

Family Counseling and Family Life Education

There is a significant linkage between poverty and the breakdown of the family. Single parents are much more likely to have inadequate incomes, substandard housing, malnourished children and lack of access to health care. Divorce usually degrades the economic conditions under which the woman and children live, while improving the economic conditions of the man. Each year, family breakdown pushes large numbers of middle and working class mothers and children into poverty in North America.

There is a growing concern about family life among the general public. "Family values" has become a topic for heated, political debate in the United States. Polls indicate that large numbers of North Americans feel unprepared to raise their own children and worry about their relationship with their spouse. There is a strong consensus that

more must be done to prevent divorce, domestic violence and child abuse.

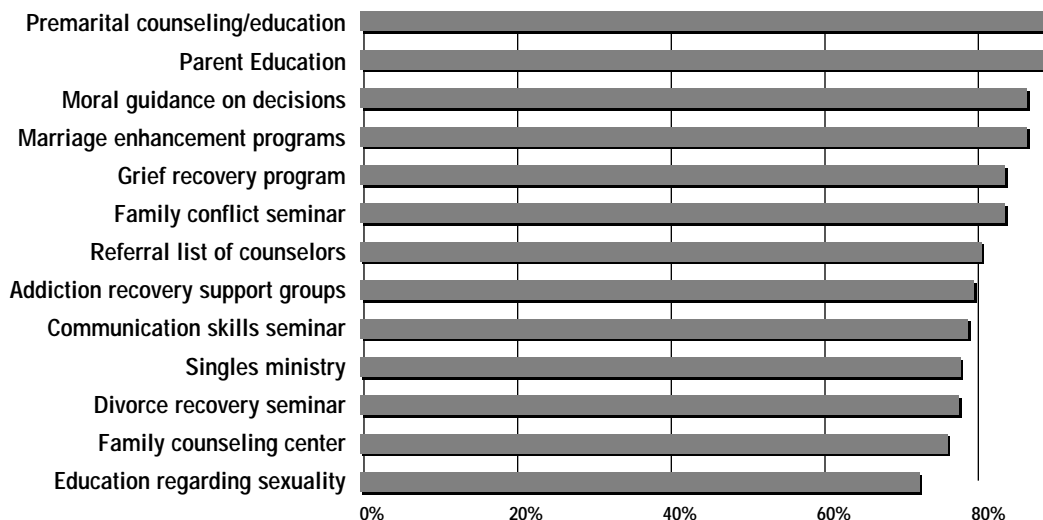
The needs of single adults are becoming more prominent as a growing percentage of the population in both the United States and Canada is made up of unmarried, divorced and widowed persons. This is the result of several factors "delay in the average age at which people get married, increase in divorce, and in more divorced people, and an increase in the lifespan" and results in a growing population which needs specialized help. This is especially true of single parents, who must cope with both parental roles and make a living for

The general public looks to faith-based and church-related community service organizations to help meet the needs of families. More than two-thirds of Americans (69%) say that Christian organizations must act to meet the needs of families (George Barna, *America Renews Its Search for God*;

Chart 1

What Programs are Needed

Percent who say essential/important



(1992, Regal Books, Ventura CA), Table 38). More than half (52%) indicate that faith-based community services must meet the needs of single adults. The same attitude exists about meeting the needs of parents (2. Barna, Tables 33 and 34). In general, it appears that this is a new challenge for Adventist Community Services, one that we must move quickly to meet!

What Are the Needs?

What family-life programs and services should your ACS unit be providing? A needs assessment was conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry recently which provides some helpful information across North America (Monte and Norma Sahlin, *A New Generation of Adventist Families* (1997, Center for Creative Ministry, Lincoln, Nebraska). Obviously, there will be different priorities in each local community, but the agreement among the survey respondents on the importance of several activities is so strong that the need for them is very clear! There is a message in these data that no ACS director or board can afford to ignore.

Two services are “musts” every in every community. (See chart 1.) The survey respondents were asked to indicate the importance of each activity on a four-point scale “absolutely essential,” very important, somewhat important and not important. (The percentages shown in chart 1 are the combined responses for the first two options on the scale.) These two programs are rated as “absolutely essential” by a majority of the respondents. When the “very important” category is added, nearly nine out of ten say each of these services must be provided regularly in their community.

