

File
Russian

The Center for Russian Jewry

with

Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry

200 WEST 72nd STREET • SUITES 30-31 • NEW YORK, N.Y. 10023

(212) 799-8900 • (212) WA 8-7451

July 26, 1974

Mr. Philip Soskis
Executive Director, NYANA
200 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10003

Dear Mr. Soskis:

I'm glad we were able to meet, exchange ideas and find out more deeply about NYANA's work. Based on yesterday's discussion and our growing work with the increasing number of community-based groups helping Russian Jewish immigrants, I'd like to put down in writing what we perceive to be some of the needs of Russian Jews in New York.

A. English

Although it is true that a good number of Russian Jews would rather find a job than learn English when they arrive, NYANA should explain to them that proficiency in English leads to better jobs and that such an opportunity to learn English without having to work at the same time will probably not exist again for them. Private language instruction, rather than the public school type, seems much superior (smaller classes, more keyed to need to know technical language) should be made available to all who ask, even to those who have first tried a public school course and found it wanting.

Volunteers are needed to help immigrants practice English (how can you increase your knowledge if the people in your class don't know the language well?), both by personal meetings and by three or four times a week phone calls. The latter would give an opportunity for a shut-in, older person or one too far away from the Russian family to help. See section D - lists.

B. Jobs

The vocational department of NYANA should be reorganized, with an emphasis on enlisting, publicly, the aid of the Jewish community to help new immigrants. The New York Jewish community, as a whole, is now not aware of the employment needs of Russian Jews (or most of their other needs, for that matter). Employers can "pitch in" with finding jobs; others can help by asking friends, family or business contacts. NYANA and the Federation Employment Service maintain separate job lists, which should be shared. Radio spots, as the Federations, can create awareness of job needs, as well as free ads in Anglo-Jewish newspapers. (A volunteer, Mr. Martin Schwarczschld,

(more)

GOVERNING BOARD Rabbi Steven Riskin, *Chairman*; Professor Irving Greenberg, *Vice-Chairman*; Professor Michael Wyschogrod, *Vice-Chairman*; Paul W. Freedman, *Treasurer*; Rabbi Charles Sheer, *Secretary*; Rabbi Avraham Weiss, *Secretary*; Professor Eugene Borowitz, Moses Brodetsky, Rubin R. Dobin, Rabbi Ezra Finkelstein, Jack Friedgut, Arnold Grant, Rabbi Jules Harlow, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, Professor Ronald Rubin, Professor Seymour Siegel, Rabbi Israel Wohlgelernter, Sanford Zwickler; Jacob Birnbaum, *National Director*; Glenn Richter, *New York Coordinator*.
HONORARY SPONSORS Hon. Herman Badillo, Hon. Abraham Beame, Theodore Bikel, Hon. Paul Bookson, Monsignor Harry Byrne, Rep. Leonard Farbstein, B. Z. Goldberg, Rabbi Harold Gordon, William Haddad, Dr. Abraham J. Heschel, Rabbi David Hill, Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, Senator Jacob Javits, Rabbi Gilbert Klepperman, Rep. Edward Koch, Rabbi Norman Lamm, Mayor John V. Lindsay, Hon. Robert Morgenthau, Rabbi Louis I. Newman, Paul O'Dwyer, Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, Hon. Burton Roberts, Rep. Benjamin Rosenthal, Bayard Rustin, Rep. William F. Ryan, Rabbi Herschel Schachter, Rep. James Scheuer, Dr. Hillel Seidman, Dr. Judd Teller, Hon. Carl Vergari, Rev. Dr. Moran Weston, Elie Wiesel.

solicited a free ad in the well-read Jewish Press for specific jobs, received 35 replies, and obtained 6 actual job placements.)

NYANA should try to stimulate a high job aspiration among the Russian immigrants, which will benefit the Jewish community in general and help create a favorable impression for continued permission for more immigrants. Beside matching aspirations with available jobs, NYANA should help provide or find job training on a wider scale, and take advantage of the many government employment and training programs available. (Only after an article appeared in the Jewish Week that volunteers got jobs for Russian Jews through the Council of Jewish Manpower Association did Mr. Paul Slater of NYANA make contact with the Council.)

You mentioned to me in yesterday's conversation that the immigrants tended not to stay with their first job. For that reason, NYANA's counseling and guidance should extend beyond this time, until the immigrant can properly make it on his own.

C. Housing

NYANA provides the money, but not enough guidance, when the Russian immigrant seeks an apartment. The immigrant must know to evaluate the neighborhood into which he lives -- availability and quality of schools, transportation and neighbors with whom he'll have to live.

The New York Jewish community can certainly "pitch in" in this area, with leads on apartments and donations of high quality new or used furniture and household equipment. If an immigrant obtains such a donation, his apartment subsidy should not be cut.

This means that NYANA should hire a worker and a field worker in the specific area of housing. Their job would also be to solicit furniture, household equipment, look at the housing, and solicit reputable merchants for special discounts to the immigrants (furniture, utensils, tv, etc.).

