

# A TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR HOMEMAKERS

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## INTRODUCTION

The term Homemaker has been used to describe roles which range from a friendly visitor, to a teaching role, to that of a domestic or nursing aide (Canadian Council of Social Development, 1971). To avoid any confusion the Homemakers referred to in this article are essentially support workers with a teaching orientation. Their role is to prevent breakdown in the family unit by acting as a resource to the parent in a range of problem areas, but with a specific focus on child rearing. They aim to protect, restore or improve family functioning in the area of physical, social and emotional health. In some situations they may perform practical tasks to help improve the quality of life in the home, but generally their main task is to assist the parent to acquire the necessary skills.

Homemakers with the Parent Education and Assistance Project (PEAP)\* have been trained to be the

primary service agents in a programme offering support, parent education, and other forms of assistance to single parent families with pre-school aged children. They are based in a Drop-in Centre in Fremantle, Western Australia, which offers occasional child care facilities, a toy lending library, an information and referral service, and a supportive and educational home visiting service. There is a very wide educational and recreational activities programme involving films, discussion groups, play groups, crafts, sports and outings. In addition to the ten Homemakers, the staff of PEAP consists of a Social Worker/Co-ordinator, a Child Care Nurse, a Secretary and during the first three years of the Project, a separate evaluation research team based at the University of Western Australia (Drake-Brockman and Constable, 1976).

The training of Homemakers is a field which has received very little attention in Australia. A survey

*This article is a sequel to "The Parent Education and Assistance Project: A programme for single mothers and their children" published in Australian Child & Family Welfare, 1979. This paper examines the pre-service training programme for Homemakers.*

conducted throughout Australia in 1973 revealed that only a minority of Homemakers are offered any training (Australian Council of Social Service, 1974). This reflects the argument that adequate selection and supervision should be sufficient and that training only leads to professionalization which conflicts with the role of Homemakers.

The Western Australian Homemaker Service of the Department for Community Welfare does not subscribe to this viewpoint (Grimoldby, 1977) and neither do the authors of this article. We believe that however good the selection and supervision, training provides a vital contribution to the maintenance of quality of service. Furthermore, effective supervision usually contains a strong element of training. For example, a good supervisor will recommend appropriate reading material or provide experiences to enhance learning.

## SELECTION PROCESS

Selection of the Homemakers for PEAP was based on a combination of group and individual interviewing. Applicants were initially invited to a group discussion focusing on a hypothetical case record. This offered them the opportunity to explore the job possibilities more fully, and enabled the interviewer to observe attitudes, approach to the work, knowledge of resources and interpersonal skills in the group setting. An additional individual interview yielded information about relevant life experiences and other more personal details. Approximately

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sixty people were interviewed in order to select ten Homemakers.

The applicants were selected on the basis of a combination of the following characteristics: A relaxed, comfortable, warm and pleasant personality, concern for people, sensitivity, tolerance, flexibility, insight, the ability to empathize, a good general knowledge of life skills and community resources, and a high level of personal security and emotional maturity. It was also important that they had experienced the pressures of raising their own children and had a good understanding of the problems inherent in a single parent situation.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMEMAKERS**

At the time of the Training Programme, three of the Homemakers were between 31-40 years of age, six were in the range 41-50, and one was over fifty. Most were at an age when their children were grown up or in high school, and therefore the Homemakers were seeking to re-enter, or enter the workforce in permanent, part-time employment. Since marriage only three of the Homemakers had worked intermittently, mostly part-time and from home (for example, dressmaking). The average number of children for each Homemaker is 3.4, with the range being from 1 to 5.

Five of the Homemakers completed 3 years of high school. Of these three had no further training, while the other two completed some nursing training. The remaining five completed their matriculation. All of these attempted some further training, including three who attempted some university courses, two who trained as nurses, one who completed mothercraft training, and one who trained as a typist. Two of the Homemakers are single parents.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME**

The Homemakers' Pre-Service Training Programme aimed to familiarize the Homemakers with the goals of the Project; and to develop the skills and provide the information and resources they would need in order to achieve these goals. Briefly, the major objectives of the Project include the prevention of family breakdown by the reduction of stress;

teaching parenting skills; developing the parents' self-help skills and facilitating optimal development for the children involved.

