

or reach agreements. Rather, points of view, differences in approach and methods, and angles for further consideration are stated as crisply as possible.

Just before the group takes a recess for luncheon or supper, all the participants are asked to stand up and identify themselves. The fellowship which follows, during the meal, is an important feature of the whole occasion. Invariably the room hums with: "I didn't know you had that service." "When did your organization adopt that policy?" "When can you come and talk with our staff?" "Let's get together for lunch next week."

In the session which follows, the leader attempts to draw the group a little farther along on points on which there seemed to be desire for more expression and to develop group thought on any major points or plans on which the members seem to want to take steps. This may result in little more than agreements for further meetings or for plans for an exchange of speakers between the respective professional groups. However, it often is found that, following the meal, more candid statements are made on topics of the earlier session and more interest is shown in an exchange of ideas and for cooperative efforts. Care is

taken not to prolong this session to a point of boredom.

The results of these meetings have been encouraging. They have stimulated other conferences, individual study of special problems, and the exchange of reports and other material between persons in different fields. Individual social workers, clergymen, teachers and others have expressed sincere appreciation of the opportunity to stretch their horizons. More frequent inquiries and referrals and the more hospitable opening of doors have offered tangible evidence of increased understanding and cooperation.

Under capable leadership and with careful preparation, this group conference procedure can be counted on to break trails across almost any barrier between professional groups in community life. We know that it has been effective in Providence. But again it must be emphasized that the degree of success depends on how well the committee and the leader know and do their jobs; on how well the group is prepared in advance and how well it is led once it is assembled. Anyone planning to undertake such conferences will find much helpful counsel in Frank Walser's "The Art of Conference," and Harrison S. Elliott's "The Process of Group Thinking."

## All Learning One Tongue

By FRANK KINGDON

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**A** YEAR or so ago the New York Adult Education Council, in the course of answering inquiries for adult education offerings in the metropolitan area, became aware of a severe lack of classes adapted to the needs of refugees. It, therefore, called a conference of all organizations dealing with refugees.

This conference found that the most immediate need was English instruction, of a character designed to speed the process of adjusting refugees not only to the language but to the American scene. Tax-supported institutions were overcrowded and their appropriations badly cut. Refugee funds, hardly sufficient for the most meager support, could not be used. Here was a vicious circle. Refugees could not get jobs without knowing the language, yet the means for eliminating their handicap were lacking.

The organizations, thereupon, agreed to investigate the possibility of pooling resources and enlisting volunteer teachers to set up small informal English classes. It was agreed to limit these classes to ten students each so that conversational ease might be developed, the refugees served as individuals, and an atmosphere of friendliness created.

A plan soon was worked out. The twenty-one participating organizations divided the responsibility for administration and for securing volunteer teachers and free space. A non-sectarian committee of lay and professional leaders in the community agreed to raise the small budget required for operation and materials. Volunteer teachers were selected by a professional consultant on the basis of educational background, awareness of the American scene, and willingness to accept supervision. They were then given a training course under the direction of Caroline Whipple of the State Education Department.

Classes began in November. The first forty teachers trained were all at work within a few weeks and a second training course was held in January. After four months

some seventy classes were in operation with a new teacher training course in process.

In brief, this is the background of the Committee for Refugee Education in the City of New York. The problems that have been met, the procedures, the discoveries and results, offer suggestions worth exploring further.

The first point that impresses me is that the project grew out of factual information concerning the problem. The committee began with facts. In the initial conference, the New York Adult Education Council checked its records of inquiries and its records of educational resources against the experience of a large number of organizations dealing with refugees. This sharing of thought has guided every development of the work.

In the second place, the problem was approached from an experimental point-of-view. For two months subcommittees sought the answer to such fundamental questions as the ability of volunteers to teach such classes. A trial training course was held and experimental classes set up as a test. When success seemed clear, the subcommittee on materials proceeded with its task of discovering adequate materials available at small cost. There was at no time any attempt to make a case for a preconceived idea, but rather each development was treated with impersonal scrutiny and criticism.

Third, and of far-reaching implication, is the pooling of community resources. The idea of using volunteer teachers grew out of the experience with this method of the Society for Ethical Culture, the Council of Jewish Women, and the Walden School. The National Refugee Service, through its extensive contacts with refugees, warned of the need to locate classes in living centers so that carfare would be unnecessary. The YWCA, out of long experience, brought skill in the selection of volunteers. Representatives of the Board of Education and the WPA

made suggestions based on their experience with the foreign-born. The American Committee for Christian German Refugees volunteered to obtain space so that if the problem of race prejudice arose they would be in a position to meet it. The Good Neighbor Committee, the Greater New York Federation of Churches, the Committee for Catholic Refugees, the YMHA and YWHA and other organizations, all contributed to the development of the plan. It is realistic to mention these relations as a recognition of the thousands of dollars worth of information, professional advice, and actual work that was contributed.