D. Involvement in the Jewish Community

Russian Jews have developed a different psychology from ours. They are fearful of official authority and suspicious of Jewish institutions (only synagogues are allowed in the USSR, filled with informers and KGB agents). NYANA cannot simply inform Russian Jews which Jewish institutions and organizations are available; they won't come to us. For us to come to them lists of Russian Jews in each community must be made available, not just a selected neighborhood as Washington Heights, possibly through a Jewish community council, or synagogues (of which we are blessed with many hundreds in New York). We should not fear that synagogues will quarrel over who is to take whom -- in most communities there are tacit agreements among synagogues on a range of Jewish issues and problems.

Volunteers, if their energies are properly channelled, can be a great help to NYANA, but NYANA's attitude to prospective volunteers who call has been negative. The hiring of a volunteer coordinator(s) can make the integration of Russian Jews into our Jewish community much easier and pleasant. Every immigrant group seems to stick together and be ignored by the community at large; volunteers can help break the ice.

(more)

E. Outreach

.3

As a forward-looking social agency, NYANA cannot afford to wait for problems to come to them; problems have to be sought and rooted out in the field. The experiences of the Federation's agencies and other social work groups give testimony to the efficacy of outreach programs. (e.g., A group of young Russian Jews gathers on Brighton Beach to smoke pot. Who has ever communicated with them?) This outreach can be NYANA-sponsored or jointly sponsored with other agencies, as JASA.

This requires a strong cadre of field workers, who do not have to have professional (or even college) degrees, but simply have large doses of good sense and who can speak Russian. They can work full or part time at salaries substantially less than MSW's require. It seems from conversations with friends in different communities that these people exist and would be willing to work.

F. Resources

I was astonished to learn that NYANA does not have a closet or file of Jewish books in Russian (and English or Hebrew) to be made available on request from Russian Jews or local synagogues. As an active member of Lincoln Square Synagogue, just a block from the Embassy Hotel which houses many Russian Jewish immigrants, I feel constantly at a loss when we bring them to the synagogue for Shabbat or a festival. This material can be obtained from the religious ministry in Israel, from SHAMIR (an association of religious professionals arriving from the USSR in Israel) and from Lubavich, as well as some material from Rabbi Pinchas Teitz of Elizabeth, N.J. It includes Bibles, prayerbooks and explanations of Jewish history, customs and festivals.

Other equipment, as a Russian typewriter, can be placed in local synagogues to attract Russian Jews into the institutions. Perhaps a basic library of Jewish books in Russian can also be stocked in synagogue libraries.

G. UJA

Many of the real Zionists in Russia have been able to leave for Israel; many Russian Jews in the USSR who seek exit want to leave for whatever possible, not just the Jewish state. This must be acknowledged publicly before the press "discovers" this fact and twists it. UJA must indicate in its ads more information about NYANA and the fact that Russian Jews want to come also to the U.S. (The ads, it seems, discuss a bit about Russian Jews in America but not that they want to come here too or that their numbers are increasing.)

I have written frankly; I hope you take it in that spirit. It is a real shame that such a vacuum exists in NYANA's work that volunteer-led community groups to work with immigrants have to spring up. These groups are organized by idealistically-minded people with no political axe to grind; but have found it necessary to set up a New York Coordinating Committee for Russian Refugees with a scheduled budget of over \$20,000 and full-time workers. Life is brutally such that the solid, good work of NYANA is scarcely seen; it will be the accumulation of many small problems that might well lead to a "scandal" being "discovered" by the press. It will then be too late.

Sincerely yours,

Glenn Richter
National Coordinator, SSSJ
New York Coordinator, CFRJ

P.S. You made many notes during our meeting yesterday, and said that a number of problem areas were "under review". In checking with friends who have spoken to you I find you told them these same problems were "under review" many months ago. I hope there are real changes, soon.

Jip

cc: Mrs. Sophie Udell (NYANA President)
Mr. Carl Glick (HIAS President)
Mr. Gaynor Jacobson (HIAS Executive Director)
Mr. Ernest Michel (UJA Executive Director)
Mr. Malcolm Hoenlein (Greater N.Y. Conference on Soviet Jewry Director)
Mrs. Leah Hamoui
Mrs. Pauline Bilus
Mrs. Edith Everett
Mrs. Joseph Grunblatt
Mrs. Elfi Mayer
Mr. Max Stern
Rabbi Steven Riskin
Rabbi Norman Lamm
Rabbi Yakov Pollack
Mr. S.H. Scheuer
Mr. Samuel Hausman
Rabbi Julius Mark
Rabbi Ronald Sobel
Rabbi Philip Hiat
Rabbi Shlomo Balter
Rabbi Wolfe Kelman
Miss Miriam Sternberg

P.P.S. We'll forward you copies of our Russian Jewry "survival handbook" for new immigrants as soon as it's out.