Parent education is a crucial activity to be provided in the eyes of nine out of ten respondents (89%). Women are more likely to see the need for this than are men. Adults who have not completed a secondary diploma are more likely to agree, so there is a particular need among the poor.

It is not necessary for every ACS director to learn how to teach parenting classes. Any ACS unit can find the resource people necessary to lead out in these classes. A number of curriculum pack-

ages have been published. Some of them have the major presentations on video cassette (To obtain any of the resource materials described in this section, contact *AdventSource* at (800) 328-0525). There is no good reason why a parenting seminar cannot be taught in every community at least once a year.

Marriage strengthening programs are needed in the opinion of seven out of eight (86%) respondents. Women are more likely to feel strongly about this need, as are adults from the Baby Boom generation. It is important that every Family Service Center include as a part of its yearly program a marriage enhancement retreat or series.

Volunteer networks such as Marriage Encounter and resource centers such as the Center for Creative Ministry regularly provide these experiences in collaboration with local cosponsors. If your ACS unit does not have qualified, trained leaders, you can link up with these resource organizations and still provide this important service in your community.

If we can prevent marriages from breaking up, we will very likely prevent women and children from sliding into poverty. If we can help parents do a better job of raising their children, we can in many cases keep that child from becoming at risk of failure in school and the inevitable results “inability” to get a decent job, despair, alcohol and eventually contact with the criminal justice system.

These first two services are crucial in stopping family breakdown and dealing with the root causes of poverty, but there are several other needs which were identified as important by more than 75% of the respondents. On each of these items, 40% or more of the respondents say this service is “absolutely essential” and another 35% or more say it is “very important.” In no case do more than 8% see these services as “not important.”

Grief recovery program is important in the opinion of four out five (83%) respondents. Baby Boomers and adults with less than twelve years of education are more likely to feel this need, while Baby Busters and male respondents of all age groups are less likely to do so. Obviously this is an activity that is needed when it is needed and

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could, conceivably, not be needed for periods of time. Larry Yeagley, who pioneered grief recovery ministry among Seventh-day Adventists, believes that a seminar or support group should be provided at least once a year in each community. A curriculum resource is available with video lectures featuring Yeagley.

Family conflict management seminar is needed in the opinion of four out of five (83%) respondents. Men are less likely to see this need, while Baby Boomers of both genders and adults who have not completed a high school diploma are more likely to see this need.

There is strong evidence that one of the things that makes marriages durable is when couples “learn how to fight fair” (“Researchers Say Learning to Fight Can Help a Marriage,” *Mental Health Weekly*, February 3, 1992, page 5). Howard Markman, a researcher at the National Institutes of Mental Health, “found that couples who handle conflict effectively have a 50 percent lower divorce rate than those who do not.” Markman says that “love, sex and physical attraction are not as important in keeping the marriage together as how the couples handle their differences and anger when it arises.” Teaching people how to handle conflict is a service your ACS unit can provide that will keep families together, prevent poverty and reduce domestic violence.

A *referral list of family counselors* is something that 80% of respondents see a need for, and expect of Community Service Centers. If your ACS unit does not have a list of family counselors to whom you can make referrals, you are not living up to the expectations that four out of five of your constituents have for your program.

People do not expect ACS centers to have professional counselors on staff or as volunteers, although a few Family Service Centers do. They do expect you to be able to guide them to one or more skilled, properly licensed counselors whom they can trust.

To build your list, begin by contacting the Association of Adventist Family Life Professionals (AAFLP). The members include marriage and family therapists, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists. You can get the name of the

member or members nearest to you by contacting the AAFLP national office at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring MD 20904. Another source of names is the Association of Adventist Social Workers, at the same address.

To establish a referral relationship, make contact with the individual(s) you get from these sources. Sit down with the counselor and discuss issues that are important in your eyes before you can comfortably make referrals. Ask about their fees and policies. If you feel comfortable, ask for a number of their business cards and put those in your desk.

Addiction recovery support groups are needed in the view of four out of five respondents (79%). A distressing number of North American families report alcohol and drug problems. A significant number of individuals in your community struggle with addictive behaviors. Less educated adults are more likely to see this as an important need.

