



Jerry W. Friedman

This issue of *Policy & Practice* marks the start of festivities for the 75th anniversary of the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA). It is a glorious time to be a part of this association that has worked diligently for 75 years to improve the quality of life for our neighbors who are at risk or who have been left out and left behind. APHSA, which has its roots during the Great Depression, was formed by state officials “charged with the distribution of relief” who decided that they needed a vehicle to bring their issues to public policy leaders in the nation’s capital.

A milestone event such as a 75th anniversary provides an opportunity not only to celebrate the past and reflect on accomplishments, but also to assess the current state of affairs and glimpse into the future. Human service professionals owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to those visionary founders of APHSA who put their time, talent, and energy into advocating for effective public policy and improving the service delivery system. I feel honored to be standing on the shoulders of human service pioneers who built this small grass-roots organization concerned with “relief” into a major national association.

I often wonder what the founders of APHSA would think about the current state of human services in this country and the work activities and products of their association. I think they would be surprised at the number and range of programs that have been developed, the complexity of public human service administration, the growth of expenditures, and the role and reliance on technology. I also wonder what kind of guidance and advice they would give to current members.

I have been associated with APHSA for almost one-third of its existence. For me, one of the biggest changes has been the expansion of the use of information technology in conducting our business. The advantages in efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability are evident. When I began my career in county government in 1970, manual typewriters, carbon paper, ledger books, and hand-written case notes were the norm. There were no

computers, word processors, cell phones, calculators, or other electronic tools that we accept as commonplace today. I don’t believe that APHSA’s founders in their wildest imagination could have envisioned this explosion of technology and our reliance on it. I recently received a photo from a *Popular Mechanics* issue dated 50 years ago that had a prototype of a visionary home computer model for 2004 developed by the RAND Corporation. This picture shows a room

of dials and switches (even a steering wheel), a large console TV (1950s genre) suspended from the ceiling, and a massive teletype machine. The photo caption conceded that “the needed technology will not be economically feasible for the average home.” The caption concluded that “with teletype interface and the Fortran language, the computer will be easy to use.” I can only imagine how human professionals 50 years from now will look back on the tools, processes, and technology in use today and have a good laugh at how primitive we were.

Several years ago I had an opportunity to participate in another milestone event—to be the first speaker at a “New Millennium Conference.” I felt a sense of history as I was packing for the event. While reaching for my cell phone, pager, palm pilot, laptop, calculator, and Dictaphone, all the necessary tools for the two-day trip, I realized that I had become a metaphor for the misplaced focus of the new century. There was so much emphasis on technology, especially with Y2K remediation, that perhaps we were missing the true essence and challenge of this new era. With all of the communications devices, I’m not sure that we are actually communicating more effectively.

Technology is a wonderful, powerful, and necessary tool that can greatly help us get things done faster and more efficiently, but it can’t replace what lies within our hearts. As we approach the next 75 years in human services, I think

one of the critical questions is whether our ethics discussions have kept pace with other advancements in the field, especially related to technology. For me, the most vivid example was the Chernobyl accident, which most people consider to be a technological disaster. It was not; it was an ethical disaster caused by unauthorized experiments conducted by engineers who had to override numerous safety systems to test a theory. In human services, evolving questions of

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privacy, the use of extraordinary life support measures, automated screening and intake, and outsourcing and offshoring are emerging as issues for APHSA’s leaders. During the next 75 years, new programs, treatments, health care advances, therapies, medications, and technology will surely emerge. The one constant is the need for an ethical base and a values system that ensures that the higher purposes of human services are the prime consideration.

While I can only speculate on the advice that APHSA’s founders would give us on the occasion of the 75th anniversary, I believe that they would encourage members to adopt new technology and ideas, because they were visionaries and innovators. Most importantly, I think they would advise us to remain firmly embedded in our values, to embrace those universal lessons we learned from our parents and grandparents—honesty, loyalty, integrity, and teamwork—and to always honor the privilege of public service. It has been, and remains, the foundation of APHSA’s success.

Happy Anniversary.