

Regardless of the specific steps, it is very important that there be a partnership in long-range or short-range planning between the agency and Federation. We have found, in Detroit, that when a new project is proposed through *joint collaboration* of the Federation and the agency, the likelihood of implementation—and funding—is immeasurably increased. Most important, there is a commitment to continue the project for at least a specified number of years rather than having the agency “experiment” with the program for a year or two, with little sense of assurance of community backing for its continuance. We found that when we wanted to be involved in a Housing Relocation project to subsidize rentals for

Jews who were moved out of ghetto areas, and when we began a program of financial assistance for the poor or near-poor, the *programs obtained Federation support and long-term commitment because Federation was involved in mutual planning.*

In summary, long-range planning has severe limitations; when the emphasis is more on short-range planning, with some tentative projections on a long-range basis, then the planning is more meaningful. Best of all, when short and long-range planning are done with collaboration between Federation and the agency in an attempt to agree on a communal approach, then there are greater prospects of realization and implementation of the plans. At that point dreams can become realities.

The New Immigrant: A Study of the Vocational Adjustment of Soviet Jews*

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Successful adjustment of the Soviet Jew to our culture is often predicated upon vocational adjustment during the initial resettlement period. Understanding the role of occupational identity in the culture from which they come facilitates our efforts on behalf of the new Jewish immigrants.

Introduction

The following presentation will discuss the resettlement of the Soviet Jew in New York City from a vocational perspective, including three areas of inquiry: first, the background of current Soviet culture as found in the literature; second, the counseling experience with this population; and third, returns from a questionnaire focused on the attitudes and backgrounds of 100 clients of the New York Association for New Americans, the resettlement agency for Jewish immigrants in New York City.

As of August 1, 1977 there were 9,500 Soviet Jews in New York City who had immigrated within the last five years as conditional entrants (refugee visas). This is about one-half the total number of “new” Soviet Jewish immigrants to the United States. The Soviet Union has recently been releasing about 1,000 Jews per month of whom about one-half come to the U.S. Most of the remainder go to Israel. The vast majority of those in New York City are given resettlement services by N.Y.A.N.A., which provides casework and vocational services during the immigrant’s first year in America.

This one-year period of acclimatization involves learning a new language, settling a new household, coping with separation from familiar customs and norms, and becoming financially independent through employment.

The Work Ethic in the Soviet Culture

Several sources of American and Soviet

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literature indicate that work is of particularly central importance there because of the nature of the Soviet society. Ideologically, in the U.S.S.R., the concept of “socially useful labor” permeates the lives of the citizens from preschool to the actual work setting. Lenin believed that it was the responsibility of every citizen to contribute useful labor to the Communist state.¹ In fact, it is illegal to be unemployed in the U.S.S.R.² Through the implementation of the planned economy the Soviet society provides the basic needs of food, clothing, housing, health care and job security.³

The planned economy emphasizes practical, technical skills. This is evidenced in the school curriculum⁴ which focuses on preparation for jobs in technical and applied scientific occupations.⁵ These fields are imbued with high prestige because they are valuable in an industrial economy.⁶

1. Elizabeth Moos, *Soviet Education*, New York: National Council on American Soviet Friendship, 1970. p. 10.

2. U.S. Dep’t. of Labor, *Labor Digest* #90, 1965, “Decree 1961.”

3. G.V. Osipov, *Industry and Labour in the U.S.S.R.* London: Tavistock Publications. p. 89.

4. I.V. Sharov, “Educational Planning,” *Soviet Education*, Volume 17 (June 1975), p. 19.

5. K. Nozhko, *et al.*, *Educational Planning in the U.S.S.R.*, UNESCO, 1968. p. 136.

6. M.N. Rutkevich, *Career Plans of Youth*. White Plains, New York: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1969. p. 89.

A second factor contributing to high work centrality is the policy which restricts the flow of information and speech, limiting individual self-expression. Career becomes the primary avenue of self-expression and as such is extraordinarily meaningful to the individual. The effects of this situation on the Soviet Jew are particularly well expressed by Alexander Voronel, a physicist and professor at Tel Aviv University, who left the U.S.S.R. in 1974. He writes that intellectuals are deprived of religious and other transcendent avenues of expression of the meaning of their lives and live in a milieu which is an "ideological vacuum." Practical and scientific values are substituted and one's work becomes the only means available for self-expression.⁷ This dilemma is particularly troublesome for the Jew, who is limited from experiencing her or his heritage and yet is always reminded of being a Jew, which is noted under "nationality" on internal passports and work records.

