

# RURAL

We live more and more in an age of courses and conferences.

The thrust of the 80's has become a measure, designed to help women become productive members of society. It is becoming more evident that we must be in charge of our own decision-making.

A three-day Conference designed for women living in rural Ontario attracted around 100 participants plus a resource staff representing government and educators. A joint effort of the Ontario Congress, Learning Opportunities for Women, OCLOW, and the Faculty of Part-Time and Continuing Education, University of Western Ontario, drew women from Kenora and Dryden down to the Niagara Peninsula, from Kent to Carleton Counties. Representatives from their National counterpart CLOW were present as well. The Canadian group organized in 1972 number about 500, the Ontario group around 100.

This is a loosely knit organization without benefit of a constitution, nor the formal methods used at meetings of more traditional institutions. Their aim is to identify problems and needs that concern their group, choose a direction and move along to achieve results in a short period of time. Because they are so new they do not have to live up to any previous achievements nor follow in any footsteps.

Listening, provides an opportunity for further learning. We were told that the wide variety of hand-outs should be gathered up and used for further reference — not only for the information provided but for all sorts of ideas when it is your turn to design a brochure or gain further ideas for planning a meeting.

It was evident from the conversation that the women were willing to share not only experiences but more importantly contacts for further resources. How to — develop skills bank — seek funding — meet the needs of the women in rural communities.

This OCLOW is striving to open doors for themselves and the women in the communities, encouraging members to do new things, learn new methods and skills. They see themselves as an education oriented group with spin-offs to community awareness.

One thing was evident this is not a women's lib group,

rather they are striving to gain more access to learning facilities focusing on advocacy and networking. A group of women interested in adult learning and its opportunities.

As was pointed out many times, the thrust of the '80's will lean increasingly more toward adult learning. Changing needs and life styles, are pointing a finger more toward the importance of continuing learning after formal education. A need to shift education around, because adult learning is the key to "where it's at" after you think your education is finished. Every day presents a challenge for women to strengthen their awareness beyond their own doorstep. Working with community groups, keeping it community based, working toward community needs will help make learning successful.

What are common concerns of women in rural Ontario? Incidentally, there were about a dozen present who lived on farms, rural Ontario means anyone living in a built-up area of 6000 persons. What can be done for deprived and isolated groups of women in rural Ontario? Goals need to be defined and priorities set with a constant 'watch' on the methods involved in developing guidelines.

Networking was a key word for the three days. Assessing needs of a community, establishing learning opportunities, approaching Community Colleges and Agricultural Colleges asking for appropriate courses, is one networking approach. If after finding out (1) what the women want to learn. (2) are there enough women with similar interests in the community? Then the time has come to articulate the needs of the community and to further network. It may only be a single meeting with a guest speaker as the resource person. It could be a few meetings about a single topic, but dealing with various phases, or it could be a course provided by Community or Agricultural Colleges because of local urging.

One of the recommendations passed was the need for more courses on stress and business management. This proved an important point that came out frequently during discussions, that it is difficult to know where to go for resource information. OMAF already provide courses on both stress and money management, so women should get in touch with the local Agricultural Representative for details.



**CREEMORE WI, SIMCOE WEST DISTRICT** members stand behind the decorated tea-table with the "special" 79th Anniversary cake.