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The cover features a yellow and grey striped background. In the top right corner, there are three logos: JDC-Brookdale Institute (two stylized figures), William Rosenwald Institute for Communal and Welfare Workers (a shield with a star and diamond pattern), and JDC-FSU Department (a stylized 'JDC' inside a circle). The title 'Hesed Evaluation Study: Jewish Identity, Community Orientation and Voluntarism' is centered in bold black font. Below it, 'Report Number 1: Findings from a Survey of Hesed Employees' is also in bold black font. The authors' names, Sima Zalberg, Esther Katz, and Iaroslav Youssim, are listed with their affiliation 'JDC-Brookdale Institute'. Research consultants Prof. Jack Habib and Prof. Yaakov Ukeles, and Content consultants Dr. Amos Avgar and Aliza Kol-Fogelson, are also mentioned with their respective affiliations. At the bottom left, the code 'S-106-03' is printed.

**Hesed Evaluation Study:  
Jewish Identity,  
Community Orientation  
and Voluntarism**

**Report Number 1:**  
**Findings from a Survey of**  
**Hesed Employees**

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S-106-03

## Abstract

This report presents findings from an evaluation study of Hesed Community Welfare Centers in the former Soviet Union (FSU). The study was initiated by the JDC-FSU Department and was conducted by the JDC-Brookdale Institute in cooperation with the William Rosenwald Institute for Communal and Welfare Workers in St. Petersburg, Russia.

After nine years of experience and development, the JDC-FSU Department decided to conduct an evaluation study of the Hesed Centers, using a comparative case study approach. The evaluation focused on the following aspects:

- ◆ Hesed Centers as a lever for Jewish renewal and renewal of the Jewish community
- ◆ The linkage of Hesed Centers to municipal services, other Jewish community organizations and key community figures
- ◆ The volunteers and their work at Hesed
- ◆ Welfare services provided by Hesed
- ◆ Training for Hesed's employees and volunteers.

The study addresses these issues from the perspectives of various groups – Hesed's directors, its employees, its volunteers, its home-care workers and its clients, as well as community representatives. This report provides the perspective of Hesed's employees regarding all of these issues.

Data were collected from 445 Hesed employees at eight Hesed Centers in three republics: Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Ninety-three percent completed the questionnaire in a group at the Hesed Center, and 7% in face-to-face interviews.

## Findings from the Study

### Socio-demographic Characteristics of Hesed Employees

- ◆ The majority of the employees (hereinafter: respondents) (76%) were women.
- ◆ About half of the respondents (51%) were under age 50.
- ◆ The majority of the respondents were married or living with another person (65%), and the majority had one or two children (75%).
- ◆ The percentage of the respondents with a higher education (B.A., B.Tech or higher) was particularly high (96%).
- ◆ The vast majority of the respondents were working full time or more (84%).

### Hesed's Impact on Jewish Identity of the Employees

Hesed's impact on Jewish identity was examined through two strategies:

1. By asking the respondents whether their Jewish identity in a variety of dimensions was different than it had been before working at Hesed.
2. By asking how the respondents' Jewish identity had been influenced by working at Hesed.

## **Personal Definition**

- ♦ ***The Meaning of Being Jewish:*** Large percentages of the respondents chose "To regard yourself as part of the Jewish People" (93%) and "To be proud of the Jewish People" (83%) as defining what it means to be Jewish.
- ♦ ***Self-identity:*** A large percentage of the respondents (96%) reported that they consider themselves Jewish, or both Jewish and another nationality. More than half of the respondents (59%) reported that they define their national consciousness as primarily Jewish. The percentage of the respondents who said they consider themselves to be only Jewish, and the percentage reporting that "Jewish" appears/appeared on their State-issued passport, rise with seniority at Hesed. In examining the impact of working at Hesed, it was found that the percentage of the respondents reporting that being Jewish was currently important/very important in their life (63%) was higher than the percentage reporting that, prior to working at Hesed, being Jewish was important/very important in their life (45%).

