Volunteer Involvement in Soviet Jewish Resettlement: Issues and Challenges*

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Introduction

We are considering the role of the volunteer in the Soviet Jewish resettlement and acculturation process during a time of unusually great social and economic upheaval. This is a period in which very difficult deliberations about the entire concept of social entitlements are taking place, including those for refugees. While Israel's reception and placement grant for Soviet Jews and the Soviet Jewish resettlement program here have the support of the Administration, I believe we shall find ourselves in the position of having to defend these programs before the Congress as they debate the relative merits of a wide range of social and human service programs, as part of the process of reducing federal expenditures.

Let us be very clear; any reductions in block grant funding will have an impact upon all those Soviet Jews who arrived a year to two prior to the reduction as well as upon those who arrive during the particular fiscal year in which the reduction takes place. As of April 1981, refugees are entitled to a wide range of services for a three-year period after arrival. Illustratively, and these may not be as well known as some of the more concrete or familiar services we provide, voluntary resettlement agencies with federal contracts are required to:

- Ensure utilization of and access to community resources to enhance the resettlement process.
- Work with refugee communities on selfhelp activities and assistance to new arrivals.

• Assist refugees with the preservation of their cultural heritage and maintenance of cultural contacts.

Although we as a community may feel that meeting these objectives is an obvious concern, I selected those items because there is a consensus that they are essential elements of qualitative resettlement and acculturation program. Because they relate directly to the use of volunteers I will also discuss them below.

The report of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee policy recently delivered to the Congress and the President states an awareness "of the fact that we live in a shrinking, interdependent world and that world economic and political forces result in the migration of peoples."2 The report also notes how inadequately the world is prepared to deal with the forces of migration and the fact that our country continues to be the world's number one magnet for all refugee groups.3 In the face of these facts, the commission takes a conservative-restrictionist position. Curiously, it refuses to believe one of its own commissioned research reports prepared by Julian Simon, an economist whose work reveals that immigrants rapidly become contributing members of our society and economy. The Jewish community has known and experienced this for decades. His work documents the fact that

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¹ Office of the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs and Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Refugee Resettlement Resource Book (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 26-27.

² Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, U.S. Immigration Policy and the National Interest (Washington, D.C., 1981), p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1 and 3.

not only do they rapidly pay their own way, but they aslo help to pay for the public needs and services of all citizens.⁴ It is ironic that at a time when the world refugee population is close to 16 million people ⁵ and Rev. Theodore Hesburgh chooses to use that famous quote from Hillel as the opening statement for his introduction to the Select Commission report to which we just referred:

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now. When?

that as a society we are turning more and more inward and becoming more and more conservative. What is even more frightening, however, is that because we Jews have become such excellent Americans, and have largely abandoned our prophetic role, we tend to mirror those very same attitudes.

During the years 1913-1915, Solomon Schechter periodically lectured the students at the Jewish Theological Seminary on Jewish philanthropy. His last lecture on the subject was given on November 19, 1915, just five hours before his death. Three ideas he discussed bear restating. He noted that the Christian world felt that our approach to philanthropy was seriously lacking because "it is the oucome of the Law (Torah) and is lacking in love. It is not in the Jew but outside of him. It is wanting in tenderness and delicacy, in ennobling the poor, etc."7 He commented, of course, that it was unfortunate that Christian Society did not understand our Law, the fact the communal context of the giving of assistance was (and is) central to our being, and that the giver of help in our system bears the responsibility for figuring out how to do the job so that the ones in need will be able to take what they need with their dignity intact. Finally, consider the notion of the highest form of giving being the kind given in secret. Literally in secret, since there was a special room in the Temple in Jerusalem where the righteous left their gifts for the needy to come to obtain their support.8

Consider those attitudes and the values they reflect in contrast to the current trends of our society and even in our own Jewish communities as we hear people speak of "getting the Russians off the Jewish dole." Consider the meaning of that attitude in the face of the fact that our national experience is that the great majority of our Soviet brethren are self-sufficient in less than six months after arrival and often in the job market after being here only one or two months! Curious isn't it, that a record unmatched by any other immigrant group or program is somehow not quite good enough to satisfy many in the Jewish community. Paradoxical isn't it, that we have developed the most sophisticated, humane, efficient, and effective resettlement system in existence8a (one might respond to that with "Why not, we've only been dealing with refugees for nearly 6,000 years!"), and yet we are in danger as a community of violating some of our basic Jewish values because we have begun to direct some of the growing negative attitudes towards welfare and the poor to our Soviet brethren? My use of the word, brethren, is not an accident. The Bible often calls the needy "brother," meaning

⁴ Julian Simon, What Immigrants Take From, and Give To, The Public Coffers, Final Report Submitted to The Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, October 15, 1980.

