

FROM "OUTSIDERS" TO "INSIDERS": PLACEMENT OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN IN THE KIBBUTZ*

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RECENTLY a group of Israeli social workers and social scientists undertook an experimental study which required intensive innovative planning for dependent youngsters referred by municipal welfare offices in Israel for institutional placement. The research staff were looking, among other things, for new alternatives to institution placement where it was felt that such placement was inappropriate. One of the alternatives which was closely looked into and experimented with was placement in communal agricultural settlements (kibbutzim).

A great deal has been written on the kibbutz in recent years particularly with regard to its patterns of child-rearing and its effect on personality (NEUBAUER, 1965; RABIN, 1965; SPIRO, 1966; KRAFT, 1967; BETTELHEIM, 1969; TALMON-GARBER, 1965). Other studies have related specifically to elites in the kibbutz (ETZIONI, 1959), patterns of kibbutz socialization (BAR-YOSEF, 1959; FAIGIN, 1958), ageing in the kibbutz (TALMON-GARBER, 1961) and the effectiveness of kibbutz youth in the Israeli Army (AMIR, 1969). Together, these studies have provided a fair, although at times contradictory, description of the kibbutz. This paper discusses the kibbutz as a placement resource for dependent youngsters and the experiences, issues and problems which were encountered in attempting to use it as a social service setting. Kibbutz people have an interesting and revealing term for youngsters who come to live with them as welfare agency placements. These children are referred to as *yaldei chutz* ("outside children"). Since success or failure of a youngster's integration into the kibbutz hinges on his attaining "insider" status, this paper attempts to clarify some of the dynamics that makes "insiders" out of "outsiders" in kibbutz settings.

Many kibbutzim desire and seek "outside" children because, in the absence of sufficient natural growth to assure continuity of the population, they are obliged to find other ways to enlarge the group and achieve the group socialization and collective education which they aspire to for their children. On the other hand, kibbutzim have difficulty in absorbing youngsters because of the attending sacrifices they are called upon to make and which

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This article describes part of a larger demonstration research programme aspects of which have been documented in the following publications by Eliezer D. Jaffe; Correlates of differential placement outcome for dependent children in Israel, *Social Service Rev.*, 41 (3), 390-401 (December 1967); Substitutes for Family: on the development of institutional care for dependent children in Israel, *J. Jewish Communal Service*, 44 (2), 129-144 (Winter 1967); Effects of institutionalization on adolescent, dependent children, *Child Welfare*, 48 (2), 64-71, 111 (February 1969).

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their memberships are increasingly reluctant to sustain. Every Israeli social worker who has sought kibbutz placement for a child knows how difficult it is to obtain this partnership and how uncertain the chances are for the placement to succeed. However, few social workers would discount the kibbutz as a child placement resource and there is general recognition of its great value for those children who have been properly matched.

The search for kibbutz placements for children in the care of our research units was a Herculean task and a discouraging one in terms of the end results for we succeeded in placing only nine of the fifteen children (from six families) for whom this type of placement was sought.

There is little agency coordination regarding placements and we noted that applications are usually made directly to specific kibbutzim, through channels of the national organizations of the major kibbutz movements, through Youth Aliyah, or through the Recha Freier organization, known as The Institute for Training Israeli Children. We tried all possible channels in our concerted and persistent effort to place our candidates, but we worked mainly with the Recha Freier Institute since our clients fell into the category served by the Institute and because of our excellent association with the Institute's placement worker (herself a kibbutz member)*. We had great difficulty however, in placing siblings, together or apart, but in kibbutzim within close geographic proximity. The Institute was seeking "vacancies" for our other candidates and at the close of our study we were still involved in the arduous task of "matching" child and kibbutz. For a few candidates plans were near completion but could not be realized within the 18 months allotted for the study. One child had been accepted and matched, but his placement was prevented by a 6 month delay caused by the local welfare offices' inability to resolve an administrative problem. In another instance there was a change in plan due to the fathers insistence on institutional placement. Had we been able to continue, there is reasonable assurance that placement in kibbutzim for more children would have been reached.