The objectives of the training programme can therefore be stated as follows:-

1. To give a general background orientation to the Project: rationale, background, goals.
2. To develop interpersonal skills in the formation of warm supportive 'helping' relationships.
3. To clarify important principles and ethics involved in working with families, such as confidentiality and client rights.
4. To develop a sound knowledge of child development.
5. To ensure the existence of attitudes compatible with good childrearing practices.
6. To develop the ability to communicate knowledge, particularly in the field of child development, in a non-threatening manner to increase the parents' skills and support their self esteem.
7. To increase the Homemakers' self knowledge in order to facilitate their objectivity and skill in a 'helping' relationship.
8. To increase the Homemakers' knowledge of the problem areas with which they would be dealing. For example, this includes research and background information about the problems of one parent families; the aetiology of specific problems such as child abuse and neglect; the sociology of poverty, and similar topics.
9. To develop the Homemakers' practical skills in area such as childcare, nutrition, child health, safety, home management and knowledge of community resources.
10. To clarify the boundaries of the Homemaker role, including relationships with other agencies, when to refer, and use of supervision.

### **TRAINING TECHNIQUES**

As the programme aimed to cover many areas it seemed appropriate to choose a wide range of teaching/learning techniques. Didactic methods such as lectures, films and tape recordings were balanced by the experiential techniques of discussion groups, human relationships' workshops, role-playing and problem solving groups.

It was not possible to use an apprentice system of training (i.e. where trainee Homemakers are attached to more experienced ones), as PEAP was a newly established Project. However, contacts between PEAP trainees and Homemakers experienced in other areas of community welfare were arranged on several occasions. These proved successful in allaying some of the Homemakers' understandable anxieties about such things as the clients acceptance of them, and how to deal with the exceptional and awkward situation e.g. the alcoholic or abusive client.

### **THE TRAINING PROGRAMME**

The Homemakers' Training Programme was a pre-service one, most of it taking place before the opening of the Drop-in Resource Centre. Ten Homemakers employed for the Project attended, as well as two others who came on a voluntary basis.

The programme was developed and presented by the Project Co-ordinator, the Evaluation Director and a number of visiting consultants. Maximum use of outside consultants and resources appears to be a common principle in Homemaker Training programmes (National Council for Homemaker Services, 1969).

The major part of the programme extended over an eight week period for three hours, five mornings per week. It would probably be unwise to run a longer pre-service programme without work experience, but it was significant that at its termination the Homemakers felt the need for more training. Training continued on an in-service basis one morning each week for the first three months of their field work, and then reduced to fortnightly, or as required. American precedents for the length of Homemaker training programmes range from six week 96

hour courses, down to monthly two hour sessions, so by this standard our programme was not brief (National Council for Homemaker services, 1969).

Within the sessions a balance between formal and informal

methods of presentation, and active and passive types of learning, was maintained by ensuring variety. Each three hour session was divided into two parts, often unrelated, the rationale for this being that it would retain the attention of those

unaccustomed to lengthy learning situations. Lectures or talks were usually followed by critical appraisal of films, discussion groups, or workshops developing interpersonal skills.

**COURSE CONTENT**

Table 1 presents a summary of the

form of a timetable. This shows that approximately half of the programme was devoted specifically to child

lectures, films, discussions and workshops conducted on this subject area. A total of 17 films were shown

