

idea corner

Continuing Education for Nursing Home Elderly

Imagine a group of students ranging in age from 76 to 93! Imagine this student body gathering every Monday morning, regardless of weather conditions, and stacking their walkers and canes against the side of the classroom.

The program I'm describing is called, "Continuing Education for the Elderly in Nursing Homes," and is now finishing its second year. Using faculty from the University of Wisconsin's Extension staff, and from the university itself, the program is unique and exciting. Watch for it to get even bigger.

The ongoing success of the program depends on its sponsoring agency, the Attic Angel Association. Members of this outstanding women's group provide the volunteers necessary to transport the

participants from several nursing homes to the classroom site. In addition, the volunteers make sure room arrangements are adequate and coordinate the programs. Early Monday morning the drivers of the transportation vehicles check in with a transportation chairman. The chairman has already checked with the participating nursing homes to make sure enough cars are available to convey members to class.

Until the fall of 1975, classes were held at a local church and another nursing home's activity room. Starting in September, 1975, classes were shifted to their permanent home—the Attic Angel Towers—a facility for sheltered-care living. When the site changed, the class doubled. At first 18 to 20 came in; now the lectures attract 40 to 42 each week.

The program was initially set up using community and university commun-





ity advisors familiar with aging programs. With this input, the members of the committee then polled the elderly to see what they wanted to explore. It was definitely understood that this would be an educational activity, not craft or entertainment oriented. The results of the survey were given top priority; programs were planned to meet participants' needs. Recently, one of the students requested a language lab in Spanish. Although this may be on tap for a later day, right now this type of individualized learning must be postponed.

The curriculum was developed into modules, four sessions each. Thus, health sciences would comprise a four-week session; current events, another four weeks; history of opera, a complete module in four sessions, and so on. The last semester consisted of programs for four months, ranging from history of other cultures, physical and mental well-being through another segment in the arts.

The most recent development in the program is the way it's sent to others who are interested but unable to attend the base lecture. In March of 1976, activity directors from other nursing homes were invited to attend the lectures, received a

cassette of each lecture, and then returned to their facility equipped to hold the lecture, via cassette. The coordinators of the program insist that a designated leader attends each lecture and that the cassette not be the whole presentation. In this way, the leader may interpret parts of the cassette that are questioned and act as a reliable resource person.

One of the most exciting remarks about the value of the program came from one of the participants—a gentleman of 87 years. "The professors treated us as adults with understanding. Unfortunately, too many people talk to us as though we are children and play children's games with us."

In a society where 20% of its population will be above 65 years of age in a scant 20 years, it's essential that Extension professionals prepare programs to meet demands of this segment. The results of this program already indicate that continuing education will be one of the demands. Learning is forever.

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