⁵ Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, U.S. Refugee Programs, 1981, Serial No. 96-79 (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 186.

⁶ Sayings of the Fathers, 1:14.

⁷ Solomon Schechter, "Notes of Lectures in Jewish Philanthropy," Studies in Judaism, Third Series (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1924), p. 240.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 246-247.

⁸a Barry N. Stein, Refugee Resettlement Programs and Techniques, Research Report Submitted to The Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, September, 1980, p. 66. Stein also cites a U.S. House of Representatives report issued in 1979 which expresses the same opinion.

the equal of the rich. Why do I dwell on attitudes? It seems to me that one cannot consider matters involving working with people unless one is prepared to consider the impact of one's self on another person when engagement for the purpose of giving and receiving help takes place.

I would like to consider some of the community and public relations aspects of the expression of negative attitudes towards Soviet Jews. We have all experienced Soviet Jews at their worst: pushy, abrasive, demanding, manipulative, and so forth. But, our volunteers and staff also know them in many more caring and positive ways. Our volunteers are in the best position through their varied social and institutional contacts to spread the good news too. Much of this will happen quite naturally, but volunteer chairmen and professionals ought not to leave it to chance. We have a very special opportunity to exploit appropriately the good work we are doing in the Soviet Jewish resettlement program. We have a right to give ourselves a public pat on the back, and that will encourage our volunteers to do the same.

Among all the peoples on this earth only within the Jewish community is there behavioral evidence of our communal concern for our brethren. We are the only group in the world that has responded both historically and currently to the idea that "All Israel is responsible for one another." That is why none of our people will ever be a refugee for long, that is why Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people is such a powerful idea, and that is why our Falasha dying in Ethiopia and languishing in the Sudan are such an aberration of our people's values.

The Social Context of Resettlement

Bertha Reynolds, a very special pioneer in the development of social work, said that "practice is always shaped by the needs of the times, the problems they present, the fears they generate, the solutions that appeal, and the knowledge and skill available."10 This view has evolved into the ecological approach to service delivery. Carel Germain, its foremost spokesman, comments that "Ecology seeks to understand the transactions that take place between environments and living systems and the consequences of these transactions for each. Applying ecological ideas essentially means attempting to understand either a living system or its environmental context by looking at the features of both and at their interaction."11 This is obviously a useful perspective for us to use as we examine the impact of the various components of our system (the Soviet Jewish immigrant, the volunteer, the professional, the agency, HIAS, Israel, the Jewish community-at-large, and the Jewish Federation) and the system as a totality. In the remainder of these comments I will focus on a few of these components.

Soviet Immigrants

First, who are the Soviet Jewish immigrants when they touch our shores and with what perceptions do they greet us? "Of all the industrialized democracies of the West, the United States is probably the one that least conforms to . . . Soviet derived expectations (regarding the need to manipulate and be suspicious of bureacracies); the transatlantic cultural shock may be even greater than the east-west cultural shock." 12 Freedom is a preposterous and

⁹ Ibid., pp. 244-245.

¹⁰ Bertha Reynolds, "Social Work and the Life of Its Time," Unpublished paper presented to the Maryland Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, Baltimore, Maryland, January 21, 1965.

¹¹ Carel B. Germain, "Social Context of Clinical Social Work," *Social Work*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (November, 1980, p. 483.

¹² Robert J. Osborne, "The Soviet Social Environment and American Contrasts," in Jerome M. Gilson, E., *The Soviet Emigre* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Hebrew College, 1977), p. 123.

