

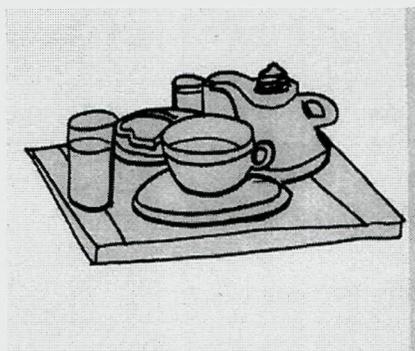
The Birth and Early Years of CalSWEC

The author earned his MSW in 1952 from the University of California at Berkeley's School of Social Welfare. He served as Executive Director of the Zellerbach Family Fund from 1972-1995. Prior to that, he was Coordinator of Mental Health Services for Contra Costa County and Field Director at UC Berkeley's School of Social Welfare.

by

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It's a treat for me to write about Harry Specht and the early days of CalSWEC, the California Social Work Education Center. I often think of Harry and the fun we had plotting programs and initiating projects. He was the Dean of the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley. He was determined to put the social conscience back into social work. He was learned, eclectic, and electric, as well as clear and to the point. He could have been an excellent therapist if his first allegiance had not drawn him to community organization.

With a social work degree from Berkeley, I became a combination of clinician, consultant, and program developer for the Zellerbach Family Fund in San Francisco. There the board gave me a relatively free hand in initiating, funding, developing, and implementing new ideas.

Harry and I had known each other from a distance for about 20 years before we became much closer in the last 10 years. He joined the faculty at Berkeley around the time I was leaving it to work in the foundation in the early 70's. Although he was based in Berkeley and I was working in San Francisco, our mutual interests drew us together for weekly Faculty Club breakfasts and hilarious dinners as he, my wife, and I pursued the gour-

met experience. Along with enjoying the pleasure of his company, we developed a deeper bond as each family lost a member to death, and we became a small support group until Harry died in 1995.

It was during our breakfast meetings that Harry said he had a hankering to be a foundation director and to control all that money. As for me, I enjoyed consulting on the personnel problems of the graduate school and proposed ways to bring the skills of the faculty to the community. We were not thinking of CalSWEC then, but of ways to bring Bay Area social welfare directors, deans of Northern California schools of social welfare, and foundations into a working relationship. This effort created the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) which preceded CalSWEC.

The directors of county social welfare departments had a certain reverence for the intellectual and theoretical knowledge of the deans, but there was a distance, as though they lived in different worlds. Many years ago, Edwin Sarsfield, former general manager of San Francisco City and County Social Services, had some creative ideas for bridging the gap. As nearly as I can recollect, Ed and I had met with a group of Bay Area county social

service directors in 1984 to discuss the idea of regional services and collaborative county efforts.

Harry and I formed a team to revive and improve on some of Ed's ideas. At the time the ideas were first presented, the directors listened politely but didn't see themselves as ready to follow Ed Sarsfield's visionary leadership. They suspected that the whole idea was a way to increase San Francisco's influence in the welfare decision-making process of all counties.

AGE OF COLLABORATION

In many areas, the mid-1980s might be called the awakening age of collaboration. Public-private endeavors were being promoted, and collaboration was becoming the in-word. Integration of services in one-stop service centers sounded good; neighborhood empowerment projects were receiving serious support. It was a time of anticipation; counting your blessings and assets seemed to bring more hope than inventory of community deficits.

County welfare directors, always experiencing super-stress, began to see the value in joining with the deans to find ways to improve social service departments, administration, department managers, and supervisors. Harry saw potential in this development. Along with me, he began to seek out the Bay Area deans and directors of county social welfare agencies to work together for the benefit of all.

Ernest Hirose of San

Mateo County and Michael Reisch of San Francisco State University were committed to promoting this joint venture. After a year of struggling to develop an organization, Harry and I paid a visit to Dick O'Neil, director of Social Welfare in Santa Clara County. Dick was skeptical and said that he would assign a staff member to attend meetings and to represent the County. Harry and I were disappointed not to have Dick on board after we had driven to San Jose just to meet with him. We persuaded him that the consortium must see his personal participation as important; he finally agreed. Dick brought added knowledge of legislation and new ways to draw on federal and state funds. He gave a tremendous boost to the organization through his participation and leadership. Further professional leadership came from Bart Grossman, coordinator of Field Work at UC Berkeley, who also staffed BASSC during its development.

Now, what does this impressionistic history of BASSC have to do with the origins of CalSWEC? It connects with the relatively small world of philanthropic foundations and the reputation of Harry Specht. Another element was a relationship with Patricia K. Biggers, an outstanding program officer at the Ford Foundation. She had won the Scrivener Award for being one of the most creative persons involved in philanthropy for a given year.

