the
Seminar with the following questions:

- How has the North American Jewish community responded to these crises, focusing on Israel and Argentina?
- What have been its strategies?
- What obstacles have to be overcome and how can we professionals play a definitive role?

Steve noted that the news of the September 11th attack on New York and the United States was stressful to the members of his delegation visiting Israel at the time. Israeli professionals found themselves in helping roles to the Amer-

ican members of the mission, who were in distress over the catastrophic news and over their concern for their families back home.

Israel and the Diaspora have become closer—through experiencing the days of fear that gripped our delegation. This event almost created a crisis of communal function in the United States.

It was Israel's example, demonstrating that help had become a two-way street, and that it was a strong and full partner of the Jewish people. This partnership became the "mechanism" for our joint project in helping the Jewish community of Argentina.

The pain suffered on both sides of the ocean, concluded Steve, brought out the best in mutual support, so that this year will stand out as one of the finest in our joint experience.

JOHN RUSKAY, at the podium, recalled that this has been an exhausting year and continues to be a treacherous period for both Israel and all of the Jewish people. He stressed that immediately after September 11th, "our system was effectively implemented because it was already in place on September 10th!" Volunteerism increased and we again learned how the synagogue was the institution to which most New York Jews turned for support."

There was commendation in John's declaration that the leadership of the American Jewish community took collective responsibility to help the Argentinian Jewish community, which led to immediate results. This response also mirrored the depth of feeling and resolve of the American Jewish community to stand with the people of Israel. Nevertheless, we need to assess how effective professionals have been as community educators in enabling people to grapple with the challenges facing Israel and the Jewish people everywhere. Empathetically stated, there

is no case to be made any longer against offering aid to a victim of terror in Netanya and not to a victim of terror in Efrat or Ariel or anywhere else. John concluded that while we are achieving our goal of solidarity, as professionals we need to examine how to involve our communities more deeply in all issues.

JEFF KAYE took the chair from Max Kleinman, pointing out that it is a challenge for a person to deal with a crisis that one is not part of at every minute, which was the experience of Americans when terrorist bombs exploded in Israel. In introducing his Israeli colleagues, he raised the following questions:

- How does an organization mobilize in order to provide quick and effective intervention?
- How does an organization maintain a balance between its ongoing mission and at the same time react effectively and appropriately to the crisis situation and therefore remain relevant?
- How have each of you maintained the balance between your professional duties and your personal duties as fathers, mothers, sons, husbands, and friends?

ISRAELI RESPONDENTS

DR. MICHAEL GANOR in describing his work introduced the concept of "community Resilience," which he defined as the ability of individuals and communities to deal with the state of continuous and repeated experiences of stress, which causes gaps between the reality of the environment and the function of coping behavior of both individuals and groups in the community.

The building of resilience is a process. Community resilience requires the infrastructure of leadership, the infrastructure of community identity, the infrastructure of community networking, and the infrastructure of community cohesiveness. These must be maintained and nurtured all the time.

We mean by coping that the individual or the group takes some action, and this requires there be *vision*—something to look forward to in the future. We enhance the

ability to cooperate, building for cohesion, feeling the sense of belonging and of being needed—reinforced by belief in a leadership that projects its strength and its solutions.

DR. YITZHAK BRICK described some of the JDC's responses to crises. JDC-Israel is mainly concerned with vulnerable populations: children at risk, the disabled, the elderly and *olim* (new immigrants). JDC had to respond and to mobilize our resources immediately after the first shootings on the Gilo neighborhood of Jerusalem.

It provided a basket of services for homebound elderly people. To the existing community infrastructure for emergencies—call systems, medical services, and social activities—the JDC added professionals, community workers, translators for *olim*, and special equipment for homebound persons. In the "Warm Home" program, volunteer families invite other families to join them for social activities in order to promote mutual support. This program now functions in communities in different parts of Israel in cooperation with the military's Home Command. The same model also serves to support disabled people.

Terrorist attacks exposed our children to greater risk when out of school or outside our homes. The UJC and the Federations assisted JDC to develop a program to keep children safe during the past summer by attending summer camps. During the school year, there is after-school programming.

We also train social workers and other staff in the social service departments on how to deal with traumatic situations and with terrorism survivors. We are also preparing for a different kind of war that may happen in the future—working with the institutions and their staff on how to deal with this new situation.

Dr. Brick concluded, "We are a small country and a small nation. Everybody knows everybody. We feel all together now. I feel this togetherness as I sit here with my colleagues. Let us hope we have peace in Eretz Israel."

DAMON ROSE explained the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) goal of community mobilization by focusing on an organization

in the Mei Ami region (neighboring on Um-al-Fahm). We are in the business of building a Jewish community and building relationships among Jews.

Through the fund for victims of terrorism we can provide individual care to the afflicted. We are able to respond immediately to each victim, helping him or her deal financially with the problems arising from their situation. As a private service, we have the flexibility to innovate, for example, we can provide proper planning and new facilities helping out-of-work people to learn new professions. Thus we are the liaison between individuals, the local community and the general Jewish community, acting as a channel to connect them to the Jewish world at large.

QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PERIOD

John Lemberger (Maccabi Health Care Services) stressed that in Israel some statutory services are in serious trouble. Jerusalem social workers are functioning under severe stress. The Health Services, required to treat Israelis and Arabs across the Green Line, are forced to use protective vehicles and protective clothing. In the distribution of monies raised by federations, Mr. Lemberger was concerned about what will happen when monies go directly to the government; we need urgently to make sure that funds go to our health, educational and social services.

Jenny Cohen-Khallas (volunteer at the Pitchon Lev Association) declared that "poverty should be on your agenda!" The security crisis has also worsened social conditions, and there are now over a million people below the poverty line in Israel, including 600,000 children. The seminar participants were invited to visit the People-to-People voluntary organization to help the poor. They are involved and empowered to break the cycle of poverty.

Baruch Sugarman (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs) wondered how the Israeli crisis is interpreted by the American Jewish community and by our Israeli community. Where are

all the organizations that should be showing evidence of supporting *solidarity* with Israel?

Anna Krakovich (Israel Projects Management Center) recalled with pride and strong feelings of togetherness the May, 2002 Salute to Israel Parade in New York City. The support Americans give and your identification with Israel are as important as your moral support. Thank you.

Chaim Posner (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs) affirmed and declared: We welcome you for your support and for your coming to be here and to enjoy Israel.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

JOHN RUSKAY noted, "We are needed by the Israelis, and American Jewry is consumed with its identification with Israel and its concern for Israel's welfare. Ours is a shared history and a shared destiny."

STEVE HOFFMAN admitted that like Israelis, Americans also live with fear these days. He also reported that of the \$289 million raised by the Israel Emergency Campaign Fund, \$100 million has been designated for projects throughout Israeli communities. We will work with JDC and JAFI and have consulted the government in order to determine priorities for developing a creditable program. I can assure you that not one penny is staying in the hands of the Jewish Agency's or the JDC's budgets. It will cost *them* to administer these programs.

YITZHAK BRICK noted that we are happy when we bring people to Israel. If they won't come, we might bring Israel *to* them, getting us together as ONE Jewish people.

JEFF KAYE, on closing the Seminar, thanked all of the participants and panelists, reminding us that "being Jewish professionals has meant that our Jewish passion is also a profession!"

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Edited and summarized by Prof. Sol Green for WCJCS.