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William Rosenwald Institute for
Communal and Welfare Workers



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Department

Hesed Evaluation Study: Jewish Identity, Community Orientation and Voluntarism



Report Number 2: Findings from a Survey of Hesed Clients

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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 clients regarding most of these issues.

The study was conducted at eight Hesed Centers in three republics: Russia – St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod; Ukraine – Kiev, Odessa, Vinnitsa and Dnepropetrovsk; and Belarus – Minsk and Vitebsk.

A total of 2,400 clients (300 at each Hesed Center that was examined) were randomly sampled out of the total client population in these eight centers (65,449 clients that were in Hesed's database). The response rate was 78% (1,876). Eighty-five percent of those clients completed the questionnaire at home in face-to-face interviews, and 15% completed a self-administered questionnaire in a group at Hesed.

Findings from the Study

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Hesed Clients

- ♦ The majority of the clients (hereinafter: respondents) (62%) were women.
- ♦ Most of the respondents (91%) were aged 60 or older; 60% were aged 60 to 74.
- ♦ More than a half of the respondents (54%) were married or living with another person, and the majority (75%) had one or two children.
- ♦ The vast majority of the respondents (78%) had a higher education (B.A., B.Tech or higher).
- ♦ Most of the respondents (83%) suffered from Nazi persecution. Most of them were forced to flee (80%) or suffered the loss of family members (78%).

Clients' Involvement in Hesed

- ♦ **Clients' Use and Needs of Hesed Services:** Forty-one percent of the respondents were Hesed clients for less than three years, and a similar percentage (40%) were clients for three to five years. Nineteen percent were clients for more than five years. Most of the respondents (92%) cited that they receive food packages from Hesed. Relatively high percentages of respondents reported receiving humanitarian aid (clothing, blankets, etc.) (40%), visits and/or telephone calls from volunteers (37%), and participation in cultural activities (32%). Relatively high percentages of respondents said they need, but do not receive, the following Hesed services: medical consultations (31%), household appliance repairs (26%), humanitarian aid (17%), cultural activities (13%), consultations with specialists other than doctors (12%) and hairdresser and cosmetologist services (12%). The respondents who need a service but have not received it, cited most frequently (30% or more) "I did not make a request" and "lack of awareness" as the reasons for not receiving the service. Fifteen percent of the respondents reported that there are services required by the elderly that Hesed does not provide, mainly apartment repairs, medical services, and nursing care.
- ♦ **Reasons for Involvement in Hesed:** The most frequently cited factor for the clients' involvement in Hesed was the receipt of various types of material aid (88%). Three additional factors that the clients frequently cited were "Sense of belonging to the Jewish people" (76%); "My family and I receive social aid and services" (70%); and "Opportunity to become closer to Jewish culture" (67%). Half of the respondents cited "Opportunity to get to know new people and enlarge my circle of acquaintances".

Hesed's Impact on Jewish Identity of the Clients

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 becoming a Hesed client.
2. By asking how the respondents' Jewish identity had been influenced by Hesed.

Personal Definition

- ♦ **The Meaning of Being Jewish:** Large percentages of the respondents reported that regarding one's self as part of the Jewish people (93%), being proud of the Jewish people (88%), and having at least one Jewish parent or grandparent (80%) define what it means to be Jewish.
- ♦ **Self-identity:** Almost all the respondents (98%) reported they consider themselves Jewish or Jewish and another nationality. The majority of the respondents reported that "Jewish" nationality appears/appeared on their state-issued passport (81%), and that they define their national consciousness as primarily Jewish (63%). About half of the respondents reported that being Jewish is important/very important in their life (51%) and that involvement in Hesed had increased the importance they attach to being Jewish (49%). The percentage of the respondents reporting that involvement in Hesed increased the importance they attach to being Jewish was higher among those who participate in Hesed cultural activities (58%) than among the respondents who do not participate in these activities (44%).

