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PARENT and FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

for
low-income
families



CHILDREN'S BUREAU PUBLICATION NO. 434—1965

The Subcommittee on Parent and Family Life Education of the Interdepartmental Committee on Children and Youth is responsible for and cooperated in the preparation of this publication. The Subcommittee members are listed in the appendix.

PARENT and
FAMILY LIFE
EDUCATION

for
low-income
families

a guide for leaders

LOUISE PROEHL SHOEMAKER

foreword

THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD and his family are the focus of national concern. The environment in which the child and his family live is central to this concern, whether the disadvantages are due to defeating poverty, a mental or physical handicap, the rootlessness of migratory living, the impact of being transplanted into a new culture, or inadequate education. These disadvantages are the targets of many of the new programs initiated to build the Great Society.

The upsurge of interest in programs of parent and family life education for low-income families stems from this concern. The home environment is viewed as the target as well as the tool for securing change and preventing family deterioration. In recent years, attempts to apply to low-income families the methods and content in parent and family life education that were successful with middle-income families have been discouragingly unsuccessful. Recognizing this fact, the Subcommittee on Parent and Family Life Education of the Interdepartmental Committee on Children and Youth decided to center its activities on the particular needs of low-income families.

In February 1964, the Subcommittee conducted a 2-day seminar on this subject with its membership and other Federal personnel interested in family life education for low-income families. A recommendation growing out of this seminar urged that the Subcommittee sponsor a meeting of practitioners actively engaged in parent and family life education with low-income groups at State and local levels throughout the country.

As a result, a National Consultation sponsored by the Interdepartmental Committee and conducted by the Subcommittee on Parent and Family Life Education was convened in December 1964. Forty-two practitioners, representing a wide range of professional disciplines and experience in direct work with low-income families in a variety of settings throughout the United States, met with the Subcommittee members for 2 days.

Its threefold purpose was to pool the knowledge and ideas of these practitioners and members of the Subcommittee, to increase communication among the various professions engaged in parent and family life education, and to produce some practical guides for leaders working with low-income families.

One of the outcomes of this meeting is this publication, *Parent and Family Life Education for Low-Income Families: A Guide for Leaders*. This guide should prove of immense help to all professional personnel working with low-income families.

Mrs. Louise Proehl Shoemaker prepared the manuscript from her own observations of the consultation, from reports of recorders in work groups, and from background materials submitted by participants. To its production she brought her professional background as a social worker, her skill as a writer, and the insights gained from working with parents in many different settings.

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chapter I

PARENT AND FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

THE LOW-INCOME FAMILY has been placed under a high-powered microscope in recent months. Increased activity under the microscope has already been noted as Federal, State, and local programs for conducting the "war on poverty" go into operation.

Long before the high-powered microscope, long indeed before many scientific instruments or much money was available, sturdy pioneers in several disciplines were concerning themselves with the problems of America's impoverished families. Public health nurses, school counselors and teachers, physicians, social workers, home economists, and many others of the helping professions sought to adapt their knowledge and skill to help those families who were at the bottom of the American social and economic heap.

The Children's Bureau itself was formed out of the concern for all children and their families, especially those who were disadvantaged: those who could not obtain health and educational services available to other more economically advantaged groups; children from impoverished families who were exploited in factory and field. The Agricultural Extension worker has long busied himself with the need for the marginal farming family to carve out a healthier, more stable niche for itself in our national life. The public health nurse and the public welfare worker have documented a million times over the lack of the most simple everyday necessities in the homes of our poor.

Who is "the low-income family"?

"Low income" means many things to many people. In the current war on poverty, a family income of \$3,000 is being used as a line of demarcation. Below this line, it is felt that a family is living in severe poverty. A family may struggle to live on this income, but it is

impossible to achieve and maintain a physically, emotionally, and socially healthy family life within it. As Mark Twain put it, poverty makes some virtues impractical and others impossible. This is true for the low-income family, with an added word of caution on the use of a cutoff figure, such as \$3,000. Family size, health problems, individual abilities, and many other factors make this a rather arbitrary figure. There are many families with incomes of \$4,000 and more who are materially and culturally impoverished.

Low-income families have many problems based in economics alone, no matter how high the coping abilities of their members. So much physical and emotional energy is used in maintaining a bare existence that there is very little left over for anything else. There is little energy left to invest in planning for the future. There is little energy and no money to beautify the home or to buy books or to expand one's horizons beyond the neighborhood. The know-how, the skill and education are also lacking which would make it possible for parents to help their children realize their potentials to become healthy, productive adults.

Many low-income families have been a low-income family for generations. That is, few low-income families have known anything other than deprivation. The depression of the thirties saw many families with stability and good work histories plummet into the low-income group. Many of these families moved upward again through new opportunities and the strength of their earlier experiences. But most of today's low-income families have known no such stability. Many persons who are being automated out of their jobs are from work which had very low pay anyway and demanded low skills. The work history may be good in terms of endeavor but poor in opportunity and pay. Upward mobility is almost nonexistent. Lack of opportunity, lack of know-how, and lack of inner strength and security keep the low-income family where it is.

Parent and family life education defined: its use with low-income families

The Subcommittee on Parent and Family Life Education of the Interdepartmental Committee on Children and Youth early in its work decided to place its emphasis in the field of parent and family life education with low-income families. A definition of parent and family life education which encompasses both the varied aspects of these fields and the wide interests of the membership of the Subcommittee (see appendix for membership of Subcommittee) would be as follows:

[Parent and family life education is] an educative process directed toward individuals in groups, with the goals of imparting knowledge, through a variety of methods and from a wide number of disciplines that may have a positive impact on the physical, emotional, social, and economic life of the family.¹

Through the use of discussion groups, printed materials, lectures, mass media, and other forms of contact, parent and family life education programs have sought to help parents in their task of rearing children. Emphasis has been placed on helping parents achieve an understanding of their role as parents and an understanding of their children and their relation to each other and to their various worlds—community, school, church, work—with the goal of raising children to be healthy, productive adults. Such programs have traditionally served middle-class parents, who through education and experience are comfortable with a rather traditional teaching-learning situation.

Scattered attempts have been made to reach low-income families with parent and family life education programs. Settlement houses, schools, public health nurses, family counseling agencies, among others, have reached out to low-income families with their programs. Agricultural Extension workers have emphasized reaching the low-income family, sending workers into such specialized settings as the Indian reservations. But no group and no program has reached significant numbers of the low-income groups.

Income alone is an inadequate index of the need for help with raising children. Families who move into a middle-class income bracket from culturally impoverished circumstances do not automatically achieve competence in raising their children well. On the other hand, there are low-income families who are functioning acceptably according to any standards one might apply: their main problem lies not so much in themselves as in their restricted circumstances and in the debilitating effects of poverty.

While income alone does not indicate what a family's child rearing practices are, families with low incomes have not responded to the traditional programs offered and it is obvious that poverty imposes special problems on parents in trying to rear their children adequately. Aside from economic betterment, something no parent and family life program has to offer, is there hope that the low-income family can achieve a more satisfactory, healthful life through educational services in areas related to child rearing, family relations, and homemaking skills?

¹ Chilman, Catherine S. and Kraft, Ivor: *Helping Low-Income Parents. I. Through Parent Education Groups.* CHILDREN, 1963, 10, 127-132 (July-August).

Although traditional programs have failed to reach large numbers of low-income families, they have reached some. There is evidence that low-income families do respond to the help which parent and family life education offers. There is evidence from urban and rural settings that parents caught in the most grinding poverty are concerned about their children. Many are willing to invest considerable energy in the effort to be better parents.

The material in this handbook is based on the experience of parent and family life educators in many parts of the country, from many different kinds of disciplines, working in a great variety of settings. The experiences form the basis for a beginning statement of principles which will hopefully prove helpful to those in the field of family life education and to those groups or agencies which are planning to reach out to low-income families with educational efforts in the area of sound family life. While materials used in parent and family life education, research, and current literature on poverty help form the background for this handbook, it is essentially concerned with the "how," rather than the "what."

Since traditional methods of parent and family life education are not effective with most low-income families, new methods which have been tested will be described. Attitudes and skills basic to working with low-income families will be spelled out and an attempt will be made to bring together some of what is known about low-income groups in America and how parent and family life education may be helpful to families in these groups. The process of people helping people is a very ancient one, and still, each specific cultural group and each family within that group has special needs and special ways of reacting to help. What is written here may be helpful in some situations, with some families: eventually, it is hoped, more definite and refined knowledge will spell out more helpfully what methods are most effective in reaching low-income families.

The current situation of knowledge about families living in poverty

The recent spate of articles and books and TV programs about poverty in America has brought facts, figures, and some fiction to the attention of the public. The actual studies on which much of this is based are beginning to yield valuable information that can offer guidance in working with low-income families. While waiting for further refinement and testing of findings, there is one finding, writ large, which should accompany everything that is written or said about the "poor": the only generalization one can make about them, except that

they are materially poor, is that one cannot make generalizations about them.

The lowest socioeconomic group in America is not one monolithic, homogeneous subculture. The low-income population presents a variety of groupings, subgroupings, and subcultures of many variations and shadings of life—style, habits, and modes of expression—certainly at least as varied as the middle classes. There are groupings about which generalizations can be made. There are habits and modes of response and adaptation which are fairly predictable in given situations for some subgroups. But the “poor” cannot be divided into segments like so much pie, each piece yielding the same content from a homogeneous whole.

There is a continuing discussion among social scientists as to whether the poor in America represent a distinct “subculture” or whether they are a part of a total continuum of society, representing and reflecting the general culture, only more so or less so because of the conditions imposed by poverty. While this discussion goes on, perhaps it is enough for those who need to act to know that there are similarities between lower and middle classes. There are enough similarities in response to learning situations and to some of the basic human problems to act “as if” there were a continuum along which one can move with increased understanding and appreciation for differences to be able to communicate with those of other classes.

There are differences which must be recognized and worked with if low-income families are to be reached with parent and family life programs. The differences are not only economic. Between an impoverished family living on an Indian reservation and a low-income white family living in Brooklyn there are differences as great as each family would find with middle-class families in its own community. In each group, then, one will look for and deal with the additional differences which poverty creates, alongside the differences of clan and tribe and region and race.

Catherine Chilman of the Division of Research of the Welfare Administration has performed a valuable service in compiling some of the findings of studies of child rearing patterns among the very poor.² Many of these findings, while still general and applicable to many if not all low-income families, indicate both the harshness of poverty, on the one hand, and on the other the adaptive responses of human beings to poverty. In defending themselves against the cruelties of poverty, many of the poor are distrustful and suspicious of others, especially of those in authority; they are marked by a sense of alienation from the mainstream of society, they are fatalistic about

² Chilman, Catherine S.: *Child-Rearing and Family Relationship Patterns of the Very Poor. WELFARE IN REVIEW*. 1965, 3, 9-19 (January).

the future and have a sense of despair about the present and their chances in the world of today.

Especially important and relevant to those interested in working with low-income families on family life education are the findings Dr. Chilman has garnered about the learning habits of many of the poor. “. . . a pragmatic, concrete, personal, physical learning style appears to be characteristic of most low-income persons.”³ Patterns of child rearing are often authoritarian and impulsive, with harsh, inconsistent, physical discipline used. The low self-worth of the parents makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to teach their children positive values of family living by word or example.

A study of child rearing practices among low-income families in Washington, D.C., reveals a conclusion relevant to work in family life education.

In many study families, the effects of external influences are reflected in the strikingly early appearance of cutoff points in parental control and emotional support—in the falling off of parents' confidence in their ability—as well as their will—to control and give attention to their children.

Changes in control and in self-estimates of ability to control occur when the children are as young as five and six. . . . Here we are talking about the mothers who are not basically rejecting of, or hostile to, children. . . . As children grow older there seems to be a cutting point at which parents express impotence and bafflement.^{3a}

The pressures of poverty force the low-income family into dealing with the present moment, which may be difficult for future-oriented middle-class persons to understand and work with. Especially in the family with no regular employment, punctuality is no virtue: life is less structured around the clock and demands for involvement in organizations and community affairs are felt to be meant for someone else.

Discussing children's behavior with groups of mothers from low-income groups led to the following conclusions:

What the lower class mother does want from experts in child rearing is practical guidance about the day-to-day management of her child. In a discussion which followed a film presentation

³ Ibid. p. 15.

^{3a} Lewis, Hylan: CHILD REARING PRACTICES AMONG LOW-INCOME FAMILIES IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA. Washington, D.C.: Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, 1961. 17 pp.

to a lower class group, one mother asked, "Will my son get into trouble if I let him stay out late?" By contrast, when the topic came up in a middle-class group, one mother asked, "Will my child be harmed emotionally if I make him come in earlier than his friends?"

