

The Blind Homemaker

In Your Community

By Dora W. Burke

IS THERE A BLIND WOMAN in your community? Do you see her at any of the meetings or social activities you attend? If you know of a blind woman who doesn't take an active part in community life, why not ask her to go with you to your next Institute meeting? She probably needs just a little assistance to enable her to participate fully in most community activities.

Last September I took part in an Institute on Problems of the Newly Blinded Homemaker, held at a University in United States. At one of the meetings we heard a panel of blind women discuss their problems. These women felt their problems were due to their being blind, but I thought they were just the same problems which I've heard expressed many times by the sighted members of the Women's Institutes and other groups with whom I've worked. They felt they were being left out of community activities; they lacked up-to-date information on textiles, laundry, floor care, equipment and furnishings for the home, and they didn't know enough about the latest colours and styles in home furnishings and clothes.

Being a member of the Women's Institute would give a blind woman a feeling of being actively involved in a community organization, and she would gain a good deal of helpful information from the talks, panels and various programs of the regular monthly meetings. She could also participate in the short courses, forums and training schools offered by the Home Economics Branch. After the blind homemaker has been a member of your Institute for a while, ask her to participate in your programs, give a talk, be a member of a panel discussion, be a leader or do any other job which suits her particular talents.

Don't hesitate to invite a blind woman to go with you to the meetings because you are worried about your ability to help her. If your experience is like mine, you'll find that most of them have learned to cope very well with their disability. Until I went to these meetings last Fall, I had almost no contact with blind persons, and I did not find it difficult to adapt. I travelled with a blind woman and spent several days attending meetings and eat-

ing my meals where a majority of the people were blind. Except for offering a little guidance in moving around, or a little help at the table, it was no different from being with sighted people.

When you invite a blind woman to go out with you, of course you'll call for her and take her home. When you are walking, let her take your arm—don't take hers, go ahead of her through doors, pause at curbs, steps and landings. At lunch time, tell her what is being served. If she needs any help, she'll tell you. Put yourself in her place and think of what help you would need if you couldn't see and you'll not have any trouble. Don't make the mistake of giving too much assistance; she will want to be as independent as possible. The blind homemakers I met complained that their families and friends were inclined to overprotect them.

I would urge you to seek out the blind woman in your community and include her in your activities. You could enquire at the nearest office of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind for the addresses of the blind women in your community.

A Home Teacher for the Blind would be an interesting speaker for one of your meetings, as well as a possible new member for your Institute. The Home Teacher is usually a blind person who is trained to help people learn to adapt to blindness so they can live a normal, active and useful life. The Home Teaching Program covers a broad range of subjects, such as grooming, crafts, typing, or how to arrange the kitchen and other parts of the house so the homemaker can carry on the regular housekeeping chores.

The workers for the blind are looking for ways of getting the blind involved in the regular community activities, and they are particularly anxious to find a means of making information on consumer and homemaking matters more readily available to the blind homemakers. I think the Women's Institutes could do a good deal in this direction by asking blind homemakers to become members and take part in their regular monthly meetings and the services offered by the Home Economics Branch.