Attitudes toward Jewish Issues

- ♦ ***The Importance of Components of Basic Jewish Identity:*** Very high percentages of the respondents chose the "State of Israel" (92%) and the vast majority chose "Learning Jewish history, customs, values and culture" (77%) as being important/very important to them, while a relatively low percentage (30%) chose "Judaism" (Jewish religion). More than half of the respondents reported that Hesed had strengthened their interest in learning Jewish history, traditions and culture (57%), the importance they attribute to the State of Israel (54%), and to celebrating the Jewish holidays (52%). Among the respondents who participated in Hesed's cultural activities, there were greater percentages who attached more importance to components of basic Jewish identity and reported that Hesed had strengthened their attitude toward components of basic Jewish identity, in contrast to those who did not participate.
- ♦ ***The Continuity of Jewish Culture and Tradition:*** A very high percentage of respondents (91%) agreed/strongly agreed that it is very important for children to learn about Jewish history, customs, values and culture, and a high percentage (60%) agreed/strongly agreed that it is very important for children to learn about Judaism (Jewish religion). At least 27% of the respondents reported that they now agreed more that these two issues are very important than they did prior to their involvement in Hesed.
- ♦ ***Intermarriage:*** Sixteen percent reported that they are opposed to intermarriage, while the majority (64%) reported that nationality/religion does not matter. Only three percent reported that they had become more opposed in their views concerning this issue.

Feelings of Belonging to the Jewish People

- ♦ ***Feelings of Belonging:*** The percentages of respondents who reported that they agree/strongly agree with the items presented to them concerning the sense of belonging to the Jewish people were quite high, at least 67% for most of the items. Almost all the respondents reported that they agree/strongly agree that "I feel part of the Jewish people" (98%), and that "Being Jewish connects me with my family's past" (94%). For almost all the items related to feelings of belonging, at least 25% reported they agree more now than they did prior to their involvement in Hesed.

Knowledge of Jewish Concepts and Practices

- ♦ The respondents reported varying levels of familiarity with Jewish concepts and practices: 26% to 93% of respondents reported that they know/know somewhat the concepts that were presented to them. The most familiar items were "Circumcision" (93%), "Kotel" (87%), and "Torah" (83%). A vast majority (about 77%) also cited the High Holidays as familiar. Most of respondents (78%) reported that their involvement in Hesed had increased their familiarity with Jewish concepts and practices to some/a great extent. A higher percentage (41%) of respondents who participated in Hesed's cultural activities reported that their involvement in Hesed had increased their familiarity with Jewish concepts and practices to a great extent, in contrast to those who did not participate (22%) in the cultural activities. Hesed's impact on familiarity with or closeness to Jewish tradition and custom also extends to a broader group. Thirty-one percent

of respondents reported that members of their immediate family became more familiar with Jewish traditions and customs to a great extent.

Personal Behavior

- ♦ ***Participation in Jewish Activities, Rituals and Practices:*** The most prevalent Jewish-oriented activities among the respondents were listening to radio and/or watching television broadcasts concerning Israel and reading Jewish literature, magazines or newspapers (66% and 49% respectively reported that they often/always participate in these activities). About half of the respondents reported that since they became Hesed clients, the level at which they read Jewish literature, magazines or newspapers and listen to radio and/or watch television broadcasts concerning Israel had increased somewhat/to a great degree (53% and 51%, respectively), and 32% reported that the level at which they participate in the Jewish social life of their community had increased somewhat/to a great degree.
- ♦ ***Jewish Holiday Observance:*** The holiday the respondents now celebrate most frequently either within or outside the Hesed framework is Pesach (11% and 34% respectively reported celebrating Pesach regularly). The percentages of respondents who reported that they regularly celebrated the holidays when they were growing up reached at least 31% for most of the holidays (5 out of 7). Again, the holiday cited most frequently as being celebrated when growing up is Pesach (43%). In general, the percentage of respondents who regularly celebrated the holidays since becoming Hesed clients is lower than the percentage of respondents who celebrated the holidays when they were growing up. We can assume that this is the result of two factors: first, since the majority of the respondents are elderly, they had a higher degree of Jewish identity in their families during childhood, before or during the early Soviet period. In addition, the respondents' present age-related and economic problems make it difficult for them to celebrate the Jewish holidays.

Connection to the Jewish Community

- ♦ ***Involvement in Jewish Organizations Other than Hesed:*** Thirty-one percent of the respondents reported that they are occasionally/often involved in synagogue activities. The percentages of the respondents who reported that they occasionally/often participate in the activities of the other organizations that were listed ranged from 7% to 13%. Nineteen percent of the respondents reported that since becoming Hesed clients, their participation in the activities of other Jewish organizations has increased.
- ♦ ***General Participation in the Jewish Community:*** Twenty-nine percent of the respondents reported that they feel part of the Jewish community to a great/some extent. The percentage of respondents who reported this is higher among the respondents who participate in Hesed's cultural activities (41%) than among those who do not (23%). Half of the respondents (48%) reported that their feelings of being part of the Jewish community have been strengthened since becoming Hesed clients. The percentage of respondents who reported this is higher among those who participate in Hesed's cultural activities (60%) than among those who do not (42%). Thirty percent of the respondents reported that they would like to become more involved in the Jewish community, and the same percentage 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 (58%) and that they have friends living in Israel (64%), a very low percentage (2%) said they themselves plan to immigrate to Israel. Yet 9% reported that the situation might change, and if so, they would consider immigration to Israel.