The Soviet Jewish Immigrant as Client

Through the counselor's experience a composite picture of the immigrant as vocational services client has emerged. The salient features of the "composite client" include the following: They tend generally to be well educated and urban, originating primarily from Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, Kiev, and Tblisi. Reasons for immigration are varied, but most often cited is the lack of opportunity for education and professional advancement because of anti-semitism. General ideological, political, religious, creative repression are also mentioned. More recently, wishes to be reunited with relatives already here are increasingly mentioned. Few speak English well but they are intent upon learning the language. Mastery of English is viewed as a key to job opportunities. Clients are sometimes interested in learning about their Jewish heritage, a knowledge which was denied them in the U.S.S.R., but they tend not to be inclined toward orthodoxy. They tend to settle

7. Alexander Voronel, "The Aliyah of the Russian Intelligentsia," *Midstream*, Israel (April 1976), p. 4.

in middle-class neighborhoods and value higher education for their children. Child and home-care are viewed, as traditionally, as the woman's domain; however the dual career family is the rule, with both women and men having work roles.

Work

Most people express an intense attachment to their occupations and are very proud of their skills. They find great personal satisfaction in using their talents. They arrive with high expectations and hopes of being able to step into the same job they left behind. These expectations cannot be satisfied in our presently slowed economy characterized by a surplus of workers and a shortage of jobs. The loss of vocational identity and the prospect of employment in a different and usually lower level occupation are a major source of frustration and anxiety.

The Client's View of the Agency

The situation described above is further exacerbated by the newcomer's view of the resettlement agency as part of the government—to which they respond with suspicion. Because of this preconception formed from their past experience, they tend to establish trust slowly. They are not initially as open with their thoughts and feelings as counselors would hope. When the reality of the struggle necessary to rebuild a career becomes apparent, the client often experiences a period of depression. It is at this point that the counselor's support and realistic planning can engage the client. Some are able to discard the coping mechanisms that worked in the past toward Soviet bureaucrats and others rigidly adhere to it. The rigid ones blame the agency (read "government") for not providing the right jobs, apartments, day camps and so forth. For them an unskilled job is viewed as a trap and its prospect produces fear and resentment. The flexible ones seem less fearful of loss of status and are able to progress toward adjustment. When the newcomer can perceive the first job as a stepping stone, the depression lifts and the newcomer is mobilized to face the challenges ahead.

The Study

To explore further the issue of vocational attitudes of the Soviet Jew, data was collected directly in the form of a questionnaire. The form was written in Russian and distributed to clients in the reception room of the Vocational Services Department of New York Association for New Americans in April, 1976. Seventeen items were included, covering demographic data, vocational expectations and work attitudes. The client was asked to circle the number corresponding to the statement which best described her or him. The questionnaire took about 10-15 minutes to fill out. It was voluntary. Included in the written instructions was a statement indicating that the purpose was to help the agency better understand their problems. One hundred people filled out the forms.

Approximately 25 percent of those clients coming in to discuss their vocational plans with counselors did not fill out the form because of unavoidable circumstances, such as being called in by the counselor or caseworker prior to completion of the form. One rather agitated person refused. It was observed that most clients took the task seriously. As for the selective factors operating, it can be noted that this project sampled clients not yet working, and in the U.S. a short time. Most of the Soviet immigrants who were in the U.S. over nine months were already working and not to be found in our waiting room. It should also be noted that the surveyed population had been selected by their caseworkers for vocational services. It therefore did not include the obviously unemployable among the aged, infirm, or those of school age. No other selection factor was operating.

Tabulator Results

1. Age: 80% of the study population were between 26 and 55.
2. Sex: 68%, men; 32%, women.
3. Family status: 78%, married; 5%, divorced; 16%, single; 1%, no response.
4. Origin: 91%, urban.
5. Education completed: 43%, college grad-

uates; 26%, technical junior college graduates. Only 1% less than eight years of school.

6. Occupational breakdown: 47%, professional or managerial; 4%, semi-professional; 16%, skilled, 11%, service; 9%, clerical or sales; 5%, semi-skilled; 2%, students; 6%, no response.

7. Months in New York: 62%, to 3 months; 26%, 3 to 6 months; 14%, 6 to 9 months; 6%, 9 to 12 months; 2%, no response.

8. English: 75% signified they knew a little English, only 1%, well.

9. Yiddish: 59% indicated they knew at least some Yiddish.

10. Religious affiliation: 42% considered selves not religious; 50%, somewhat religious; 3%, very religious; 5%, no response.

11. In completing the statement "My occupation is . . ." 46% felt it "most important;" 34%, "fairly important;" 20%, "not important" or "necessary to be changed."

12. 11% thought they'd find jobs in their fields within three months, 39% in six months, 29% in 12 months of arrival.