## **Attitudes toward Jewish Issues**

- ♦ ***The Importance of Components of Basic Jewish Identity:*** Very high percentages of respondents chose the "State of Israel" (92%) and "Learning Jewish history, customs, values and culture" (84%) as being important/very important to them, while a lower percentage (52%) chose "Judaism" (Jewish religion). More than half of the respondents reported that working at Hesed had strengthened their attitudes toward all the individual components of Jewish identity that were presented. Especially large percentages reported that working at Hesed had strengthened their attitudes toward "The importance of celebrating the Jewish holidays" (87%), "The importance of meeting/being with other Jews" (84%), and "The interest in learning Jewish history, customs, values and culture" (81%).
- ♦ ***The Continuity of Jewish Culture and Tradition:*** At least 30% of the respondents reported that they agreed more now with each issue relating to the continuity of Jewish culture and tradition, than they did before working at Hesed. The biggest change was in how they view the importance of children learning about Jewish history, customs, values and culture: 58% of the respondents reported that they agree more now than they did prior to working at Hesed that "It is very important."
- ♦ ***Intermarriage:*** A small percentage of respondents (22%) reported that they are opposed to intermarriage, while a relatively high percentage (61%) reported that nationality/religion does not matter. Only a small percentage (8%) reported that their views concerning this issue had become more opposed.

## **Feelings of Belonging to the Jewish People**

- ♦ ***Feelings of Belonging:*** The vast majority of the respondents (at least 75%) reported that they agree/strongly agree with most (six out of eight) of the items relating to a sense of belonging. Particularly high percentages reported that they agree/strongly agree that "I feel a special responsibility to care for Jews in need" (96%) and "I feel part of the Jewish People" (96%). For all of the items, at least 25% said they agree more today than they did before working at Hesed. At least half reported that they agree more now than they did prior to

working at Hesed concerning "I feel a special responsibility to care for Jews in need" (62%), "An unbreakable bond unites Jews all over the world" (60%), and "I feel part of the Jewish People" (55%). In addition, a high percentage of the respondents (77%) reported that they now have more Jewish friends than they did prior to working at Hesed.

- ♦ ***The Impact of Hesed's Activities:*** Most of the Hesed activities that were presented were cited by a large majority of the respondents (at least 74%) as contributing to their sense of Jewishness to some/a great extent. The activities contributing most to the respondents' sense of Jewishness (at least 88%) were "Jewish and Israeli music and songs," "My specific position at Hesed," "Lectures and seminars on Jewish issues," "Informal conversations with Hesed participants," "The celebration of Jewish holidays/festivals and religious ceremonies and rituals," and "Exposure to other Jewish Hesed participants."

### **Knowledge of Jewish Concepts and Practices**

- ♦ The vast majority of the respondents (at least 87%) said they were familiar with most of the Jewish concepts and practices presented, and the vast majority (78%) reported that their involvement in Hesed had greatly increased their knowledge of Jewish concepts and practices. Respondents reported that Hesed's impact on knowledge of or closeness to Jewish tradition and custom also extends to a broader group, i.e., their immediate family (62%), close friends (37%), extended family (32%) and casual friends (29%). The impact on the respondents has a potential impact on their broader family. It was also reported that many of the respondents' family members participate in Hesed's activities.

### **Personal Behavior**

- ♦ ***Participation in Jewish Activities, Rituals and Practices:*** The most prevalent Jewish-oriented activities among the respondents were reading Jewish literature, magazines or newspapers (81%); listening to radio and/or watching television broadcasts concerning Israel (73%); and participating in the Jewish community's social life (59%). High percentages reported that their level of participation in all of the Jewish rituals and practices that were listed had changed since their involvement in Hesed. Particularly high percentages reported that their participation in the Jewish community's social life (84%) and their reading of Jewish literature, magazines or newspapers (83%) had increased.
- ♦ ***Jewish Holiday Observance:*** For each Jewish holiday, more than half (53% or more) reported that they regularly celebrate within the Hesed framework, and at least 31% reported that they celebrate outside the Hesed framework. The holiday most frequently cited as being celebrated either within or outside the Hesed framework is Pesach (84% and 67%, respectively). For each holiday, a very high percentage of those who did not regularly celebrate when growing up reported that since beginning to work at Hesed, they regularly celebrate.
- ♦ ***Rites of Passage:*** More than a third of the respondents reported that they will/would celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah for their children (42%), and a similar proportion reported that they will/would circumcise their son. These percentages are relatively high for the FSU,

where celebrating a bar or bat mitzvah and circumcising one's son were not considered part of the culture during the Soviet era.

