

Chapter XXVII

Teamwork between Agencies

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**CO-OPERATION ESSENTIAL.** No social agency can live for itself alone. Even in the smallest community an agency that is attempting to follow the principles of organizational efficiency will have to accommodate its procedure to the activities of other organizations. In the larger communities the social agency finds itself one among scores, hundreds, and in a few cities thousands of organizations. It must accommodate its program to their activities and work out effective relationships with them. Although the first duty of any social agency, as part of its mutual responsibility to other agencies, is to do its own work efficiently, it can do so only if it has satisfactory means for co-operation with all other agencies whose fields touch its own. A social agency is only successful as it is an effective part of a community plan.

**UNDERSTANDING OF OTHER AGENCIES REQUIRED.** The first step toward co-operation is an understanding—on the part of the agency's executive, its staff, the members of its board, and its committees—of the other social agencies in the community. This understanding should cover the purposes, the methods, and the types of work of these agencies; the methods of referring cases to them; their general policies in relation to the agency in question and to other agencies; the spirit of the other organizations as expressed in their boards and staffs; some knowledge of their history and background; and anything else that will help to better understanding and closer co-operation.

**CARD FILE ON RESOURCES.** A mechanical aid to knowledge of the possibilities which lie in other social agencies (and one which any organization will find it wise to keep) is a card file of community resources. In this would appear the names of the various agencies and their purposes, their officers, their addresses, their telephone numbers, and any other specialized information that might be worthwhile. This list need not be restricted to local agencies but may in-

clude state and national organizations which the social agency might use on occasion. The resource file may also include cards on key individuals—including committee and board members; volunteers; business men; racial, labor, and neighborhood group leaders; executives of newspapers and radio stations; potential committee material; politicians; other professional workers; individuals who may render specialized service; attorneys; clergymen; and so on through all the agencies and individuals of potential service to the agency. This list might be set up in a 3-by-5-inch card file. Someone in the office must be responsible for keeping the file up to date. That is very important. The resource file would manifestly be of value in planning co-operation and in securing the counsel and aid which might be necessary in working out the community relationships of a social agency.

A social service directory, if locally published, would serve much the same purpose.

**PLANNED CONTACTS WITH OTHER AGENCIES.** Contacts with these community resources—primarily with social agencies rather than with individuals—may be merely a matter of direct discussion between social agencies whenever the need develops, in order to prevent misunderstanding and to clear up difficulties. Executives should know one another personally through calls at their respective agencies. Conferences of agency representatives may be called by executives when difficult cases in which the agencies are concerned need adjustment, when problems of responsibility in the same or adjacent fields develop, and under many other circumstances. Staff members as well as board members may be assigned to work out with other agencies definite agreements and statements of responsibility as to ways of handling cases, the conduct of joint experiments in various fields of endeavor, the exchange of workers between agencies for short periods for mutual advantage, and similar inter-agency problems. Sometimes conferences may be regularly scheduled as a matter of routine between agencies in the same field. On the other hand, they may be called only as occasion offers, by one agency which takes the initiative. Out of these conferences should come written agreement, mutually exchanged.

Some value has been found in joint board meetings, conferences, get-together dinners, teas, and the like between representatives of two or more agencies. Executives of various agencies may be invited to describe the work of their agencies at the staff meetings or board meetings of an agency that wishes to promote co-operation.

**AGENCIES WHICH DO NOT WISH TO CO-OPERATE.** Sometimes an agency does not wish to co-operate, either because it does not see the value of interaction or because it is more interested in holding on to its own cases for reasons of self-satisfaction than in the well-being of its clients. That agency must be dealt with diplomatically and tactfully through continuing conferences with its executives and board members in order to secure a basis of mutual co-operation. Sometimes the problem is complicated by the fact that one social agency has high standards of work whereas those of another are low. In this case the first agency is faced with a problem of education in social technique. One meeting may lead to another, with free and open discussion on difficult points followed by agreement on outlines for future programs. Mutual relations are a problem not only of the executive or of committees of the board but also of staff members. The executive must foster a co-operative spirit in the members of his staff.

**HANDLING CONTROVERSIES.** Whenever a controversy develops, personal interviews between the workers most closely in touch with the facts usually overcome the difficulty without its being necessary for the boards to enter the discussion. Even the executive usually should only take a hand when a decision of policy is at stake. He may, however, advise his staff members as to effective procedure.

