

# idea corner

## Meeting Needs of the Disabled

Virginia Extension family resource professionals have used their subject-matter areas of clothing and textiles, family (home) management, foods and nutrition, housing, and personal and family relationships to help people with disabilities. However, Extension agents and other professionals may need additional training to better understand how to adapt family resource information to meet the needs of the disabled.

Two projects, "Family Resource Development for the Handicapped" (1978) and "Barrier-Free Environments: The Family and the Community" (1979), were funded by Title IA, HEA. These projects were designed to integrate the family resource subject-matter areas using an interdisciplinary approach. The interdisciplinary approach is a problem-solving methodology that unites professionals from a variety of backgrounds to focus on the solution to a complex problem.<sup>1</sup>

This approach was used in training professionals, including Extension agents and paraprofessionals, to deal effectively with the home and community problems facing people with disabilities. Extension specialists in the identified subject-matter areas comprised the interdisciplinary team.

A four-day in-service education session, held in January, 1979, was the first effort to communicate this interdisciplinary approach to Extension agents

in family resources. A positive evaluation of the initial in-service education session resulted in regional conferences being conducted in the six Virginia Extension districts.

The regional conferences were conducted as part of the 1979 project "Barrier-Free Environments." An added dimension was given to this project by involving people from the Virginia Tech College of Architecture. Information on construction and modification of public buildings was included.

A "Barrier-Free Environments" hotline was established to make subject-matter information readily accessible to people with disabilities as well as family members, paraprofessionals, and professionals who work with them. The hotline is manned by the coordinator of the Tri-City Information and Referral Service (I and RS) located at Virginia State University. Answers to questions are handled, when possible, by the coordinator who responds to all I and RS calls and has access to resource materials provided by Extension specialists.

If the coordinator is unable to give a needed response and it's agreeable to the client, the call is referred to the appropriate specialist. Otherwise, the coordinator serves as a mediator to maintain confidentiality. When possible, the specialist furnishes the client's name to the Extension agent in the client's county or city so a more personal response and follow-up information can be provided.

Publications and other teaching materials were prepared by Extension specialists. A listing of these materials is available on request.

Extension specialists involved in this project concluded that: the interdisciplinary approach is valuable in communicating information about people with disabilities to Extension agents, professionals, paraprofessionals, and to the people themselves; the interdisciplinary approach requires planning on the part of the subject-matter specialist to effectively integrate information for dealing with the problems facing people with disabilities; and the interdisciplinary approach provides an opportunity to work with people from other agencies in addressing the needs of people with disabilities.

*Footnote*

1. N. C. Hook and B. Paolucci, "The Family as an Ecosystem," *Journal of Home Economics*, LX (1970), 315-18.

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