This is definitely not a program that requires you to find leaders for it. The self-help approach places the responsibility for leadership on recovering addicts themselves. An introductory booklet on how to start support groups is available from *AdventSource*. An in-depth handbook for groups focusing on substance abuse issues entitled *Regeneration* has been published by the Institute for Addiction Prevention at Andrews University.

A *communication skills seminar* is something four out of five respondents (78%) would like to see regularly provided in their local community. Baby Boomers and adults who have not completed a secondary-level diploma are also more likely to see this need.

There are a number of good curricula available to help you provide this seminar in your community.

A *divorce recovery seminar* is a needed program in the opinion of three out of four church members (77%). Baby Boomers and adults who have not completed a high school diploma are more likely to see this need.

An excellent curriculum resource, *Dealing with Divorce* (*AdventSource*, 1989), has been developed by David White, community health consultant for ADRA's North American Regional Office. His field

testing has found this to be a program to which there is good response in the community. He believes that it can be as successful as the Five-day Plan was in the 1960s if it is widely implemented.

Family counseling services are seen as an important need by three out of four respondents. The less education a respondent has, the more likely they are to feel strongly about this need. Men are less likely than women to see family counseling as a need in the community.

Some ACS Family Service Centers are providing counseling services staffed by volunteer professionals. At least ACS center has a mental health professional on staff. Any Community Service Center that has office space available could seek an arrangement with a licensed counselor who is interested in private practice: in exchange for rent-free office space and receptionist services, the counselor would agree to donate a limited number of sessions which the center case workers can provide to needy families.

The lowest ranked need in this research is programs providing *education regarding sexuality*. Only 71% of the respondents believe this is a service needed in their community. With the proliferation of news comment about sex education and therapy, as well as the controversy attached to it, it is easy to understand why this is seen as less of a need than the other items.

ADRA North America has adopted as one of its strategic goals to urge more Community Service Centers to become Family Service Centers and hire qualified social workers as directors. We believe that family life education is important enough that it needs to be supported by local social service agencies that have the same kind of organizational strength church schools provide for the education system sponsored by the Adventist Church.

Starting a Family Services Program

Successful community programs “scratch where people itch.” In order to start a family services program, you need to know where people in your community “itch” right now. How many are interested in parenting skills? In grief recovery? In dealing with divorce? In improving their mar-

Discussion Questions for Your Board

1. What kind of priority is family life in our community? What kind of priority should it be?
2. Has anyone in the group ever visited a Community Service Center with a strong family life program? If so, what did you see there?
3. To what extent does family breakdown result in people who come in for emergency food and other basic services?
4. What kinds of family services are most needed in our community?
 - Marriage strengthening programs
 - Parent education
 - Education regarding sexuality
 - Communication skills seminar
 - Divorce recovery
 - Family conflict management seminar
 - Grief recovery
 - Addiction recovery support groups
 - Family counseling
 - Other (What?)
5. Who in our sponsoring congregation(s) might have the gifts necessary to get something started? Can you list several names that might serve on a program team or planning committee?
6. What barriers would need to be overcome to turn our Community Service Center into a Family Service Center? Or, to start a Family Service Center in our community? What resources are available within the constituent congregation(s) and from outside sources?

riages? How many are singles? How many are prisoners or homeless or handicapped? What kinds of activities would be helpful to them? What are they willing to invest in time, money, and personal involvement?

One way to define needs is simply to assemble the statistical data already available. You can construct a family profile of your community by getting the census data on file at the public library the number of teenagers, married couples, single

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parents, divorced persons, widows, or families with children under age 13, low-income households, etc.

Statistical data will reveal the raw number of potential participants in various services and programs, but cannot indicate their degree of interest or their “felt needs.” Various survey instruments are available that can be used to find the interests of community residents through telephone interviews or doorstep visits.

You can obtain even more specific information about the kinds of activities, topics, publicity, and locations that will draw a crowd by setting up one or more small group discussions with potential program participants. Marketing experts call this “focus group research.” For example, statistical data indicated that 413 households in one neighborhood had children under 6 years of age. In a telephone survey, 65 percent of these expressed interest in attending parenting classes. To get more specific information a group interview was set up with two couples and two single parents with preschool children. A trained interviewer led the discussion, using a detailed list of questions compiled by the planning committee. The entire discussion was tape-recorded (with the permission of the participants) and transcribed for careful study.

