

A DISTINCTIVE ORGANIZATION: "There are so many organizations in the community, and so many 'working' women with little spare time for meetings, that the Institute is having a hard time to carry on." This was a common lament in the Institutes' annual reports this year. Almost every secretary wrote that her Institute was trying to interest the younger women of the locality; but it seemed to us that some of the lures they offered had little to do with the Women's Institute's real purpose. One secretary even wondered if the Institute should start a bowling club to attract young women! Only a few recommended the organization on its own merits.

"There are so many organizations." Then if we want ours to stand out among the others it must have some distinction; and the Women's Institute has this in the very purpose for which it was founded. It is the only organization I know of that was organized for the good of the family. That means every individual in every family, therefore every person in the community — with the community expanding to take in the whole country and, as our horizons broaden, the whole world. But we see people most clearly — men, women, children, youth and the aged — when we think of them as individuals in the setting of a family with its sympathy or misunderstanding, gloom or gaiety, ignorance or enlightenment, poverty or comfort, nurture or neglect of children, the tolerance of evil or the quest for goodness, truth and beauty. An organization that concerns itself with the family has a broad base to work from.

To begin with fundamentals: can anyone say women have outgrown the need of skills in feeding, clothing and housing a family, and making the most of the family income? The new foods and textiles and appliances coming on the market, the high pressure selling of these times, constantly bring new problems to the homemaker. Institutes have study courses available in these fields; and isn't there a job here for women who have raised their own families to arrange these courses for the young women in their locality? We know of one woman who personally took on the responsibility of organizing a class in money management for a group of interested young mothers.

In the psychology of family living some Institutes have child study discussions led by a panel of, say, a school teacher, a clergyman, a social worker or a psychologist if one is available and always a parent or two. Recently, there has been an upsurge in the use of films on family relations. Is any other organization offering this sort of program?

Women's Institutes care about the health of the family. We find them sponsoring child clinics, bringing lectures on health topics to their own meetings and to meetings for the community, helping with schools and hospitals for retarded children. A new and popular project for Institutes near a mental hospital is to visit the patients socially to help in their rehabilitation when they go back into the community.

Naturally, the Women's Institute is interested in anything in the community that has an impact on the family, such as schools, libraries, recreation facilities. In earlier days Institutes provided schools with all sorts of equipment; they established libraries; they raised funds for community halls and skating-rinks. Now they are more likely to be bringing in authorities to acquaint the people with new trends in education. (We still have a lot to learn about junior colleges and the dignity of vocational training.) It is not uncommon to find the librarian at an Institute meeting talking about books and planned reading. And Institutes have been known to arrange a public meeting to discuss the recreational needs of the community with young people and old people and others in between on hand to speak for everything from sports and square dancing to drama and study groups and singing. Most Institutes visit their County Home occasionally and some are taking a new interest in the problems of aging.

Women's Institutes, like other organizations, are becoming more and more aware of the poverty and hunger in other parts of the world; and like other organizations they are trying to help to relieve it. Perhaps their sympathy is especially quickened because they help by way of the family — they correspond with the children, they sponsor through the Save the Children Fund; they hear, through their international scholarship, how women are learning about nutrition and how to conserve food to keep their families from starving.

And all the time, right at home, the Institute finds the most original ways of helping a family in misfortune — the hearing aid for an old man, the cleaning woman for a neighbor recovering from an illness.

We could go on and on with this program. And women with imagination and understanding hearts could find other things to do that no one else had dreamed of yet. And no one could deny that the Women's Institute is an organization with a character of its own.

Ethel Chapman