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Research Report



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Hesed Evaluation Study: Jewish Identity, Community Orientation and Voluntarism

Report Number 6: An Integrative Perspective of Training and Development of Hesed Workers and Volunteers

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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 Myers-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 workers and volunteers.

The study addresses these issues from the perspectives of various groups – Hesed's directors, administrative/program workers (hereinafter: program workers), volunteers, home care workers, and clients, as well as community representatives.

Data were collected from 1,561 Hesed workers (445 administrative and program workers, and 1,116 home care workers), 1,022 volunteers, and 1,876 clients, using self-administered questionnaires; they were collected from 74 community representatives through in-depth interviews. The respondents came from eight cities in three republics: Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Additional data were collected from the centralized database of the network of Institutes for Communal and Welfare Workers.

This report presents an integrative perspective on human resources and professional training at Hesed, based on the data collected from Hesed's salaried workers (program workers and home care workers) and volunteers. It focuses on the background characteristics of the respondents, their views of their work at Hesed, their participation in training, and their unmet needs for training.

Findings

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

- ♦ Hesed's work force – program workers, home care workers and volunteers – has a high level of education.
- ♦ The volunteers are older than the salaried staff and have somewhat more seniority at Hesed.
- ♦ The volunteers view their work at Hesed in a manner that is similar to that of the program workers. Both see it as an opportunity for professional development and view Hesed as a place where they can utilize their skills.

Participation in Training and Views of Training Needs

Participation in Training

- ♦ The rate of participation in training was higher among the salaried staff than among the volunteers. Yet it is important to note that, in absolute numbers, the volunteers constituted a large group, so that their coverage by training was quite significant.
- ♦ Differences in rates of participation in training were also found among Hesed departments.
- ♦ There were differences found among Hesed Centers regarding the rates of participation in training for each of the three staff groups: program workers, home care workers and volunteers. In addition, differences were found in the rates of participation in training for different types of work and by proximity of the Hesed Center to a training institute.
- ♦ All of the respondents had someone to whom they could turn for help at Hesed in solving problems. This indicates the existence of rudimentary supervision for people who are not in training. However, this issue should be further investigated.
- ♦ The complementary data from the network of Institutes for Communal and Welfare Workers show that the extent of training as measured by number of days is higher among the salaried staff than among the volunteers. The volunteers receive shorter training sessions than do the salaried staff.

Need for Additional Training

- ♦ The rate of respondents who said they require additional training is higher among the program workers than among the home care workers, and higher among those who had participated in training in the past than among those who had not. It could be that exposure to training raises awareness of training needs. In addition, a perceived need for additional training might be related to the area of training previously received.
- ♦ Social work and psychology were the main topics requested for additional training.
- ♦ The expressed needs for more training focused on professional caring skills, and less on community orientation and Jewish values.

Discussion

- ♦ The current interest in social work and psychology training needs among those who had participated in training might be related to several factors: It was very rare for people to study these topics during the Soviet era, such that there is general interest in these topics in post-Soviet society as a whole. These topics are emphasized by current training programs, and exposure whets the appetite of participants for more. In addition, knowledge about these topics is very relevant to the skills required for performing caring roles at Hesed Centers. If, during the early stages of Hesed's development, emphasis was placed on providing instrumental care, Hesed workers and volunteers are now more attuned to the emotional and social needs of their clients.
- ♦ Although all training was reported as being provided “in-service,” after the respondents had begun their work at Hesed, the location of the training varied. While most of it was held at one of the training institutes, an additional and substantial amount of training was provided “on-the-

job”^{*} at Hesed, by both institute and Hesed staff. Initially, training focused mainly on skills in order to meet immediate needs; at present, there is an increasing need for system training that develops not only individual staff, but the organizations as a whole.

- ◆ The extent of training of both Hesed workers and volunteers is quite broad; however, emphasis was reported to be placed on salaried workers.
- ◆ A more in-depth study of training needs is required to gain an understanding of the issues facing the people who work and volunteer at Hesed, and of the assistance required to improve their performance at work. In the current study, the focus was on the perspectives of the staff regarding their training needs. Future studies should include information on the perspectives of the Hesed directors, JDC representatives and professionals from the training institutes regarding training needs.

^{*} That is, coaching on site.

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