Limited as our achievements were from the concrete standpoint, and though work with kibbutzim was a relatively small part of our overall research, we learned a great deal about the kibbutz as a placement resource. In the course of our experience we visited fifteen kibbutzim seeking from them placement openings for specific children. In each case we met with members of the kibbutz's education committee, and other school personnel and individuals in the kibbutz who carried special responsibility for "outside children". It is interesting and significant to note that the chief contact person on behalf of the kibbutz was usually the head of the kibbutz' education committee. This fact reflects the kibbutz' primary motivation for accepting "outside children" as they call them. The number, age, and sex of the "outside" children acceptable by the kibbutz each year is determined by the need for "completing" or "balancing" school classes to bring them up to full size, to justify assigning a kibbutz member to teaching duties, and to avoid sending kibbutz children elsewhere to study.† Thus, we have the practice of kibbutzim forwarding the list of school "vacancies" to the placement agencies, the rush to make placement just before the school year begins (with or without foster families available), and the heavy accent of the placing agencies on testing for educational achievement of candidates.

* Social science field experiments often stand or fall on these personal relationships. In this regard we were extremely fortunate in being able to work with Mrs. Rivka Ayalon of the Freier Institute.

† It is no coincidence that primarily "border" kibbutzim house "outside" children, since these younger settlements are most in need of increased manpower and providing peer social life and educational services to their own children.

The members of the kibbutz education committee are consequently charged with the "outside" children as their undertaking and in many cases have more direct responsibility for this group than do the individual foster parents. In fact, when the number of children needed to "fill out" a class is decided on, the call goes out to kibbutz members for foster parents, and in not a few cases foster parenthood has been bestowed on a kibbutz couple (or bachelor) by simply assigning this task as the kibbutz assigns other work tasks. True, many of the people "chosen" were "known" to like children, but the lack of professional selection criteria has often been responsible for placement failure. The collective approach here is rather inappropriate in assuring the individual needs of "outside" children; in fact, it often contributes to his remaining "outside" of the kibbutz society.

Nevertheless, it is our impression that the unique overlapping of interests—class placements for the kibbutz, and "homes" for the child welfare agencies—provide good grounds for developing a successful matching of needs, on condition that the match is developed and guided by professional considerations and techniques. It was this kind of matching which we undertook to create for our candidates in the placement process and follow-up work. The more we were involved, the more we were accepted, welcomed and sought. This is not to say that everything we did was of expert quality, nor did we make any such pretences, but it did mean that social work methodology was being introduced for the first time into the kibbutz setting regarding "outside children".

This sense of responding to an unmet need particularly struck us on one occasion when we held a "full-house" discussion in the dining hall of one kibbutz on the general problems of caring for "outside" children. Many of those who attended were people who had served or were serving as foster parents to such children. They showed no tendency to focus on the pros and cons of taking "outside" children *per se*, but were very interested in discussing the adjustment problems of these children which they encountered in their daily efforts to help and take care of them and their own feelings and the intra-family complications with which they were groping as a consequence of foster parent-hood. Any experienced social worker who has worked with child placement and with urban foster parents would have felt at home. What is more, the participants felt some guilt with many of the problems they were presenting and appreciated our identification of the universality of some of these problems of foster care. Most of all, our presentation of specific social work methods in child care stimulated their interest.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN KIBBUTZ PLACEMENT

It seemed to us that the kibbutz was a suitable setting for children able to benefit from group living and needing a kind of substitute family experience which was less intense and demanding of intimacy than a foster family. We considered the kibbutz setting appropriate for children who needed long-time placement and who would in all likelihood have to grow up outside of their own home, for it offered a real possibility of belonging. Many children who make their way in kibbutzim could look forward to the prospect of becoming permanent members as adults. We considered also that kibbutzim have a great deal to offer in terms of constructive satisfying life experience and transmission of positive social values, which for many children more than compensated for some of the limitations of kibbutz life. We saw the kibbutz as a dependency resource and not as a treatment resource. However, the fact that a child may have had certain personality problems did not automatically disqualify him as a candidate. In these cases we found that a clear explanation of our referral criteria was exceedingly important since there was a consistent wariness among

kibbutz people that an attempt would be made to foist "problem children" on them.

