

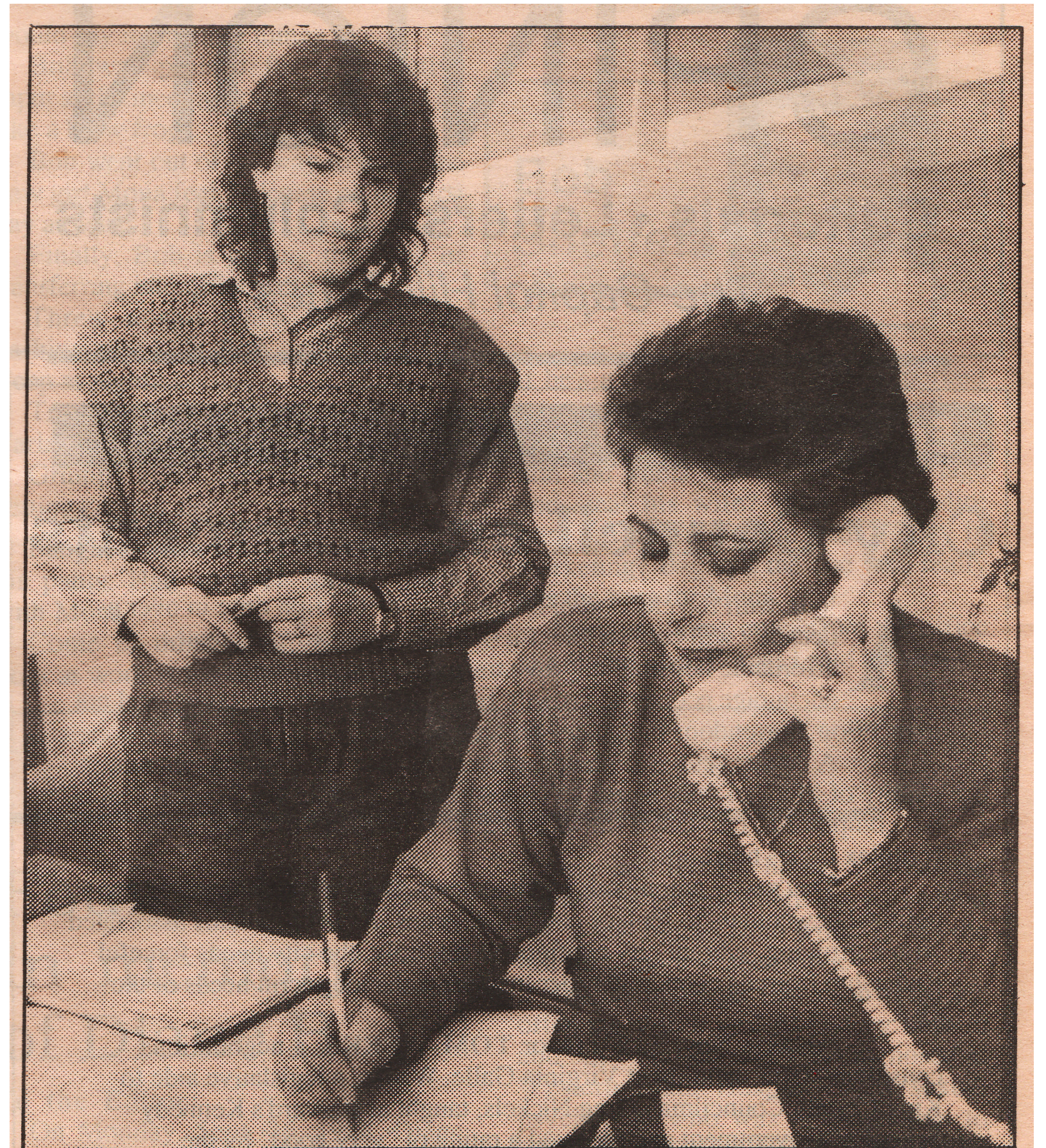
THE SOVIET JEWISH EXPERIENCE

WASHINGTON STATE STORIES

Resettling
the Refuseniks
Carol Benedick
Seattle '89



CAROL BENEDICK



Photo/Greg Farrar

Carol Benedick looks on at Jewish Family Service as Jeanette Lozovsky tells a caller how to file an Affidavit of Relationship. It will take 12 to 16 months or more before the caller's relatives will be able to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

CAPITAL HILL TIMES, NOVEMBER 1, 1989

Once the doors opened for Jewish emigration in 1988, Jewish Family Service took the lead in relocating Refuseniks in Washington State. Carol Benedick was the first caseworker JFS hired to help the immigrants get settled in their new homes.

"I didn't grow up Jewish, so I wasn't aware what was going on with Jews in the Soviet Union," Carol recalls. "I was at UW getting my Master's degree [in International Studies, with an emphasis on the USSR] and I saw an announcement that Jewish Family Service was looking for someone who spoke Russian, because the floodgates had just started opening.

"The immigrants all had family here. It might not have been close family, but it was family, and they sponsored them. They were very motivated. They were very educated. They were doctors and dentists and computer specialists. Their skills didn't always translate here, so we started many skilled workers as child care employees or janitors. Many of them took classes here and moved up quickly, but it was a long process. They sacrificed their careers for their families. And they knew it, and that's okay."

Because of the discrimination Jews faced in the USSR, many of the immigrants had an ambivalent relationship toward their religion, though all of them strongly identified as Jews. **"Most of them had lived their lives wishing that they could assimilate in the Soviet Union,"** says Carol, **"but the Soviets would not allow them to assimilate. Their Soviet passport had a line for nationality and theirs said Jew.** There were some who came to the United States who loved Judaism and wanted to learn more about it and it was wonderful to have this religious freedom, but most did not. For them it was finally the freedom to assimilate."

