

Trends Affecting Public And Voluntary Social Welfare Planning

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WHAT are the trends in health and welfare services in the United States? What are the most pressing needs? What are the areas that require a new emphasis, or need more careful consideration?

Because social conditions in this country are undergoing constant and rapid change, it is important to review our welfare programs at intervals with such questions in mind.

The most obvious trend that has developed during the last quarter century is the shift in function of the voluntary family agencies from that of giving relief assistance either in cash or kind to that of giving skilled counseling and caseworker services. Before the 1930's they were devoting a large part of their funds and staff time to investigating and meeting the financial needs of those who sought their help. Public agencies even at that time were the major source of relief but often did little more than meet emergency needs, and in many places their assistance was largely limited to the distribution of coal and grocery orders.

Today the public income-maintenance programs have become an important source of income for persons too old, too young, or too disabled to be included in the labor force. The old-age and survivors insurance program is paying benefits to persons aged 65 or over, to their dependents, and to the survivors of deceased wage earners at a rate of more than \$4 billion a year; in November 1954, benefits were being paid to 6.8 million beneficiaries. The Federally aided public assistance programs are paying out more than \$2.5 billion a year to about 2.5 million needy aged persons, some 2 million mothers and children, more than 100,000 blind persons, and almost 240,000 disabled persons. Thus, well over 10 million persons rely on the social security

programs of old-age and survivors insurance and public assistance for a considerable part of their income.

As a result of the development of the public programs, the problem of meeting financial need, of course, is less pressing today, as far as voluntary agencies are concerned, than it was 25 years ago. Nevertheless, the private welfare programs still play an important part in meeting need. Under what conditions should voluntary agencies provide financial aid? In what circumstances should voluntary agencies take care of a case entirely from their own resources? The answers to these questions depend not only on the character of the public programs in a particular locality but on the history of the particular voluntary agency, its place in the social work sun as seen by its board of directors and its supporters, and many other factors too numerous to be discussed here.

One area where the changing scene is of increasing significance to voluntary and public agencies is the problem of the aging. Not only is the number of older persons in our population growing, but concepts concerning their care are changing.

In 1900 there were only 3 million persons in the United States who were 65 years of age or over. Today there are approximately 14 million. It is estimated that by 1970 there will be 18.5 million and by the year 2000 almost 27 million persons aged 65 and over.

A number of factors are combining to make old age a serious challenge. The urbanization of our country has created housing needs for the aged. No longer can the grandfather make himself useful as part of the large family in the farm or rural setting. In addition, the mechanization of industry is ruling people out of work at an earlier age.

Although voluntary agencies have been doing much experimentation in

methods of care of the aged, much still remains to be done. What services should voluntary agencies provide for the aged? An increasing number of voluntary agency homes for the aged, for example, are becoming filled with those who are senile. Is this a productive and valuable use of the limited facilities and funds of voluntary agencies? Should voluntary agencies become more active in helping the aged to find solutions to housing, employment, recreation, medical care, and a host of other problems that are becoming increasingly important with the growth in the aged population?

Another trend that affects voluntary and public welfare planning is the growing realization on the part of the general public of the value of social services in meeting a wide variety of personal and social problems. This recognition has resulted in a demand for new and expanded social services.

In the provision of needed services, government agencies have only touched the surface. Although they are making great progress, they are not yet able to provide a quality or variety of services comparable to those given by some of the better voluntary agencies.

On the other hand, many voluntary agencies, particularly the family agencies, have restricted their services to the point where they are becoming, in effect, overspecialized in one type of service. No longer do some of them engage in broad programs that include services for the aging and for unmarried mothers, homemaker services, general counseling, and the like.

While it may be argued that it is better for family agencies to do a particular job well than to attempt to do a broader job and do it poorly, nevertheless the fact remains that serious gaps in services exist. As a result, many public agencies have

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come to feel that services are not really available through the family agencies for any large group of the population.

The question then arises: Who is going to handle the problems that come up in a community and that neither private nor public agencies are as yet equipped to handle? If these problems are going to be handled, obviously either private agencies, public agencies, or both, must find the staff, time, and funds to do the job.

In many communities, public and private agencies have been sitting down together to conduct basic planning to meet these unmet needs. This basic planning is of particular importance at a time like the present, when many agencies are having to operate on reduced incomes and must therefore make every penny count.

A further trend noticeable throughout the country is the growing emphasis on services to prevent dependency. In the 1920's it was considered the important thing to care for persons in distress. Now it is realized that, while such aid is vital, services to help men and women become self-supporting and self-maintaining—able to hold their own in our competitive society—are the most important things. As a result, there has been an increase in all parts of the Nation in counseling, rehabilitation, and casework services designed to make men and women self-supporting.

These services are extremely important—for the Nation, the recipient, and the taxpayer. They have resulted in eventual savings to the taxpayers, although it is sometimes difficult to make people realize how expenditures that are heavy over a short period of time save tax money in the long run. Expenditures for these services must be looked at from a long-range perspective.

