

A New Model of Voluntary Organization In Israel

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A recent study of voluntary organizations in Israel found that they tend today to operate long-term activity programs, heavily supported by the government, and are reluctant to turn existing programs over to the government and thus enable the establishment of new programs or assumption of monitoring and advocate roles. This status quo among voluntary and statutory organizations may not be in the best interests of the development of social services in Israel.

Most of the social welfare services in modern society were originally initiated and developed by voluntary organizations. Many of these services were later turned over to governmental authorities or became heavily supported by them.¹ Voluntary organizations tend traditionally to serve as pioneers in identifying need areas which are not adequately met, conducting demonstration programs and gradually involving governmental authorities in the programs both conceptually and financially to various degrees. In a situation of scarce resources, politically based priorities and bureaucratic inflexibility, voluntary organizations serve as one of the most important vehicles for social innovation and improvement.

Israeli society does not differ in this sense from any other modern society. Indeed most of its social welfare infrastructure was built by voluntary organizations even before the establishment of the State in 1948. The special circumstances of the Jewish society in Israel, the Yishuv, prior to the establishment of the State had a major impact on this phenomenon.

In its early stages, the young pioneering society of the Yishuv had no use for social welfare. Proclaiming the return to the soil and the sanctity of physical labour it did not sympathize with "non-productive" sections of the

¹ Madeline Roof, *Voluntary Societies and Social Policy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1957, p. 261. Ralph M. Kramer, "Future of the Voluntary Service Organization," *Social Work* Vol. 18 (November 1973), pp. 59-69.

population. The General Federation of Labour, however, built up a network of social and medical insurance. Later on several social services were established mainly by the Jewish Agency and other voluntary organizations such as immigrant associations and Landsmanschafts.

Most of the voluntary organizations of the Yishuv were usually an integral part of its political and social structure and were later on absorbed by the State.² Yet new voluntary organizations soon began to develop. A recent study of voluntary organizations in Israel³ found that they tend today to operate long-term activity programs, heavily supported by the government, and are reluctant to turn existing programs over to the government and thus enable the establishment of new programs or assumption of monitoring and advocate roles. This status quo among voluntary and statutory organizations may not be in the best interests of the development of social services in Israel.

Eshel—A New Voluntary Organization

The creation of Eshel (the Association for Planning and Development of Services to the Aged in Israel) in 1969 has marked a new

² Joseph Neipris, *Social Services in Israel*. Jerusalem: the American Jewish Committee, Jerusalem 1972. p. 4.

³ Ralph M. Kramer, *The Voluntary Service Agency in Israel* Research Series No. 26. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1976.

venture on the voluntary organizations scene in Israel. Eshel was originated in 1949 by JDC-Malben, a voluntary organization which provided for immigrants who because of illness, physical handicaps or age had difficulties in being absorbed into the new country. JDC-Malben was involved both in direct and indirect services and in the middle sixties went through a change process acting on a decision to cease its direct services in order to make room for new ventures. JDC-Malben had proposed to the government to hand over its direct services for the aged (mainly homes for the aged) and to create a joint organization that would provide the necessary impetus for the neglected area of services for the aged in the country.

The proposal called for the creation of a new voluntary organization which would be supported on a matching basis by JDC-Malben and the Government and which would take upon itself several functions.⁴

(a) Initiation of planning services for the aged on the national level.

(b) Developing various demonstration projects that in addition to providing needed services would serve as models for duplication by governmental and other authorities.

(c) Changing the low priority assigned to the issue of the aged in the Israeli society.

The government of Israel being aware of the underdeveloped existing welfare services for the aged and the need to improve it, yet hesitating to take sole and full responsibility in this area, was ripe for that proposal and after a period of negotiation Eshel was established.

The Aged in Israel

The aged did not constitute a major problem for Israeli society prior to the establishment of the State and in its early years. During that period the age structure of the population was relatively young, composed mainly of young immigrants. In 1948, the aged (over 65) constituted 28,000 persons, 3.8 percent of the Jewish population. However their number grew and multiplied over the past years,

⁴ See Eshel's *Annual Reports* 1970-1975.

growing at a rate 50 percent more than the general population, reaching the number of 285,400 persons or 8.1 percent of the Jewish population in 1974 over age 65. This trend has been continuing and it is expected that the aged will be 9.5 percent in 1980.⁵ This process is the result of the lengthening of the average life span, a decrease in birth-rate among Jewish population and a higher percentage of aged among recent immigrants.

The growth of the aged population caught Israeli society unprepared. In the relatively highly developed welfare system little allowance was made for the needs of the aged. The service system for the aged was only partially developed, lacking important components, scattered among many organizations and lacking legal lease.⁶

The constant growth of the aged population, the change in its composition, as more and more veterans and middle-class Israelis joined the aged ranks, and the severe findings of research about the living conditions of the aged, made Israeli society and its authorities more and more aware, in the middle sixties, of the poor conditions of the elderly and the service system available to them.

