

EDITORIAL

IN OLDER DAYS, on the frontiers of our country, when the forces of law seemed inadequate or too far away to be of much protection to the settlers, volunteer vigilance committees were often set up to have a sort of legal oversight of the community. Sometimes the vigilantes dealt out rough justice, but the lawbreaker knew that they never closed their eyes to an offence and that they were both persistent and thorough in dealing with it.

The vigilance committee was only a makeshift and its day has passed. But we still find voluntary groups of people keeping a quiet watch over their community, speaking out when they see a need that should be supplied or a wrong that should be righted, and giving their help in whatever action is needed. Some Women's Institutes are tops in this field.

Not long ago something happened in a County Home that showed a tragic lack of both accommodation and staff. It is true that a grand jury had already recommended improvements, but a grand jury doesn't create much stir in a community. An aroused body of women does. The women of the local Institute had been interested in their County Home—possibly they had given it a television set; but their sympathy went beyond providing material things. They wanted their old people to have decent living conditions and some of the security and comfort of a real home. They took the story to the County Council—without hysteria but without sparing the facts. They enlisted the help of the press to build a public demand for a new Home. And the result is that a new Home is coming.

In a northern Ontario district, the Women's Institute worked for five years to get a dental car for their isolated settlements. Five years of negotiating with authorities both local and provincial is a tedious business. But at the first of this year the dental car was "rolling."

The community need may not be anything dramatic. Have the children of the village any place to play but in the roadways? Have the teenagers a recreation centre other than the doubtful places they find for themselves? Have the young mothers any advice on the care of their children such as city mothers get at a free baby clinic? Are there handicapped children who aren't having a chance at school? Is there nursing help available for women who must struggle, unaided, with serious or chronic illness in the home? Is there a girl lacking opportunities who should be brought into club work, or a woman who needs the friendliness of the Institute and whatever else it has to offer?

A lot of Women's Institutes have had the vision to see these needs, and the heart and the gumption to do something about them; so their communities now have playgrounds and recreation centres and child health clinics and auxiliary classes and Victorian Order Nurses for country people. And more and more we see the good sense of these women in taking such issues to the authorities appointed and fitted to deal with them, the council or the health department or the school board—not asking their handful of members to raise funds that should be provided by public taxes.

But someone has to spark the movement. Someone has to care about people and what happens to them. The Institute that really cares will see things to do that no one has ever thought of before, and will find ways of getting these things done—just like the old vigilantes.

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