

Between The Lines



Dear Women's Institute members:

I would like to share the theme of my area's last convention with you, and discuss it as it pertains to the Women's Institutes. The theme was, "Self-knowledge is the beginning of self-improvement."

Self-knowledge, - the capability to know oneself, to be able to acknowledge our weakness, to develop our talents and to share ourselves with others, is the first step to self-improvement.

Do we as Women's Institute members know what strengths we have? Do we acknowledge that we have the homemaking skills so vitally necessary for a well-run and comfortable home? Are we aware of the leadership talent we have developed among our members by encouraging them to be 4-H leaders, or Junior Farmer leaders, or even by preparing a good program and presenting it to our members at a meeting? Are there among us former career women who have book-keeping skills, nurse's training, teachers, women who can manage a cattle herd, or maybe even weld? Are we providing an opportunity for these people to enrich our lives by sharing their skills with us? More importantly, are we reaching out into the community and sharing our skills with non-members. It is vitally important to the survival of the Women's Institutes that we inform other women in the community of our programs and our goals, that we reach out with an offer to help them become better informed, more aware citizens of the community and the world. In return, if there are programs offered by other groups, we as Women's Institute members can participate in them. Is our image in the community what it should be? Can we say to others, and mean it, "You

will find benefits in your life by joining us". Do we know ourselves as W.I. members, and our organization and its purposes well enough, or are we going along day by day without a vision, but just "hanging in there"?

At a recent Provincial executive meeting, a session was held to discuss the future of the Women's Institutes. In summarizing, the issues most recognizable were; 1. Improving our organization, 2. Personal development of our members, and 3. Improving our community.

This year we hope to tackle the first one by giving a renewed meaning to the role of the convener. To provide help to our provincial conveners, the executive planned workshops at the spring semi-annual Board meeting. We hope that after this meeting, the conveners will be better informed about sources of information, have some new ideas, and be better prepared to train other conveners. It was felt that the role of the convener is to train others, to give advice, to take leadership, and to report. It is important to summarize our activities, but more important to provide leadership for those activities.

I challenge every convener in the branches to recognize a need in her community that is related to her particular portfolio, to present that need to her branch, and to initiate action directed at that need. Conduct a survey, get a speaker for a meeting, gather information for a study session, or use any method that will stimulate members to take an active interest in the subject at hand.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find a questionnaire, "How are our vital signs". We would like each branch to use this questionnaire at a meeting, preferably your annual meeting, and to compute your scores. The provincial executive has already used it, and it was a very good indication of our feeling about W.I.

Can we get more life into our District Annuals? They are coming up quickly. The feeling that they were "boring" was rather general. There is no better year than this year of the Bicentennial to get material for an interesting meeting, and one that will encourage more members to attend. Conveners, you are the initiators, not just reporters.

The second issue, personal development of the members, seemed to be a direct outgrowth of better programming. As well, we will be participating in a Rural Women's Conference coming up in November.

This will be a conference for women who wish to learn or develop leadership skills to use in their communities. We have representation on the planning committee, and also hope that some of our members will have the opportunity to attend.

RSVP workshops have been a source of personal development, Officers conference gives each branch an opportunity to help a member. Within our own communities there is the opportunity to sponsor courses, and to attend workshops and forums.

We have been asked to respond to a study on the need for protecting the occupational health and safety of people who work in agriculture. The Ontario Task Force on Health and Safety in Agriculture will investigate and report on the health and safety of farmers, farm workers and members of farm families engaged in farm work. Watch for hearings in your areas in the fall.

If there are any concerns that your branch feels should be addressed on this subject, be ready to make a presentation to a hearing. A discussion starter, if you haven't already used it, is a safety check printed in the April, May, June 1983 issue of Federated News. Could the branches prepare a record of farm accidents that have occurred in their communities, either as a result of faulty machinery or from the use of pesticides or chemicals, and initiate a Farm Safety program. Medical doctors could be used as consultants, information obtained from the Workmen's Compensation Board or a study of the safety features on equipment could be made.

From these studies perhaps we will determine where the need for protection exists, what age groups are affected, and ways of protecting people against health and safety hazards in farm work.

These concerns have been raised because of the high accident rate among farmers, and because farmers are at present not covered under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Action will be necessary if we do not wish legislation for farmers under this Act.

It will be an interesting year, and one in which we will accomplish many things that will give us a stronger and better image in our communities.

Yours sincerely,

Charlotte Johnson