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THE CHANGING FAMILY--THE IMPACT ON THE DELIVERY OF LEISURE SERVICES

BY

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ABSTRACT

The types and kinds of leisure services provided in a community are strongly influenced by the changes in the structure of families. The traditional nuclear family is now in the minority; one in six children live in a single parent family; delinquency rates among children ages 10 to 17 have increased 130 percent since 1960; over the past 25 years, the divorce rate has triped; and in the wake of divorce, the standard of living of the ex-wife falls by 73 percent, while that of the ex-husband rises by 42 percent. There are gay parents; cultural differences are the rule; childless marriages; latch-key kids, yuppies giving way to Ultras (Ultraconsumers); stress and competition; the graying of our population and AIDS, human sexuality and promiscuity. Although more men are pitching in with domestic chores, there are still 22 million women in America who return home after an eight-hour day bringing the house up to health standards.

One of the first tenets of program planning is to start where the potential participants are, at their level and lifestyle. The concepts on which most family recreation programs are based today have been outdated by social and constitutional changes.

Many specific recreation program suggestions are offered to meet the needs of today's families including: high adventure, music, drama, service, camping/nature/interpretation, dance, clubs/hobbies/collecting, arts/crafts, mobility type programs, sports/games/aquatics, special days/holidays, building traditions, mental/language, social and food related activities and experiences.

THE CHANGING FAMILY--THE IMPACT ON THE DELIVERY OF LEISURE SERVICES

So family night was a bust! In many cities the main objective of a family night is to have neighborhood parents take an active part in the summer playground program. Perhaps if you and your program staff are a bit more "with it," a regular time is scheduled for family get-togethers throughout all four seasons. But apparently most of the children

couldn't even scrape up one parent to come with them. In our town, Friday is payday and the evening is spent trying to cash in coupons for double value on next week's groceries. The T.G.I.F. syndrome in other families means shoes off, a can of beer, and television. Does your program successfully compete with the Friday night movie?

One of the first tenets of program planning is to start where the potential participants are, at their level and lifestyle, where they are coming from. And this may well be where you'll find the cause of your family night bust. For the concepts on which most family programs are based today have been outdated by social and institutional change.

For most of us, family means the traditional nuclear social unit, the "ideal" form that includes father, mother, and children living together, usually in some private, separate dwelling. Father earns the money and mother raises the children. This ideal family may expand to take in a mother who works in paid employment, but the father is still seen as the head of the household, the "provider," the "chief executive."

THE FACTS--A DIFFERENT STORY

* The traditional nuclear family is now in the minority. In only 34 percent of the households the man is the sole breadwinner; in 50 percent both parents work; for three percent of married couples, the woman is the sole provider; and for the rest, 13 percent, there is no breadwinner.

* The number of one-parent families is increasing faster than the number of two-parent families.

* One out of six children (about ten million) live in a single-parent family; 87 percent of these families are headed by women and 13 percent by men.

* Delinquency rates among children ages 10 to 17 have increased 130 percent since 1960.

* Drug use by teenagers is the highest for any industrialized nation.

* Over the past 25 years, the divorce rate has tripled.

* In the wake of divorce, the standard of living of the ex-wife falls by 73 percent, while that of the ex-husband rises by 42 percent.

* Sixty percent of divorced fathers fail to support their children, and 49 percent haven't seen their children in the past year.

* If you are a 25-year-old woman today, you have a 30 percent chance of ending up an impoverished single mother.

* Marriage patterns have changed, with more divorces, and there are more remarriages, and wider gaps in age. Some of these young wives are having children with much older men. The focus is on the present and not

to think about tomorrow.

* Marriage partners' roles have changed.

* All families that look different from our imagined norm--the complete, heterosexual nuclear family--have to deal with a sense of being marked by disgrace or a feeling of defeat for not being the "ideal" family. Yet there is an increasing number of varied family forms. For example, single-parent families, communal families, families with stepparents, and families with gay parents.

* Many parents of "different" families feel branded by the stigma. Single parents are concerned with the amount of time they can spend with their children. Parents in the crisis of separating have a hard time striking a balance between caring for themselves and for their children. It is a time when it is very hard to keep from using the children as weapons of anger or pawns in negotiating.

* Many single parents are faced with economic insecurity as well as the sole responsibility for making most decisions.

* As more and more parents divorce and then remarry, a growing number of families now include stepparents and children who can be related in a number of ways: as biological or adoptive siblings, step-siblings, half-siblings--the "his," "hers" and "ours" family.

PROGRAMMING INDICATIONS

* Teach recreational skills to both children and parents in some activities so the time they do spend together is quality.

* Provide many inexpensive family programs---all may not have discretionary dollars.