TABLE 1  
**HOMEMAKERS' TRAINING PROGRAMME TIMETABLE**

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<p><b>Day 15</b> <b>Part I.</b> Evaluation Director: film and discussion: Children Growing Up Series — "We see it like this" <b>Part II.</b> Consultant: Human Relationships workshop on "Communication."</p>	<p><b>Day 16</b> <b>Part I.</b> Evaluation Director: Child Development Lecture 6. <b>Part II.</b> Continuation plus film and discussion of Children Growing Up series: "All in the Game".</p>	<p><b>Day 17</b> <b>Part I.</b> Evaluation Director: Child Development Lecture 7. <b>Part II.</b> Project Co-ordinator: Toy Workshop. Feedback on reading material.</p>	<p><b>Day 18</b> <b>Part I.</b> Evaluation Director: film and discussion: "Infant Development in the Kibbutz" <b>Part II.</b> Guest Lecturer on "Playgroups".</p>	<p><b>Day 19</b> <b>Part I.</b> Project Co-ordinator: Effective communication workshop on "Body and Speech Mannerisms". <b>Part II.</b> Co-ordinator: Behaviour modification techniques: "Social Reinforcement".</p>
<p><b>Public Holiday</b></p>	<p><b>Day 20</b> <b>Part I.</b> Evaluation Director: film and discussion Children Growing Up series: "How Far How Soon". <b>Part II.</b> Project Co-ordinator. Review and discussion of education principles.</p>	<p><b>Day 21</b> <b>Part I.</b> Project Co-ordinator: Behaviour modification techniques: "negotiation and contracting". <b>Part II.</b> Consultant Human Relationships Workshop on "Economic Differences".</p>	<p><b>Day 22</b> <b>Part I.</b> Guest Lecturer on "Adolescence". <b>Part II.</b> Consultant doing a "Family Sexuality" workshop.</p>	<p><b>Day 23</b> <b>Parts I &amp; II.</b> Project Co-ordinator viewing and discussion of Children in Separation films: (a) John (b) Lucy</p>
<p><b>Day 24</b> <b>Part I.</b> Guest Lecturer on "Child Health Services". <b>Part II.</b> Consultant: Human Relationships Workshop on "Discrimination".</p>	<p><b>Day 25</b> <b>Parts I &amp; II.</b> Evaluation Director Film "God Bless Mummy and Make Her Good". Open discussion on child development principles.</p>	<p><b>Day 26</b> External visit to Department for Community Welfare's Homemaker Training Programme on "Welfare Housing".</p>	<p><b>Day 27</b> <b>Part I.</b> Guest lecturer on "Child Health". <b>Part II.</b> Consultant "Family Sexuality" Workshop (continued).</p>	<p><b>Day 28</b> <b>Parts I &amp; II.</b> Project Co-ordinator. "Use of Community Resources". Questionnaire and discussion.</p>
<p><b>Day 29</b> <b>Part I.</b> Project Co-ordinator "The Homemaker — Client Relationship". <b>Part II.</b> Consultant: Human Relationships Workshop on "Being a Child".</p>	<p><b>Day 30</b> <b>Parts I &amp; II.</b> Evaluation Director, Film: Troubled Children Series — "The Aggressive Child". Lecture and discussion on aggression in children.</p>	<p><b>Day 31</b> <b>Part I.</b> Consultant: "Family Sexuality Workshop". <b>Part II.</b> Guest lecturer: "Interviewing young children and adolescents".</p>	<p><b>Day 32</b> <b>Parts I &amp; II.</b> Guest speaker on "Nutrition", with film "Jenny is a Good Thing".</p>	<p><b>Day 33</b> <b>Part I.</b> D.C.W. Homemaker Service continuation of "Role of Homemakers". <b>Part II.</b> Project Co-ordinator continuation of "Community Resources" session.</p>
<p><b>Day 34</b> <b>Part I.</b> Project Co-ordinator. Role playing of interview situations. <b>Part II.</b> Consultant. Human Relationships Workshop: "Caring".</p>	<p><b>Day 35</b> <b>Parts I &amp; II.</b> Project Co-ordinator. Effective Communication Workshop on "Attacking and defending".</p>	<p><b>Day 36</b> <b>Part I.</b> Guest lecturer on "Group Work Skills". <b>Part II.</b> Project Co-ordinator continuation of "Human Relationship Skills".</p>	<p><b>Day 37</b> <b>Part I.</b> Project Co-ordinator Film and discussion "Sexuality and Human Communication". <b>Part II.</b> Consultant: "Family Sexuality" Workshop.</p>	<p><b>Day 38</b> <b>Part I.</b> Evaluation Director. "Evaluation within PEAP". <b>Part II.</b> Project Co-ordinator and Evaluation Director Finale.</p>