Of the seventy-seven teachers trained in the first two courses offered, only two were without college background, and they had had special experience. Fifty-four were college graduates, while twenty-one had had two or three years of college work. Thirty-six of the seventy-seven had done postgraduate work.

FULLY as important as educational background is the experience of these teachers. Sixty-three of the seventy-seven had worked professionally. Forty-four of them had taught, and twenty-seven had taught English. Another important point is that fifty-five of the seventy-seven had done volunteer work. All of them were more than ordinarily aware of American problems, and all had an excellent command of English. On the teaching staff at the beginning of summer were sixty-nine women and eight men, forty-six of them married. Forty-two were between twenty-five and thirty-nine years of age; seventeen between forty and fifty; and thirteen over fifty. Only two were under twenty-five.

Here is a picture that should startle those who think of volunteers as well meaning but rather idle and uncertain people. It is a picture of highly trained, serious-minded, busy people. The teachers have been faithful in their attendance. They have shown ingenuity and judgment in handling their work. They are eager for supervision and patient about the chores of record keeping and reports. One of their most valuable achievements has been the atmosphere of enthusiasm and friendliness which they create for their classes.

In a city as complex as New York, it certainly is an achievement for twenty-one organizations to cooperate in making and putting a practical plan into operation promptly and effectively. This involved meeting specific difficulties—eliminating suspicion of ulterior motives on the part of any of the groups; the mechanical problem of getting representatives together often enough to arrive at conclusions; making a plan that would cover a large number of considerations resulting from the varied experience and information contributed by the groups. Division of responsibility among subcommittees not only answered the first problem but served as a practical means of maintaining general communication and obtaining the largest contribution of community effort.

One of the strongest indications of the success of a class is the attendance. The attendance record of classes conducted by the Committee for Refugee Education is 80 percent. This is nothing short of phenomenal. Comments of students and the fact that they are constantly bringing friends eager for admission, is another proof of the attractiveness of the classes. It is also an achievement to prove that volunteers can do so excellent a job in a technical field. Here again, the technique has contributed to success. At each step, the work of the volunteers has been

safeguarded by the cooperation of professionals. A professional person selected the volunteers; professional educators trained them; their work was followed continuously by active consultants working full time and overtime.

In all adult education projects the relation between class and leader or teacher is of vast importance. In the Committee for Refugee Education emphasis has been placed on the importance of maintaining an equality of relations between students and teachers, and upon the value of letting the needs of the group determine the program of the class. The volunteers have achieved this relationship to an extent that might be difficult for professionals to equal.

Materials for class use constitute a special achievement. Because there was not even enough money for large scale mimeographing, particular ingenuity was required in collecting the more than 5,000 pieces needed. A trained research worker and a teacher of foreign languages volunteered their services for this task. They solved the difficulty by developing a bibliography of background material concerning methods, grammar, history, economics, and so on, to serve as reference material for the teachers. For class use they obtained free material from government agencies, commercial firms, and philanthropic and social agencies. Almost nothing was purchased. The special difficulty was to adapt this free material to the need, since it had not been prepared for use in teaching English to foreigners. This has been overcome by a full time consultant who works with the teachers adapting available materials and discovering new materials as occasions arise. So far there is every indication that the materials make up in freshness, variety, and suggestiveness what they lack in technical adaptation. They are certainly an exhibit in Americana.

There is one procedure which deserves special emphasis, for so much of the present and future success of the project depends upon it. Each stage of the project has been guarded by records and reports. There is constant clearance on referral of students to keep the classes small, adequately graded, and adapted to the needs of individual refugees. A detailed record is kept of each student. A daily check of attendance provides a picture of what is actually happening. If attendance is consistently low in any one class the reason is discovered. A continual interchange of committee reports keeps those participating in the project aware of its status.

STANDING out as a distinct achievement, valuable as more than a by-product, is the broadening of the outlook of the participating groups. Organizations have learned more about other organizations in their community. Professional educators have discovered the special contributions that volunteers and lay persons can make. Volunteers have acquired new skill and a new evaluation of their own country through the eyes of their students. And they are carrying their devotion to these refugees out into the community of their friends, creating new areas of interest and participation.