The lower class mother is less concerned with her child's individuality and more concerned with problems of overt behavior. [Her] concern in child rearing is with the why, when, and how of discipline, what to do to alleviate the immediate situation. The middle class mother's concern [includes] what the behavior means, the dynamics of the child's growth or his future development. Principles of personality development and complex psychological concepts play little part in [the lower class mother's] thinking about child rearing.⁴

There is much to be learned from what low-income persons think and feel about themselves. A young mother receiving public assistance had this to say about herself:

You don't be proud of being dependent on someone. Now, the way I feel is this, I'd separate the people into two classes: one is the "insiders" and one is the "outsiders." The insiders are the people involved with the welfare department. They are the people that work for them, who receive aid from them or have anything at all to do with it and the outsiders are the people that don't know anything about it only what they hear and these things are usually rumors.

Now, the outsiders feel that—oh, it's just a picture of the person on welfare. They're supposed to be dirty, they aren't supposed to have nice shoes, their hair is supposed to look bad. Their children are supposed to be dirty and running around with no manners, no knowledge or intelligence. They aren't supposed to hear fairy tales at night, they aren't supposed to go to the movies or play games like other little children. They are supposed to be the lowest things out. They're just supposed to be bad.

OK, those are the rumors . . . the insiders will tell you that's not true. You could take my daughter and put her beside anybody's daughter and she looks just as well, has just as many manners and is just as well educated. Her mother reads to her . . . she is just an average child.

If you met me on the street you would say "Hello," but you would

⁴ Scott, John F.: THE FAILURE OF MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION. Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Youth Guidance Center, 1964. 6 pp.

not say that she gets her money from welfare. You wouldn't know that because I wouldn't look it. You carry yourself in that way. At least if you're down, you don't try to look down and feel down, and if there's anything you can do to better yourself, that's what you try to do.

You don't knock a person when he's down. A lot of people like to say, "She's on welfare" or "She's not taking care of herself—the kids are bad." I found out that everybody can get down and if you can't reach out and help them up, then leave them alone. That's the biggest thing I've learned, to have consideration for the next person.⁶

Sometimes people say what they think we want them to say, but this young mother had genuine feelings behind her homespun philosophy (with its own sophistication). Her strivings, her aspirations and disappointments are real. We must *listen* to those we wish to serve so that in their words we can find their deep and honest feelings and needs.

Many families must have help of other kinds before they can benefit from parent and family life education. Severe poverty can bring a complexity of social, mental, and physical problems which cause breakdown of individual and family life. As family life educators we recognize that our programs cannot reach all low-income families. But many families are not so unfortunate, and our concern is directed toward meeting the challenge of those who can enrich their lives through our programs.

⁶ Department of Public Welfare, State of Maryland: Training materials for AFDC: taped interviews, 1964.

chapter II

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE in parent and family life education with low-income families in many parts of the country by many groups is gradually being written up and talked about. As one analyzes what is being written and said, some basic principles begin to emerge. These principles were spelled out and emphasized at the Consultation in December 1964 by participants who represented a broad background of experience and a variety of settings.

The principles originate in many areas of study: some come from mental health, some from education, and others from social work. They are tentative principles for working with low-income families because most have yet to be tested through research and evaluation. They are principles born of experience in working directly with people. They are principles of helping and teaching, of stimulating and motivating. The list is not exhaustive, but these were chosen for their special applicability to parent and family life education with low-income families. In succeeding chapters, the principles will be applied to the topics of reaching and holding low-income families in programs and developing program content.

Basic principles

1. **Attitude:** Basic to our work is our *attitude toward other people*. When the "others" are of our own kind, it is not too difficult to be accepting and helpful. Even when they are poor, but clean and polite, we may be equally helpful. But it is when the "other" is beyond our understanding that we must still accept him. The other person is a person in his own right even if we do not understand him or his behavior.

Much is said in this country about respect for others and the dignity of human personality. Often, when this is to be translated into action, something goes wrong. The person who is poor—the object of our help—often retreats, he does not respond, he does not take our help. Unwittingly, our true attitudes speak through our actions and betray our distaste and our judgment of the other person as undesirable or lazy or immoral. If we look at our own attitudes with some humility, we will recognize our own humanity and the humanity of the person we wish to serve. This is the common denominator and the basis on which we can reach out to serve. Skill in helping, rich content in programing, appropriate methods, are all desirable and necessary, but none is effective unless we can truly let the person know through our attitude toward him that we are there for him.

In a group for unmarried mothers, all under 23 years of age and each with at least two children, one said she had lived in the same apartment for 3 years. She had never ventured to talk to her neighbor because she was afraid the neighbor would ask her name and she would have to say "Miss" Smith. The public health nurse meeting with the group said she was surprised to hear this because Miss Smith talked so freely in the group. Miss Smith laughed and said it was very different here—this was the first place she had ever been where she could say how she really felt. Some of the other mothers felt this way too and one said to the nurse, "You make it easy to talk. You don't say we're all bad."

If we want to help people to learn to be better parents, they must believe that they can learn; they must recognize, from the way we work with them, that they are worth something.

2. Beginning where people are: A second basic principle is to *begin where people are*. This means that at times a beautifully designed program may have to be set aside because it is not of interest to the parents being served. The ideas may be used later on, but now the parent and family life educator must concentrate on finding out what the interests of these parents are; at what level do they understand what is to be taught? what kinds of information and methods will they respond to now? are they able to discuss in a group, or are tangible projects needed? are there special aspects of their background which will help in understanding them?—are they all mothers raising children alone or all of Mexican background, or all parents with teenage children? In other words: where is the group beginning?

3. Assessment of the individual: Some *assessment of the individual and his situation* must be made for effective work. The same holds true for work with a group. Not everything needs to be or can be known about an individual or a group, and much of what will be useful can be learned as one teaches. But we should be sensitive to where

we are beginning and what each person brings to the situation, so that we can make sense to people and set the proper direction with them.

4. Recognizing the need for help: One often hears the remark, "They don't even want to be helped!" flung at the poor. While much of our ineffectiveness in reaching low-income people stems from our own lack of knowledge, understanding, and skill, it is true that many persons who need help don't know it. The poor have no corner on this to be sure, but they are an easier target for disgust. And the old truism still holds: you cannot force help on another person.

For low-income parents who see no need for instruction in being better parents, many avenues can be used to help them *recognize their need for advice*. This does not need to be very conscious or spelled out on their part, but some readiness to learn or take help is necessary if learning is to take place. The schools, for example, have a readymade situation built around the concern of the parents for their child's education. It is often difficult for the parent to accept that his child's problem stems at least in part from the home, but the school has an opening wedge in the child's attendance and behavior. The public health nurse also has good entree into most homes. Her services are tangible, direct, and usually acceptable. The step from treatment of illness to treatment of harmful child rearing practices resulting in poor health is a logical and natural one.

5. Partializing problems: In contrast to the person who feels no need for help is the one who is completely overwhelmed by his needs. Rather than being helped to recognize his needs, he needs help in looking at them one by one so that he is not immobilized or overwhelmed by them.

One worker meeting with a group of low-income mothers asked them, "Well, what's your problem?" Such a torrent of answers followed that the worker had to write them down. She spent the meeting time gathering problems from the women. She was pleased that they could express so openly what was bothering them.

After the meeting the worker planned the sequence of the following meetings, which problems she would take up with the group, and in what order. She was quite chagrined to find that only three of the eight mothers returned for the next meeting. As she and the three mothers proceeded with the low-cost food preparation she had planned, one of the mothers commented, "Betty will wish she'd been here—this is what she wanted to do." It dawned on the worker, as she talked with the mothers, that she had not told them how she planned to proceed, one step at a time, to discuss their problems and work with them. They had gone home from the first meeting with the unrelieved feeling of "all those problems!" She would have made

a better and more helpful beginning if she had helped the group to set some priorities on their problems, to plan themselves what parts of their problems they wanted help with first.

In social work this principle is called *partializing*: breaking off one piece of a problem to work on at a time. None of us can deal with life whole. We need training and practice to deal with it even a piece at a time. This is something that can be used in practical ways with low-income families. As a family learns to deal constructively with one part of a problem, the whole problem and other problems often yield to solution. Learning from one situation tends to spill over into other areas of life.

6. Recognizing and using family strengths: We learn to appreciate the learning that can take place in working with low-income families. Changes can be noted—sometimes a long time in coming—but changes which mean a great investment of effort and time. Low-income families have strengths. These *strengths must be recognized and used*. The poor are not the “happy savages” of the romanticist nor are they a depraved breed of another kind. They are human beings who have potential for growth and change and creativity. We may be fooled into seeing only the stunted growth, the dimmed imagination, or the murky life picture of the poor because of the setting in which we find them.

A public welfare worker began home visits to a young woman, the mother of three preschool children. They lived in the worst kind of slum room. Previous workers, hurrying by with large caseloads, had written, “Client very limited: unresponsive.” She was the butt of neighborhood jokes because of her appearance. Her furnishings consisted of one bed, a cookstove, and a table.

Patiently “beginning where the client was,” the worker helped her get chairs and dishes and linens. The client reported happily to the worker how thrilling it was to have her whole family sit down to eat a meal together. The client’s quick response to the concrete help she received showed a quality not observed before. The worker used this newfound strength to talk about other areas of family life.

One day, before the client moved to better housing, the worker found her writing at her table. The client was taking a correspondence course on her own and was writing out the lessons. She didn’t have the postage to mail her work, so there was an accumulation of papers. She allowed the worker to read them. Among them was an essay from which the following is taken:

My father and mother lived among the trees in a large 8 room house made of plant and shanger. Behind the house there was a large oak tree. It had a swing in it that my oldest sisters put in it. They had very much fun playing swinging in the backyard.

They had a nice well. They had a rope on it and a wheel and a bucket so they could draw water and drink it. In the spring the water was very good and cold. I always been a lover of the good cold waters and the trees. I feel sure that in the long summer before my birth, my mother must have enjoyed herself thoroughly.

In imagination, I can see the heavy pine trees with the ground all carpeted with pine needles. I hear the wind rustling mysteriously in the tree tops when the weather is fine and tearing them like mad when a storm has come up. I see the millpond made by the dam across the little river with the shining surface of the water changing in all the different lights reflecting the blue sky and the clouds above with the deep shadows of the trees or rippling prettily in long curves as the light breeze plays over it, or splashing with the brown bark of the logs as the men bring them down to the mill. You can readily perceive that such a scene and such an experience are the most enjoyable to me of anything I know in the world and I like to think I was born in such a place.

Not every person has this talent, but another mother's strength may be shifted from distress and anger at the school into constructive help to her child. The strength of life which the deprived person shows by being angry or indignant with the way he is being treated should be valued. This is not a resistance to be broken down. If we break down his defense, we may be destroying what little he values of himself. His strength, which may be expressed destructively, must be channeled constructively for the benefit of himself and his family.

7. Expectation: Related to the principle of working with the strengths of the people we serve is the principle of *expectation*. If we expect nothing, we usually get nothing. Typical here is the almost plaintive cry of the teenager who said, "If my parents had expected me to stay in school, I would have stayed there."

Expectation can be a powerful influence, for good or ill. The expectation of the gang that its members will go along with delinquent behavior can exert a tremendous force on a youngster in that direction. The expectation of a parents' group that all its members will try out family conferences can be a strong influence to act in this way.

The parent and family life educator must set expectations that are realistic for the individual and the group. The expectation must be set with some knowledge of what is possible. The successful meeting of expectations can be helped to move from group to family, and then to community. Many low-income families have difficulty meeting community expectations. With successful training and practice in the group, they can be helped to meet the demands of the wider

community. A mother receiving public assistance told her worker, "My neighbors think I'm queer because I don't run around with men. But you expect me to be different and I do want to be a good mother. So when they ask me, 'Are you queer or something,' I say 'Yeah' and that stops them!"

8. Helping make decisions: One of the expectations we must act on is that the individuals and groups we serve can be helped to *decide things for themselves*. Research in small groups shows that problem solving and making wise choices can be learned by individuals in all social classes. In other words, it is possible to teach many lower class persons how to solve problems and make good choices. People who are impoverished often feel pushed around by fate; they feel they are where they are and what they are, not by choice, but because of circumstances. To break into this fatalistic mode of thought and life, it is necessary to begin with small steps to help people decide things for themselves. The choices may be as simple as what recipe the group will try out or what topic will be discussed. But, bit by bit—partializing the problem—and seeing that the decision made is carried out—each may begin to feel a little of his life coming under his own control.

A woman told her rehabilitation worker, "I was so angry when you kept saying 'But it's not my choice to make, it's yours' that I really hated you at first. Now I see why you did it. I am *free*. I have a job and know what I can do."