Interpersonal skills workshops were held no more frequently than twice a week, as these can be emotionally taxing, and it is necessary to allow time for consolidation. A prominent organization involved with conducting human relationships workshops in the community ran one weekly workshop programme, and approximately once a week there was another interpersonal workshop such as the 'Effective Communication' series (Argus Communications, 1971). Approximately 30 percent of time was spent in assisting the Homemakers to develop the necessary interpersonal skills and awareness which would be required in their daily work with clients.

Guest lecturers were invited to contribute on topics such as child health, family nutrition, adolescence, group work skills, children's play and sexuality. The remainder of the content was covered by the Project Co-ordinator and the Evaluation Director. As there was not time for scheduled visits Homemakers were encouraged to contact, and form their own indexes of, a number of community resources outside the programme timetable. They reported back to the group on their findings and were instructed on how to find out about any resources they might need in the future.

Elements of the programme content corresponded with each of the objectives. The objective "to increase the Homemakers' knowledge of the problem areas with which they would be dealing" was pursued further in the in-service training. Time precluded an intensive exploration of sociological material, and an immediate, practical and action oriented emphasis was preferred.

A complete record of the course content has been compiled and this is used as the basis for training new Homemakers who join the Project. During the course copies of lecture notes, pamphlets, resource indexes, and so on, were distributed for later reference. In addition, the parent education components of the programme, including the content of lectures and films on child development, lists of age appropriate toys, design of the home environment, safety recommendations, relevant community resources, and a

bibliography, have been incorporated into a manual (Constable et al, 1977).

### EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

Three measures were used to gauge the effectiveness of certain aspects of the Homemakers' Training Programme: A test of knowledge of child development, a scale showing attitudes to child development and child rearing, and a rating scale of the various components of the Training Programme.

**1. Test of Knowledge.** A preliminary form of the **Knowledge and Expectations of Early Childhood Development (Form A)** (Constable et al, 1976) was administered to Homemakers before and after the training period. In its preliminary form this test was a 37 item questionnaire designed to measure knowledge in four areas of child development: intellectual, motor, language and personal-social.

Results indicated that prior to the Training Programme, knowledge of child development was very good and left little room for improvement. In the area of intellectual development, 83% of answers were in the correct range, in motor development 88% were correct, language 92%; and personal-social 93%. However, improvement was evident in all four areas, although this was not significant.

**2. Test of Attitudes.** An attitude scale, **Attitudes to Early Childhood Development and Child Rearing Practices** (Constable et al, 1976), comprising a set of Likert-type summated scales, was devised for this Project. The questionnaire incorporates four separate sub-scales covering the areas of personal-social development, intellectual development, discipline and general attitudes to child rearing. It was anticipated that the Training Programme would result in changes in the Homemakers' attitudes to child rearing and child development and that these changes would be reflected in their post-training scores. In fact, results using the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed ranks test (Seigel, 1956) indicated that significant differences were

found (at the .01 level of significance) between the pre- and post-test scores on all sub-scale scores, except Discipline. The total scores also showed significant change. It is evident, then that positive change in attitudes to child rearing did occur during the training period.