Face-to-face discussion should take place whenever the issue really demands mutual adjustment. On the other hand, the social agency should be careful not to call conferences on immaterial subjects when telephone calls or correspondence would be equally satisfactory and would save the time necessary for extended interviews.

Co-operation is an attitude as well as a technique. It is an attitude which should permeate the whole organization so that the agency is seen only as a link in the complete chain of joint community endeavor. This attitude may perhaps be most satisfactorily expressed through the agency's participation in the community machinery which already exists or which may be created, such as social service exchanges, community councils of social agencies, community chests, and similar joint activities.

**USE OF THE SOCIAL SERVICE EXCHANGE.** Every social agency which gives individualized social service should use the social service exchange (sometimes called the central index or confidential exchange). This is merely a confidential card list of the families and individuals known to social agencies, together with the names of the agencies concerned. Inquiry of the exchange prevents duplication of effort, provides a basis for case conferences which result in the de-

velopment of co-operative programs for the client, and makes possible service based on the fullest available knowledge of the problems and background of the client or patient. The social service exchange is an indispensable factor in effective individualized social service.

**PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL.** The social service exchange is generally operated by the community council of social agencies or the community chest (the terms are used here interchangeably, because the community chest is merely the financial aspect of the joint endeavor, of which the community council should be the primary expression). The council is a group of persons, representative of the various agencies and of the community, affiliated for fact finding, mutual discussion, joint planning, and common action on mutual problems.

(a) *Belong to One or Start One.* Every social agency should be active in the work of the council. Most of the agency's problems of inter-agency relationships should be handled through the committees of the council rather than by direct contact with other agencies. The council provides the machinery through which conflict is avoided, understanding created and co-operation made possible. Every social agency should by all means belong to the community council of social agencies in its community or help to bring about the creation of a council.

(b) *Representation by Board Members and Staff Members.* The agency should be represented by competent board and staff members on those committees and departments of the community council which affect its work. Representation in the council should not be restricted to the executive. Participation should be as widespread as possible—for the training of board and staff members, for lessening the burden on the executive, and for giving other agencies the benefit of the points of view of others than the executive. The agency's representatives must take an active part in the various committee activities, represent their agency's point of view (and their own), report to their agency the results of mutual discussion, and bear their full share of creative responsibility in the joint endeavors which the council develops. Through participation in the council, the agency may work out its program of service with full consideration of the needs of other agencies and of the community at large, in the belief that each agency should do that job for which it is best qualified.

(c) *Effects of a Council.* A community council of social agencies

makes possible effective mutual working relationships. Through the council the agency may improve its own standards of service. It may set definite boundaries between its service and that of another agency. It may work out agreements as to the extension of its service into new fields of work. It may obtain advice as to the ways in which that work should be carried on. It may participate in surveys of needs and of the relative efficiency of the various agencies concerned. It may help to develop practicable plans for the welfare of the whole community in which each agency has its appropriate part. On the other hand, the agency may agree to reduce its work, to turn it over to some other agency, or even to go out of existence if better ways of handling its work are found. The community council serves as a sort of community brain through which each social agency must send its impulses for co-ordinating intelligence and action. As someone said long ago, the council puts the "unity" in "community."

**PARTICIPATION IN A CHEST.** As was noted in the previous chapter, the social agency has the responsibility of active participation in the community chest if it belongs to one. The chest is merely another phase of the type of joint planning and action which a community council promotes. The chest is a federation of social agencies engaged in joint collection and distribution of funds for their common needs.

The agency's co-operation within the chest should mean not merely the acceptance of funds which are allocated to it. The agency (as we have said before) should furnish volunteer workers for the annual campaign. It should supply volunteer personnel when needed for campaign offices. It should provide qualified speakers for a year-round public relations program. It should share in the deliberations of the year-round public relations committee and provide adequate publicity material. It should mention its connection with the chest in all agency publicity. It should furnish, monthly, adequate and prompt service and financial reports. It should provide detailed budgets and explain them adequately to the chest budget committee. It should boost the chest publicly rather than complain about its faults (because complaints, which lessen giving, affect each agency as well as the whole fabric of joint finance). It should make suggestions and criticisms directly to the executive of the community chest so that any faults may be corrected.