9. Dealing with real, specific problems: Effective parent education programs for low-income families should be built on the *real, specific problems* that group members see as important. This principle needs emphasis. Many a parent and family life education program for low-income families has gone down in defeat because it has not met the immediate, central issues that dominate the lives of the poor. When a family doesn't know where the next meal is coming from, the parents in a parents' group can hardly be expected to discuss the niceties of toilet training—if they come to the group at all.

Part of the reality situation for a parent of low income is that he too is a person and not merely the parent of John and Jane and Jim and Since, in parent and family life education, children are to be helped through the education of their parents, we can reach the children effectively only if we reach their parents. The more integrated, healthier person the parent becomes, the better parent he can be.

A parent who is ill or unemployed needs help with these problems before he can turn his attention to problems of child rearing. If it is not within the function of our agency or organization to help him directly with his primary problem, we may nevertheless have to assist him in getting to the place where he can get help.

All of us who work with low-income families have all made many referrals. We write letters or make a call on behalf of a client or patient to get him to an appropriate source of help. We know that among our low-income patients and clients, many never do get there. The call which we make without thinking, the letter we write without effort, or the door we enter without question is completely outside the experience of the person we wanted to help. It may take handing him the telephone, to make the appointment himself. It may even mean going to the other agency with him. If he can do it alone, fine—he should. But if he cannot, it may take the extra mile on our part. We are speaking here, not of the mentally ill or of children, but of impoverished persons, who do not feel spoken to when the community is addressed, who feel they do not fit in, that they do not belong. Our accompanying such a person must be made to seem like an integral part of our service to him so that he does not feel odd or stupid or bad because of it. Again, our basic attitude of valuing him as a person will help him make use of our service, however elementary and supportive it needs to be.

The low-income parent, then, must feel our concern for him and the situation he is in. As we approach parents, we must look at their needs and reach them through a genuine concern for their problems as persons as well as for their problems as parents.

10. Recognizing progress: *A recognition of gains* made is important as we work with low-income families. When we realize what it means to us to receive recognition, whether it is a raise or a better job or even a "well done," we can appreciate what it means to an impoverished person who has known little success in his life to accomplish something worthwhile. In one group, a home economist awarded certificates to all the members of her group as they completed one series of meetings. One mother said she had framed her certificate and hung it in her living room. She had never graduated from school. Now she could show her family and friends that she could graduate from something too!

Sometimes recognition can take the form of a group talking over together what they have done, how far they have come in doing what they set out to do. With the help of the parent and family life educator, this can help affirm for each one what he has learned, what changes have taken place in himself, in the group, and in his family. In a parents' group of mothers and fathers whose children had been in training school, one mother had spoken only when asked a direct question in all 12 group meetings. At the final meeting, when the members were evaluating what the experience had meant for them, the quiet mother said, "Maybe you all thought I should talk more. Well, that's not my way. But I listened and when I went home I talked about it

with my family. Last week I was sitting down and my boy (a teenager) came from behind me and kissed me on the cheek. I'd do it all over again just for that."

Talking about what has been accomplished brings it out in the open and strengthens it. Fresh impetus is given to try the next step. It allows each one to say openly or to himself, "If I can do this, and I *can*, I can do more."

11. Setting goals: *Setting goals* is an essential part of working with groups in parent and family life education. These can be as broad as the whole field of parent education, but they must be made specific for each group to be served. Specific goals grow out of the needs and interests of the group for whom and with whom we are planning. For example, the goals for a group of low-income parents with mentally retarded children will be different from the goals of a group of low-income mothers who are raising their children alone.

There are general agency goals which bring the family life educator and a group together, such as the general goal of helping parents become more adequate parents. As specific goals evolve, however, the group to be served should be involved so that the group members' needs and interests are met through the group and its programming. If only agency goals are pursued, without group members' involvement in setting their own goals, little learning or change will take place.

The moment we begin with a group, we share our goals, "We thought you might like to get together because . . ." If goals are set mutually, the group members begin to have a stake in the group and can begin to take some responsibility for their participation in it.

Evaluating where the group is in relation to its goals is the next step, during the life of a group and at its ending. If goals have been made clear and they are realistic, it is easier to work toward them and to find satisfaction in the progress made.

12. Appropriate program methods and content: Our *methods and the content* of the programming in working toward the goals of parent and family life education must be appropriate to the group and adapted to its needs. This is an area where parent and family life educators have to make many innovations in working with low-income families. Discussion groups, so popular with many middle-class parents, have proved successful with only a very few low-income parents. Other methods have had to be found to reach these parents, to hold their interest and elicit their participation. Chapter IV deals with this topic. Here we wish to emphasize the importance of appropriate methods. Jane Addams wrote in 1902, "We slowly learn that life consists of processes as well as results, and that failure may come quite

as easily from ignoring the adequacy of one's methods as from selfish or ignoble aims." ⁶

13. Importance of effective communication: *Communication is the keystone* of the work of the parent and family life educator. Everything that is said (verbal communication) and everything that is done (nonverbal communication) can be a part of the effectiveness of the experience. Here, again, methods are vital since how we choose to communicate will determine whether we really get through to the members of the group. Verbal communication is important, but we will do well to remember that the low-income person is least equipped to say what he thinks or feels.

Nonverbal communication takes on an even more crucial role in low-income groups than in other parent groups. There is a direct tie-in here with the finding that low-income persons often want action rather than verbal insight or abstract understanding. The low-income mother most often wants to know what to do about her child's behavior, not so much how to understand him. Insight and understanding to a degree may come, and some educators say must come, but in beginning with many low-income parents, communication should be geared to action and doing rather than to thoughtful insightful verbal interchange.

The use of a group situation widens the possibilities of communication, of course. It introduces other persons besides the teacher* and the one to be helped or taught. Not only are numbers added, but a group made up of low-income parents will mean protection for the fearful and support for the timid. In a small group, one member often acts as interpreter for the other group members. This group member-interpreter is understood in a way that the teacher is not. The teacher or educator represents the authority of his agency or school or organization. He may represent the threatening community. He may not be understood by many group members. The member-interpreter may use the same words the teacher uses, but he is understood because he is not authority. He is "one of us." A mother who received individual counseling in relation to four children over several years was in a parents' group for help with a fifth child. Around many basic points of child rearing, her response in the group was, "I never understand that before!" It was as if a light had been turned on.

*Addams, Jane: DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL ETHICS. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1911. 281 pp.

*Teacher and educator are used interchangeably in this handbook to indicate the person working with and responsible for the group, regardless of his professional orientation or the fact that he may be a lay person or volunteer.

14. Positive use of authority: The *positive use of authority* is a principle basic to many of the disciplines serving low-income families through parent and family life education. Public housing personnel must use authority to insist upon maintenance of health and sanitation standards in dwelling units. Schools must hold parents responsible for their children's school attendance. Low-income families encounter authority at every turn. Often these encounters seem harsh, unyielding, punitive. But authority need not always be felt this way.

The probation office or housing authority or school can use its authority in a helpful, positive way by being genuinely concerned for the individual. This concern shows itself in providing personnel who work skillfully and with compassion, holding the person consistently to what he must do, but providing him with the help he needs to do this. It is most often the lower class person who is pinioned on authority against his will. He does not make the rules: he must follow them. He is conspicuous in speech, manner, and dress on many occasions. Often rules are made to anticipate his antisocial behavior. For him, authority and discipline are on the outside and against him. The impoverished person, buffeted by a cruel and demanding environment, finds it almost impossible to identify with the authority he feels as completely imposed on him, which he feels as alien and enemy.

This appears very bleak, but bit by bit, some parents can be helped to learn new ways for themselves and their families. One father *had* to participate in aftercare supervision with his 14-year-old son after the boy returned home from training school. The father was a member of a small group of parents that met for 8 weeks of special parent education as part of the service. As the 8 weeks ended, the father said that he had been forced into the group and service to begin with. Now that the group was ending, "they are forcing me out of it, but they can't take from me what **I** gained" and he enumerated all that he had learned and put to use in his family.

15. Continuity in working with group: Our basic principles, beginning with accepting people, to the last, of using authority positively, contain the implicit assumption of relationship. The assumption is that within the relationship of teacher or helper to parents and from parents to other parents in a group, learning takes place and help is given. Of special note for the parent and family life educator with low-income families is that helpful relationships are not gained easily nor transferred readily to another person. The *continuity of one person* in work with an individual or group is highly desirable and sometimes necessary. The low-income person is often suspicious of the professional person. At best he may have an attitude of wait-and-see for the professional to produce, before he will become involved.

At worst he may completely ignore all overtures to involve him in any kind of program.

The St. Paul Family Centered Project illustrates this principle very well.⁷ There, in the welter of agencies with which the low-income family tried to cope, one worker was designated as the "family worker." This worker helped the family use services of other agencies, interpreting them and identifying himself as the family's worker. He helped tie together the confusing redtape of the many agencies with which the family was involved. The continuity of one worker, the assurance of the steady, regular help of one trusted person helped stabilize the family and helped it with problems in many areas of living.

16. Recognition of limitations of family life education: Although we can never understand the effects of poverty completely, it is necessary that we understand as much as is available to us of new knowledge and methods. We can use our understanding sensitively and with compassion to help those who suffer from the effects of poverty. But we will need to understand enough to *know when we cannot help*. In some instances, we will need to recognize that a person is too damaged to be able to use our services. In other cases, poverty may be so harsh and relentless that only a drastic economic shift can be of any help. Our best service then will be to find the appropriate help for those in need.

⁷ *Families in Trouble*. St. Paul, Family Centered Project, 1958.

chapter III

REACHING LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

"WE HAVE interesting programs, if they'd only come and see! We can't *reach* the families we want to serve." The complaint is heard often from the parent and family life educator about low-income families. The traditional signing up for groups at PTA, the usual response to a mailing or a group asking for a class, typical of the middle class, is often missing.

How is the low-income family to be reached?

First and foremost, *personal contact is needed*. Instead of sending a letter, it would be better to go to the home. Instead of expecting a signup at a PTA meeting, it would be better to go where low-income persons congregate: at the supermarket, the tavern or bingo parlor. One public welfare worker could never find her women clients at home in the morning, despite having sent letters that she was coming. She discovered that a group of them met regularly in the local tavern for coffee. At once, they were saving fuel at home and enjoying each other's company. The worker gradually moved the group, coffeepot and all, to a nearby church.

Persons from low-income groups are to be reached most effectively through other people, not always the professional person—the teacher or educator. The most effective "other people" are often their own neighbors or persons from their part of town. A parent who is experiencing real help through parent and family life education is usually a much better salesman for our product than we can be. In some groups, as happens on some Indian reservations, where dependency has existed over a long period of time, families resent the intrusion of a home visit by a professional worker. Such families can best be reached through other families whom they know and trust.

When a home visit is made, either by the teacher or the neighbor, attractive and appropriate printed material left with the family

can be of help in interpreting a program. It can be helpful to leave the family meeting announcements, with time and place and purpose of meetings, but reading materials alone have a limited usefulness in reaching low-income families.

As we reach out to low-income families, clarity and honesty are needed in representing our program. Representing ourselves as a purely recreational program, for fun, hoping to win people with a soft approach, and then springing an educational program on them will alienate rather than attract. Varied programing can show them that learning can be fun, and that becoming more adequate parents can be very satisfying. If our program has relevance for the low-income family we hope to reach, then there must be ways of putting this into language which the low-income family can understand and to which it can respond.

By language, we do not mean only the spoken or written word. We mean the language of action, of taking and showing, of calling for, of introducing them to new experiences.

Speaking and doing the language of low-income families will involve relating our program to the immediate situations of these families. Our program must have something to say to their present problems. This means individualizing the approach to reach families. It means individualizing the program for the specific families and groups we wish to reach and serve. Each agency and organization will have to determine for itself how it will do this.

The approach of the public health nurse will be through the avenue of the family's health, while the school counselor's will be related to the child's school performance and adjustment. The same goals of healthful family living are the ultimate goals of both professional groups, but the approaches and the programing will grow out of the service each one has to offer the family in meeting its specific needs.

There is some confusion now because low-income families have not responded in great numbers to the specific services offered. Family life educators are being advised to "serve the whole person." Does this mean that we are to try to be all things to all people, which we have repeatedly been warned against? No; but it does mean an approach which has concern for the person as a whole person or for the family as a whole family. It does mean seeing a person not just as a sick person who can be helped to get well or as a mother who must learn to feed her family economically or as a parent whose child is misbehaving in school.

The low-income family can be reached through a specific service—in fact, the more specific and concrete it is, the more readily the family may be reached. But the reaching out must be with concern

for the person and the family. Concern, interest, compassion will help each one feel he is a person in his own right, and not merely the object of our desire to help.

