

Diversity Issues In Social Work Practice

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The Weinstein Jewish Community Center or JCC is a community center located in Richmond VA that offers a community for those of the Jewish Religion as well as many programs for the surrounding community. These programs include a fitness program, gym, swim team, preschool with an inclusion department, an after-school daycare program, various summer camps, and more. Although the JCC serves as a welcoming environment for people of different backgrounds and religions the JCC does have diversity issues relating to socioeconomic status. The JCC allows those who enter to sign up for the specific services they want or they can obtain membership status. By being a member of the JCC the person is entitled to certain privileges. For example, a child can not be signed up for the preschool program or afterschool program if they are not a member. Members also get special discounts. As an example of these discounts a non-member wishing to enroll in the counselor in training, summer camp program pays five hundred and eighty-five dollars. Members wishing to sign up for this same program only pay four hundred eighty-five dollars.

An agency categorizing their clients by member versus non-member and using non-member status to prevent enrollment in certain programs is by nature oppressive. It is oppressive because it can prevent many families from accessing needed services such as inclusion services. The preschool program at the JCC has an inclusion program which is a benefit for parents with children who have disabilities. Parents whose children utilize the inclusion and support staff at the JCC receive these services at no additional cost. For a family with financial difficulties and a child with a disability receiving services from the JCC without additional costs elevates additional financial strain. Parents with children who have disabilities already face significantly more costs for their child's daily living. These costs can include special diets, medications, occupational therapists, and physical therapists. For families

that have a child with a disability and financial concerns, these costs worsen. “Families of Children with special healthcare needs face increased barriers to health services as evidence also reflects the influence of socioeconomic factors on access.” (Donely, 2018, p.366) The JCC not allowing non-members to enroll their child into their preschool is not only harmful to families with financial burdens but families with a child with disabilities as well.

The preschool program costs about twenty thousand dollars a year per child, and it should be noted that the cost of tuition does rise each year. While some families can afford to pay the cost of tuition while also paying membership fees the high cost does prevent families of different financial backgrounds from participating. The JCC operates as a non-profit meaning the JCC can not make a profit from their agency. Any profit made is supposed to go back into the agency. For instance, the inclusion and support team in the preschool costs the agency around two hundred thousand dollars in salaries yearly, but the program does not bring in any profit. Because the cost of tuition for preschool covers the cost of programs which includes paying the staff, the current administration does not believe there is any way to effectively lower the cost of programs. Although lowering the costs of the programs is not an option as of now, there are still ways for a social worker to advocate for those with financial limitations to attend the programs.

The first option is to advocate for more fundraising opportunities. The JCC currently hosts several big fundraisers a year such as a gala and a golfing tournament. The money raised at these fundraisers is used to offer scholarships for families who can not afford the tuition of preschool. As of now the JCC typically raises around two hundred thousand dollars a year for scholarships but with more fundraisers the possibility for more children with financial needs to get coverage improves. Another option is advocating to the board for the member-only policy to be waived for programs that only allow members to sign up for programs such as preschool. By

waiving this policy it would save the family around a hundred and ten dollars a month.

(Weinstein JCC, 2022) For families who are already financially struggling to have to spend the additional money every month for membership on top of the costs of the programs is not equitable.

Due to the current policy being discriminatory against families who can not afford to become members it would be unethical for a social worker in this agency to not advocate for policy change. The NASW states within the ethical standards in 6.04 of social and political action that “Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully.” (NASW, 2017) In order to advocate for policy change, the social worker would need to discuss these changes with the head of the departments. For example, there is someone at the JCC who focuses on creating fundraising opportunities and setting up fundraisers. The social worker could go to them and ask about creating more fundraisers. As for eliminating the member-only policy for preschool and the afterschool program, the social worker would need to advocate for this change by going to the board who makes these decisions which would include the CEO. The social worker should also come prepared to explain how the current policy is discriminatory to families with financial concerns.

These efforts can also be attempted at various levels of social work practice. On a micro-level supporting families with financial concerns would be a bit more personal and not as generalized as policy advocacy would be. On a micro level, the social worker could support families with financial difficulties by reaching out to them and providing them with resources for areas where their needs are not being met. On a macro level, the social worker could go directly

to the board at the JCC and advocate for the policy changes. This would benefit more families because some cultures look down upon asking for help, this would allow people who would not typically advocate for themselves to not feel as if they were suffering in silence.

Lastly, on a mezzo level, the social worker could get the head of fundraising to host more fundraisers to raise money for tuition. This would get the community involved and it has shown to be successful in the past. Another option on the mezzo level would be to get other parents involved. This could be done by asking more affluent parents in the preschool program if they would be okay with their tuition costs rising a small percentage which would be used to sponsor another child. In this case, if enough parents agreed then not only would another child be able to attend preschool, but it also would not be as dramatic of an increase to their tuition. Because in this case, the ones raising the money would-be parents of preschool-aged children themselves, they may feel more inclined to help. This could be done confidentially or the family receiving the money may disclose who they are. If they did choose to disclose it may encourage more parents to help because it would help to humanize the family that is struggling.

Although programs such as preschool programs are not considered a basic need having access to these programs does largely benefit the children in them. It was found that “One year of preschool education had an average impact on cognitive skills that represented three months of additional learning beyond the normal levels of skill acquisition that occur among four-year-olds without access to preschool.” (Yoshikawa, 2016, p.23) Children are a vulnerable population barring enrollment into a preschool or daycare program on the basis of membership status is a form of discrimination that can have unintended negative consequences. This is why it is crucial for social workers to evaluate how their agencies' policies can cause diversity-related issues.

References

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