### **Connection to the Jewish Community**

- ♦ ***Involvement in Other Jewish Organizations:*** More than half of the respondents reported that they occasionally/often participate in Jewish Community Center (JCC) activities (57%) and in synagogue activities (54%). More than half of the respondents (58%) reported that their level of participation in the activities of other Jewish organizations had increased since they began working at Hesed.
- ♦ ***General Participation in the Jewish Community:*** The majority of the respondents reported that they feel part of the Jewish community to some/a great extent (61%), and that these feelings have been strengthened since they began working at Hesed (73%). Forty one percent of the respondents responded "Yes" when asked whether they would like to become more involved in the Jewish community, and a similar percentage (42%) reported "Maybe."

### **Intent to Emigrate**

- ♦ It is interesting to note that while high percentages of the respondents reported that members of their extended family live in Israel (66%) and that they have friends living in Israel (85%), a relatively low percentage (6%) said they themselves plan to immigrate to Israel.

### **General Evaluation of Hesed's Jewish Programming**

- ♦ In general, there was a very positive evaluation of Hesed's Jewish-oriented programming. Very high percentages of the respondents reported that Hesed's Jewish-oriented activities are important to them (96%); that they are satisfied with these activities (95%); and that Hesed meets their needs in the area of Jewish life (93%). In addition, a majority of the respondents (80%) reported that the Jewish elements of their work at Hesed are important/very important to them. A very high percentage (94%) reported that Hesed "brings them back" to the atmosphere of their father's and grandfather's home to some/a great extent. The events regarding the respondents' work at Hesed that were frequently cited as being the most memorable were: "Celebration of Jewish holidays"; "Participation in job-related seminars"; "Events that evoke feelings of Hesed's usefulness in general, and of my contribution to this usefulness"; "First Shabbat celebration, Shabbat activities"; and "Establishment of Hesed, other Jewish organizations."

### **Hesed's Impact on the Commitment to Non-Jewish Community Issues**

The findings show that Hesed has had an impact on non-Jewish issues as well.

- ♦ ***Hesed's Impact on Attitudes toward Social Issues:*** The majority of the respondents (72%) reported that working at Hesed had strengthened their concern about the social needs of non-Jewish disadvantaged populations. Almost half of the respondents reported that working at Hesed had strengthened their readiness to speak out when there is any type of official discrimination – ethnic, religious, age, etc.

- ♦ **Hesed's Impact on Involvement in Non-Jewish Organizations:** Twelve percent of the respondents reported that working at Hesed had strengthened their involvement in non-Jewish organizations.

### Reasons for Working at Hesed

We also examined the reasons for working at Hesed.

- ♦ **Factors in the Decision to Work at Hesed:** The factors most often cited by the respondents as having motivated their decision to work at Hesed are that the work is interesting (93%); they are able to use many of their abilities and skills (88%); working at Hesed helps them widen their social circle and make new friends (87%); and they gain satisfaction from caring for the Jews in their city (83%). The factors least often cited as having motivated their decision to work at Hesed are that it helps prepare one for aliyah (12%) and gains one access to material assistance, e.g., "In addition to my salary, there are material benefits" (15%), "I and/or my family receive welfare assistance and social services" (20%), and "If I'm ever in need, I want Hesed to be there for me" (33%). There was significant variance by department and by roles for a number of motivational factors.
- ♦ **Preference Regarding Place of Work:** The vast majority of the respondents (80%) reported that they prefer to work in a Jewish framework. The percentage rises with age and varies among the department categories, being particularly high among the curators (92%) and relatively low among the administrative staff (69%). This is another reflection of their Jewish identity.

### Perceptions of the Jewish Community and of Hesed's Role in It

- ♦ **The Meaning of "Community":** Especially large percentages of the respondents reported that when they think of "community," they think of people caring for one another (93%); that a community is an outgrowth of common interests (96%); and that a real community provides services that people need — social, health, security, religious, cultural, educational, etc. (94%).
- ♦ **Current Perceptions:** The vast majority of the respondents (82%) characterized the Jewish community in their city as being active. A particularly high percentage (92%) reported that Hesed has a strong influence on the life of their city's Jewish population. Most (63%) said they see Hesed as being the main center for Jewish community life in their city; among those who did not, 37% reported that Hesed could become the center for Jewish community life in their city. Almost all of the respondents (97%) reported that Hesed cooperates with other Jewish organizations in their city, mainly with other JDC programs (93%) and with the Jewish Community Center (86%). The role of Hesed is also reflected in the perceived awareness of its activities: A very high percentage of the respondents (94%) reported that many/almost all of the Jews in their city are aware of Hesed's activities.
- ♦ **Perceptions for the Future:** A related dimension is how the respondents view Hesed's future role. An especially large percentage of the respondents (95%) reported that Hesed should expand its social activities to other needy groups among the Jewish population. Most (94%) thought that Hesed should expand these activities to children and to single-parent families.

