



Jewish Family Services



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Thoughts From Adrienne



Adrienne Rosenberg

The mood of the country on all levels is to lower costs and to no longer provide the governmental safety nets to vulnerable populations. The aim is to lower government costs by slashing social "entitlements." Thus, we hear about block grants and going to families and the private sectarian community for funding. In the areas of subsidized housing, the elderly, children, legal services, physical health and mental health provisions, refugees and legal immigrants, the working poor, and public education will be affected.

The reality among others is that if the block grant programs go into effect in Fiscal Year 1996, North Carolina would be one of the biggest losers among the 50 states. That's because the formula for figuring the size of the block grant to each state penalizes this state because it has low unemployment, low incomes, and has not aggressively sought federal funds in the past five years. The state would lose \$209 million over the next five years in cash welfare payments, as much as 12% of its current spending. Most other states would lose 6% to 11%.

As a result of these cuts and with the knowledge that Jews in financial need in our community will then turn to community agencies for help in greater demand, the Federation has, at the request of JFS, appointed a Welfare Reform Task Force to address the options available to the entire Jewish community in the areas of community awareness, information gathering, policy, and advocacy. The Task Force is co-chaired by Lois Benjamin and Marilyn Tuckman. Other members include Vicki Hopkins, Seth D. Levy, Adrienne Rosenberg Staff, Elaine Schefflin, Tammy Seigel, Alene Strause and Leslie Winner.

In reality, Jewish continuity planning which does not address the centrality of Hesed (kindness) and Tzedakah (righteousness) and support programs which carry out our responsibility to help those who are hurting (children, elderly, disabled, financially strapped) will be empty of the vital meaning of Judaism. The centrality of Judaism is not brick and mortar but regard for others.

Currently there are 26 Jewish persons living in subsidized housing in Charlotte. These are elderly and disabled individuals living on fixed incomes. If subsidized housing costs go up by \$50, they will have to limit the medications they buy. Thus, they get poorer. There will be more children at risk and in need of scholarships to tie into the Jewish community from the JCC, the Temple religious schools, the preschool, and the day school. JFS and the Blumenthal Home, which are mandated to serve all Jewish seniors, will find that many of our clients are older, more infirm or strapped financially, and have fewer options. The Blumenthal Home currently has 22 Charlotte residents, 14 of whom are on Medicaid. The state does not reimburse nursing homes at full costs for Medicaid now, so any cuts will hurt the Home even more. Many of these persons went in as private pay but then had to go on Medicaid when their own funds were depleted. The punitive refugee and immigrant bills would limit the number of Jews coming from the former Soviet Union, thus throwing Jews back into anti-Semitic systems. The Community Tzedakah Fund, administered by JFS, would not be able to be supplemented as much by community agencies, thus limiting what we can offer people. Managed care is already limiting health care for people in the community, a middle class nightmare in some situations.

This article is too short to list all of the possible ways Jews will be totally affected. To learn more, I will be glad to provide you with a paper I recently wrote on this subject if you will just call me at 364-6594. However, I want each of you to know that, while we have fewer pockets of poverty in our community than in the general community, in no way should any of you assume that present "welfare reform" cuts will not hurt fellow Jews!

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