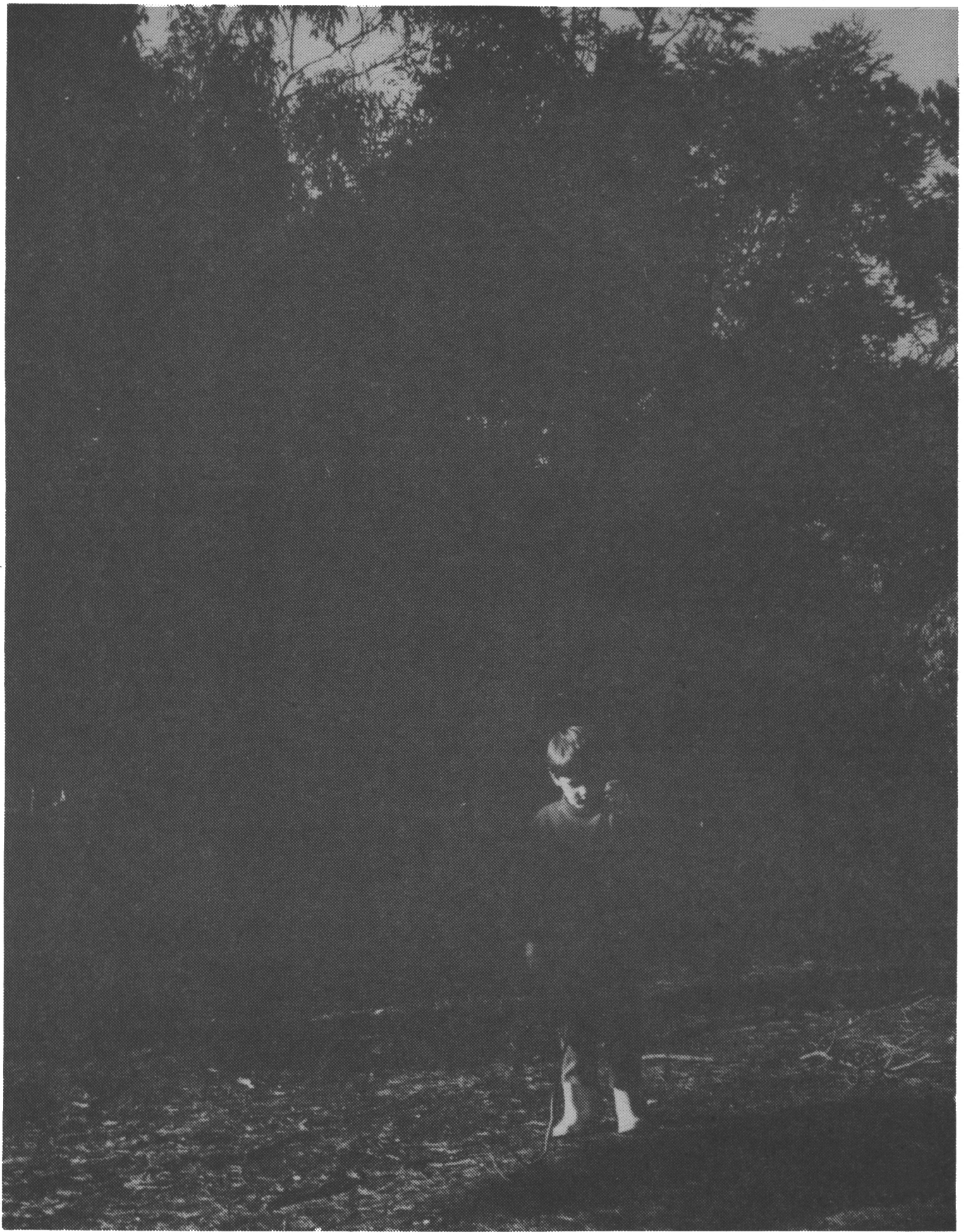
Six months after the completion of the Training Programme 9 Homemakers were re-administered the Attitude Scale. It is interesting that no significant changes were found in any of the sub-scales, except for Discipline. Overall, the effects of the Training Programme had persisted after six months, and the anticipated changes in the area of Discipline were now also evident. It appears that attitudes to Discipline are more resistant to change than attitudes in the other areas.

**3. Homemakers' Training Programme Rating Scale** (Constable et al, 1977). This Rating Scale was designed to assess the Homemakers' perceptions of the relevance of the Training Programme in helping them with their work with single mothers. This scale was administered 7 months after the end of the Pre-service Training Programme. Homemakers were asked to rate how useful they had found 15 components of the Training Programme. A 7 point rating scale, ranging from 1 = "useless" to 7 = "extremely useful" was used.

