

Rabbi Kanter Gets Youth Appointment

"The 12-18 year olds are the key to what goes on in society and the key to hope."

--Morton Kanter



RABBI MORTON KANTER of Farmington begins this week his new post as deputy commissioner for youth development in the U.S. Health, Education and Welfare Department.

By SANDRA ARMBRISTER

With "a little bit of courage" Rabbi Morton Kanter, of 31711 Bel Air, Farmington, is looking forward to his appointment as deputy commissioner for youth development, a newly created position in the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW).

Kanter will report to the assistant secretary for human development in HEW "to make that department more effective."

Although youth development has existed since the 1960s, Kanter said his position was created during the last few months in a reorganization of HEW "to make that department more effective."

Formerly with Temple Beth El for nine years, Kanter had to turn down a rabbinical position in Boston when he was appointed to the Washington job a year after applying on a recommendation from Sen. Robert Griffin (R-Mich.)

"Just that HEW is willing to pursue this area is enough to excite me," enthused Kanter, who has been involved in youth-related programs throughout his career.

"One of the things that has excited me is being able to develop this area in the department. About \$10 million has been allocated for youth development," he added.

It took "a little bit of courage" to take the new position which Kanter believes is consistent with his career as a rabbi.

"I've been a rabbi for 17 years. The word 'rabbi' means teacher. So much of the thrust of education is

teaching the young, and so much of the teaching is informal," he explained.

In his new position, Kanter said his department's major thrust has been in the area of juvenile delinquency, particularly in the 12 to 18 year old bracket.

"The 12 to 18 year-olds are

the key to what goes on in society and the key to hope," he said while leaning forward to emphasize the importance of "speaking to the aims and needs of youth before they become delinquent."

Kanter said he has "no grand plan" to follow when he gets to Washington.

"I fancy myself an adagio, not a thunder. I've done a good deal of reading, but I want to be a heck of a lot more immersed before making changes," he frankly admitted.

"I'll start by studying, but not to a point of getting so involved that I can't see solutions. You have to look for the answer to specific questions."

With a warm smile he acknowledged that the "real courage is to see sometimes what you can't see." You start with what can do most intelligently."

"The question to ask is not have you saved the world? but 'have you saved one other person?' I would like to have a part in one success somewhere," he continued.

Combined with the positive interest of the HEW department, Kanter believes "it is the legitimate function of a rabbi or anyone else interested in people to take such a post emphasizing the 12 to 18 year-old category."

"In fact one of the reasons

they chose me was because I am a rabbi. I'm not giving that up," he added.

In Rabbi Kanter's philosophy there are two areas of concern in the prevention and correction of juvenile delinquency: "the need for legitimate involvement of young people in deciding their own welfare and needs, and a need to draw the community together."

Youth work succeeds, according to the rabbi, when youth can create "an aura of their own so that when they have success they can go with it."

"Success is the ability to enable a youngster to feel that he has a role in his own development. His broader projects that are real, not make-work, projects that he can claim credit for succeeding and recognizing failure," he continued.

Community organizations can be linked to provide "the total community attitude that can create a common response to the needs of young people growing up," said Kanter.

"I've gone through so many community programs that so much of it is what adults determine is good for kids. Adults get bored with some programs that adults

do. Currently Kanter is finishing his doctoral dissertation on "Humanizing the World of Adolescents" for the school of education at Wayne State University.

teaching the young, and so much of the teaching is informal," he explained.

Government agencies need "answers that have to be pragmatic," he said. "So much of what is done doesn't work and is maintained because that's the way it's been done - or they don't care."

Kanter said his government agency will also work with national youth-serving organizations and will develop an internet library on youth needs and activities.

Kanter goes to Washington with a solid background in youth related activities. He was involved in youth programs at all age levels at Temple Beth El.

He was also founder of the Mitzvah Corps, a group of high school age youngsters working in inner city schools. He was a founder of a church-synagogue tutorial program, the former North Woodward Inter Faith Corps, a black arts development center and a member of a broad-based Detroit study commission.

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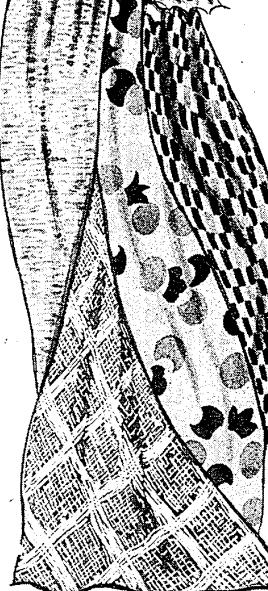
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