

ARC FOR ACTION AND RESOURCE

The Action and Resource Centre for Low-Income Families has now been in operation for six months. Over the last few months of the Family Centre Project, Family Members were appointed to the positions previously held by professional staff. We feel that low-income people can best understand the problems of other low-income people. The new staff are settling into the new Centre with enthusiasm. The Family Centre Project was an exciting three-year experience with sixty low-income families. It demonstrated new methods of work for welfare workers, provided a pilot scheme for a guaranteed minimum income scheme, and most important of all, it demonstrated that consumer participation within a welfare agency is possible.

The Action and Resource Centre, or A.R.C. as we now call it, is a self-help organisation run and staffed by low-income people. At present we have fourteen workers called resource workers.

The Credit and Debt Consolidation Resource Area informs consumers of their

rights and provides advice on Credit Unions and referral to a legal service where necessary.

The Children's Resource Area involves a "kindy" for pre-schoolers where mothers can leave their children for a few hours a day, every day or on an occasional basis. There is an evening program one night a week for primary school age children and another evening for teenagers.

The Holiday Host Resource Area can provide a suitable temporary home away from home for children whose parents need to go into hospital, on a camp, or are in some other crisis situation and also provides holidays for children during the school summer holidays. Families often help each other in this way, but mainly the hosts are families from the community who generously open their homes to the Centre children.

The Camps Resource Area creates opportunities for families to go off on camps and in a holiday environment learn to communicate with each other and understand themselves more. This helps promote group cohesiveness and co-operation.

The Family Centre Council is made up of nine members of the Centre elected by the whole membership. This is the decision making structure of ARC. With the assistance of several standing committees, council makes decisions regarding budget allocation, deployment and hiring of staff, what resource areas the Centre will provide and what activities it will run.

The Housing Resource Area provides information for families on emergency accommodation, their rights as tenants, how to deal with the Housing Commission, and where to find sympathetic landlords. The Housing Worker also brings her first-hand experience of difficulties in obtaining rental accommodation to committees working in the housing policy area.

The Social Security Resource Area aims to assist families achieve income security by informing people of their full entitlement to the various benefits and pensions available from the Department of Social Security. The Social Security worker is actually working with the Department in assisting them make their

information leaflets easier to understand and to spread the information more widely in the community.

The Employment Resource Area provides resources which will enable people to obtain a job or improve skills so that they may take on the employment they prefer. The Support Work Program, which was written up in the last edition of Action, is part of this resource area.

One important aspect of the Centre is that it provides a place for people to come to meet friends and make friends. There is a coffee lounge where people can enjoy a cup of coffee or tea and have a chat. From time to time there are craft activities, working groups and sewing groups.

The Centre also employs a social action resource worker because it is concerned with the causes of poverty and inequality. The members of ARC are enthusiastic about this opportunity to demonstrate that, given the resources, the training and the opportunity, low-income people can provide an Action and Resource Centre for low income families.

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