One of the most frequent complaints lodged against kibbutzim by social workers and child welfare administrators is that kibbutzim are too discriminating, too self-interested and unwilling to invest in helping the dependent child. The kibbutzim, on the other hand claimed that referring agencies were not sufficiently discriminating and that they therefore sent too many children who were unsuitable and subsequently created problems. There was no doubt that kibbutz people saw the directing to them of difficult children or children who came with built-in barriers to adjustment from other settings, whether by intention or error, as the major source of placement failure. They offered also the familiar and likely complaint that after the placement, children are cut off and abandoned by their families and the responsible social agencies and that they react to this rejection and isolation with behavior problems. Kibbutz members expressed distrust of social agencies, claiming that social workers did not understand their particular problems and by encouraging visiting by relatives created status problems for the children. We were told on one occasion that we were privileged in being permitted to enter kibbutzim and engage in follow-up work, as social workers were ordinarily not very welcome.

There is a need for agencies interested in using the kibbutz as a placement resource to develop clearer placement criteria, but this is not the major factor in the high degree of failure and sense of discouragement by kibbutz people. Nor would we agree with those critics who assert that kibbutzim do not invest themselves in caring for outside children for we noted that once a child is accepted a great deal of effort is made to absorb him and that non-fruitfulness of effort is perhaps the major reason for this accumulated discouragement. We were impressed by the insufficient awareness by kibbutz people of the inherent, elementary problems of placement such as separation anxiety and the complicated nature of substitute parentage and longterm rearing functions. This lack of awareness was expressed in many ways. We noted that although the importance of a child's having a foster family is taken for granted, recruiting, selection and matching of foster families is not at all developed and children often arrive on the kibbutz with no "family" yet available for him. Some kibbutzim claim that they do this deliberately to reduce trial and error by being able to observe the child *before* selecting a family, but for the most part it is a consequence of the difficulty in drafting families and the pressure to get the child to the kibbutz in time for the school year. This would indicate, however, that there is an inadequate understanding of the role of the foster family and also has implications for the concept of preplacement preparation. In addition there is little awareness of what kind of family is needed to contribute to the success of the placement.

A major problem is the fact that the kibbutz movement's own professional resources are not yet mobilized to deal with placement and follow-up of outside children nor are the principle placing agencies equipped to give kibbutzim the services needed. Consequently, there is no regular, ongoing service to those responsible for and engaged in caring for "outside" children. The reaction of kibbutzim is to place emphasis on selection of candidates and sieze upon psychological testing of the child to try to ward off failure, which obviously does not solve the problem as it evades dealing with unavoidable placement situation problems. While they express concern about the lack of work with the child's own family little is done by the kibbutz to insure or demand it, but instead there is a tendency to refrain from accepting a child if his family background impresses them as being too complicated.

The need for help and the dilemma of kibbutzim with respect to outside children with traumatic histories is well illustrated by the following case situation which we encountered:

One of the cases in our care involved a family where a compulsively hardworking old-world father who had once been hospitalized in a mental institution had been provoked into killing his wife. A central symptom was his inability to part with money which he stored in various banks. His wife, being more modern and desirous of providing the children of ordinary advantages, he always regarded as a wastrel. When two of the older children began to work, the husband withheld all money from the family. Consequently the family acquired a support order from the court which resulted in increased quarrels between the wife and husband, though he paid nothing. The court then attached his wages and this he could not bear. In a fit of anger he struck his wife on the head, and she died several days later. The father was imprisoned. A homemaker was placed by us in the home and subsequently a decision for kibbutz placement was reached. We sent our exploratory letters to a number of kibbutzim and asked for appointments, but we were rejected by nearly every kibbutz we turned to.* Only through direct face-to-face conferences in the kibbutzim were we able to get across the fact that the children in this particular family were actually less complicated than many children already placed in kibbutzim and that the murder did not automatically mean that the children would be exceptionally disturbed. Only thus were we able to work through this maze of prejudices and misinformation. We then engaged the kibbutzim who accepted these children in preplacement planning involving pre-placement visits with the children and their older relatives, with the ground having been prepared by our caseworker.

