

Need For

Homemaking Education

A survey of low income families reveals a need for homemaking training, reports Lois Stewart

LACK of homemaking knowledge ranks with poverty as a major cause of poor living conditions among America's submerged one-third, a recent study of 50 low income families in Ames indicates.

Maxine Watson, of the Home Management Department, who made this survey for her master of science thesis, found that few made maximum use of their resources. Many were unaware that their families were ill-fed and undernourished, and almost all lacked the training necessary to operate efficiently on marginal budgets.

Typical was the wife of a tile ditcher who earned an average wage of \$15 to \$20 per week. The family lived in a scantily furnished frame house in which the living room boasted only a dirty rocking chair and a small corn-cob-burning heater. Water was carried from a neighbor's well.

However, when the homemaker was first questioned concerning her difficulties she could think of no problems. Although all the children were dressed in rags, the mother felt that there was no clothing problem in her family because items could be handed down through successive age groups. The three children observed appeared malnourished and sickly, but their mother denied any child care problem. Both parents apparently felt that they needed no help from the community and seemed satisfied to continue under existing conditions.

Approximately half of the low income families studied failed to meet the minimum milk, fruit and vegetable requirements. The most frequent reason given for inadequate use of these protective foods was not that the cost was too high, but that the homemaker did not consider them necessary.

Few food purchasers in the group bought economical quantities. Almost all purchased conveniently packaged foods, not realizing the saving that would result from buying larger amounts. However, the main reason for this was inadequate storage facilities. Over half of the group failed to recognize any food purchasing problem, yet they were not well enough informed to be able to specify the cut of meat or the

grade of canned fruits and vegetables they were getting.

Clothing seemed to cause little worry and almost no one seemed conscious of any problem until it was suggested by the interviewer. Over half asserted that they had no trouble clothing themselves and their families, yet many were wearing garments which needed mending.

A majority was able to choose the better material from samples shown them, but the reasons given for the choices indicated widespread ignorance of what to look for in judging fabric quality. Only 13 reported doing most of their sewing, and only half did their own mending.

Undernourished, undisciplined children brought few wrinkles to maternal brows. The interviewer felt that the majority of the mothers recognized this condition but considered it a problem about which they could do little.

Problems in caring for the home appeared to be augmented by the homemaker's mental attitude. Many appeared to have no incentive for keeping the home clean and attractive, feeling that outmoded buildings, dilapidated furniture and lack of family cooperation made the task hopeless. The investigator observed strikingly low standards of cleanliness in the homes visited.

Money cannot be made to stretch far enough, the homemakers reported, unable to offer any explanation for this difficulty. More than three fourths of the group interviewed made no definite plans for spending and a greater number kept no record of income.

In general, the low income homemakers were completely unconscious of problems in time management. Several, interviewed in the afternoon, said they found it difficult to keep busy all day—while unwashed breakfast dishes faced the interviewer. Basing her judgment upon such indications as unmade beds and unwashed dishes, Miss Watson found almost three fourths of the homemakers to be poor managers of time or lacking in ambition.

More than half reported no home economics training in grade or high school. This was particularly characteristic of older women. Formal education ranged from none to high school graduation. The

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Step by Step Memorial Union Grows



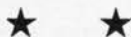
Organist Howard Chase plays a concert on the Lane-Wells organ in Great Hall.

Philanthropy Provides An Organ

Main characters in this chapter of the life of the Memorial Union are W. G. "Bill" Lane and Walter T. Wells. Both men were engineering graduates with the class of 1910, and Lane received a previous degree in '09. With a Horatio Alger success story behind them, Lane and Wells have derived a great deal of pleasure in contributing generously to various college projects. In 1936 Memorial Union's now popular pipe organ was a gift to the college from the two men.

The organ was brought to Iowa State from Madison, Wisconsin, and installed during the summer of that year. In October, Lane and Wells and their wives came back to the campus to attend the dedication ceremony held in Great Hall.

During the school year organ concerts are played in Great Hall once a week. Three recitals are broadcast over WOI weekly and the organ provides appropriate music for Sunday evening vesper services. Thanks to Mr. Lane and Mr. Wells, Iowa State's Memorial Union is one of the few in the country which provides organ music as a part of the daily life of the student body.



Memorial Union

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Homemaking Education

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majority had completed only the eighth grade.

Typical of the low nutritional standards set by these women is the case of one mother with four children who used only one quart of milk a day. When Miss Watson suggested that the money spent for candy be used for milk the woman answered, "Oh, no! My husband would never listen to that. He says it's the candy that makes the children love him!"

A re-education program should begin with foods training, Miss Watson concluded, since the homemakers themselves are most aware of food problems. She suggested the presentation of experimental effects of dietary deficiencies in an effort to drive home the importance of good nutrition. A program concerning menu preparation was also recommended to help the mothers visualize the application of dietary recommendations. According to Miss Watson, an awareness of the need for more careful selection of textiles must precede any improvements in this field. She suggested actual demonstrations concerning the effect of repeated washings on various qualities of sheeting and the difference in construction of clothing fabrics.

The need for homemaking education for low-income groups is strongly indicated by the survey's results. More general knowledge of economical purchasing and planning methods will do much to raise low income living standards above the bare subsistence level, Miss Watson predicted.

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