Concrete help, tangible evidence of our wish to serve, will help reach many low-income families. This help should not be used to buy the participation of families. The assistance check, the surplus foods, remodeled clothing, or even refreshments can be such an integral part of the whole service that they can be accepted and used without fostering or reinforcing dependency.

The very act of seeking out what a family needs to exist can be most humiliating to low-income families. A mothers' group in a low-cost housing project was discussing plans for Christmas. The mothers were speaking so easily of going to half a dozen places to ask for baskets, shoes, and gifts of all sorts that the housing aide asked how it felt to ask for things. A deluge followed. A very hardened looking mother broke down and said how she hated it. She was receiving public assistance, she said, and even there, when she went to ask for help, she rushed from the reception room with her head down when she was called to be interviewed. "But you have to do it. How else are you going to live?" was the general bitter consensus.

In reaching low-income families, it is often helpful to *meet them on their own ground*. A nearby, familiar place for the meeting—the parlor of a housing project community center, a room in a nearby school or church—will usually be more comfortable for many low-income families to reach and use than it would be for them to travel outside their own community. Not only is the nearby meeting place familiar, it may also be reached on foot, while the downtown meeting place may mean carfare. Many parent and family life education groups in low-income areas are finding that meeting in the homes of group members can be very successful. In one group, sponsored by public health nurses, the mothers moved from home to home. One mother asked that her home be used last. With the help of a home economist, she painted her living room and put up new curtains so that her shabby home would be more presentable for her new friends.

Sometimes, despite distances and carfare, it is *helpful to have a family life education group meet in the agency or school*. This is especially true if the agency has an authoritative function, such as the school or probation service must perform. The experience of being in a group, which is often positive for its members, can help the "bad" agency become the "good" agency. The agency can then become more effective as a constructive force in the lives of the families served.

A child welfare worker met in the agency with a group of teenage foster children. The worker was trying to help the youngsters prepare to leave foster care and to be on their own. The group

bragged about meeting in the agency boardroom. They were incensed one day to find the board of directors was using *their* group meeting room! Another day, one of the girls said, "The only other time I was here they took me away from my mother. It's OK now, but I didn't think I'd ever like coming here." For these foster children, the bad agency had become at least partially good and helpful.

"Come dressed as you are." Low-income families need reassurance that they will not be terribly different from others when they come to a meeting. They don't want to be poorly dressed when everyone else is well dressed. Actually, as groups meet and relationships grow, parents who previously have done little about their appearance begin to wear clean clothes or to shampoo their hair or to show in other outward ways the importance of the meetings to them.

"Come as you are" should be an invitation to come and be accepted as one is now. For some mothers, this will mean inviting the boy friend. One agency was very much aware of the varieties of relationship in its low-income neighborhood. All agency invitations were addressed to include boy friends, grandparents, and anyone else immediately concerned with the care of children. This awareness of a reality situation is also an awareness and acceptance of a cultural difference.

From group to group, even within the confines of one neighborhood, there will be differences we must be aware of in trying to reach parents.

In areas where Puerto Ricans live, the approach must often be made through the husband and father. Until the wife has her husband's permission to participate, there is little likelihood that she will come to meetings. However, in some areas, the husbands consent to this participation if arrangements are made for wives to come in groups.

In a largely Negro neighborhood, preschool children brought to a parent and family life meeting could not be pried loose from their mothers. Gradually, with the use of refreshments and simple programming for the children within sight of their mothers, the youngsters were weaned for the length of a group meeting. To understand and deal with this behavior meant knowing something about the families. It was found that the families lived in such close quarters, with whole families to one room, that some of the children had never been anywhere without a parent present.

In another preschool situation the mothers could not bear to be separated from their children at first. Even when the children were moved to another room, if a mother heard her child's voice, she would run to tell him what to do or what not to do. Here it was found that

the mothers were fearful that the children would do the wrong thing. They had to be on hand to control them rigidly.

The outward behavior in both groups appeared to be about the same. In the first group the children clung to their mothers because they had never known anything but to be with them. In the second group, the mothers held on to the children so that they could control them. The different causes of behavior point to different needs to be met in the family life groups.

Cultural differences create different needs. In some areas well-supervised babysitting facilities must be provided if parents are expected to participate. In other areas, one parent or the other will remain at home with the children. Differences will exist as to when groups can meet. In some neighborhoods, mothers will come out only for daytime meetings; in other neighborhoods, only evening meetings are attended.

Some parent and family life programs report that the only way they reach fathers is to "leave the backdoor open." Particularly when a film is being shown or a speaker is on hand, no formal attendance is taken and the door is not locked so that they can slip in unobtrusively. These differences will have to be discovered and used so that the program can be effective.

In the context of cultural differences, some family life educators contend that, because low-income families are not always geared to the precise use of time our society demands, they should be allowed to come and go in a program. Programing may be set for a certain time, these staff people say, but great latitude should be allowed for people to arrive early or late. It is true that flexibility in timing is necessary, but this is true to some degree in working with all social classes.

It is in this very area of the use of time that we can carry on valuable and useful teaching in family life education with low-income families. Children must get to school on time, an employee cannot show up late for work consistently, nor does the supermarket stay open past its stated closing time for the person who doesn't know what time it is. While we try to meet the reality situation of the parent, there are reality situations of the society in which we live which we must also meet. Let us be certain that our flexibility in the use of time really is for the benefit of the families we serve and not to justify our own lack of focus or purpose.

When we speak of flexibility of time, perhaps we mean that low-income parents may drift in early because they like coming to the group and they want to enjoy as much of it as possible. If this is true, then a comfortable lounge facility may be made available to them. Or the group's regular meeting room can be open to them so they can talk with others who come early or work on a current project.

A mothers' group began with an hour's meeting time. It was found that this was as long as the members' interest could be held. As the group developed and projects and discussion progressed, the time was extended, consciously and with the approval of the group, to an hour and a half and later, to 2 hours.

A purposeful use of time with low-income persons not only helps them learn a better use of time, it also shows them that we value their time. Hours and days are spent in waiting by those who are poor. They wait for interviews at the welfare office. They wait all morning in a clinic. They wait for surplus foods to be distributed. They wait to pay their rent. They must feel as if their time is of value to no one. If we cannot cut down the waiting time for them in other community services, perhaps we can value the time when we are directly with them in programs led by us.

Many parent and family life education programs are set up to meet a certain number of times. To know that a group will meet 8 or 10 times can be helpful to low-income parents. The meetings do not stretch endlessly ahead of them: the total investment in time can be seen. If at the end of the series, the group is so meaningful that its members wish to go on together, the group can be restructured for another period of time. Such a purposeful use of time needs sensitive handling by the worker so that the group does not feel pushed.

In timing, some groups lend themselves to being open ended. The group goes on continuously, some members dropping out and new members coming in. Such a clublike group can afford a relaxed, social learning experience for many low-income persons. Here the family life educator's sensitivity must be attuned to whether the members' needs are being met in the group. He must see to it that members who really need the experience are being helped to use it and that an exclusive clique does not dominate as the continuing core of the group. Within the membership of the continuing group, the family life educator should also be alert to the possibilities of structuring short-term groups around members' special needs. Parents whose children are entering adolescence may profit from a series centered on the topic of adolescence, then disband and continue in the larger group.

Using our time effectively, then, we should be aware that many low-income families are not as time oriented as we are. With help, they can learn to use time more purposefully, a big step in helping them to relate to the greater world of employment and school and appointments.

The principle of *helping people to decide things for themselves* comes to the fore as we consider what we can do to reach and hold low-income families in parent and family life programs. When individuals and groups make their own decisions, they move toward greater

independence. At the same time, they are investing themselves in the program, in the group. They have given of themselves, of their time and ideas and effort. Their increased feelings of responsibility for what happens should result in more regular attendance, and in a more stable group. Even in very stable groups among low-income parents, there are still absences because of illness or because men's work shifts change, but real effort goes into attending the group regularly.

Responsibilities in family life programing must be real, not made work. Sometimes what we would regard as a task too small to challenge anyone is the place to begin with a fearful parent. A mother who would stay away if she were given the job of preparing coffee for a group may respond if asked to fold and place napkins at the table. The new member must not be overwhelmed with responsibility, but helped to take a little at a time.

Everyone in a group can be a part of planning, although not each one can do each of the tasks planned. The more experienced members can recruit new members; the more reticent can take care of the housekeeping chores of the group until they grow up to other work. Whatever the ability and experience, each needs to feel himself a part of the whole. Each one must come to feel "this is *our* group." The teacher with the family life group who lets slip with "*my* group" may be more accurate than he wishes to be and may need help in letting the group belong to its members.

Variety of programing which is geared to the needs, interests, and level of understanding of low-income families will help in reaching and holding membership. We need to be imaginative in using enough of known experience so that members will not feel threatened by everything new and different. The new, combined with the old, can gradually expand the horizons of members. Variety also should awaken and stimulate individual interests. How dull it would be, even for articulate middle-class parents, to attend only discussion groups—no bridge club, no athletics, no hobbies, no holiday trip. While we cannot be all these to low-income parents, one of our goals will be to help them make use of the wider opportunities within their reach. Practicing, trying out and learning in the small group where it is safe to make mistakes will make possible a variety of experiences. Discussion groups, talking: yes. But also demonstrations, field trips, dancing, carpentry, role playing, films, cooking, civic action, music, refreshments, excursions, family nights, housewarmings, and roof raisings.

Belonging to a group fills two basic needs of human beings: the need to belong and the need to give. If we can help meet these two needs through our parent and family life programs, we will reach and hold low-income families.

DEVELOPING PROGRAM CONTENT AND METHODS

HOW DO we arrive at appropriate program content and methods in working with low-income families in parent and family life education? The question is asked advisedly, because we do not propose to present specific content for family life education. Rather, a discussion of what needs to be taken into consideration in program planning follows.

Family and child welfare agencies, Agricultural Extension Service, church boards of family life, the Children's Bureau, to name a few, have materials in breadth and depth, treating all phases of child development and family life education. Our question is: how can one adapt the riches of these available materials to work with low-income families?

Basic principles of teaching, of work with groups, and work with individuals can again be our guide. Beginning with the services our agency or organization has to offer, we assess (or diagnose) the needs of the persons we wish to serve (in this instance, low-income families) to determine what methods and content will meet some of these needs: we then develop our materials—our curriculum—to meet those needs (treatment). How do we adapt this known procedure to the low-income family?

1. Program to serve people: Rather than molding people to fit our program, we must mold the program to fit people. If this is true, then program is not a fixed, static perfect plan, but a tool or instrument to be used in reaching our goal of service to people.

Viewing program as a tool may help us get a proper perspective on ourselves in relation to the service we give and the people we wish to serve. If we see ourselves as our main tool—the use of ourselves in teaching and in forming helpful relationships—we can then picture program content and methods as auxiliary tools at hand to help us.

As we develop a program *with* the group itself, the development of the program becomes part of the instrument of learning. Learning achieved in this way is not only learning of subject matter taught, but also learning responsibility, sharing, and of valuing oneself and others.

2. Discovering the needs of low-income families: If family life education is to serve people, we have to find out what they need from us. We can begin to find existing needs by turning to the neighborhood we are to serve, in which low-income families live.

Pastors, priests, schoolteachers, and ward leaders can provide us with information and opinions about what is needed. Often the informal leaders of a neighborhood can tell us even better what really bothers people in their neighborhood. The butcher, the druggist, or the tavern keeper who is sought out for advice can apprise us of neighborhood needs.

What about low-income families themselves? Are they able to tell us what they need? Yes, we can learn from the families themselves. Verbally, they can tell us some of the things they are interested in and feel they can use from family life education. If we observe them, they will show us still more specifically what they need.

We may see mothers and children crowded anxiously into a small dispensary and may hear the kinds of problems they discuss with each other. We can observe the meager response at PTA to a talk on curriculum and watch the animated conversations as parents visit classrooms and see their children's work. We can see the sullen lines outside the State employment office and hear the boisterous noise in the poolhall. The all-out neighborhood effort for a family which is burned out of its home tells us something of the need for action and the response to the immediate physical needs of others among low-income families.

In assessing needs of low-income families for parent and family life programs, it is important to know what family homes are really like. To know this, we may have to visit a few in the process of beginning and carrying on the program. As a preschool program for culturally deprived children was begun in one city, teachers were amazed and shocked to find what their pupils' homes were like. We must go beyond the shock and amazement and find the strengths, as well as the needs, to use in our efforts to help low-income families.

3. Adapting program to meet the needs of low-income families: A parent and family life education program to meet the needs of low-income families follows an assessment of family needs. The following examples illustrate how one area of service—homemaking—was adapted to meet the needs of many kinds of low-income groups.