incomprehensible idea understood as a synonym for the word disorder. Exercising one's rights, taking responsibilty for decision-making, the expression of ideasall these are seen as "an opportunity of executing with impunity some kind of antisocial or dangerous actions."13 One feels respect for force, authority, or even education in the USSR, but not the rights of an individual.14 Taking care of one's self is an equally foreign notion since the State took care of everything and if Soviet Jews did not like that, they did develop a heavy reliance upon that system. Unconscious as that reliance may have been, our independent, self-determining way of life is psychologically terrifying to the newcomer. The fact that they had to resist the Soviet government in some fashion in order to leave the USSR often causes them to arrive here with rather over-blown feelings of selfimportance.¹⁵ While they appear to be more interested in their health than are Americans, they have no idea of how to use physicians or what physicians can do for them. 16 The overall health picture in the Soviet Union is a disaster. Two examples: the average number of abortions per woman, per lifetime is 0.5 in the U.S. while in the Soviet Union a conservative estimate is eight per woman. Families from urban areas in the U.S.S.R. spend as much on alcohol each week as their counterpart American families do on food. If a Soviet worker can stand up then factory foremen mark them sober and fit for duty.17

Another vital problem concerns the emotional status of the immigrant. Research indicates that multiple life changes of a major character and which are undesired, uncontrollable, and unanticipated have a direct relationship to consequent mental health problems. In fact, persons incurring more than one significant change of this kind are three times more likely than others to experience serious mental health problems in the year following such changes. ¹⁸ There is no doubt that for many Soviet Jews, emigration and its aftermath represents a series of major life changes.

What is it like to apply for an exit visa . . . and then to wait? Steven Kellman gives us an insight into that experience: "I . . . came to know a mathematician and his family who have been waiting for exit visas for more than a year. They are members of an underground circle of Hebrew students . . . We arranged to meet in a busy Metro station, but we were followed anyway. I was told of how the police periodically raid apartments of members of the group and seize their Hebrew books." 19

Another perspective comes from a Soviet Jew now residing in Boston: "I know only that it was not possible to stay, and it was impossible to go. I had lived for seven years in this never-never state before actually applying for an emigration visa, but I know people who have been agonizing for more than ten years and still cannot decide."²⁰ The waiting does not disappear easily: ". . . sometimes I have nightmares—I am back there and they do not let me out. Or, the sensation of wind in my ears, suffocation in my throat and emptiness in my stomach comes back from those last days

¹³ Andrei Amalrik, "Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?," cited by Robert Kaiser, Russia: The People and the Power (New York: Atheneum, 1976).

¹⁵ Edgar Goldstein, "Psychological Adaptations of Soviet Immigrants," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1979), pp. 257-263.

Martha Loewenthal, "Preliminary Report of the Health Survey Administered to 95 Russian Jewish Immigrants," Unpublished report from the Chicago CJF Health Demonstration Project, June, 1980, p. 1.
 Nick Eberstadt, "The Health Crisis in the U.S.S.R.," The New York Review, February 19, 1981, p. 24.

¹⁸ Michael Roskin, "Integration of Primary Prevention Into Social Work Practice," *Social Work*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May 1980), p. 193.

¹⁹ Steven G. Kellman, "Georgia (USSR) on My Mind," *Moment*, Vol. 5, No. 10, (November, 1980), pp. 51-52.

²⁰ Eleva Tsypkin, "Where We Are Not," *Moment,* Vol. 5, No. 9 (October, 1980), p. 42.

before leaving Moscow."21 And finally, the guilt of waiting for others: "In the morning dawn I think, 'Should I still be there, helping my mother to nurse my grandmother in a dirty hospital?' . . . Yet it is because of some of those friends that I am here enjoying life, while they still are refused their visas, or—worse—are in exile or prison. The guilt then becomes so unbearable that I am shattered and ask, 'Where am I really? I should be rotting there, shouldn't I?" "22 There are many other important characteristics we need to be aware of, but my purpose here is simply to emphasize what Joseph Edelman recorded so well:

You Americans think that refugees from Hungary, Poland, and the Soviet Union are all the same. We Soviets are not like the Eastern Europeans. We have had 57 years of isolation and brainwashing. We are not just from another country. We are from another planet.²³

Second, we need to look at the volunteer. Volunteerism is a solid part of the American scene. Nearly one out of every four persons age 14 or older served as a volunteer in 1974 (up five percent from 1965). The services of those 36.8 million volunteers are estimated to be worth \$33.9 billion (a figure estimated to be three times greater than that for 1965). The single age bracket with the largest representation is 25-44 despite the frequent assumption that these are the very people who have the least available free time.24 This fact, incidentally, has important implications for targeting our recruitment efforts. A survey by the United Way found that of 2.4 billion volunteer hours donated in 1974, 83.1 percent were directed at the delivery of program services and 93.1 percent were provided through personal and social adjustment and development agencies (day-care, family counseling agencies, community centers, youth programs). It turned out that the volunteers providing these services numbered nearly two for every one professional.²⁵