Patricia and I had

worked together from 1975 through 1990 on the resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees. She had met Harry and knew about our collaboration with BASSC. One of her Ford colleagues, John Lanigan, a program officer with a background in social welfare education, saw the need to educate students to appreciate the diverse cultural backgrounds of persons served by social service departments.

He considered California, with its changing demography, as the best state for educating minority students and developing relevant curricula for them. He knew about the increasing stipend programs that drew on federal and state funds for social work education. Pat suggested that I urge Harry to phone John and to begin discussions about California as the base for the new organization. Harry called John, who now recalls the conversation going something like this:

"Hi. I'm Harry Specht, Dean of the School of Social Welfare at Berkeley. I don't suppose you know who I am. Could we meet to discuss cooperation among California schools of social welfare and county welfare departments in educating students to pursue careers in child welfare and other public services?" Harry was just getting into high gear on his book, *Unfaithful Angels*, which dealt with social workers whom he saw as abandoning public service jobs for private therapy opportunities. It so happened that John was a social worker who idolized Harry and had read all of Harry's publications—a true fan. Harry

and John talked about the concept of CalSWEC; Harry was invited to the Ford Foundation for further discussion and was encouraged to submit a concept paper.

GAINING FOUNDATION SUPPORT

John's superiors at Ford liked the concept of a statewide social welfare education organization that involved all the deans, representatives of social service, and foundations. What John had not anticipated was the insistence of his boss that, as a measure of commitment to the project, local foundations match Ford's grant by 10 to 1 or 6 to 1 for each dollar of Ford's contribution.

Some years earlier I had organized a Matching Grants Committee of the Northern California Grantmakers. Our purpose was to discourage large national foundations that, following an agenda of their own, would start programs in local communities with a matching grant provision. The nationals would establish the programs and then move to other interests after two or three years, and leaving the locals with continuing funding responsibility. I was eager to meet with John to discuss the whole proposal.

We met at a National Council of Foundations gathering. I remember telling him that local foundations could not match Ford at 10 to 1, 6 to 1, or even 1 to 1. Only a few would give a high priority to improving social welfare education. I did think that with great effort we could probably collect about \$50,000. John and I hit it off. He liked the straight talk and really wanted to see the project succeed.

As I remember, Ford made a grant of \$83,000 per year for two years to cover direct costs and some indirect costs, and continued to give support for five years. In addition, the following local foundations each contributed \$5,000 per year for three years to cover direct costs and some indirect costs: the Walter and Elise Haas Fund, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, the Louis R. Lurie Foundation, the Community Foundation of Santa Clara County, the Stuart Foundation, the Van Loben Sels Foundation, and the Zellerbach Family Fund. It worked out that Ford gave two dollars for every one local-dollar contribution.

The first year of CalSWEC was not an easy one. The deans had pledged to submit a single scholarship funding request to the federal government and to the state on behalf of all California schools of social welfare and social work. The organization planned to divide and allocate the scholarship funds in an equitable way. For some reason, the Southern California social work schools submitted a request on their own without consulting with Northern CalSWEC members. It felt like an end run around established principles. Harry was outraged as only Harry could be. There were all kinds of explanations and apologies. Harry remained indignant (enjoying his righteousness) while everyone from Southern California was uncomfortable. I think that the deans renewed the pledge to work for the good of the whole in the future, and the crisis was resolved.

After attending a few CalSWEC meetings I decided to

spend my meeting attendance time with the Bay Area Social Services Consortium, since I was more of a streetworker than an educator.

A SUCCESS STORY

The turnover in deans and county directors of social service in CalSWEC has been high over these past ten years, and it is remarkable that the organization continues and remains vital. Of course, the millions of dollars in child welfare stipends that are administered by CalSWEC help to keep everyone at the same table. CalSWEC is clearly a success story. Its membership has expanded to include the County Mental Health Directors Association and the California Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

The Zellerbach Family Fund, which provided initial funding and encouraged other foundations to participate, remains an active member of the group. A 1999 grant of \$20,000 from the fund will be used to enable CalSWEC to take leadership in promoting interdepartmental training and services on behalf of needy families and, further, to put more efforts into developing social workers equipped to work in a variety of roles in public human services. County Welfare Departments also contributed funds toward this exploration.

Harry would be pleased that CalSWEC has strengthened the commitment of educators to public social services and has attracted hundreds of minority students to public social service careers.

Aknowledgment

Ellen Walker represents Zellerbach on the board of CalSWEC and provided information for this report.



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