A settlement house in an urban area cooperated with the public

housing authorities in helping a group of mothers try to improve their housekeeping. The women were such poor housekeepers that the families were to be evicted within 90 days if no improvement took place.

The mothers differed from their neighbors in the housing project mainly in size of family: the "poor housekeeping" families were of larger-than-average size. The mothers themselves "appeared to be of at least average intelligence, articulate, able to verbalize their feelings, very candid about personal faults, mild-mannered, evidenced good sense of humor, were not social isolates nor unduly wrapped up in themselves. . . . With few exceptions these women could make and sustain a warm relationship and generally wanted a richer life for themselves."⁸

The main difficulties the women had in becoming better homemakers were a lack of organization in their daily habits, lack of housekeeping skills, and lack of energy to perform the many physical tasks of homemaking.

The program set up to help the mothers and their families included:

1. *Mothers' Discussion Groups*: A series of 12 sessions, conducted on a weekday afternoon, intended to assist the mothers (or mother substitutes keeping house) in specific areas of home-making functioning. Absent mothers were visited by the caseworker, working closely with the discussion leader, during the week of absence. Help was given in overcoming factors contributing to the absence.
2. *Homemaking Consultant*: A mature woman, who was a skilled homemaker, visited the homes of all the mothers in the experimental group, by appointment. This worker actually engaged the mother, or mother substitute and others at home at the time, in directing cleaning activities and in planning other housekeeping functions including cooking, budgeting, etc. She provided guidance, instruction, and supportive relationships.
3. *Play Group* for preschool children met during the discussion hours being held with the mothers. . . .
4. *Teenage Girls' Discussion Group* led by a Guild staff member. Program content was determined by discussion of problems in housekeeping as the girls saw them. Consideration was given to how each girl could help change the family's patterns of housekeeping through specific actions to which they committed themselves. . . .

⁸Lewis, Harold, and Guinessy, Mildred: *HELPING THE POOR HOUSEKEEPER IN PUBLIC HOUSING*. Philadelphia: Friends Neighborhood Guild, 1964. 35 pp.

5. *Teenage Boys' Discussion Group* (similar to girls' group).
6. *Fathers' Discussion Group* led by a Guild staff member, a mature man. Home visits were made in order to contact fathers directly and subsequent visits were deemed appropriate. Program content included consideration of (a) the reality of possible eviction and the fathers' stake in the resolution of the crisis; (b) the fathers' expectation of family members and selves; (c) selection of factors on which family action could be taken; (d) selection of factors on which some personal action could be taken now, leading to some personal commitment to specific action; and (e) evaluation of personal action, and the fathers' relation to present and future role as the responsible head of the household.

The Guild Woodwork Shop was open to fathers and teenagers over 17 years of age throughout the 12 weeks of the demonstration.

The programs of both the homemaking consultant, the caseworker, and the group discussion leader were limited in scope and depth to that which the workers believed could be utilized by the families within the time available. The help in the home and the group discussions were planned to give the mother insight into her housekeeping difficulties, to broaden her housekeeping experience and ability. It was learning combined with action in order to help the mother or other member of the family gain some understanding of what good housekeeping was and some skill in typical housekeeping tasks. For this reason, staff worked for actual involvement of the family members around the "concrete" rather than the "abstract." For example, helping mothers to take their stoves apart themselves, helping mothers discuss with the children specific ways they could help around the house; i.e., empty trash, make their beds, straighten their rooms, etc.

These women seek and use direct advice and follow guidance authoritatively given in relation to specific actions to be taken in performing their housekeeping roles. Such help, however, is not effective in grappling with family relationship problems and personal, introspective concerns. These latter respond more readily to emotional support and reassurance, along with clarification of elements in the situation and alternative actions possible, from which to choose. In almost all instances, the provision of concrete resources is welcomed and helpful, whether limited to household cleaning materials, instruction booklets, or expanded to include washing machine and sewing machine where the need is indicated and otherwise unlikely to be met or direct referral to other community resources for counseling and financial help, where these are indicated.

This is how families were helped with homemaking in one

project which carried program in depth for families able to use it.

On an Indian reservation in Montana, an Agricultural Extension worker is developing a homemaking project by bringing the program to the women who live in small, scattered clusters. The worker's car is the storeroom: she must carry with her, from place to place, whatever is needed in equipment. Beginning where the families were and filling an immediate need, the worker began by teaching the mothers in the low-income families how to sew curtains for their new housing project homes. As the worker met in some of the homes for the sewing, other needs were brought to her attention. Some of these she helped the women work on, others she took on behalf of the groups to the housing personnel. The worker's "mobile unit" is not as elaborate as some, but serves the purpose quite well.

In a midwest high school a home economics teacher in a low-income area saw the need for family life education among her students. On visiting homes, she found that the parents needed much the same kind of parent and family life program her students needed. With her help, a mothers' group was formed. The mothers' group studied the same materials, had the same demonstrations, and went on the same field trips their daughters had. At the end of the semester, the two groups met together to evaluate their experiences. The learning of both groups was greatly enhanced in the areas of learning covered, such as cooking and sewing, but an even greater gain was found in improved family relationships.

In a low-cost housing project a regular "housing clinic" is held. It is compulsory for residents whose housekeeping would result in eviction if not improved and voluntary for all other residents. Demonstrations and the use of a simple manual which residents may keep bring action into the program. The group is lively and the worker allows for participation in planning from group members. "Graduation" is always a ceremony in which all participate with enthusiasm and a sense of accomplishment.

In a mothers' group in a public assistance agency, the social worker found that many of the clients' problems stemmed from lack of homemaking skills. The worker planned with the group for programing and did some of the basic teaching herself. A home economist met several times with the group, teaching the use of government surplus foods and the use of inexpensive materials in furnishing a home. The group visited a model apartment in a low-cost housing project.

When they had started as a group, the worker had asked each mother to make a list of her needs in homefurnishings, including furniture, linens, dishes, etc. At the next group meeting, only two mothers had their lists. The others said they were sure she was kidding—what was the use anyhow, the agency would never give them what they

needed. As the mothers worked with the social worker and the home economist, they found they could do things on their own which cost little or no money to improve their homes. They also found that, as the worker came to know of their specific needs, she could make good on her promise to secure furniture, etc. The mother who could find no fault with her bare, filthy home when she started in the group ended by asking her landlord for paint. She painted every room in her house and sewed curtains for two rooms.

In another mothers' group on homemaking, public health nurses and home economists worked together, supplementing each other's knowledge and skill to provide an ongoing activity and discussion group for very deprived mothers with mentally retarded children. The content was geared to help the mothers with the special problems created by the presence of the mentally retarded child in the home, along with all their other homemaking problems.

In all these groups there was the basic need for improved home-making skills. The use of programing ranged from cooperation on a rather sophisticated level among urban agencies involving several disciplines to the simplest one-person service on the wide-open plains. Yet each was effective because it was appropriate to the group served and planned specifically for those who were to receive the service.

4. Program paced to members' needs: The programing was effective because it began with the group's interests and moved at the group's pace. In the high school group, for example, the teacher did not complete the textbook. To have achieved this, the girls and their mothers would have done little else than read. From this they might have learned something, but very little compared with what they learned by working together, first in those areas which interested them. Then, as their horizons were broadened, their interests grew and spread to other topics. Textbook and the usual formal teaching plan were laid aside; knowledge from the text and experience from using teaching plans came in, but the teaching was for *this* group. The pace, the materials, the new lesson plans were geared to *this* group.

We have used homemaking as one example of adapting program to meet specific group needs. The same principle can be applied to physical health, mental health, adolescent behavior, or what have you.

5. Building program around meaningful problems: Program content should be geared to the low-income family. Making use of the current life experience of low-income members in parent and family life programs can be worked in quite readily if one remains sensitive to what they are. A public welfare worker knew from their home situations that many AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) parents were having difficulty with sex education for their

children. The worker knew that this is an area of concern to most parents and that many low-income families are anxious about how to handle this with their children, if they handle it at all. As part of planning for program with the group, the worker suggested inviting a pediatrician to address them. While the worker herself could have given the group much of the information the physician gave, the status of the medical doctor and a new feeling toward doctors because of their good experience with this one, made a lasting impression on the parents. In their group's history, this was one of the high points. They often referred to it with pride, feeling they had accomplished something worthwhile as a group.

Many things come together in the example given: the need of the parents for help in dealing with the sex education of their children; the continuity of the social worker in relating this one experience to their total experience; planning together for an outside resource person to come in at an appropriate time in the life of the group; the help of an expert, giving the group status; a contact with an important person from the outside world; a goal which was within reach of the group. Seemingly small parts of programing can have deep effects, if they are a part of the total process of the group's life.

Within the group the worker can test to find what the life experience of the members is. This can involve simple role playing or problem gathering or just plain discussion. In one group, a mother had written down what she wanted to get out of the group, which was just beginning a new series of meetings:

SOME OF THE THINGS WE TALKED ABOUT AT OUR PREVIOUS MEETINGS

To refresh our memories, we discussed a number of interesting subjects concerning the upbringing of our children, and I think it helped us to understand our children better. I know it has helped me and I have become more adjusted to my children and know them better. We discussed such topics as: How do we let our children know we love them? Why do girls act like boys and boys act like girls? Should we be ashamed to tell our girls about their menstrual periods? Also, do we discuss with our sons about the period of life in which they begin to have wet dreams? How do we answer questions that children ask us which might seem a little embarrassing to answer? Is it hard to raise a family without a father? All of these subjects had very interesting and helpful answers. We also attended a movie at the department of public welfare which brought out a lot of interesting facts and we also had the privilege to ask the doctor questions that we didn't know the facts about. We also discussed why some children sass their parents or fight them and why children will go to other homes and clean up and won't do it at home. If we stop to think, we couldn't help but say all of these subjects are interesting

and play a very important part in the upbringing of our children. I think a good subject to discuss now is: Should we turn our children against their father if he is not living in the home with them? Another subject is: Should we condemn our children if they have made several bad mistakes which have caused people to dislike the entire family? These two subjects I am very much interested in and would like to have discussed because (and I am not ashamed to say) it plays a very important part in my family life. Since the last meeting we had, I have gotten out more with my children, we've planned meals together, I've been to the schools to discuss my children's progress and I've been to the library with them. To sum up these facts, I'd like very much to say that I have learned a lot from these last meetings and that is why I would like to have these two subjects discussed. I think they will help me to become more adjusted to my family. I thank Mrs. P. [worker] very much because if she hadn't decided to have these meetings, I might have been still searching for a way to become more adjusted to my family, and I might still have been that sad and lonely woman still wondering what to do to make a more happier life for my family.

This began a discussion in the mothers' group which lasted for several meetings!

The reality situation of the family with a special problem holds a tremendous potential for parent and family life education. Groups for parents of the mentally retarded, for example, have been successful in bringing together parents with a common problem. While some low-income parents have been involved in such groups and other specialized groups, they are not participating in appreciable numbers. The same difficulties which hold true for lack of participation in other parent groups hold true for these specialized groups as far as parents from low-income areas are concerned. A special effort and special groups can be formed with them in mind.

The limited capacities for functioning as parents of some low-income parents means a slow, laborious process through simple education, emotional support, and encouragement. The limited parent cannot keep up with the parent of average intelligence. If, in addition, the limited parent is in the low-income group, where he is likely to be because of his earning capacity, he cannot buy help and his relatives are less likely to be able to provide it for him.

Helping parents with mental limitations is forcing agencies concerned with "what is minimal in standards for family living" to pare down to the bare bone what must be in a home to make it adequate for the rearing of children. And even when the minimum is spelled out, there are parents who cannot reach it. These parents, many of them extremely limited in their abilities and potential, need much help in using what resources they do have to try to maintain an adequate home. Family life programing for such parents requires, in the

context of program discussed here, the simplest of content learned through doing and accompanied by understanding and warm support from the helping person.

Other problems around which meaningful parent and family life education can be built include a parent raising children alone, a physically handicapped child or parent in the home, mental illness, unmarried parenthood (the unmarried parents themselves and/or their parents), and mothers employed outside the home.

These problems can be treated effectively in family life education groups, relying on the basic principles of helping and teaching, plus knowledge of the common problem which brings the group together. Here, again, the continuing help and concern of one person to work with the group or individual or family is important. Experts can be brought in as they are needed, but the helper or teacher for the group should be present to help relate the expert knowledge to the members' life experience.

In any parent and family life education programing with low-income families, one of the strengths of programing lies in the use of *activities which involve people creatively.*

Programing which allows for much nonverbal expression and communication will not only reach and hold low-income families, but learning and change can take place best where something is experienced and not just talked about. Programing which makes use of old skills and teaches new ones, programing which creates opportunities for interaction among group members is called for with low-income families.