People tend to volunteer their time and energy because of forces emanating from within themselves (they give as their inner motives: fun, excitement, feeling needed, learning new skills, importance of the job, the help to themselves personally/professionally, the need to do something, the chance to influence what happens): because of forces having to do with others or groups (i.e. volunteering is a tradition, our group does this, my friend wants me to, I can't say no to him/her, they wouldn't ask me if it wasn't important), or because of situational forces (i.e. it is a new adventure, they work around the time I have available, a bunch of us will be doing it together, our national leadership has said this is a priority, I'll make new friends).26 There is documentation that the Jewish community utilized volunteers to assist immigrants through Jewish benevolent societies as early as the 1840's.27 While most resettlement programs for all refugees use volunteers, there is more current evidence to suggest that the way in which the Jewish community has organized its volunteer effort is among the most sophisticated and effectively operated. Considering the tremendous pressure our entire system has

²¹ Ibid., p. 44.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Joseph Edelman, "Soviet Jews in the United States: A Profile," American Jewish Yearbook 1977 (New York: American Jewish Committee), pp. 157-182.
 Bureau of the Census, Social Indicators III (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980), p. 501.

²⁵ United Way of America, A Study of the Quantity of Volunteer Activity of United Way and Its Member Agencies (Alexandria, Virginia: December, 1974), pp. 7-9.

²⁶ Eva Schindler-Rainman and Ronald Lippitt, The Volunteer Community: Creative Use of Human Resources (California: University Associates, 1977), pp. 48-50.

²⁷ Violet M. Sieder, "The Historical Origins of the American Volunteer," in William A. Glaser and David L. Sills, Eds., *The Government of Associations: Selections from the Behavioral Sciences* (New Jersey: The Bedminster Press, 1966), p. 5.

"shallow and uncaring American," they

been under for an extended period during which we have had to cope with both a rapid expansion of operations and an equally rapid contraction, we can be especially proud of our volunteer programs. A recent report of the Council of Jewish Federations Soviet Jewish resettlement program reveals that there are thousands of volunteers involved across the country in communities of every size, working in practically every phase of the program.²⁸ Our volunteers are often exceptional people. They are sophisticated and as "professional" as one can be without being a professional.

A newer development is the involvement of Soviet Jews as volunteers. They too carry a wide spectrum of responsibilities ranging from airport reception and initial orientation for new-comers to assisting in job finding. Self-help groups and Russian cultural preservation programs initiated and led by Soviet Jews have emerged in many communities.29 I suspect that we have not yet begun to scratch the surface with respect to the potential use of Soviet Jews as volunteers in both the resettlement and the acculturation process. There is a serious potential problem in doing so. If our goal is appropriate acculturation (as distinct from assimilation) or the provision of opportunities for learning how the American and Jewish systems work, then it is possible that too many Russian volunteers may lead to a heavily "Russified" view of the new world.

Similarly, because Soviet Jews cannot comprehend why, if it is not a job, American Jews act as volunteers, they tend to greet the volunteer carefully, passively, and suspiciously. If, on the other hand, they perceive the volunteer as a typically

Jewish Communal Agencies

I think it is fair to say that volunteer opportunities in resettlement and acculturation have captured more imagination, energy, and actual involvement than any other program of the Jewish community in a long time (with the exception of the annual fund-raising campaign which is of an entirely different order). Why volunteer programs have become such an integral part of our programs leads me to a brief consideration of the agency component of our system. I am convinced that the reason for the excellent response on the part of the volunteer is relatively easy to understand. Soviet Jews represent an opportunity to do something Jewishly important directly with people who are from the "mysterious" East; the entire Jewish community has accorded the task a high priority and high status rewards are given to those who participate. The agencies' and Federations' motivations and behavior are more complex and therefore, more difficult to comprehend. Take the question of which organizations are more likely to be open to innovation. One major student of organizations notes that those dependent upon manpower resources which are "self-activating, sentient, and potentially recalcitrant as well as voluntary . . . have a greater say regarding the output of the organi-

will maintain a critical distance.30 And should they and the volunteer become very close friends, the volunteer may well find it difficult to do a job effectively and objectively. These are complicated problems requiring carefully thought out programs of training, supervision, and volunteer selection.

²⁸ Council of Jewish Federations, "Soviet Jewish Resettlement Program Quarterly Program Report," February 11, 1981.