Results shows that the Homemakers rated the Education Programme covering child development and childrearing practices as the most useful, followed by the segments on the Use of Community Resources, Child Health lectures and Human Relationships. However, it must also be noted that the lowest mean rating was 4.56 (out of a possible 7), indicating that no segment of the Training Programme was rated less than "useful".

Overall, then, the Homemakers' results after the Training Programme indicated the required competence, particularly in the components concerned with child development and child rearing.

One of the most important consequence of the Training





Programme, additional to the original objectives, has been the sense of corporate identity achieved by bringing together a group of strangers for pre-service training. The group cohesiveness thereby created was sufficiently strong to be noted by several visiting consultants in the later part of the Programme. It also seems probable that a greater degree of identification with the Project's objectives took place than might otherwise have occurred. The welding of a disparate group into a real team in the very early stages of the Project, has been of immeasurable value. It assisted in the creation of a comfortable, warm easy environment within the Drop-in Centre as soon as it opened; it ensured that no time was lost on solving intragroup conflicts; and it facilitated the skills-sharing, co-operation, group learning and egalitarianism, which have been a feature of the Project.

### IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Homemakers with PEAP receive in-service training from two sources. Training experiences are provided within the Project and they are also eligible to attend the monthly 3 hour sessions conducted by the Western Australian Department for Community Welfare's Homemaker Service. The Homemakers themselves determine the frequency and content of programmes within the Project, according to their needs. Fortnightly staff meetings provide some opportunity for structured learning but it was initially found necessary to reserve an extra 3 hours each fortnight for in-service training. This has more recently been reduced to a monthly session. Topics covered during these sessions have included, for example, child abuse and neglect, depression, suburban neurosis, drugs, effects of stress, sexuality and contraception. Numerous child rearing subjects such as discipline, management of aggression and tantrums have been reviewed when these have become particularly topical.

After two years of in-service training Homemakers ranked a list of alternatives they had suggested for future training topics. In order of preference the subject areas were: teaching techniques, sociological topics, parent effectiveness training, factual child development, personal development, assertiveness training,

report writing skills, group grizzle sessions, role playing, with "no training" ranked unanimously last. Discussion with Homemakers demonstrates that they feel that continued training is vital to the development of necessary job skills.

Attendance at the Department for Community Welfare's Homemaker Training Programmes has had the advantage of giving the Homemakers the opportunity to learn from the diverse experiences of those working in different fields. This has been very important as a source of new ideas, new perspectives, and for objectivity about the work in which they are involved.

Staff changes since the commencement of the Project have necessitated the training of new Homemakers. This is mainly done on an in-service basis but an effort is made to ensure that new Homemakers are exposed to most of the material originally presented during the pre-service programme. The reading of written material followed by small group discussions; discussion sessions with both the Co-ordinator and the Evaluation Director; the viewing of films; contact with experienced Homemakers; participation in human relationships workshops run outside the Centre; and study of the Manual, are some of the methods used.

Rapid assimilation of new staff members into the Project team appears to be brought about by their participation in a group learning situation such as in-service training.

### SUPERVISION AS TRAINING

Homemakers' fortnightly Supervision sessions with the Project Co-ordinator provide an opportunity for staff development and training. In these situations it is possible to give individualized suggestions about reference material or learning experiences appropriate to the person. Some Homemakers need support and encouragement, others may need direction and control, or the suggestion of a new approach. An objective interpretation or the provision of background information may help illuminate a situation for the Homemaker. This type of intervention is better provided on an individualized basis, but should not be emphasized to the exclusion of those skills which are best learnt in a group setting.

### CONCLUSION

The training programme conducted for PEAP Homemakers proved to be a very useful addition to the processes of selection and supervision, in producing personnel with the skills needed by the Project. Both in terms of the Homemakers' own ratings, as well as through the measures administered by the evaluation team, it was demonstrated that the programme was valuable.

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