6. Variety in methods needed: Effective programing in parent and family life education with low-income families requires the use of a variety of methods and materials adapted to the interests and needs of low-income families. As family life educators have struggled to reach low-income families, many have stumbled by accident on effective methods. In a project for preschoolers and their mothers in a very deprived neighborhood, the mothers were introduced to books appropriate for reading to their children. It was found the mothers had never read to their children; they read very little for their own enjoyment. In the group, they had the books read to them and took turns in reading themselves which they enjoyed immensely. The next step for the group was to visit the local library, where they signed up for library cards and learned where the children's books were kept. The family life educators found it was important to the mothers that they kept a step ahead of their children in learning; the mother was now familiar with the library. She could take her children there and be the one to teach them about the library and its use. Other pro-

graming followed which helped the mothers learn things they could teach their children: trips to the zoo and to a park and learning to know the school and its personnel where the children would be enrolled the next year.

Taking advantage of the teachable moment and innovating as the need arose, a home economist found that recipes, supposedly in basic English, were still too difficult for her low-income clients in a mothers' group. Somewhat at a loss as to how to proceed, she went over one recipe with the group, suggesting new wording. She found that the women not only used the recipe learned this way, they were also proud to be part of creating something which could be used by others. One by one, the group "translated" the recipes and subsequently accompanied the home economist in pairs to help demonstrate the recipes for other groups.

Mothers of preschoolers in an extremely deprived rural area, for want of other materials, made papier-mache animals for their children's use in the nursery school. The use of ordinary materials, the freeing experience of creating something unique, and the usefulness of the product brought the group together as a group for the first time.

Necessity being the mother of invention, imaginative family life educators will continue to stumble on effective methods. With careful planning and preparation, however, the worker can anticipate many situations, and with the creative use of accidents, help an individual or group. Simple role playing, for example, is of use in many ways. A social worker helped a group of unmarried mothers role-play to face honestly the problem of enrolling their children in school. They took turns being themselves and neighbors and school personnel. They felt some of the emotional impact of enrolling children with last names different from their own, of giving their own names as "Miss" rather than the "Mrs." they now used, of "father's whereabouts unknown" or even "father unknown." Through this feeling experience, some of the mothers were able to deal honestly with their children's questions also and no longer needed to manufacture a "daddy who is away on a ship." As the women took the role of the school personnel, their stereotyped notions of what they would meet became obvious. It was possible then to talk about how realistic this was out of their own experience and the roles were played much more sympathetically.

Role playing in another parents' group took the form of acting out group procedure. Each took a turn at being chairman, secretary, guest, group heckler, etc. It was a very deprived group whose members felt self-conscious about playing host to a speaker and another parents' group. Through role playing, they groomed themselves for their real roles and gained some insight into their own behavior as individuals and as a group. When the shared meeting arrived, the host

group insisted on giving the guests a pamphlet on family life which they themselves had rejected for use; they had to give their guests something tangible to take home with them!

Variety in programing can also be achieved with the use of films. Discretion is needed in knowing when and how to use a film with a low-income group. The film should be previewed, at least by the professional worker attached to the group, to judge its appropriateness for viewing by the group. Recently films have been made which are not entirely middle class oriented as to actors, settings, and situations. An attempt should be made to use those films which do reflect more accurately the world of the impoverished and where realistic expectations of solutions to family problems are presented. In current research, it is being found that for their most effective use, parent and family life educational films to be used with deprived persons should have a sound track made for them. The regular sound track of many films is not understood by many low-income persons; hence, little learning can occur.

Learning from a film can be increased by preparing a group for its use and by discussing it with the group after viewing it. Often, it is helpful to show the film twice. During the first viewing, it can be seen mainly for enjoyment and for observing its immediate impact on the group. The film can be discussed from the point of view of first reactions, what each one was most interested in. Then the family life educator may point out what to look for, emphasizing the learning they are seeking and show the film again.

Many films are now being made with a recording tape on the side opposite the sound track. With the proper sound projector (many projectors are now manufactured with the needed equipment), a sound track can be added to the film, making the situations in the film specific to a group's needs. With a little help and some time and effort, a parents' group can achieve an unusual and rewarding effect by writing the script, playing the parts, and adding a sound track to a film.

A mothers' group in a women's State reformatory used this method in preparing a TV show. They themselves did not wish to be photographed, so an appropriate film was chosen and the group dubbed in a sound track. Local TV stations carried the film and its new sound track as a part of a public service program.

The process of interesting the TV stations, choosing a film, writing a script and recording it included much activity on the part of the worker, along with the group. But the benefits of the project to the mothers spread to many areas of their lives. The method of working together as a group was something new to them. The project came together as a mothers' group midway in a year. First they had

been able to plan only from week to week what they wanted to do and discuss. By now, they outlined several months of work for themselves. The mothers and worker had mutual trust and respect for each other.

The members' horizons had been broadened so that when the idea of interpreting themselves and their problems to the outside world was suggested, it did not seem absurd or unattainable. Weeks of group meetings were spent in writing and rehearsing the script in the group. When the engineers from the TV station arrived, the group members carried their carefully rehearsed roles off to perfection.

The mothers' group, all prisoners from low-income families, gained stature in the reformatory through its experience. In a sense, it had gained a voice for all the inmates, speaking for all of them to the outside world. The script itself was the product of long discussions about why the women were in the reformatory in terms of their own behavior, and their life situations. They discussed how to sustain relationships with their family through the months and years away from home. Talking flowed naturally with the goal in view: an interpretation of themselves, which even the parole board might see and hear!

7. Group size important: Effective methods for family life education with low-income families must include a careful analysis of the size of groups through which to serve families. Research on groups shows that a small group with a job to get done (i.e., a task-oriented group) is the kind of group in which most learning can occur and through which changes in behavior most readily take place. A group of 5 or 6 to 14 or 15 is usually considered "small" in the context of groups studied. A group of this size allows for maximum interaction among its members, and an intimacy not possible in a large group or mass activity and yet permits and fosters kinds and degrees of interaction not possible with only one or two. The teacher or worker in such a size group can observe and work with the interaction in the group with optimal effect.

Programing and method in parent and family life education with low-income groups should take advantage of these findings and adapt program to the use of small groups whenever possible. We may have to prove this point in our own experience, as an Extension worker did. She was assigned to a very low-income area. She found it impossible to get together the minimum number required for a group, 20 women. She found that if she were to work here at all, she would have to work with smaller groups than the agency's manual allowed for. With real conviction about serving in the low-income area, the worker gained permission to work for a year with lower-than-minimum-sized groups. She documented her work carefully during this

time and drew housing management personnel and teachers into the program. At the end of the year, she demonstrated the effectiveness of her work, despite the lack of large groups. With the evidence clearly at hand, the agency allowed the worker to continue with small groups.

It is not always possible to work with small groups in parent and family life programs. Family life education can reach some low-income families in the same way persons of other classes are reached. PTA meetings, school fairs, county and State fairs, church gatherings, open forums, and demonstrations open to the public will continue to draw audiences which are large in number and include some low-income persons. When it is feasible, a large group can be broken down into small groups for even very short periods of time. In this way, the participant feels himself addressed more directly than through the larger group.

Variety in programing is essential for larger groups, also. Films, speakers, panels, skits, and demonstrations can be used. Change of pace and switches in method are necessary, not only to avoid tedium, but to increase our chances of reaching our audience. Some persons are reached more effectively through one method than another.

The use of mass media for parent and family life education should be explored for reaching low-income families. An example has been given of the use of television. Good use can also be made of radio. In one State mental health program for family life education, it was felt that far too few low-income families were being reached.

It was an established fact however, that most of these "difficult to reach" were for the most part devotees of the radio. . . . Couple this with the fact that many of the women of these families are avid "coffee clatchers" and a design for learning begins to emerge.

The radio station agreed to lend its service. . . . The health department via radio invited parents to send in or telephone in questions regarding their children on which they would like help. A large part of the questions dealt with problems concerning either sex education or discipline. Because sex education is developmental and could involve so much of general maturation, this topic was selected. The involvement was so great that hundreds were interested enough to come together at the end of the series to clear up unanswered concerns.

As a result, a group of leaders was called together. They were invited from all areas of the county. They were asked to serve as discussion leaders using their own homes as "listening posts" for a radio series on child growth and development. To aid them, they were to have six or seven 3-hour sessions of study,

involving both process and content. About 35 leaders were finally involved.

In the morning they listened to the radio program with their personally invited guests in their own homes. After an informally presented hour-long radio program, the trained hostess led a discussion. In the afternoon of the same day the group leaders convened at the health department with the mental health educator to evaluate the experience and to plan for the next session in their homes.⁹

Such a use of radio, combined with other imaginative methods, can reach many parents with their first taste of family life education.

Publications, including foreign-language newspapers and magazines read by many low-income families, should be used to carry information on family life education and to help make such material more popular with low-income groups. The popularity of readers' advice columns illustrates how effective certain types of journalism can be in reaching a wide audience. Newspapers in towns and rural areas and neighborhood papers in large cities often carry the minutiae of announcements regarding club meetings, organizational plans and projects, and build up the status of a group in the eyes of the reader. Publicity in the newspapers or over the radio can be very helpful to the members of a group made up of low-income persons. It helps them feel they are a part of the wider community in addition to keeping them informed of their group's activities.

Content and method, then, can help the low-income family life education group involve itself in the community in many ways. Mass media may be one of the more peripheral ways, but they may provide us with an opening wedge. Handbills distributed at supermarkets, TV spot announcements, and newspaper articles can help prepare a neighborhood or community to think and look in the direction of more intensive, personal programing in family life education through community agencies and groups.

⁹ Middlewood, Esther: A STATE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM FOR CULTURALLY DEPRIVED GROUPS. Lansing, Mich., 1964. (Mimeo.)

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING

THE PARENT and family life education agency or organization creates a certain tone or climate which it communicates through its personnel and program. If it is to be effective in a positive way in the lives of the people it seeks to serve, the agency must be committed to work with low-income families in such a way that it provides a compatible environment for its efforts. Whether parent and family life education for low-income families is a small, new part of the program or the major service area of an agency, it must be able to enjoy its place in the sun along with other services. Distinctions, relegating work with low-income families to a second-class-citizen rating, works its subtle influence on staff as well as on membership. Even in a large public welfare agency, serving the community's neediest citizens, there can be a pecking order, with some services being regarded as the more desirable and elite in which to work. For a full commitment of staff which can begin to cope with the problem of the poor, the agency must be clear about the rightness and importance of serving low-income families and it must reflect this in what it says and does.

One avenue the agency must pursue toward effective work with low-income families is staff development. The regular features of staff development must be realigned for service to low-income families. Supervision, staff meetings, seminars, and inservice training of all sorts must be geared to work with the differences the low-income families bring with them. In the agency where only part of the total job is with low-income families, staff meetings and department or interdepartmental meetings where all staff members are involved should be used to carry information and discussion of the work with low-income groups. This is a necessary part of providing a compatible environment for the work.

An educational program for clerical, maintenance, and other

auxiliary staff is also essential. One finds persons in some of these positions who have little understanding of the agency's work with low-income persons. Sometimes there are strong prejudices among staff which come out in unintentional rudeness and small cruelties. In their contacts with the public, clerical and maintenance personnel are influential in conveying feelings about the agency and in creating an image of the agency. What is conveyed may prove critical in our attempts to serve low-income families. Inclusion of auxiliary staff in some regular staff meetings where material on work with low-income families is presented, films and demonstrations can usually bring this staff into closer identification with the agency's effort.

For professional staff, also, there may be deep-seated prejudices to work on, stereotypes to be altered, and new learning to be taken in. Daylong or 2-day workshops are a helpful way of initiating a program with low-income families—immersing the staff in a concentrated intensive exposure to the problems of the poor and beginnings of work with them. A sample workshop is outlined here to illustrate the how and what of helping a staff begin at the same point in working with low-income families.

Housekeeping Staff Workshop X Neighborhood House

MONDAY

9:30 a.m.—11:30 a.m.

PROTECTIVE SERVICE

Comments by executive of a protective service for children.

Positive use of the quasi-authoritative role maintaining identity as X

House staff working with housing personnel.

Clients' response to the authoritative approach.

Discussion led by social worker from House.

Lunch

1 p.m.—3 p.m.

THE ANALYSIS OF LAST YEAR'S HOUSEKEEPING PROGRAM

Comments by research consultant to X House project.

Description of the research design.

Discussion of the program: Characteristics of the poor housekeeper; methods of helping; implications for present program.

TUESDAY

Discussions:

Living in public housing

Satisfactions vs. dissatisfactions.

How do we work with housing management to achieve the best effect for our clients.

The right to choose to be evicted.

Influence of other housing residents.

How much can we expect the client to change

Realistic expectations—goals.

Attitude toward authority.

Self-image.

