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The recent 75th anniversary celebration during APHSA's Spring Meeting created a wonderful opportunity to honor our past, examine the current state, and look toward the future. I want to thank the attendees, staff, and especially the presenters who made this event such an outstanding success. The conference was both celebratory and content rich, and addressed many of the universal themes that affect our human service system today. Therefore, coming on the heels of this meeting, I think that the international theme of this issue of *Policy & Practice* is particularly fitting.

Much to my regret, I have never had the opportunity to work in a foreign country. As a young man, I hoped to serve in the Peace Corps, but finances, babies, and other circumstances interrupted this plan. In fact, it has been over 35 years since I have traveled overseas. I have to admit that I am envious of my colleagues who have had the opportunity to apply their professional human service skills abroad, especially in developing countries. I am always fascinated to hear about their experiences, the impacts that they made, and the challenges that they faced.

While working overseas has eluded me, I have benefited from exposure to other human service leaders throughout the world. From time to time, foreign delegations eager to learn about the U.S. human service system have visited APHSA. On two occasions my wife, Jeanette, and I were privileged to host visitors from Middle Eastern countries at our home in Austin, Texas. Perhaps the most significant learning experience for me occurred in Washington state, when the Department of Social and Health Services sponsored Sasha Navotniy, head of the Department of Social Protection of the Ministry of Labor for the Republic of Uzbekistan, for a six-week visit. Working with Sasha was one of the highlights of my career, both because he was such a wonderful, gracious, and compassionate person, and because of his insight, experience, and philosophy of human services.

My interactions with colleagues from different parts of the world have always left me struck more by our similarities than our differences. This is especially true when it comes to human service challenges that appear to me to be universal in nature. Sasha confirmed his struggle with services integration and benefits distribution when he proudly described his efforts to consolidate 16 separate lines for various services in

Until I met Sasha, it had never occurred to me that I had a colleague halfway around the world who was dealing with the same problems and issues that I was facing on a daily basis. I also didn't realize how much of a resource we could be to each other. I have come to learn that there is a universal family of human service professionals who, when the opportunity presents itself, will focus on key professional concerns regard-

## It's a Small World

his offices in Uzbekistan into eight. His goal was to have a single line to access all services, an approach that mirrored our own integrated eligibility application and one-stop efforts. Sasha decried his lack of resources, both for services and infrastructure, especially computer support. He expressed his frustration with overly cumbersome and excessively bureaucratic procurement, personnel and budgetary practices as well as intrusive oversight from regulators and an unsympathetic media. Sasha also articulated his strong desire for larger investments in prevention programs, a stronger systems approach to service delivery and management, and the need to improve the public image of his agency in order to obtain the necessary resources to meet his goals. The timing of Sasha's visit was particularly helpful as it occurred shortly after the passage of welfare reform when the state was discussing the impact of time limits, the end of entitlement, and range of requirements related to personal responsibility, workforce attachment, child care and other critical concepts in preparation of the initial TANF plan. As state officials grappled once again with finding the right balance of maintaining an effective safety net without fostering dependency (a debate that extends back to English Poor Laws and beyond), I think Sasha summed it up best when he said, "Social protection must not give birth to dependent moods."

less of the political climate, economic unrest, and external forces that may exist between countries. Human services remains an industry predicated on the principles of compassion, inclusion, and hope, regardless of where and how it is delivered. As the world gets smaller with the Internet and global economy, there is an opportunity, through exchanges like these, to build a better bridge of understanding among nations while embracing our diversity, perhaps even model the very best in productive communication among public officials. Maybe some day there will be an International Public Human Services Association, where we can carry this mission forward, celebrate our collective hope, and address our common challenges.

I often wonder how Sasha is doing and whether he was able to implement his "one line" concept in his country. Perhaps one day I can visit with him again and share with him just how much his visit meant to me and what a great honor it was to host him. It truly is "a small world, after all."