The most frequently cited activities that Hesed should provide in order to develop Jewish cultural and religious life in the city were cultural activities featuring prominent artists (9%); programs geared toward youngsters, children, the middle-aged and families (8%); and information published in the mass media (8%).

## Voluntarism and Hesed

Hesed was designed to strengthen voluntarism within and for the community. Today, a considerable proportion of Hesed's activities are based on the work of volunteers. Thus, many Hesed employees come in contact with volunteers during the course of their work in one way or another. From the perspective of the employees, we examined various issues concerning the work of the volunteers, including relationships with the volunteers, the recruitment of volunteers, the motivation to volunteer at Hesed, and the nature of the volunteers' work.

### Employee Relationships with Volunteers

- ♦ The majority of the respondents (71%) reported that they interact with volunteers during the course of their work. Almost half of these respondents reported that volunteers work under their supervision. A very high percentage (95%) of these respondents assessed their relationships with the volunteers as being good/very good; most (74%) reported that they seldom encounter problems in their work with them. Among the problems that were specifically mentioned, those cited most frequently were illness and age-related (16%), a lack of ability on the part of the volunteers to communicate with the elderly and lack of professionalism (11%), and psychological problems (10%).

### Recruiting Volunteers for Hesed

- ♦ **Methods:** The method most frequently cited (88%) for recruiting volunteers was word of mouth by other volunteers or employees of Hesed. This method was also believed to be the most effective (93%).
- ♦ **The Selection Process:** The vast majority of the respondents (79%) reported that potential volunteers undergo a selection process. The characteristics that were most frequently cited as being taken into account were the candidate's patience and desire to help (40%), his ability to work and communicate with people (35%) and his sense of responsibility and honesty (19%).
- ♦ **The Need for Additional Volunteers:** The situation with respect to the need for volunteers appears to vary from Hesed to Hesed. Forty-one percent of the respondents reported that Hesed needs more volunteers, yet at the same time, 16% reported that there is a "waiting list" of people interested in volunteering. The methods most frequently suggested for recruiting more volunteers were the distribution of more information on Hesed and its volunteers (38%), more material incentives for volunteers (29%), more recognition for volunteers (24%), and more cultural programs and other benefits (22%). A high percentage of the respondents (83%) reported that there is a need for more volunteers aged 20-40, and most (91%) felt that Hesed could successfully attract volunteers in this age group. Most felt that

conducting an information campaign in places frequented by young Jews is an "effective" method for recruiting volunteers in this age group.

### **Motivation to Volunteer at Hesed**

- ♦ ***Motivational Factors:*** At least 94% of the respondents cited that aspects associated with altruism, social life and leisure activities, and Jewish affiliation motivated people to some/a great degree to volunteer at Hesed. Smaller percentages of respondents cited aspects associated with professional goals and material benefits as having motivated people to volunteer at Hesed. Moreover, the majority of the respondents (77%) reported that most/all of the volunteers at Hesed are clients.
- ♦ ***Incentives to Volunteer:*** Almost all of the respondents (98%) reported that it is necessary to provide incentives to volunteers. The existing incentives and benefits most often cited are the opportunity to participate in Hesed's club activities, special seminars, trips out of town or other recreational activities organized for volunteers; the receipt of concert or theater tickets, or gifts for holidays or special occasions; and the provision of verbal or written recognition of their work. Most (90%) reported that the current incentives and benefits for volunteers are appropriate. The most frequent suggestions were the provision of additional non-material recognition (such as diplomas, honorary citations, public expressions of gratitude, etc.) (49%); additional material rewards (35%); and birthday celebrations, concerts, trips, tours, etc. (27%).