How can we be more effective in providing service to—

The hard core of the hard core.

The atypical.

The unmobilized.

How can we be more effective in—

The use of X House staff by clients.

The use of time by staff and clients.

Lunch

Discussions—continued.

How can we strengthen communication within a family

A threat to some members of the family.

Terminating service

What responsibility has staff for sustaining a relationship which they have begun.

Transferring of relationships.

Proposed schedule and housekeeping program for fall

In the same agency, joint staff meetings were held once a month for all staff involved with the project in anyway. These general staff

meetings were concerned with giving information of the work with the low-income families in the project, family patterns in the neighborhood, findings of surveys on the neighborhood, community resources, and other topics specific to the neighborhood being served. Weekly conferences among staff working directly with families made problems and ways of helping specific to the individual families' needs. Individual supervision took care of how the worker applied his knowledge and skill in working with the families he served.¹⁰

In agencies where great numbers of personnel work directly with low-income families, training may have to be spread out over a period of time. It may have to be conducted in several places, for the convenience of Extension workers or county workers at some distance from the training center.

In a large public welfare agency the home economist and a social worker held six weekly training sessions of 2 hours each for all social workers who worked with families. In groups of 15 to 18, the workers had lecture-discussions, demonstrations, field trips, and presentations by clients on housing, health and sanitation, child rearing practices, clothing and homefurnishings, and nutrition. Information was given on which the worker himself could act, for example, in relation to housing code enforcement in areas served. Other information helped the worker know when to call upon a community resource, such as the public health nurse. Threaded through all of the material was discussion on methods of working with low-income families. The workers brought case material from their own caseloads, illustrating the points under discussion.

Interagency staff meetings and workshops will also need to be a part of staff development, since no agency can serve all the needs of low-income families alone. Where agencies are cooperating in giving service to low-income families, especially where agreements are reached in serving the same families, sharing of information and planning is essential.

In the interests of efficiency, joint meetings among agencies can also extend information, make good use of resources in materials and speakers and field trips. Mutual concern for better service to low-income families among agencies can also be strengthened as agencies pool their resources in staff development.

Development of leadership among low-income groups

Parent and family life education has depended a great deal on volunteer leadership to carry out its program. In middle-class areas the volunteer leadership is often from the neighborhood or even from

¹⁰ Op. cit., see footnote 8.

within the group being served. As parent and family life education turned its attention very specifically to low-income families, the same attempt has been made to locate and use local leadership. This has been a slow and frustrating attempt, but we will treat that problem later on. The use of local leadership in any social class has much to commend it, but it brings special problems with it too.

Some of the strength of local leadership in parent and family life education is that local leadership is familiar with the neighborhood and is often known in the neighborhood, it is using leadership close at hand, and upgrades leadership generally in the area being served. Use of local leadership gradually can put responsibility for program development and execution on the community served. These are compelling reasons for working toward local leadership. They will be discussed later in the light of some of the difficulties in recruiting and training local leadership among low-income families.

Some of the problem of using local leadership in low-income areas lies within the nature of leadership itself. In order to be able to turn around to lead others, a person needs a certain degree of objectivity which will help him see the job to be done and his part in it. He needs self-confidence to concentrate on his task with others, without the need to turn all his attention on himself and whether he is doing a good job. He must have skill in the area to be taught or worked in. Even as the professional worker in family life education, he need not be highly skilled in all areas of programing, but rudimentary skill must be present to begin helping and teaching. He must be able to accept some supervision; that is, he must be able to take help while he is in the process of giving it. And in order to give helpful leadership, the leader cannot use the group to meet all his own personal needs.

The fact that a person is of a low-income group does not rule out the fact that he may qualify for leadership. Unions, churches, and recreation programs have found and used leadership from among low-income groups. But all agencies and organizations have had problems in locating, training, and using local leadership.

The lack of sufficient numbers of persons qualified for leadership in family life education for low-income families is based on some of the reasons for lack of participation as members in such programs and in other community programs. Lack of formal and informal training and experiences which give confidence in giving leadership, lack of opportunities for expressing oneself before a group, and lack of energy needed to carry out leadership are some reasons for the lack of leadership among low-income persons. The involvement with the daily struggle to survive, many times given up for an unimpregnable apathy, makes objectivity and seeing someone else's problem sympathetically very difficult—difficult, but not impossible.

It is within the realm of possibility to find and use local leadership for family life programming, even in low-income areas. Leadership may be found in a number of ways. Persons who are already known to be local leaders may be tapped to give leadership for these programs or to help in finding others within the neighborhood who can be recruited. Persons who have been active in previous parent and family life education groups as members may be leadership material. The parent and family life program may feed into existing programs in the community and make use of the leadership in current family life groups.

Parent and family life education groups can be formed for the express purpose of training low-income family members for leadership in specific areas of programming. A number of local public welfare agencies have instituted classes for mothers receiving AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), who met certain criteria of age, health, child care plans, etc.

In one city, such a training project was carried out jointly by the county extension service and the department of public welfare and has become an ongoing program in the county. Material from the program gives this description of the program:

The objectives of the training program are twofold:

1. To train groups of selected public assistance recipients as Home Management Aides. Upon completion of the training, the aides are available for assignment by the Department of Public Welfare Homemaking Service to other welfare homes where help with home management is needed. These trained women are to go into the homes as teachers, not housekeepers.
2. To provide an opportunity for the trainees to develop skills which might lead to their becoming employed. It was felt that the experience the trainee would gain in the training course and in subsequent assignments to various homes would greatly enhance their chances to become independent and no longer in need of public assistance.¹¹

An increase in the clients' budgets allowed them enough for transportation costs and extra expenses incurred because of working, etc. The training materials were developed by the Extension Service home economist and University of Wisconsin specialists. The home economist served as the teacher for the 2-month training period.

¹¹ Rice, Barbara: "Home Management Aide Training." Paper prepared for Consultation on Parent and Family Life Education. December 1964. Washington, D.C. 15 pp.

Fifteen to twenty women make up each class which is held for 3 hours, three times weekly. Subject matter is divided into five units:

1. Food for the family—selection and preparation.
2. Home management.
3. Family financial management.
4. Clothing the family—selection and care.
5. Child care.

A general quiz on all subject matter is given at the end of the training course. . . . Graduation exercises are held with a "speaker" from the supervisory staff of the welfare department and certificates were awarded. The trainees ranged in age from 21 to 55 years of age. Formal schooling among the women ranged from second grade to some college training.

Practical, tangible goals help give impetus to leadership training as illustrated. The leadership may be displayed in a very limited way by some of the women, but it is leadership in teaching and helping.

Local leadership of another sort is being built up in a communitywide program in a city where a university is situated in the heart of a slum district. The university is seeking to enlist citizens of the community in a mutual effort to improve the area. Over a period of 2 years, university personnel assigned to this task have worked with local individuals and groups, bit by bit working on projects, large and small, that the community was ready for. Each year, the program has culminated in a community festival for which the local leadership is taking increasing responsibility. This local leadership, through small beginnings and proceeding at the pace of the neighborhood people, with short-range objectives first and then long-range goals, has been nurtured and guided by the professional staff.

In the small neighborhood group, potential leadership among the group members can be tested. In the protected group situation where he is familiar with the others, the group member's ability can be tried without too much risk. There is help from the leader and the group if he falters or fails. He can be given a limited assignment, and if he is successful with this, he can be given increased leadership responsibility. In other words, the principle "Beginning where the person is" applies to training local leadership also.

Variety in group programing is important in training local leadership. Group members' abilities vary, so a variety of opportuni-

ties of exercising leadership should be provided. The parent who is inept at leading a discussion may be the teacher of carpentry or a good host. Through role playing, members can begin to get the feel of leading a group as they first act out leadership roles and later are helped to assume these actual roles in the group. As activities shift, leadership roles shift and each may be a leader in an area in which he does well and feels comfortable.

It is often difficult for a group to be led entirely by a person who has been one of its own members. Apart from the member's own feelings about the group of which he has been a part, the other members find it difficult to make the shift, accepting their ex-member as leader. It is usually advisable to have the professional worker or a volunteer who is not from within the group continue to work with the group. Basic research shows this to be true with all social classes, not only among low-income groups.

The basic principle of expectation can be applied in developing local leadership. We hold up an implicit standard of behavior representing "leadership" and help create the situations in which the person can experience the steps developing this behavior. If we hold up as the explicit goal the next step of development itself, the person can stop whenever he reaches the step which is the outer limit of his potential. For example, as we see Mr. J. perform as discussion leader in the parents' group of which he is a member, we wonder whether he might not be groomed to lead other groups. More experience in his own group is held out to Mr. J. and he continues to grow in his ability. A leadership training course may be the next step, and here, too, Mr. J. may progress well. After training, Mr. J. works well with small parents' groups but backs down at working with a large group or working outside his own neighborhood. For the moment at least, Mr. J. has reached his goal and we are happy to accept his present level of performance.

Group members often set unrealistic expectations for each other and for themselves. In such situations the worker will have to help set goals which can be reached without having members lose face. It may be that Mr. J. thought he could lead a parents' group and we thought so too. When he tried to carry out his plans, he could not meet the group's expectations or his own. Then we must act to save both Mr. J. and the group.

Any type of leadership on the part of members of parent and family life education among low-income families must be used appropriately; that is, it must relate to the working of the group and to the function of the agency. It may be that the parent who is able to teach carpentry to a group can be helped to give leadership in a group where his ability can be allowed full play, even while he continues as a par-

ticipating member of the parents' group. As suggested earlier, the group member who is an expert in an area, who has the potential for working with a group on his own, can usually function better in a group of which he has not been a member. He may need help in finding his way to the group or agency in which his abilities can be used appropriately. Here the professional worker can provide what is needed in information and support.

An integral part of the appropriate use of local leadership is the clarity of the job which is to be done. Not only must the leadership potentials of the individuals be known; they must be known and measured against the job to be done. A realistic job description, including the amount of time which must be invested, is a beginning.

In helping with parent education in a low-income area, some of the residents of that area were trained as aides to help in the programming. The eight major functions of the aides were:

1. Identify newcomers (to the community in which program was located) and initiate some steps to helping the family feel welcome.
2. Prepare for possible solutions to life conflicts by recognizing the problems; suggesting sources of help in solving the problem.
3. Give information about community resources.
4. Improve the potential of parents as role models for their children by—
 - a. giving them the added dimension of school information.
 - b. stimulating curiosity and broadening their knowledge of community life.
5. Develop a beginning sense of identity with the community by locating some familiar institutions: neighbors, shops, etc. Encourage parents to overcome their resistance to involvement and to become more active in a learning process for themselves and their children. . . .
6. Approach more directly the experience of their children which might be bothersome to either parent or child.
7. Create a climate for sharing fears and confusion about—
 - a. the newness of the area.
 - b. dealing with their home and community problems.

8. Increase the school's responsiveness to life styles other than middle class, by interpreting obstacles new families of a lower class style experience in their contact with the school.¹²

Training was given the aides before they began their work and continuous inservice training was provided as they carried out the program with low-income families. With the knowledge that the job description was filled fairly adequately by most of the aides recruited, there is proof that individuals from low-income areas can carry leadership of some sophistication if they are given the proper help.

Leadership training for aides or local leadership places demands on the agency and its professional staff. In addition to job descriptions, orientation, training, and ongoing supervision must all be a part of the agency's investment. The local leader must be given every opportunity to perform at his highest level of ability, not only for his own benefit but also to give as good a service as possible.

¹² Dowery, Mary A.: "Mobilizing Disadvantaged Parents Through the Use of Parent Education Aides." Paper for Consultation on Parent and Family Life Education. Washington, D.C., December 1964, pp. 4-6.

EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

Informal evaluation

Informal evaluation of program goes on all the time, often without our realizing it. Membership and staff contribute in a continuous way to this process. They analyze program as it evolves, judging it to be effective or ineffective. The postmortem over a cup of coffee, why tonight's program worked when last week's didn't, is an example of informal evaluation. As staff considers progress and direction with low-income families in its caseload, evaluation is going on. Monthly meetings between agencies to determine where workers are with families are partially evaluative in nature.

Evaluations presuppose specific, clear goals or objectives against which one evaluates or measures what has or has not happened. Broader agency goals and specific group goals are an integral part of beginning work with a family or group in parent and family life education, as we saw earlier. As teaching and helping progress, it is important to weave informal evaluation into the process. Such evaluation should include the interaction which is taking place among members and with the worker, the appropriateness and effectiveness of content and method, individual group members' progress, and the role of the worker or teacher in the particular situation. Oral evaluations are helpful, but written evaluations are generally more valuable in documenting at points further along the way what seems to have really happened in the group, not leaving important points to memories which may be faulty, or at best, highly subjective. Written evaluations can help in giving direction to further work, pointing up areas of weakness and strength in programing and participation, in worker performance and usefulness of agency policy. Written evaluations can point up the helping and teaching process, giving a fuller view of a group's life within a given time.