The Impact of Hesed's Activities on Jewish Identity

- ♦ ***On the Respondents Themselves:*** Regarding each service and activity that was presented, the majority of the respondents who were recipients of the service (75% and above) reported that it contributed to some/great extent to their general sense of Jewishness. The programs that contributed most to the respondents' sense of Jewishness were programs and activities related more to material help, such as welfare canteen (88%), food packages with Jewish articles and objects (Jewish calendar, etc.) (88%), "Warm Home" (89%) and "Open House" (85%), as well as programs and activities related to culture and Jewishness, such as Jewish and Israeli music and songs (90%), concerts, shows and theatrical performances (89%), and the celebration of Jewish holidays/festivals, and religious ceremonies and rituals (84%).
- ♦ ***On the Respondents' Families:*** Forty-one percent of the respondents reported that their family members take part in Hesed activities. Of these respondents, the vast majority (83%) reported that these family members receive holiday food parcels; 40% said these family members attend holiday celebrations and Sabbath celebrations; and 42% reported that these family members receive other types of material assistance.

General Evaluation of Hesed's Jewish Programming

- ♦ The respondents, in general, provided a very positive evaluation of Hesed's Jewish-oriented programming. High percentages of the respondents* reported that to some/a great extent, Hesed's Jewish-oriented activities are important to them (81%); that they are satisfied with these activities (87%); and that Hesed meets their needs in the area of Jewish life (85%). In addition, the majority of the respondents (69%) reported that the Jewish elements in Hesed's programs are important/very important to them. Twenty-six percent of the respondents reported that there was no Jewish tradition in their home when they were growing up. Among the remaining respondents, the vast majority (83%) reported that Hesed "brings them back" to the atmosphere of their father's and grandfather's home. seventy-six percent of the respondents reported attending an event that was most memorable for them. Among these respondents, the events that were most frequently cited as being the most memorable were: celebration of Jewish holidays (18%), material aid (16%) and participation in cultural activities (15%).

* Not including those who reported "Don't know" (ranging from 16% to 29%, depending on the item) in response to the three items that followed.

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

- ♦ ***The Meaning of "Community"***: Especially high percentages of the respondents reported that "a real community" provides services that people need - social, health, security, religious, cultural, educational, etc. (98%); that a community is an outgrowth of common interests (94%); and that when they think of "community," they think of people caring for each other (92%).
- ♦ ***Current Perceptions***: The majority of the respondents (59%) characterize the Jewish community in their city as being active. More than half (55%) said they view Hesed as *the* center for Jewish community life in their city. Among those who did not, 34% reported that Hesed could become *the* center for Jewish community life in the city. More than half (55%) reported that Hesed has a strong influence on the life of their city's Jewish population. Twenty-one percent reported that Hesed cooperates with other Jewish organizations in their city, mainly with other JDC programs, the Jewish Agency and the Israelite cultural center. The role of Hesed is also reflected in the perceived awareness of its activities: most of the respondents (83%) reported that many/almost all of the Jews of 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 high percentage of the respondents (92%) reported that Hesed should expand its social activities to other needy groups among the Jewish population. At least 85% of these respondents thought that Hesed should expand its social activities to children, to single-parent families, to young families and to youth.

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 clients come in contact with volunteers in one way or another. We examined various issues concerning the work of the volunteers from the perspective of the respondents as service recipients, including their relationships with volunteers, volunteer home visits to them, and their general evaluation of the volunteers. Since Hesed considers the clients as volunteers or potential volunteers, we also relate to issues such as client volunteerism in the present, intent among the clients to volunteer at Hesed, the clients' motivation to volunteer at Hesed, and the placement of clients who are interested in becoming volunteers.

The Respondents as Recipients of the Volunteers' Services

- ♦ ***Client Relationships with Volunteers***: Forty percent of the respondents reported having come in contact with a volunteer during the past month. This contact involved some kind of formal assistance. Most of them (90%) reported that volunteers phone them to monitor their situation. Two other major types of contact with the volunteers (at least 30%) were volunteer visits to their homes (not necessarily as part of their regular home visits), and participation in Hesed activities or services arranged by/with volunteers. In addition, 35% reported friendship with volunteers. Forty-five percent of the respondents who interact with volunteers in these or other ways, reported contact with a volunteer once or twice a month; a similar percentage (42%) reported contact with a volunteer less than once a month.