²⁹ Ibid. Also see, National Council of Jewish Women, Community Partners: The Staff-Volunteer Team in Soviet Jewish Resettlement (New York: 1981), pp. 17-40.

³⁰ Martin Koosed, Refugees and Acculturation: Theory, Review of Literature, and Annotated Bibliography with Special Emphasis on Soviet Jewry (Chicago: Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, 1981), pp. 24 and 46. To be published by the Council of Jewish Federations.

zation . . . "31 Clearly, Jewish communal agencies fit that description. Agencies which are receptive to receiving proposals from the lower reaches of the system also tend to be more innovative. As an important aside, it is unfortunate that many in the lower reaches of social welfare bureaucracies assume—often without any supporting evidence—that such proposals will meet with resistance. The facts are that more often than not organizational leaders seek innovations that will enhance goals valued by the organization.³² Some of the inhibiting forces are that most social agencies have two jobs to do: ". . . that of regulating the behavior of people that become classified as deviants, ostensibly in their own interests . . . (and) A second function... is to absorb a part of the work force of the nation."33 To give over work with Soviet Jews to volunteers, or even to other agencies, may not be perceived as being in the self-interest of a particular agency. To be more specific, the following factors have been identified as working against organizational innovation:

- The larger the number of groups involved, the less the readiness to implement change.
- The existence of disagreement about values.
- The probability of the idea of having an impact on organizational structure.
- Impact upon the allocations of resources.
- The degree to which new learning, training, or skill development is required.

- The extent to which organizational leaders are not able to diagnose accurately the complexity of the planning issues involved.
- Lack of ability to make the right strategic choices in order to simplify the process of change.³⁴
- An absence of turbulence in the organization's environment.
- Too much formalization or centralization.
- An absence of professional leadership.35

A major focus of social policy for all human service organizations is the efficiency and equity with which services and resources are made available. Traditionally, equity has received the greatest attention. More recently, and as resources have become less available, efficiency has attracted equal interest. While producing a profit is not a function of social agencies, the cost of units of service has become a pressing management matter.³⁶

There is no mistaking the fact that these issues impact directly upon the extent and character of volunteer programs. Until Soviet Jews can be safely evaluated as accepting our system, many look upon them as deviants and as is known most volunteers are not allowed to work with deviants, except under very carefully defined professional direction. Many Jewish communities were in the process of mounting volunteer programs, until the numbers declined severely. Suddenly, there was less of a need for such programs or the implementation required further examination. I read that as a need to protect client loads and professional positions. Federations, on the other hand, mounted tremendous pressure on the agencies to initiate the programs, sometimes regardless of the need for one or the readiness of the resettlement/acculturation agency to do a

³¹ Charles Perrow, "Members as Resources in Voluntary Organizations," in William R. Rosengren and Mark Lefton, eds., Organizations and Clients: Essays in the Sociology of Service (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1970), p. 105.

³² Rino J. Patti, "Organizational Resistance and Change: The View From Below," in Simon Slavin, ed., Social Administration: The Management of the Social Services (New York: Haworth Press, 1978), p. 544.

³³ Charles Perrow, "Demystifying Organizations," in Rosemary C. Sarri and Yeheskel Hasenfeld, eds., *The Management of Human Services* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 108-109.

³⁴ Andre L. Delbecq, "The Social Political Process of Introducing Innovation in Human Services," in Sarri and Hasenfeld, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 310-313.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 309.

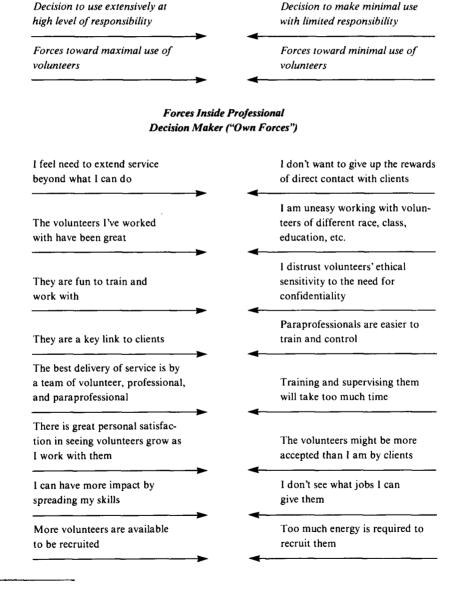
³⁶ Arnold Gurin, "Conceptual and Technical Issues in the Management of Human Services," in Sarri and Hasenfeld, *Ibid.*, pp.293-298.

good job. The Federations saw a marvelous opportunity to generate more money through hands-on contact. That was, and is, an accurate perception, if sometimes misapplied.