Parent and family life group members in low-income areas can and should participate in informal evaluation of programs in the same way that they can and should be a part of program planning and execution. An experience of evaluating a group by its membership can be of real value to the agency (and the agency should acknowledge this in some way). Its value to the group should be obvious in terms of affirming learning and growth change.

"Evaluation is too time consuming" is sometimes heard from staff members. Busy workers fret at having to stop to take stock. They want to get on with this business of helping and teaching people. The old saw "Practice doesn't make perfect: it just makes permanent" holds true here. In our eagerness to help in the desperate life situations of the poor, we will become more and more entrenched in less than helpful practices if we do not take time, now and again, to informally evaluate what we are doing, how we are doing it, and with whom, and what the results are.

Evaluation in every phase of family life programing is important. This includes evaluation of staff development and training of local leadership. In one agency, group training and training only through individual supervisory methods were carried on concurrently. At the end of the training period, results were compared through objective testing. It was found that in the areas of applying knowledge to specific situations of helping, in the use of group interaction, and in ability to be self-critical, the group training was more effective. Attention to detail and understanding of some agency policy was carried more effectively in the individual supervisory conferences. With this objective knowledge from evaluating its experience, the agency was able to design more effective training. Whether or not these same findings would occur in other agencies is something that requires further study.

Evaluation within an agency is necessary to the optimal functioning of its own program, but its usefulness remains limited if the experience is not widely reported. Reporting tends to be confined to one's own agency or organization. It is usually a part of accounting for one's efforts as an agency employee. If reporting is allowed only upward, then administrative personnel carries the whole responsibility for reporting to the wider field of parent and family life education. It is to be hoped, however, that administrative and supervisory personnel will encourage and make it possible for staff members who work directly with low-income families to write up their efforts for conferences and journals and other professional media. Enrichment of program, encouragement in an exceedingly difficult area of work, additional knowledge, and increased cooperation among the several disciplines are some of the products of sharing experiences.

Evaluation has more and more become an integral part of parent and family life education. The next challenge, especially as programs for low-income families are developed, is that of more formal evaluation and more basic research.

Basic and applied action research

The very term "research" strikes many who are busy working with people as a straitjacket imposed on helping or teaching. But much of the knowledge on which we now act in the area of parent and family life education with low-income families is based on research from a variety of disciplines. Formal evaluation and more basic research in reference to parent and family life education with low-income families, per se, represents one of the many necessary areas of further intensive study. Some of the outstanding research issues in this field have been detailed in the following publications:

Brim, Orville G.: *Education for Child Rearing*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959. 362 pp.

Grams, Armin: *Parent Education and the Behavioral Sciences*. Children's Bureau Publication 379. Washington, D.C., 20402: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960. 52 pp.

Especially valuable to a group, to the agency, and to the wider field of parent and family life education, are more formal evaluations directed toward an objective, careful measurement of program outcomes. It was pointed out earlier that low-income families need to see tangible results of our service. It is also important for the agency to learn whether such results occur. Moreover, citizens in general want to know whether services that they support achieve their stated objectives. Objectives such as the following may constitute some of the specific goals of parent and family life education: improvements (where needed) in the educational achievement of children and the physical health of family members, reduced rates in deviant behavior, improved homemaking and budgeting practices, increased family stability (as, for instance, fewer out-of-wedlock births, divorces, separations, hasty marriages). These are some of the concrete criteria which can be gathered and analyzed by an evaluation team. Measurements of more intangible changes are not necessarily ruled out. These may be evaluated in a variety of ways. Changed attitudes reflected in less hostility toward others or in a greater acceptance of one's self, greater willingness to be a real part of a group and to share its responsibilities, parents' comments and smiles and relaxed faces can be a part of the overall evaluation of group members, if arrangements are made

for specific observation and recording of these observations by participant observers who are selected and trained for this purpose. More formal tools for evaluation in these areas also may be used.

This more rigorous, formal evaluation requires staff members and/or outside consultants specifically trained in research methodology, analysis, and interpretation.

Where new program methods are to be used or a new segment of low-income groups is approached, formal evaluation may be indicated. Moreover, more basic research underlying program content can be of important value. Formal evaluation should be part of planning from the outset. If it is built into the program as an ongoing process, it need not become a straitjacket for workers or program. To be most reflective of what happens normally and to be least disruptive to regular procedure, formal evaluation must be an operating part of program to be tested.

How do we go about planning action research (formal evaluation) or even planning for it? In many localities, expert help in research can be obtained on a consultative basis. Expert help is needed because research is a highly specialized field. Further, it is difficult for staff who are immersed in ongoing program to factor out *the* questions which are researchable and most valuable to pursue or to look objectively enough at existing program to devise a research project alone. It is also a temptation to try to support favorite ongoing programs with money for research grants when what is needed is testing of new ideas or old hypotheses with new methods. Professional and technical help in setting up a research project, from design to evaluation, can result in a professionally sound research program and, hence, in a saving of time and effort on the part of the agency.

An action research (formal evaluation) plan begins with defining an objective to be tested or a hypothesis. A time limit is set for testing this hypothesis through methodology and content which are a part of the total plan. At the conclusion of the time limit, an attempt is made to answer as objectively as possible: Was the objective achieved? If so, how? Why? If not, why not?

The research plan will include collecting data while the plan is in operation. These data are then used in helping to determine the results. The data may include much of the kind of data which most programs collect now, such as background of members, attendance and participation in program, and kinds of programing. Additional data which help make results more meaningful are also sought. It is the process of gathering this additional information at which many of us balk—if we do not need it for the operation of our program, then it is probably not essential to serving people, we may reason. But do we really know enough to know what we should know in order to

serve low-income families effectively? This is the very dilemma we are in, in trying to reach a large segment of our population: to know whether certain methods are better than others, to know whether programs are effective and why.

Action research can be fairly simple and short term, or it can be elaborate and long term. But well-designed and competently administered studies are vital to test the theories, methods, and materials with which we are now operating and to develop new approaches. Our present difficulties in developing widespread, knowledgeable, clearly effective programs in parent and family life education with low-income families vividly illustrate how much we need more basic and applied research in this field.

Federal funds from a variety of government agencies are available for basic and applied research related to parent and family life education programs. Foundations also may be interested in financing research in this area.

COOPERATIVE EFFORTS NEEDED

PARENT and family life education with low-income families places heavy demands on the agency or organization embarking on such a program. If the program is to be truly effective, it will place demands on the whole community and its services. The time and effort needed to help each individual family in low-income areas is great. The gamut of services required can involve all available resources. No agency or organization can furnish all the services which low-income families need.

Agencies and organizations must cooperate if low-income families are to be helped in significant and enduring ways. Unfortunately, the nature of many of our community resources makes it difficult to work together easily or efficiently. In some instances, parent and family life education has been carried out by professional workers without agency sanction or knowledge. These workers have had such conviction about their services in relation to the needs of low-income families that they have worked peripherally with these families, on their own or tying it in with some other phase of their work. When they achieved enough success to make a showing, they have been able to convince their agencies of the necessity for making such work a regular part of agency program. What the workers' experience has also proved is that effective cooperation is possible. And if it is possible in a "behind the scenes" arrangement among workers, then surely it must be possible with the weight of agency sanction and policy behind it.

Although workers and teachers often cooperate individually with each other in serving low-income families, the administration of the agency must make it possible for workers to cooperate fully and effectively with other agencies. The administration can do this through appropriate policy and procedure. When accessible channels for cooperation are provided, the workers' efforts can be facilitated.

They can concentrate on service rather than on how to circumvent the administration in getting help for a client through another agency.

Some communities provide for regular meetings of personnel from all agencies working with low-income families in given areas. Further interagency conferences are scheduled among all those workers concerned with service to an individual family. Such cooperation provides the workers with an opportunity for evaluating their effectiveness with the family. The worker with the best relationship, whom the family trusts most and accepts help from most readily, is assigned to carry the major work with that family. The continuity of one helping person has been mentioned before, but is stressed here because it is agency administration and interagency cooperation which make it possible.

Private or voluntary agencies and organizations can often be more selective in choosing their area of service and the clientele who can receive this service than the public agencies can be. The voluntary agencies can concentrate on one or a few areas of service in depth. They can be fairly flexible in programing. Their services are invaluable and they are essential in the total picture of community services. As more voluntary agencies turn to the area of parent and family life education for low-income families, the opportunity for low-income families to receive the intensive services the voluntary agency has to offer these services must not be diluted. Indeed, the agency may find it takes more staff time and more resources to help the low-income family than is needed to help the middle-class family.

Increasingly from agency to agency and through health and welfare councils on a communitywide basis, services are being designed to gear in with each other, to mesh together for the most effective and comprehensive service the community can give. In many communities, however, more of almost everything is needed if an all-out effort is to be made to help all low-income families who need help and not just a selected few.

Existing services should come under close scrutiny to determine who is being served by them. In many communities the necessary services exist, but they are offered in such a way that they do not reach low-income families. The services, by policy, may be available to low-income families. Actually, however, community attitudes and usage built up over time deny them to the low-income family. This can be particularly true of services to which clients must come on their own, which are not literally brought to them. There are not only community attitudes on the part of others which shut out low-income families; often these families do not know of existing services or their own low self-esteem prevents them from feeling that the service is for them too.

A more aggressive approach to helping low-income families in parent and family life programing has been found to be a step in the right direction. Further, such projects as the St. Paul Family Centered Project indicate the willingness of the low-income family to change behavior patterns of long standing when a consistent, coordinated, compassionate approach is taken to their problems and to themselves as persons and family.

A coordinated approach to working with families will, of course, necessitate the interagency cooperation described. In examples already given we have seen public health nurses and home economists working together; public welfare, nursing, and school social workers; settlement house staff and public housing authorities; and school, public welfare, and housing personnel. Other projects have brought together such agencies as child guidance clinics, libraries, Red Cross, pediatric clinics, Agricultural Extension Service, churches, youth clubs, and police. By "cooperation" we do not mean mutual concern but coordination of separate services. By "cooperation" we mean joint efforts in programing, bringing together into the same group situation the knowledge and skills of each service, now combined into a new service of parent and family life education.

All sorts of groups are asking for help with parent and family life education for low-income families. It is the responsibility of the traditional agencies, with long histories of basic professional service in this area, to give leadership to the groups newer to the area. Store-front churches, women's service and study groups, men's service organizations, community councils, and other groups which have traditionally pursued other avenues of interest are beginning to ask for information about and help with parent and family life education programing with low-income families.

The new upsurge of interest in serving low-income families is a promising sign, if the challenge can be met. Present programs on every level of government and voluntary agencies are aiming at doing more than treating the symptoms of poverty. In this attempt parent and family life education should play an important part. What we have discussed here applies not only to those families where conditions are extreme. The parent and family life program for low-income families can and should be a potent force for prevention of family deterioration and individual breakdown. To move into programing on a scale which would really be preventative will take the cooperation of all existing services and community planning for additional services needed.

Agencies presently working intensively in the family life education field have asked themselves at just what point their programs could make the most difference in a family's life. For many

the answer has been : with the preschooler and his family. The parents of the preschooler are often concerned with his beginning in school. Perhaps never again will parents be so open to learning as around their child's start in school. Work with the child and with the parents has been viewed as a corrective experience, to some extent, for the parents and a preventive service for the child.

Another point of impact in prevention is the educational program which is carried on through the schools. A family life program has actually been geared into school curriculum at various levels. The most prevalent level at which it is carried is the junior and senior high school age level. Youngsters in this age group are tomorrow's potential parents. For young people in the low-income areas of our Nation, high school is the last chance to reach most with formal education. Imaginative family life education at this level should be a sound preventive measure.

Although we know that nothing can take the place of a secure economic base for every family, prevention of family disorganization and prevention of physical and emotional abuse and many other products of unknowing, grinding poverty must be viewed as a challenge which cannot be ignored. Parent and family life education should be in the forefront of accepting and answering this challenge.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, Federal Extension Service, Washington, D.C., 20250:

1. Cooperative Extension Service Work With Low-Income Families
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4. Cooperative Extension Service Work With Low-Income Families—MIGRANTS

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USDA Home and Garden Bulletins, Washington, D.C., 20250:

- G-5 Food for the Family With Young Children
- G-13 Food for Families With School Children
- G-17 Food Guide for Older Folks
- G-27 Meat for Thrifty Meals
- G-85 Food for the Young Couple
- G-90 Conserving the Nutritive Value in Foods
- G-94 Family Food Budgeting . . . for Good Meals and Good Nutrition

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APPENDIX

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