### **Volunteer Work at Hesed**

- ♦ ***Placement and Assignments:*** The findings show that volunteers are assigned to most, if not all, of Hesed's programs and departments. The vast majority of the respondents (83%) reported that volunteers at Hesed are able to choose their assignment from a number of possibilities. Forty-four percent reported that it is sometimes necessary for a volunteer to change his assignment in order to continue to volunteer. Forty percent reported about burnout among the volunteers.
- ♦ ***Volunteer Turnover:*** The vast majority of the respondents (81%) reported that Hesed's volunteer staff is relatively stable. The reasons given by most of the respondents for volunteer turnover were: health and age (76%), family problems (58%), Hesed is too far from home (36%), and insufficient encouragement (34%). More than half of the respondents (55%) said that when a volunteer can no longer perform his job due to poor health, Hesed should make an effort to utilize him in some other way, for example as a mentor for new volunteers. Only 12% felt that such volunteers should be relieved of their duties.
- ♦ ***General Evaluation of the Volunteers' Work:*** Almost all of the respondents (99%) said the work done by volunteers is important/very important. Similarly, a very high percentage of the respondents who work with volunteers (95%) reported that they are satisfied with their work. The most frequently recommended steps to strengthen Hesed's volunteer program were the provision of additional financial incentives, more professional seminars and more cultural programs.

## Training

Considerable training opportunities are made available to Hesed employees and volunteers. Each employee was asked about his own training experience and needs, as well as those of his subordinates and the volunteers with whom he works. The responses reveal a strong interest in additional training.

- ♦ **Prevalence of Training:** The majority of the respondents reported that they (71%), their subordinates (77%) and the volunteers (81%) had undergone professional training during the previous two years.
- ♦ **Perceived Relevance:** The training courses cited most frequently as being relevant/useful were those relating to social work methods, psychology and sociology of the elderly, and home care.
- ♦ **Improving Training:** About a quarter of the respondents had recommendations for improving the training. The main recommendations were: increased continuity of the training process; more specialists and professionals among the teachers; the provision of study materials prior to training; additional opportunities for professional exchange; mentoring and work experience in the client's home; and more practical studies.
- ♦ **Perceived Need for Additional Training:** High percentages of the respondents reported that they (70%), their subordinates (69%) and the volunteers (58%) require additional training in order to work more effectively. The areas of additional training cited most frequently were social work and psychology; computerization and administration; gerontology and geriatrics; and Jewish tradition and history and culture.
- ♦ **Addressing Problems at Work:** Almost all of the respondents reported that all three groups have someone to whom they can turn for advice when problems arise. Most can turn to their immediate supervisor, their department director or a colleague.
- ♦ **The Network of Institutes for Communal and Welfare Workers:** Most of the training of the three groups was conducted within the Hesed framework, and a relatively large percentage of the respondents underwent training within the framework of the network of institutes for communal and welfare workers. The network is composed of the major bodies responsible for providing professional training for Hesed employees and volunteers. The network provides other services in addition to training, of which publications is the most utilized, and provides services to employees of other Jewish organizations and to the non-Jewish community.

## General Evaluation of Hesed

- ♦ In general, there was a very positive evaluation of Hesed as a place of work. Almost all of the respondents reported that they are satisfied with their work (98%) and that they would recommend Hesed as a workplace to others (92%).

## Conclusions

- ♦ The responses of the employees reveal a strong attachment to Hesed as an organization and a positive attitude toward the significance of their work for them personally and for the Jewish community.

- ◆ They felt they have had significant opportunities for professional development and training. However, they also defined considerable needs for additional training in a broad range of areas, as well as their own interest in further training.
- ◆ Beyond being a place of work, Hesed was clearly reported to have a broader impact on the employees' sense of Jewish identity, as expressed in their attitudes, knowledge and behavior. This extends to their broader family and friends.
- ◆ They also reported that Hesed has had a significant impact on their general commitment to social issues and actual participation in non-Jewish communal affairs.
- ◆ Volunteers play a major role in the Hesed system, as indeed reflected in the responses of the employees. Almost all said they work with volunteers and view them as being an important part of the Hesed team. They said they feel that the volunteer staff is stable and that the organization makes every effort to enable them to continue to volunteer for as long as possible. The picture is not uniform, but many of the employees reported a need for additional volunteers and suggested a number of ways in which recruitment efforts could be enhanced. One particularly common interest was in attracting larger numbers of volunteers aged 20-40. Hesed provides a number of incentives to its volunteers, these being viewed by the respondents as a very important element in the stability of the volunteer staff – although they felt the incentives could be enhanced. They also recommended a number of areas in which additional training is needed to enhance the effectiveness of the volunteers.
- ◆ The employees had a positive view of the volunteers' role at Hesed, yet said it could be strengthened in some communities.
- ◆ There was a particular interest in expanding Hesed's services for children.

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