

THE LONELY CROWD" is the title of a sociology book by David Riesman. The book has little bearing on what we have to say except that it starts from the premise that everyone, or almost everyone, is lonely. We may not be greatly concerned with the sociologist's study of the behavior arising out of this loneliness, but as Institute women we *are* concerned with the loneliness itself. Indeed, meeting the problem of loneliness has always been a part of our business.

In the early days, one of the most important things the Women's Institute did was to relieve the loneliness of the isolated farm woman. Sometimes even yet, an Institute president will report: "We are afraid we may have to disband. There are only a few of us, we are scattered and very busy with our homes and we can't raise money and do what the larger branches are doing. But we will miss the Institute. It brings us together and makes us feel we have friends." Surely the only word for an Institute like this is that it is doing one of the most important things it could possibly do — bringing the isolated, work-driven women of the community together, making them feel they have friends.

In almost any women's organization, however sociable the members may be, there is the woman who is "lonely in herself." Perhaps we feel that she "needs something to think about," and we hope our good programmes will provide this. It is far more likely that she needs an outlet for the thoughts she has. Few experiences make us feel more alone, more ready to cry out that people don't understand us, don't know us at all, than to have a talent burning within us and no opportunity to use it. Many women in our Institutes are still suffering from this aloneness.

We have the lonely members of minority groups, women still homesick for their native land in spite of its present poverty or persecution, women who live across the railroad tracks or in the neighboring rural slum, women set apart for a score of other reasons, who have not yet been brought into our Institutes.

When the A.C.W.W. meets here this summer we will be made more aware of the mass of lonely women across the world whose children cry themselves to sleep with hunger and sicken and die for want of food. What hope can we give them? What assurance that country women the world over are with them in their misery and are trying to do something about it? And what of the women in our own country struggling with problems of their own — schooling for a handicapped child, medical service where there is none — problems that need the combined action of all of us?

In whatever programmes we plan, whatever projects we undertake, from the smallest Institute on the farthest back concession to the international organization, we dare not ever forget the crying human need of the lonely crowd.

*Ethel Chapman*