* Understand that some adults may not feel comfortable or know how to share a recreational experience with their children or with other families--don't take this for granted.

* Provide some opportunities for big muscle, vigorous activity that the single-parent family may share: jogging (the younger ones drop out before they have reached their limit); swimming, tennis; frisbee; and bicycling.

* Be aware of the time slots available and do your scheduling accordingly. Oftentimes centers are not open on the weekend. Maybe we need to go back to a concept that was once accepted by the majority of the recreation profession--that we work when others have leisure.

* Teach some skills that will enable single parents to recreate with their families at home.

PROGRAM FOR NEW ISSUES

This new family constellation raises some unique issues. Stepparents have to contend with the myths of the wicked and cruel stepmother or stepfather. It is often difficult to find comfortable names for one another. The "other parent" may continue to exert a powerful influence on the new family's life. Children who spend time with both sets of parents may still wish that their biological parents could be back together. Stepparents and stepchildren often experience a push and pull feeling, wanting trust to develop fast and yet fearing closeness too quickly.

Gay parents share with other parents their loving, their caring, their dedication, their perplexities, and their angers. Gay parents live in a society which regards them with suspicion and mistrusts their ability to raise children well. Probably the main issue for the gay parent is custody. Lesbian mothers often have painful, exhausting custody struggles, many times at the children's expense. Social disapproval of gays, plus the custom of awarding custody to mothers, means that very few openly gay fathers win custody of their children and many have to struggle even for visitation rights.

Another cost from the threat of custody battles is that gay parents live with constant uncertainty. When will someone decide to raise a fuss? Perhaps the major distortion caused by the custody issue is that it keeps many gay parents from "coming out" and telling people about their gayness.

Probably the major contribution the recreation agency can make here is acceptance. Provide a comfortable environment for gay families to participate in recreation with their neighbors. You as the professional set the tone and mood, you are the model for others to emulate. Perhaps a gradual lessening of social distance would be wise. Help the children accept their parents' gayness. They can't change it.

Cooperative living is one way people have found to maintain a family unit with or without children. With private living space, the individual at the same time has access to a larger family experience in which some space and certain daily and special activities are shared in common, an extended family living arrangement. One of the most prevalent needs is to be able to communicate when one wants to be alone or wants to be social. Another problem occurs when different lifestyles emerge, causing conflict between and among families.

PROGRAMMING INDICATIONS

* Provide opportunities so that the stepparent can shine and be looked upon with favor, enhancing his or her best qualities and skills. In recreation there are many opportunities if you, as the programmer, take the time to bring out the stepparent's or stepchild's sense of

humor, mental ability, or physical prowess. Here is a chance to see one another in a different light than "pickup your room" or "eat all your dinner," and the responding "I don't have to" or "I don't want to."

* Probably the major contribution of the recreation program to those living in a communal setting is to teach discussion skills. In some instances, where there are large number of people living together, you might go to them. Perhaps use sensitivity training, and always seek, to hone listening skills and to teach non-verbal and verbal communication.

So we have family-people oriented concerns and issues. We have addressed a few, but we haven't even mentioned:

* Marital fidelity--is it too much to expect, 50 years with the same person?

* Cultural differences are the rule; these children can vary incredibly in style, size, disposition, language and customs.

* Childless marriages--the couples least able to care for children are having them.

* Marriage vs. cohabitation--tax advantages, too!

* Latch-key kids

* Divorce reforms (less cause, shorter time, less financial security for the woman). Lifestyles, roles and responsibilities, are different in different parts of the United States.

* Trends in our lifestyle (fitness), high adventure, et al.

* Incest

* Stress on being "hurried," competition--on all members of the family.

* Role models of parents, for good or evil, on 4-5 year olds.

* T.V., a curse or a blessing?

* Yuppies giving way to Ultras (Ultraconsumers)--want the best now--will postpone home ownership or parenthood in order to spend for "accessible personal rewards." The Ultras are a large group--some 26 million consumers, ages 21 to 50 from most income groups and all ethnic groups. And since more than half of all Ultras earn less than \$40,000 annually per household, they are willing to go into debt. "Their solution is lots of plastic."

* Baby boomers, some 80 million strong, are having children (boomlets)--an average of 1.7 children, fewer than half as many as their mothers had. Baby boomers are marrying later.

* Spaces, places for recreation

* AIDS and human sexuality--promiscuity

* Weather

* Teen suicides

* The graying of our population

* Although more men are pitching in with domestic chores, there are still 22 million women in America who return home after an eight-hour day bringing the house up to health standards.

* What has happened to Saturdays and Sundays? In one neighborhood where there is a large apartment complex, the ozone of dust being circulated and rearranged on weekends reaches the smog alert level.

