

How Do We Fit The Pieces Together?

There is an essay competition in the works now, asking "Is The Vision As Bright Today As In The Time of Adelaide Hoodless" or something to that effect?

It's easy for us to think, that back in 1897 there were so many avenues to discover, it made volunteering easier, but today we're way up front having accomplished so much that there's no time to help one another, or even assume responsibility for ourselves.

However, what I want to talk about is the volunteer, and specifically the Women's Institute.

There is a complexity of purpose. Which direction should the WI take? First we must remember we've been around for a long time, so we must have done something right and good, to last. The thrust of the 80's, pull us toward thinking we must be heard and move more quickly.

When we see new groups starting up, I am of two minds. If they only last a few years but have proven their point and gained their objective, is this not a plus for society? On the other hand, WI in a more traditional fashion is facing the dilemma of how to get something done soon enough to be of real help and slow enough so that what is built can stand the test of stress and time.

This "voice" that I have spoken of many times, I still feel is a "must". However, what is that voice saying? I hear from time to time, the Women's Institute is slow moving and fuddy-duddy. Yet we know, that in today's society the role of the volunteer is both recognized and respected. If that is so, then the number of people who make time to volunteer can be expected to increase. We all look for respectability, and the status that it brings.

This will only happen if the projects and goals are meaningful, make sense and need doing. Our aim is to help women find themselves new creative ways to attack problems. We can only move on and upward and become that "voice" by taking risks and trying. It all begins with a dream of what can be.

Are we prepared for the changes in the approach to problem-solving? Are we as citizens, willing, or more importantly able, to foresee that people are striving toward a more positive leadership. There is little coincidence that the new organizations decline to volunteer in the well established traditional groups because people no longer want to "do good" in the traditional sense. They want to become involved in activities that touch their lives directly, that they feel strongly about.

In order to survive, it is apparent that we must recognize and deal with demands of a younger generation. Change some of our approaches, our structure, our methods of procedure, all these might be reviewed, so essentially we can revitalize and sell ourselves to the world.

We must adapt but never discard the spirit that has motivated us these many years.

The Women's Institute has been built. Now volunteering is changing, partially in response to changes in society as a whole, but mostly because people are changing their life styles and expectations. More and more people seem to be leaning toward the expectation of greater responsibility or participating in decision-making. Women are seeking those opportunities for personal growth and fulfillment, needing an outlet, to be heard.

Society is realizing "people" do make the difference. With so many people moving into our communities should we be re-creating the sense of 'community' that once was the strength of rural Ontario?

Perhaps we should be seeking to understand the many positive ways in which volunteering has changed, and how best we can meet new needs in the community - and help lead the way to a better future for the Women's Institute member. Never do we want to sacrifice standards, or limit creativity or stifle the uniqueness of people.

Cynics and skeptics think about better futures and say "I'll believe it when I see it." People of vision and hope, however, respond with Saul Alinsky's famous words, "We'll see it when we believe it."

I think I can see it. Can YOU?

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