13. In completing the statement "If at first I cannot find a job in my occupation I would . . ." 30% said they would take an interim job and wait to find a better one later; 39%, the largest group, said they would take a job on a lower level only if it was in their field. Just 10% said they would take other work and 16% said they would take work only in their occupation. 5% did not respond.

14. Preferred identity: 67% indicated Jewish-American; 28% was about equally divided between American and Jewish-Russian-American; 1%, Russian; 4%, no response.

15. and 16. For major problems in resettlement, language was circled by 75%; work by 59%. Housing, illness, and personal affairs were rarely indicated.

17. Expectations: In answer to the question, "Two years from now I expect . . ." 24% anticipated very satisfactory, 35%, good, 19%, still problematic resolutions of resettlement problems. 2% gave responses of discouragement; 20% no response.

Discussion

Engineers and technicians make up a smaller proportion of American professionals than they do in this study group. Approximately 15% of the population of the U.S.S.R. are professionals. The higher percentage in this study group can be explained by the greater opportunities available in an urban environment and by the influence of the Jewish cultural values. Also, the intelligentsia and better educated may tend more to emigration, being more dissatisfied ideologically. The returns from women show that they too are well educated and often professional. Although official Soviet statistics⁸ show 50.5% of their labor force to be women, a smaller percentage of our sample were women.

Although most all in our study group were not orthodox many were exploring their religious identity—that which was prohibited them in the U.S.S.R. There was also a large percentage for whom religion is not a salient issue at this time. The 20 people who chose not to answer the question relating to expectations two years hence may have been inhibited by the very anxiety about their future. When identifying what they saw to be their major problem the respondents may have been influenced by their being with the Vocational Department of the agency and thus language and work loomed largest to them—however these are in fact the major stumbling blocks to successful adjustment for new immigrants.

Most of our respondents' expectations about their ability to find work in their fields are very high, partially because they lack information or have misinformation about present conditions in the United States and partly because work is so important to their self concept. 68 people thought they would find a job in their occupation within 6-12 months. This is of course highly unlikely considering that only 9 people knew "good or very good" English and that most people have high or mid-level occupations whose skills

often do not match United States standards.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study of occupational factors compare favorably with the results of larger populations of Soviet immigrants. In 1976 the total caseload of the Vocational Services Department of N.Y.A.N.A. was 3,117. Of these clients, 34% were professional (including managerial) compared with the 44% in this sample. Both studies showed similar proportions in categories. The earlier study also sampled 500 professionals in 1976 for an occupational breakdown and found that nearly 30% were engineers, by far the largest group. In the present study sample, engineers made up about 33% of the professionals. These figures reflect the Soviet emphasis on technology.

More study, particularly regarding attitudes, is necessary to develop our understanding and thus our ability to help this unique population. The results of this study which pertain to attitudinal factors as well as occupational information tend to confirm the picture presented in the literature and empirical counseling experience. They indicate that this group of immigrants, unlike those of past generations, are largely skilled or professional people who are seeking to maintain their vocational self-concept through the resettlement period. These occupations require good written and spoken English as well as a familiarity with American methods and equipment. In the study population only one person spoke English well. The system from which they came taught them that work status is the primary determinant of self-expression and self-esteem. Work centrality was very high for 80% of the population and additionally, only 10% said they would take a job in other than their field. Their expectations are also very high: 50% of the sample indicated they expected to be working in their fields within six months.

By contrast, of job placements for all clients of N.Y.A.N.A. in 1976, 35%, the largest group, were in unskilled jobs. The contrast

between expectations and real possibilities is stark. An additional factor, not tapped by the questionnaire but seen often in counseling experience, is that the client's past experience with Soviet government bureaucracy shapes attitudes toward agency workers. The assumption is that to achieve one's goal one must be adamant and insistent, because the worker (read bureaucrat) does in fact have the power to provide. In the client's present situation, a job in her or his field would sustain status and esteem, and it becomes the intensely sought after goal. Shifting the responsibility for one's plight and its resolution on to another may give momentary relief from the intense anxiety

accompanying the assault on self-esteem and the apprehension of the future.

The "new" Russian Jew appears able to negotiate the city, is often pleased with health care, fairly satisfied with apartments and educational opportunities, and is free to explore religious and ethnic roots. She or he comes to a major stumbling block when faced with the entry level job. By understanding this basic dilemma we can endeavor to alleviate the pressure the newcomers place upon themselves. Encouraging flexibility of attitude and expectation can help the newcomer plan realistically for the present and the future.

8. "Statistical Data on Women in the U.S.S.R." *Soviet Sociology*, Volume 1972, p. 75.