- ♦ **Home Visits by Volunteers:** Among those respondents who interact with volunteers, 24% reported that they receive regular home visits from a Hesed volunteer. Among the respondents who receive regular visits, more than half (57%) reported that a volunteer visits them once a month. Twenty percent reported that they are visited by a volunteer 2-3 times a month, and a similar percentage (23%) receive four or more visits a month. A very high percentage of these respondents (94%) reported they are satisfied with the frequency of the home visits by volunteers. The majority of the respondents who receive regular home visits (64%) reported that the volunteer keeps them company and inquires about their health and/or other personal issues during the visits.
- ♦ **General Evaluation of the Volunteers' Services:** Among respondents who came in contact with Hesed volunteers, the majority (63%) said their contact with volunteers is important/very important. Thirty-one percent reported a great/very great degree of closeness with these volunteers and about half reported some degree of closeness. A very high percentage of the respondents (93%) who came in contact with Hesed volunteers reported that they are satisfied to some/a great degree with the volunteers' work. Eleven percent of the respondents who came in contact with a Hesed volunteer cited the need to improve the quality of the volunteer staff and/or the care they provide. Among the respondents who are in contact with the volunteers, only two percent reported maltreatment or careless treatment by a volunteer.

The Respondents as Volunteers or Potential Volunteers

- ♦ **The Clients' Volunteerism:** Only 2% of the respondents reported that they currently volunteer at Hesed. Twenty-four percent of the respondents who reported that they currently volunteer at Hesed cited that they help with cultural programs and 20% cited that they help with the provision of home visits. Sixteen percent keep clients company and 15% do whatever is needed. The rest work in Hesed's other programs.
- ♦ **Client Intent to Become a Hesed Volunteer:** Eleven percent of the respondents would like to volunteer at Hesed. More than half of them (58%) reported they would like to volunteer by calling clients; and 41% would like to volunteer at the Club. Among those who would like to volunteer, 33% percent of the respondents reported they were willing to volunteer with elderly homebound clients. Most of the respondents (68%) who would not like to volunteer at Hesed cited health constraints as reasons for *not* wanting to volunteer. Nine percent of the respondents who would *not* like to volunteer reported that certain conditions might change their mind. The majority of the respondents (61%) who reported that they want to volunteer at Hesed, as well as those who do not want to volunteer but said there might be conditions that would change their mind, reported that they would like to learn more about the work of Hesed volunteers.
- ♦ **Factors Motivating Clients to Volunteer at Hesed:** Among respondents who reported that they would like to volunteer at Hesed, the motivating factors most often cited were: "A sense that other people need me" (84%); "A sense of being able to help other people" (82%); and "A desire to help needy people" (79%).

General Evaluation of Hesed

- ♦ In general, the clients reports indicate a very positive evaluation of Hesed's services. A very high percentage of the respondents reported that they were satisfied with Hesed's services (90%) and that they would recommend to others that they turn to Hesed (89%). The majority of the respondents (68%) reported that they have already recommended turning to Hesed to others.

Conclusion

- ♦ The responses of the clients reveal their attachment to Hesed as a welfare center and their positive attitude toward the significance of Hesed's services for them personally and for the Jewish community in general.
- ♦ The clients gave a very positive evaluation of Hesed's services. However, they also defined considerable needs for additional services for the elderly in various areas.
- ♦ In addition, there was a particular interest in expanding Hesed's services for children and single-parent families.
- ♦ Beyond the provision of welfare services, Hesed was reported to have a considerable impact on the clients' sense of Jewish identity, as expressed in their attitudes, knowledge and behavior. This impact extends to their broader family and friends.
- ♦ Volunteers play a major role in the Hesed system, as indeed reflected in the responses of the clients. A considerable percentage of the respondents have contact with volunteers, who call them or visit them. A majority of the respondents having contact with a volunteer reported satisfaction with the way the volunteer treated them, and a majority view their contact with the volunteers to be important/very important. Yet, some said that their treatment could be improved.
- ♦ Though many of the respondents have age-related health problems which prevent them from volunteering at Hesed, a certain percentage of clients would like to volunteer at Hesed, or would do so if their circumstances change.

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