This is a community achievement that has thrived on joint efforts of people inspired by a common purpose and working through intelligent planning. The fact that it has been carried on in New York City with all its resources by no means prevents its being a pattern for communities of lesser size. Essentially, its outlines are adaptable to any community or even any neighborhood. All it requires is willingness to pool resources to serve a clearly evident need.

# In Search of a Yardstick

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THE measurement and evaluation of social work needs and services, which always has been one of the most fascinating and most perplexing of the problems that beset social work practitioners, lately has become even more pressing. The difficulty of finding a satisfactory basis for objective measurement of the intangible factors and the subtle movements that characterize the human situations with which social workers are concerned has not halted a steadily growing insistence that we shall come to grips with these delicate issues.

The profession itself demands this as the only firm basis of advancing insight and proficiency. At the same time many members of the community who in the past have shared our faith in the processes and methods of social work are no longer quite so sure either of the abundance of available resources or of the incontestable value of the services. Along with other less informed citizens, these good friends of social work feel that choices of social objectives must now be made with more careful discrimination, that all the values competing for public support must be reexamined and re-weighed. Social workers, with the rest, are called upon to produce more substantial proof than their own sincere faith as to the extent and pre-eminent importance of the problems they are treating, and the actual value of their particular contribution to community satisfaction and well-being.

It is a sign of health and growth that this challenge is being met with candor, courage, and inventive imagination. One of the significant signs of the times is the extraordinary development of systematic day-to-day statistical reports of the basic facts of social work experience, especially in the public welfare fields. It is easy to overlook the significance of this movement, but the fact is that nothing to compare with it ever has happened before in this country. Nothing, I believe, is more promising for the future of social work and for its sound and fruitful relations with its communities.

But with our rather impatient haste to master this mounting mass of factual data, we face certain inevitable hazards, not the least of them the temptation to expect and demand more impressive results from this material than can possibly be assured at once. We must not anticipate findings that are immediately valid and helpful, must not act as if they were time-tested and universal truths. If these tools of quantitative measurement are to be used with safety and profit, and in a professional spirit, we must be keenly aware of two basic considerations.

First of all we must recognize that quantitative measurements are not automatically dissociated from qualitative judgments. In the very act of defining the factors that are to be recorded and counted, the units of measurement that are to be applied, the tabulations to which they are to be subjected, we are inevitably entangled in the selection of certain objectives, upon which our attention primarily will be centered. If we leap too nimbly from the collection of figures to the application of findings in the or-

ganization and daily operation of social agencies, the nature of these underlying concepts that govern the measurement process becomes much more than a matter of merely academic concern to us, our clients and our communities; for they will determine, at least for a time, the direction our effort shall take and its impact upon the lives of those we serve.

If we set out, for example, to measure the quantitative need of a community for social case work service, it is obvious that we must have accepted in advance, consciously or unconsciously, some specific basis of judgment as to the kinds of service which social case work has to offer, the kinds of human needs that can be fulfilled by its processes, the prerequisite conditions that govern this fulfillment. Without such a frame of reference, this quantity which we term "need of service" has no stable meaning. But when we do set up such a framework of definitions and when we organize our operations on the basis of facts related to these definitions, we have then determined much more than the *quantity* of service required; we have helped to establish, at least for that time and place, the kind and the quality of that service.

The second consideration is closely related to the first. In setting up criteria of need for service we are doing much more than influencing our own professional functions and objectives. We are also helping the community to define its own social objectives and the scope of its wants, not merely with respect to social work standards but in relation to policies and institutions that reach far beyond those limits. The criteria of need for help, or of social fitness and adequacy, which we accept and act upon, will be a significant factor in determining the level of the community's own standards of a tolerable and acceptable minimum of life for its people—economic, social, and cultural.

It is a matter of supreme importance, therefore, that social workers shall scrutinize with the utmost freedom and earnestness every sincere and constructive effort directed to the measurement of social need and of the social services designed to meet that need.

FROM this point of view I propose to examine a recent ambitious and suggestive effort to measure a community's need for social work services, including, primarily, social case work.

The project is reported at length in a recent bulletin "Social Breakdown: A Plan for Measurement and Control" issued by Community Chests and Councils, Inc. It grew out of an admirable survey of the social work organization of a small eastern city, following others of the same sort. Since its main outlines have been covered in *Survey Midmonthly* [see "Stamford Studies Itself," by Bradley Buell, September 1939] I shall summarize them here only briefly.

A procedure is set up for measuring what is called "social breakdown," by reference to certain official records of social behavior and maladjustment in which govern-