

idea corner

Wardrobe Loan Program

Increasing interest in the needs of the elderly and the physically handicapped is being exhibited at the University of Rhode Island. In the College of Resource Development, Helen Lundberg of the Cooperative Extension Service and Patricia Weeden of the College of Human Science and Services joined forces to develop a wardrobe of clothing items that have been modified to make dressing and undressing easier.

Lundberg has used the wardrobe with adult groups and agencies who work with the elderly and handicapped. Weeden has used the wardrobe to increase students' awareness of special needs groups in our population.

Combining resources and efforts resulted in a wardrobe of 40 items. Clothing items were designed or modified with specific disabilities or problems in mind, such as:

- Stiffness of joints.
- Poor balance and/or coordination.
- Spasticity of fingers and feet.
- Limited strength.
- Spinal problems.
- Wheelchair confinement and/or use of braces or crutches.
- Incontinence.

The clothing modifications would allow an individual to dress more independently and efficiently or would make it easier for an attendant to dress a patient. Redesigning the location of

openings and changing the type of fastener were common adjustments made.

Some design ideas came from current literature and others were original. No data exist on the practicality of these adaptations. Weeden's students and Lundberg's groups evaluated these garments and gave valuable criticism. Further valuable information was obtained by creating a wardrobe loan program. Nursing homes, day care centers, Extension groups, public schools, and nursing associations were contacted and told of the availability of this wardrobe as a loan or as a workshop.

During a 2-year period, the wardrobe was loaned for classroom and workshop use 32 times. Two American Home Economics Association regional workshops were presented and the wardrobe was borrowed by home economists in Kentucky, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire.

In the workshop presentations, Lundberg demonstrated dressing and undressing techniques for specific handicaps. Models used were elderly or handicapped people or staff members. Comments from the audience were invited and feedback was helpful in correcting or improving garments shown. Suggestions requesting more children's and men's clothing were made. Currently, there are plans to expand the wardrobe in these two areas.



Shorter jacket lengths provide more comfort for wheelchair travelers.

Fact sheets were developed presenting suggestions for selecting and modifying as well as directions for constructing garments. These fact sheets were available to audience members. A library of pertinent books and leaflets was also displayed at the workshops. Evaluation sheets were given to workshop audiences for recommendations.

Nursing home personnel have been enthusiastic and helpful at these workshops and in some cases have acted as hosts for other nursing home personnel. Some of the clothing items such as wraparound skirts and lap covers shaped like boxes were so enthusiastically received that they were made for residents as Christmas gifts.

Suggestions and criticisms have proven invaluable. One of the outcomes from the suggestions will be to develop a slide series showing these garments.

Another outcome will be the expansion of the fact sheets accompanying the workshops.

Evaluations of the program indicate that it has been helpful to the participants. They feel more able to select ready-to-wear clothing that will aid the elderly or physically handicapped in independent living. Participants feel better able to select a dressing technique suitable to specific handicap. Knowledge of specialized clothing resources available to the handicapped has increased.

The wardrobe development has increased students' sensitivity and awareness of people with special clothing needs. It has served as a useful teaching device in several new courses planned to explore special needs groups.

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