Realistically, wouldn't you like to see a magazine that really tackles the problem of the employed housewife--and how she could create leisure time for herself. How about:

"Polyester Children--Future Myth or Reality."

"Protect Your Bathroom Against Intruders with an Alarm System You can Install in One Weekend."

"Separate Vacations: Theirs and Yours."

"Moving vs. Cleaning."

"Napping Does Not Cause Bad Skin."

"Leisure: What Is It? Who Gets It? How Much Does it Cost? Is it Catching? How Do You Get It?"

So leisure and time are other issues!

PROGRAM IDEAS

Many of the following program suggestions are not new or even novel. A great deal depends on your activity leadership expertise, your knowledge and understanding of the lifestyle and living arrangements of the families that could utilize your services and your willingness to be innovative and creative. Be aware of "trends" health and fitness.

Some of the following activities could be "high adventure," depending on the level of skill and development of the individual family members and on the manner in which the activity is presented.

Food Related Activities

- Taffy pulls

- "Putting food by" -
freezing

- Making homemade ice-cream
- Cookouts, barbeques
- Picnics
- Crab feasts
- drying, making pickles, canning
- Gourmet cooking
- Progressive dinners
- Making yeast breads

Mobility Type Programs

- Penny hikes
- Bicycling, unicycling
- Roller skating, ice skating
- Car rallies
- Bike rallies
- Coaster making and racing
- Surfing (body and board)
- Balloon volleyball
- Skiing (snow, water, "hot dogging")
- Hiking, caving
- Canoeing, rafting, kayaking, inner tubing
- Horseback riding

Footbag fever - safe sport; little bigger than a golf ball, looks like a soccer ball and feels like a bean bag (commercial names - Hacky Sack or Soc Soc)

Service Activities

- Clean up -- park, stream
- Beautification of the neighborhood
- Conservation projects -- animals, plants, energy
- Ecology days
- Cars -- wash, repair
- Bicycle maintenance
- Home improvements

Adult/Child Shares a Hobby

- Stamps
- Beer can collecting
- Metal detecting
- Refinishing
- Pottery
- Woodworking
- Rug making
- Sewing
- Making soap, scents
- Gardening (indoors and out)
- Magic
- Clowning

Sports, Games

- Swimming
- Clown diving
- Bowling
- Volleyball
- Croquet
- T-ball
- Golf
- Archery
- Skeet and trap shooting
- Fishing
- "New Games"
- Trust games
- Novelty track and field events
- Couch Potato Olympics

Nature, Historical Interpretation Activities

- Star gazing
- Camping in the snow
- Visit an arboretum, museum
- Family geneology
- Visit nearby historical sites
- Bird watching
- Orienteering
- Gardening
- Harvesting (fruits, vegetables)
- Crab, ants, cockroach racers
- Wood gathering
- Snow play (fights, forts, people, angels in the snow)
- Tree house building
- Animal/pet care and training
- Hypnotizing and flying chickens

Music, Dance and Drama

- Music appreciation
- Touch or social dancing
- Making movies
- Conversation (no T.V. for a week)
- Folk, square, contra, round dancing
- Story telling
- Charades
- Tell fortunes, cards, tea leaves, phrenology
- Theater
- Finger play
- Puppetry
- Family (sing, orchestra, fun band)
- Tap dancing
- Irish clog or step dancing
- Limbo
- Clowning
- Jam sessions

Arts and Crafts

- Making cards/wrappings for all types of special occasions
- Candle making
- Brooms
- Heritage wreaths
- Potpourri
- Pomander balls
- Weaving (card, loom)
- Sculpturing
- Dyeing with native materials
- Camera (picture taking, developing)
- Kite making and flying
- Carving
- Leather

- Painting - patchwork painting
- Origami

Special Days and Holidays--Tradition

Build, modify and enjoy them!

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Christmas tree cutting - Dreidel games - Bobbing for apples - Christmas carving - Christmas caroling - October Fest - May baskets - Family carnival - Birthdays, anniversaries - Mardi Gras- King cake | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Hog Day - Luminaries - Twelfth Night -- "Burning of the Grasses" - Rosh Hashanah - Chanukah - Purim - The tooth fairy - Doll Day (March 3) - Kite Day (May 5) |
|---|--|

These family activities are not exclusive to one category, nor will they "work" for all families or all neighborhoods. Family recreation programming has been revolutionized by the Atomic Era, the Computer Era and the Space Age. We are on the cutting edge now of what could be the most dramatic of them all--the D.N.A. Age--the ability to make man whatever we want him to be. The recreation programs we have been offering to the family for the past 25 years just won't work anymore. A continuous study of the lifestyle, family structure, living accommodations, periods of leisure, family size and economics is essential to the effective recreation program!

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