

# THE HEART OF JUSTICE: SOCIAL WORK INNOVATIONS IN ISRAEL INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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## **Shining a Light on Innovative Work**

When we first planned this Special Issue on Israeli social work, we expected to find that a great deal had been written about social work services in Israel. After all, social services have always been a part of the modern state of Israel, and Israel is well-known for its extensive philanthropic and government-supported system of social services. We were surprised then, to discover that the published literature lacks a recent overview of social work in Israel. Although this Special Issue provides a sampling, rather than a comprehensive overview of Israeli social work, it nevertheless shines a light on a variety of innovative work that is being done every day by social workers in Israel.

## **Helping Across Cultures**

The first four papers in this Special Issue explore the dimensions of Israeli social work across cultures.

In her paper, Merav Moshe Grodofsky describes her work as Director of the McGill Middle East Program in Civil Society and Peace Building. She details the extraordinary challenges of establishing and coordinating rights-based community practice centers in Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. These centers advocate for economic and social justice within Jewish and Arab communities, and, in the future may serve as the basis for cooperation among all the people of the region.

Alean Al-Krenawi presents a model for social work with Arab populations in Israel. He explains the deficiencies of Western models of social work when applied to this cultural group. In its place, he proposes a model that respects local values and integrates Western with traditional approaches. In a

series of fascinating case histories, he applies his proposed model to the issues of polygamy, blood revenge, and honor killing.

On the other end of the cultural spectrum, Hester Fass and Ronit Lazar tell the story of an ultra-orthodox woman who finds herself called upon to help members of her community cope with issues such as child neglect and spousal abuse. Her solution?: secure an education as a professional social worker. Like Dr. Al-Krenawi, she finds a middle-way that combines modern social work practice with respect for local customs and values.

One of the great challenges of Israel has been the incorporation of people from undeveloped areas of the world into a modern, democratic state. Itzhak Lander describes the history and social service needs of one of the largest of these groups: Ethiopian Jews. Once again we see that effective interventions require the application of social work principles within the context of local cultures. Dr. Lander recounts his experiences as a social worker with two troubled families.

## **Services for Unique Circumstances**

The next two articles describe innovative services that respond to the unique circumstances of Israeli life. Noemi Edlis and Ronit Sadger describe a treatment center for victims of sexual abuse. They alert social workers to the unique dynamics of working with survivors, which require attention to such issues as client projection and displacement, client reluctance to use services, and emotional reactions of social work professionals.

The husband-wife team of Peter and Pamela Mond describes an innovative program, much needed in the often hectic and stressful environment of Israel, but potentially useful in many parts of the world. The Monds

relate their own story, and that of several of their clients, in applying a training program to teach clients how to reach inner quiet. This practice has been a solution to a host of behavioral problems, from the acting-out behavior of children, to the development of self-control in a war veteran.

### **Activism**

Those of us who are social work educators often talk about the need to integrate classroom learning with real-world practice. The next two authors have done it. Using a recent social service worker strike in Israel as backdrop, Ayala Cohen and Atalia Mosek tell the story of involving students in the process of advocacy in the midst of a rancorous strike. They confront the possibilities for enhanced student learning, as well as the dangers and institutional barriers to this type of advocacy. Roni Kaufman describes the genesis and history of an innovative social justice program at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. She carefully takes the reader through the processes of community research to document the dimensions of selected advocacy issues. She then shares her own experiences of community activism and student learning around the issues of food security, and the labor struggle of non-unionized social workers.

### **Lifetime of Experience**

In the final paper of this special issue, Ruben Schindler looks back on a lifetime of experience as a social worker in Israel. In this highly personal account, Dr. Schindler takes us on a journey through his life—from his childhood fleeing Nazi persecution to his present day work as Dean of a school of social work. He details the history of Israeli social services and their transition from a universalistic perspective in the early years of the state, to the current emphasis on a work ethic. Along the way, we learn about the challenges of massive immigration, and the increasing professionalization of the Israeli social work profession.

We hope you learn as much from these papers as we have. – James J. Kelly

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