This was prime time for a move in this area and the proposal of JDC-Malben found the government more than amenable.

Eshel's Modes of Operation

Once established, Eshel decided that it would focus its activities in three areas:

(a) Planning and developing institutional services, such as homes for the aged, in the areas where there was a shortage of beds and incorporating geriatric wards in general hospitals which were almost non-existent in Israel at the time.

(b) Planning and developing demonstration projects of comprehensive community services

⁵ *Statistical Yearbook of Israel 1975*. Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1975.

⁶ Yechiel Eran, Gerda Freedheim, *Survey of Programs and Services for Older New Immigrants*, Jerusalem: Brookdale Institute for Gerontology and Adult Human Development in Israel, 1975.

in order to improve living conditions and enable the aged to continue to live and function in their family and community as long as possible.

(c) Planning and developing training programs to prepare skilled manpower to staff the above-mentioned services.

All these are already well known and accepted notions in the gerontology field, but certain elements were new to Israel. The uniqueness of Eshel, however, lay in its modes of operation.

Eshel's board of directors and its various professional committees, staffed voluntarily by high ranking members of JDC-Malben and of three governmental ministries: Health, Finance, and Welfare, has defined general policy and goals, taking into account the needs of the aged population, the existing services system and governmental priorities. A special investigation of the needs and the required services was conducted and its findings and conclusions were later formulated as *Guidelines of Services Needed for the Aged*. This guide was made available to all the organizations dealing with the aged in the country.

On the basis of its general policy and goals, Eshel made itself known and available to various organizations and communities, willing to render its help in planning, developing and participating in financing new services for the aged on condition that these organizations and communities will continue to support and develop these services after the termination of Eshel's assistance. In this way, Eshel achieved two aims, on the one hand creating new and innovative services which did not exist before, thus changing and enriching the services system, and, on the other hand, guaranteeing that these innovations would continue beyond the demonstration period and become integrated into the existing services system. Thus JDC-Malben made sure that it would continue to play the role of pioneer and innovative agent and the government made sure that only those innovations that could be integrated into the system, both conceptually and financially would be undertaken. Since

every project has to be approved by government representatives, government support was assured for its development.

True enough, this called for working on a consensus basis sometimes necessitating long discussions and deliberations, but decisions which were made were firm and unshakeable.

Eshel also decided that the programs would have to be planned by members of the communities and organizations which would later run these programs. The assumption was that these members would have a better knowledge of local needs and of choosing the services that could best respond to these needs. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the services programs depended, in part, on local motivation, mobilization of people and resources and their backing of the programs.⁷ For this purpose, the responsibility for implementing the programs was embodied in local associations made up of both professionals and lay people. Being aware of the limited capacity of many communities and organizations in carrying out the planning, developing and operation of the services, Eshel made available to them various resources in the way of experts and planning aids. Eshel's small staff extended its help to the local interdisciplinary planning teams in preparing the plans and to the local associations in running the programs. Thus it was assured that the programs would be along the general guidelines of Eshel and suited to the specific needs, circumstances and resources of each case at the same time.

After several years of its operation it became clear enough that the mere fact that Eshel brought together three governmental ministries within a voluntary organization had an impact beyond the scope of Eshel operations. Local patriotism and vested interests, though never given up completely, tended to give way to a more comprehensive nonpartisan outlook and

⁷ Yechiel Eran, "Planning Local Welfare Programs," *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (April 1973).

Ronald L. Warren, "Two Models of Social Planning" in *Truth, Love and Social Change*. New York: Rand McNally & Co., 1971.

brought about new thinking about the responsibilities of the various ministries in regard to the needs of the aged and in regard to one another.

Eshel has provided, probably, the first forum for thinking of and planning services for the aged in Israel on the national level. Eshel guidelines were accepted by all the governmental ministries as a blueprint not only for Eshel operations but for the operations of each ministry as well. The government has also asked Eshel to serve as a clearing house for various private and public services programs for the aged, requesting government support and has handed over to Eshel the responsibility to plan and develop many projects not intended originally to be included in Eshel program.

Most Eshel programs called for a new type of collaboration among the ministries which was extended again beyond the scope of Eshel programs. Some of Eshel's innovations such as: creating comprehensive programs, establishing local associations, introducing the role of project coordinators, and so on, were

adopted by the ministries and local authorities and were applied in more and more communities. Eshel also prepared various planning and training aids in the way of manuals which were made available to many communities and organizations.

Today, eight years after its creation Eshel has turned from an unknown adventure, frowned upon by many, to being one of the leading organizations in the area of services for the aged in Israel.

True enough, the road of Eshel was not all covered with roses. It had to deal with much skepticism, reservation, and stalling. Many decisions were postponed and many proposed projects were shelved because they did not succeed in marshaling the necessary consensus. Yet the achievements of Eshel have gone far beyond the expectations of its founding fathers and its activities are constantly expanding. Circumstances, careful thinking and much planning have made this unique type of voluntary organization a success story in Israel of the seventies.