Programs for Children

A relatively recent development that has affected both the public programs and voluntary social services is the decline in the number and proportion of full orphans in the population. The day of the "orphanage"

has passed. Today the so-called orphan homes have few orphans, and most of the children residing in them have either one or both parents living.

In a special study that the Social Security Administration just completed, it was found that there are now about 66,000 full orphans in the Nation; as recently as 1920, there were 750,000. Despite an increase of 13 million in the child population during this period (from about 40 million in 1920 to 53 million in 1953), the number of full orphans today represents less than 12 percent of the number in 1920. Expressed in another way, the number of full orphans has declined from 2 percent of all children under age 18 in 1920 to 1 percent in 1930 and to one-tenth of 1 percent today.

At the same time, as a result of the growth of the public income-maintenance programs, orphanhood creates less of a social problem than it did several decades ago. These programs have made it possible for many widows to keep their young children with them, and they thus have reduced the number of families separated because of economic necessity. In June 1954, of all the paternal orphans in the population, more than three-fifths were receiving benefits as survivors of veterans or of workers covered by old-age and survivors insurance or by some other form of social insurance, and more than 1 in 10 were receiving aid to dependent children.

These facts have undoubtedly had a marked influence on the development of our services for children. Few voluntary activities have greater support than the child welfare programs. Yet, with the growing public programs and limited voluntary funds, private agencies must constantly ask themselves certain questions: Under what circumstances should voluntary funds be used to supplement tax funds in the care of children away from their own homes? Should voluntary agencies seek to develop their own programs from their own funds? Should they attempt to obtain government subsidy, as some child placement agencies have been doing? These are

questions of great significance to both public and private agencies.

Since in earlier years many of the children adopted were full orphans, how has the tremendous decline in their number affected adoptions? Interestingly enough, the number of adoptions has been steadily increasing. The year 1953 probably saw about 90,000 children in the United States adopted—an 80-percent increase in the number of adoptions since 1944.

Varied social and economic factors have contributed to the increase in adoptions, and the number of adoptions will probably continue to grow. The whole concept of adoption is more widely understood and better accepted than it once was. Moreover, children born out of wedlock, who constitute half the children adopted, are now less the objects of prejudice than they once were. The increase both in the number of children in the population and in the number of illegitimate children has been an important factor in the rise in the number of adoptions. The de-emphasis on institutional care has also encouraged the placement of children for adoption.

It is noteworthy that almost half the children adopted by nonrelatives are placed without the aid of a social agency. This is a serious matter and warrants careful study by both private and public agencies.

An analysis of adoption statistics indicates that the adoption rates in States with a predominantly urban child population are about 60 percent higher than those in States with a predominantly rural child population. The fact that child-placing agencies are centered in urban areas partly explains the higher urban rates. Many unmarried mothers go to the large cities and offer their children for adoption in the anonymity of the city. The low rates in the rural States should prompt consideration, however, as to whether the need for adoption services is being adequately met in these areas.

The whole problem of rural social services needs more attention than it has, to date, received. To what extent can voluntary agencies begin to expand outside the larger urban areas?

There is a desperate need for services in the more rural parts of the country, in the poorer counties, in the sparsely settled areas. Private agencies, up to the present, have operated principally in the urban areas. Public and voluntary agencies should jointly consider how services may be made available also to persons in rural areas.

Services in the area of juvenile delinquency have increased substantially. Juvenile delinquency is becoming more widely recognized as a grave problem though not necessarily because more youngsters now than formerly are committing offenses of a serious nature.

It is true that the figures being published by the Social Security Administration do show an increasing number of delinquent children brought to the attention of the juvenile courts. Arrests and court appearances, however, are the only two major sources of statistics generally available to measure delinquency. These statistics are necessarily affected by the type of community effort to control juvenile delinquency. A growing number of communities have officers trained for work with juveniles. Such officers are unlikely to merely "pick up" a youngster, take him home to his parents, and say "Why don't you spank him, that's what he needs." Instead, the trained approach may mean referral to a social agency for service; it may mean court referral, and the youngster would show up as a delinquent in a court statistical reporting program. Then, too, the courts, as their services are expanded, are able to handle their cases more expeditiously and more effectively, and thus they build up a better kind of relationship between a child who has committed some overt act and the law-enforcement agencies. At the same time the statistics go up.

Both public and private agencies must attack the juvenile delinquency problem from a constructive point of view. One effort in this direction has been the establishment, within the Children's Bureau, of a Division of Juvenile Delinquency Service, to work with courts, police, and many

types of agencies in improving the services for delinquent youth.

Another trend around which some hard thinking is needed relates to public agency purchases of service from voluntary agencies. Many public welfare departments now purchase medical care, foster care, and institutional care from private agencies. Forty-three percent of all foster-care payments made by public welfare departments in 1953 were for children living in foster homes or institutions supported by voluntary organizations. What standards do public agencies require and what controls do they exercise over private agency expenditures in this field? How do standards for the purchase of medical care compare with standards for the purchase of child welfare services? Are standards or controls necessary and desirable? What will be the eventual result if the controls expand? What will be the effect on private agencies? On the public agencies?