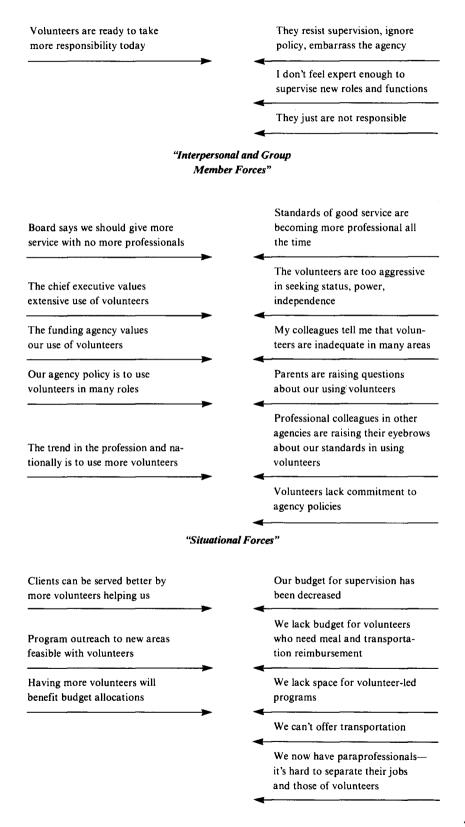
Professionals and Volunteers

Lastly, one needs to examine the process through which professionals decide to use volunteers. Here I draw extensively on Rainman and Lippitt who have analyzed the issue rather well:

Figure 3. Deciding Whether and How to Use Volunteers³⁷



³⁷ Eva Schindler-Rainman and Ronald Lippitt, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 57-59.



Conclusion

Understanding these dynamics is truly vital since some professionals still have many reservations about using volunteers. While we have come a long, long way there are still those who do not clearly understand that volunteers are interviewed and screened, hired, trained and supervised around specific jobs or tasks, evaluated, and even fired if they do not work out. Further the matter of developing an appropriate structure designed to meet the needs of a given community and an appropriate process of qualitative training is equally important. Fortunately, there is a growing amount of excellent resources, including the National Council of Jewish Women's new manual.38 If there is a bottom line to all of this it is that those who are interested in seeing to it that volunteer programs retain their proper place in our system will need to become more sophisticated change agents who engage in even more skillful social planning. "Planning is an attempt to influence inter-organizational behavior. Indeed, successful planning asks how one actually gets into organizations to affect not only their incentive systems, but also their definitions of the situation."39 That is where the skill and sophistication will pay off. A final example of a current issue that will influence the direction of our efforts for years to come deserves attention. Since 1978 we have resettled approximately 48,000 Soviet Jews in the United States. They have given new life to some Jewish agencies and institutions, extended the lifespan of declining Jewish neighborhoods, revitalized old businesses and initiated new ones.

Our responsibility as a Jewish community is not yet discharged. Indeed, we have just begun to concern ourselves with the longer term acculturation needs of our new Jewish neighbors. This will require a new wave of volunteer energy with a different focus. The CJF Task Force on Jewish Identity concluded that among the most important factors which are likely to enhance the process of Jewish integration are: the nature of community attitudes, the extent to which there is personal reaching out by one Jew to another, the involvement of the Soviet Jew as a partner in the process, and the need for consistency over time since we are talking about a developmental process.40 I began by referring to several key tasks which are the responsibility of the voluntary sector. We are the voluntary sector. "If not now, when?"

³⁸ Op. Cit., See Parts A, D, and E. Also see: Training Volunteer Leaders of Program Groups (New York: National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1974), Frederick G. Clark, et. al., Impact Supervision: A Facilitative, Goal Oriented Model (Downsview, Ont.: The Dellcrest Children's Centre, 1977), and Rainman and Lippitt, Ibid.

³⁹ Norton E. Long, "Rigging the Market for Public Goods," in Rosengren and Lefton, eds., *Op. Cit.*, p. 187, emphasis mine.

⁴⁰ Task Force on Jewish Identity, Integrating Soviet Jewish Emigres: The Continuing Agenda for the American Jewish Community (New York: Council of Jewish Federations, Soviet Jewish Resettlement Program, November 12, 1980).