



By Lorna McGrath

Is your Women's Institute interested in getting new members? Try the three P's - be Positive, be Professional and be Prepared.

Visualize the perfect Women's Institute Branch. Is it much like your's, but just a little improved? Think about it and draw a picture of this vision. This vision or dream is your goal.

Plan your strategy. Think about why you joined the WI and write it down. What have you learned as a result of being a member? Write each point on separate notes. Group them together in categories. Doing these two exercises in a group setting will generate a greater variety of ideas. These thoughts are

ammunition for your membership campaign. Compile the results and prepare invitations or brochures. List a wide range of activities.

Practice inviting someone to your meeting; practice with a friend or in front of the mirror. Think of ways to improve your message and get right to the point. Write the key points down on cue cards to help you keep your facts straight. Include when and where the meeting is and the topic of the program.

Get into action! Knock on doors! Invite people to attend the meeting as opposed to joining. Invite them to three interesting, well-planned meetings, offering to pick them up each time, before asking them to join the organization.

Think of all your members as "young at heart" - not as being young, middle-aged or old. And remember, every member is of equal value to the Women's Institute.

If we describe ourselves as a rural organization mainly interested in agriculture, some people will be deterred from joining. In fact, many of our current members are urbanites, not rural-based. We are all interested in the production of safe food. But our interests also include health, citizenship, leadership, community projects, environmental issues and

anything else that ensures a safe and healthy community. We are a caring society that believes in moral values and in families.

The Women's Institute has three R's. They are Roots, Relevance and Recognition. Use these to our advantage. We could double the membership of the Women's Institute if each person was to find one new member. What about organizing a contest? Reward the member who brings in the most new members. This could be done at the District and Area level as well.

Don't get old - think young! Let age improve your attitude! Women's Institute is an educational organization, not a service club. We like our members to think young and stay involved. Encourage others to belong to the WI that thinks and acts young.

Remember that the best advertisement for Women's Institute is right under your nose - your mouth. Make sure that what you say is positive, professional and planned. The best of luck to you in recruiting many new and enthusiastic members.

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HUMAN INTEREST STORY:

THE CHILDREN OF BELARUS

By Heather Ross

On April 26, 1986, an unauthorized experiment at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant caused the explosion of the reactor, spewing several tons of radioactive materials into the air. The power plant is located eight kilometers south of the Belarusian border and the winds were blowing north into Belarus that day. Belarus received 70 per cent of the radioactive fallout from Chernobyl.

Over 18,000 square kilometers of agricultural land (22%) received fallout. Of this, 2,640 square kilometers was removed from agricultural production. Ten per cent of the milk produced was contaminated with excessive levels of radiation.

The fallout affected 2.2 million people, of which 800,000 were children. In some areas of Belarus, the rate of Thyroid cancer is 125 cases per million children, as opposed to the worldwide average of one or two cases per million.

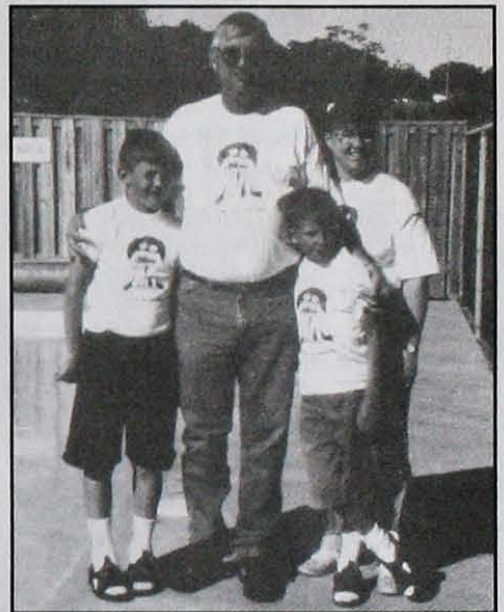
The Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus was founded in 1989 by Canadians of Belarusian descent. Beginning in 1991, it was responsible for bringing children who were victims of Chernobyl to Canada. Over 500 children were invited to Canada in 1996.

At present, the organization is completely dependent on local community fund raising.

Currently, there are over 1,000 active volunteers and 4,000 donors in 32 communities across Canada.

The Canadian Relief Fund invites children, including orphans from the contaminated regions of Belarus, into Canadian homes for six to ten weeks each summer. The children return to Belarus with strengthened immune systems and better able to resist the long-term effects of radiation. Even after this short period of recuperation in a radiation-free zone, children have reported the disappearance of headaches, dizziness, irritability and tearfulness, and they experience improved sleep patterns and a desire to participate in sports.

Because of their involvement with Scouting over the years, Heather and her husband Ron volunteer their time to help Chernobyl victims because they believe all children should have the opportunity to live in a clean and healthy environment. They believe that volunteerism, at the local, national or international level, is the best work one can do in life. They also believe that organizations like The Canadian Relief Fund can help foster a spirit of understanding among the people of the world.



Heather and Ron Ross are pictured above with two young children from Belarus, Andrei (right) and Sasha (left). They welcomed them into their home last summer for six weeks. The children enjoyed swimming, biking and playing soccer, as well as visiting many of Ontario's summer fun sites. Heather and Ron wish to thank everyone for the generosity they showed the boys. Andrei will be returning this coming summer.

Heather is a member of the Avonton Women's Institute in Perth South. She is also the Office Assistant at the FWIO Provincial Office in Guelph.