Factors Affecting Welfare Picture

Over and beyond the developments that affect segments of welfare planning, there are broader trends that affect the total welfare picture. Budgets, personnel, and programs are all affected by these significant developments—

Our population is increasing at the rate of about 2.8 million a year.

About 4 million babies are born each year.

The aged population is increasing by 1,000 every day.

Our national income and productivity have been growing and expanding.

These facts necessitate a resurvey of the role of private and public agencies in our changing economy.

Some countries— notably Great Britain, where the social insurances have been tremendously expanded— have already done this type of appraisal of their voluntary programs, and their experience may offer some guidelines to us.

Lord Beveridge, who formulated the recommendations for the expansion of Great Britain's social insurance program, subsequently wrote a book on "Voluntary Action," devoted

to pointing out the areas in which the voluntary agencies could and should operate. He says: "Voluntary action is needed to do things which the State should not do, in the giving of advice, or in organizing the use of leisure. It is needed to pioneer ahead of the State and make experiments."

Henry Mess, another Englishman, has stated that where "flexibility, experiment, supplementation or an exceptional degree of self-devotion are necessary, there is a strong case for the voluntary society."

Future Needs

Applying these conclusions to our own situation, what clues do they give to the future role of our voluntary agencies? A few illustrative possibilities may be mentioned without any attempt to be all-inclusive or to weigh priorities.

One need is for more extensive family services. Today there are about 900,000 children receiving aid to dependent children because of the father's absence from the home. They make up about 55 percent of all children on the rolls. It is estimated that within a few years, if the present trend continues, the absence of the father from the home may account for the dependency of two-thirds of all children served by the aid to dependent children program.

If voluntary agencies have as one of the fundamental principles of their program the maintenance of family life, how can they proceed to attack this tremendous problem of desertion and family breakdown? Certainly they cannot attack it if the casework agencies assume the position that their services can be made available only to those who meet narrow and restricted intake policies. This breakdown of family life is a real and current threat to our future generations and to our very way of life.

A second area of need is in the care of the disabled and their rehabilitation. There are nearly 3 million persons aged 14-64 who have been disabled 6 months or more. The number and the proportion of the population so disabled are likely to increase because of the aging of the population and the ability of modern medicine to extend the life span of

many disabled persons by the use of new drugs.

At present about 60,000 disabled persons a year are rehabilitated through the Federal-State vocational rehabilitation program. By 1959 it is expected that 200,000 persons a year will be rehabilitated, to the point of self-support, under the expanded program enacted by Congress at this last session.

There exists, however, a great need for a broader concept of rehabilitation—a concept that may perhaps be best described as “social rehabilitation.” Social rehabilitation would aim to restore a person to maximum happiness and to maximum usefulness to himself, his family, and his community. It means rehabilitating older persons who do not intend to go back into the labor market. It involves extended, nonvocational counseling for disabled women who are homemakers. Here is an area in which voluntary agencies could work with government without danger of duplication or overlapping.

The amount of experimentation within the social work program in the United States is impressive. Most of this experimenting is being done by private agencies. These experiments, it is hoped, will point the way to increased effectiveness in meeting the social service needs of all persons. The study and experimentation carried on by voluntary agen-

cies helped greatly in the shift from institutional care for children to care in family homes. It was through the study and experimentation of voluntary agencies that institutional care for infants was abandoned. The exciting experiments now being conducted by voluntary agencies in the care of the mentally ill have implications not only for private philanthropic effort but for our entire public program of institutional care for mentally ill persons. No one can deny that voluntary agencies have done a fine job in this area.

In considering what further experimentation is needed, one area should be mentioned in which government and voluntary effort, working together, can make a real contribution—that is, community planning. Services to people are given where the people are—in local communities. They are not given in Washington or in the national headquarters of private voluntary agencies. It is the local communities that are in the best position to evaluate the social needs of the residents. It is the local agencies that can best determine what services they should provide in the light of their aims and traditions and in relation to the services available from government agencies.

The Welfare Federation of Cleveland recently gave considerable attention to this problem of social action and produced criteria for determining what its role should be on

public social issues. This is the statement of their position:

There are public issues in which those whose rights are involved are unable to defend themselves. Those who are voiceless and defenseless should have first call upon the influence of the Federation as their champion. Those who are adults, strong, capable, unoppressed, and who do not depend upon the voice of the Federation for their protection, ought to agree that priority should be given by the Federation to those public issues affecting and involving the rights of the defenseless, such as children, the mentally ill and the infirm.

How much this statement will mean in terms of enabling the central planning agency and its affiliates to enter the political arena on behalf of the “defenseless” remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it is an interesting approach to a problem that many community leaders have long recognized.

These are but a few of the many aspects of our changing social scene that affect public and voluntary welfare programs. The problems they raise can best be solved by joint government and voluntary effort. This is a sound approach, consistent with our democratic way of life. Together, public and voluntary agencies, government officials, and private citizens can make a real contribution to the solution of the problems that confront us.