The community chest can succeed in financing its member organizations adequately only if they participate fully and wholeheartedly

in its activities. The member agencies must do all that lies within their power, not only for their own adequate financing but for that of all the other agencies as well. The welfare of all is so closely intertwined that each agency must be well financed and well conducted if every other is to do its work properly. In the modern community and in membership in the community chest, it is vitally true of both citizens and of social agencies that they "are members one of another."

**PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY PLANNING.** To fulfill the requirement of mutual responsibility for community service, the principle of participation which has been emphasized throughout this book is essential. Decision as to the course to be taken in such emergencies as an unemployment crisis, disaster, or epidemic should be made not by the agency itself but in consultation, through the community council of social agencies or the community chest, with other social agencies and citizens. If financial resources become insufficient, the question as to how this difficulty can be met should be a matter of mutual conference and discussion by all concerned, so that the decision made is that of the group. The strategy of effective community service demands that all agencies shall be regarded as equal in a democracy of social endeavor. Their responsibilities must be seen as mutual. All decisions which affect them must be worked out through a joint facing of the facts, through creative discussion, through concerted planning, through mutual decision, and through the willingness of all concerned to bear the consequences of the course taken. The community council and the community chest can be of pre-eminent value in applying the "technique of group discussion" to the relations of social agencies within the community. Participation in a chest and council may be made our strongest demonstration of democracy at work in the community.

**PUBLIC AS WELL AS PRIVATE AGENCIES.** The interrelationship of social agencies is a matter for public as well as private agencies. Public agencies should of course be members of community councils, sharing equally with private agencies and with citizens the responsibility for community planning and action. Moreover, the private agencies should work with the public agencies to help them develop to the fullest possible degree. The private agency should aid in developing public standards. It should back up proposed social legislation and appropriation. It should stimulate the public agency to more adequate service. It should turn over to the public agency, when possible, projects which the public is ready to assume, thus freeing

itself for further demonstration and for service in fields not covered by the public agency. Private social agencies can often use the advisory services of experts on the staffs of local, state, and federal governmental agencies for surveys. Through mutual understanding, relationships of great value may be developed.

Public and private agencies are merely two sides of the same thing—community service rendered by public funds, whether paid in taxes or in contributions. The interests of public and private agencies are one, and both types of agency should work as one.

CO-OPERATION WITH NATIONAL AGENCIES. Co-operation does not stop in the local community. Some beginnings in state-wide and national planning have been made by social agencies. The local agency should learn to make full use of its own national organization, utilizing its national public relations material, statistics, comparative figures of experience in other cities, advice on problems and techniques, and personnel service. The local agency should help its national organization to be more effective through service on its boards and committees, through supplying and exchanging information, and through making adequate financial contribution toward its upkeep. Thus the social agency has a responsibility not merely to its own community, but also to similar organizations throughout the country, either directly or through the medium of its national organization. Sharing in the work of the national body brings strength, competent counsel, and mutual experience to the local agency.

The local social agency is a member of a vast fellowship, community-wide, state-wide, nation-wide, and potentially world-wide. In each of these sectors of activity the agency must play its full and proper part with due regard to the interests of other agencies. Social work is a fabric of interwoven strands. Each of them must be strong and adequate if that fabric is to support adequately the well-being of city, state, nation, and humanity.

#### QUESTIONS

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1. In the case of some typical social agency, what understanding do board, executive, staff, and volunteers have of the work of other agencies?
2. How have they gained that knowledge?
3. What use is made of a file of community resources?
4. What planned contacts does this agency have with other agencies?
5. What does this agency do to win over another agency which does not wish to co-operate?

6. How are controversies handled?
7. What use is made of the social service exchange? If none, why?
8. What participation does this agency have in a community council of social agencies?
  9. How is it represented in the council?
  10. What part do its representatives take in the activities of the council?
  11. If a member of a community chest, how does the agency share in its activities and responsibilities?
  12. What relation does this agency, if it is a private agency, have to public agencies; or, if a public agency, to private ones?
  13. What relationship does the agency have with its national organization, if it has such a connection?
  14. How could this agency's attitude or performance be improved in any of these respects?