The above situation involved a family with clear values where the children were well reared and where the older siblings, though panicked, took over parental functions conscientiously and responsibly. Meeting with the older siblings at our request calmed the kibbutz people considerably and we worked out an understanding that some member of the family would visit the children each month. We established the condition that a foster family must be available for the children *before* they come to stay in the kibbutz and that the social worker would be closely involved in helping with the matching process. There were four children to be placed and two kibbutzim involved. While the first two children did arrive before the family allocation was completely settled, we held very carefully to the plan in the second instance. Here again, follow-up was done by our local welfare office worker who continued with the family and visited monthly in the kibbutzim for the purpose of working with the children, the kibbutz educators, and the foster families. Since the worker made good relationships, correspondence between visits was also of great value. The worker aided in the initial adjustment problems and in helping the children cope with their feelings about the family tragedy. She was called upon in crises such as an unavoidable change in foster family in one kibbutz and newspaper publicity concerning the father which was extremely upsetting to the children and people in the kibbutzim. The worker was there to help prepare the youngest child who had to undergo minor surgery and helped with the planning for this. She also saw the children when they came home to relatives for their vacation. All in all it was a tremendous investment, concentrated, and planned. Regularity, continuity, dependability and skill were more important than intensiveness, however, in making the work effective. The opinion was expressed to us, by a person having wide experience with kibbutz placement, that this placement would have had very little chance without the application of these methods. Social work methodology and knowledge of placement dynamics was perhaps the crucial element in avoiding institution placement and in the alternative attempt at kibbutz placement.

SUMMARY

Experience has affirmed for us that in Israel the kibbutz is a valuable placement resource, the effectiveness of which however is reduced by serious difficulties. We had the strong

* Kibbutzim of the religious movements were especially difficult to involve as they tend to take only children of members' relatives and make stringent educational demands which urban low-income families seldom reach. A bell can be rung with religious kibbutzim, however, with regard to "saving" children whose parents threaten to place them in Missionary schools.

impression that unless more effective means are found for coping with these difficulties than are now employed this setting will become less and less available. It seems that one of the central problems is the lack of realization in the kibbutz movement that they are dealing with the classic placement phenomena and that one cannot expect to cope with it and enjoy optimal success unless appropriate professional techniques are developed and employed. We believe that kibbutz educators and advisors should shift their emphasis from selection techniques to suitable handling of the dynamics involved in caring for other people's children.

It might be a valuable long-term investment for the kibbutz organizations to conduct an experimental programme for a period of a few years by equipping one of the placement agencies it now uses with a team of social workers to develop and activate an ongoing service. This would make it possible to engage in pre-placement, placement and follow-up work, the lack of which places a heavy burden on kibbutzim which accept children. In any case, a social worker or a specially trained kibbutz member should play an active role in knowing the child and his family, should be active in the placement process, should help in matching child and foster family, and in formulating some dependable follow-up plan after placement.

The general impression is that in order to match the needs of the kibbutz with the needs of the welfare agencies there should be a mutual undertaking on the part of those two social institutions to seek solutions to their common concerns. As things stand at present neither the kibbutzim nor the social agencies are sufficiently involved in a dialogue for seeking joint solutions to the problems encountered. The meagre empirical research available on fostering (e.g. WOLINS, 1963; FANSHEL, 1966; TRASLER, 1960; KADUSHIN, 1958; WAKEFORD, 1963; JENKINS, 1965 and MEIER, 1965) suggests that many factors must be considered in order to match a child for placement. Much more flexibility is needed in seeking out and involving more of the community in finding different types of placements. Rediscovery of the kibbutz as a foster care resource for dependent Israeli youngsters suggests that additional foster care settings are available in the community and that experimentation with them can be a valuable tool to determine the conditions under which they can best be used.

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