Assistance in conducting surveys and focus group research in your community is available from the Center for Creative Ministry (800-272-4664). A limited amount of technical assistance is also available from ADRA’s North American Regional Office.

Targeting Your New Program

When you have defined the needs, you can begin to define the target group for a new program. The nature of family life education and counseling programs is that each is designed to deal with a very specific set of needs and a very specific type of client. Who are the people your specific program is designed to serve?

There is a temptation to be very unrealistic about this question. On many occasions, when ADRA consultants with a group starting a new ministry and ask, “Who are you trying to reach?” the answer is either a variation of “everybody” or

“anybody.” Both answers can lead to failure. An “anybody” focus is a failure to see the forest because of total attention on one or two trees. An “everybody” focus is a failure to see trees because of total attention on the forest. Unrealistic estimates of how many people can actually be touched can lead to discouragement and make those who do respond feel like they are not really cared for as individuals.

Here is a realistic formula for calculating how many people might be reached through a new family life program. Start with the number of persons in the target group as given by the census data and multiply this figure by the percentage that Adventists represent among the total church members in the community. This is usually between 1 and 3 percent, and represents an estimate of your “market share” among the general population.

For example, if you were launching a support group for single parents, you might calculate the target audience this way: Let’s suppose your community contains 10,250 single parents and your church represents one percent of the total “churched” people in town. The calculation of a reasonable target group would look like this:

$$10,250 \times .01 = 102 \text{ persons}$$

This would be the number of people you can reasonably expect to reach with your new program.

Current research in group dynamics indicates that an ongoing group or seminar will enroll no more than 40 people. If a Family Service Center expects to involve more than 40 participants in a new program, it must develop a plan with several groups, perhaps meeting on different nights or on different schedules or in different locations.

The Program Team

Ideally, the coordinator for the new program should be a family life professional. This may seem impractical to you at first, but there are now thousands of Adventists with appropriate degrees, licensure or certification in social work, family life education, marriage and family counseling, and psychology. These professionals need to be made a part of the work of ACS.

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If you cannot find an appropriate individual with professional education who is willing to serve as program coordinator, look for someone willing to become a trained paraprofessional. Short-term training is available to become certified as a seminar presenter or group facilitator in specific curricula. Paraprofessional training is available through the Association of Adventist Family Life Professionals and many other organizations, as well as community colleges and state/province universities.

If there is no one in your community who can take on this task, contact ADRA's North American Regional Office. Professionals are available to come into your community for short periods of time on a contract basis to conduct programs for you.

The program coordinator may be a volunteer role, or a part-time worker with a modest stipend. It is standard practice for an ACS center to contract with a qualified person to, for example, conduct a parenting class two evenings a week for six weeks for a total fee of \$300 to \$600. Or, through a combination of program and counseling fees, fund raising and subsidies, a skilled program developer can build a program that supports a full-time coordinator.

More important than whether your program coordinator is a professional or a trained paraprofessional, it is essential that this person have the ability to organize and manage projects, and have the trust of the target audience and the church board. The coordinator need not be one of the target group, but she or he must be able to communicate with the target group. She should be an individual with a clear commitment to the mission of ACS, and a willingness to see this program as a long-term initiative, an opportunity to learn new skills and be exposed to new ideas.

The coordinator will need a supportive team of volunteers. The size of the target audience and the anticipated program will indicate how large a team, but at least three specific roles must be filled. You will want two working assistants, one to deal with paperwork, purchasing, setting up equipment, making phone calls, distributing advertising; and another to chat with people as they gath-

er at events, to get to know them personally, answer questions, be available to listen, and set up personal interviews as needed. And you will need at least one person who is actually part of the target audience, who understands personally the needs they have, the concerns they face, and the feelings they bring to the program.

The entire team should meet monthly or quarterly to debrief, for brainstorming, planning, sharing, and caring for one another. The quality of relationships within this team will determine to a large degree the success of the new program.

Developing the Program Details

When you have defined the needs and the target group, you can begin to put together a specific plan of action for your new family life program. The program team should be the planning committee to put on paper (and bring back to the ACS director and board) a proposal that includes a specific description of the needs and the target audience, the objectives, the program coordinator and team, program design, curriculum resources, budget and suggested starting date.

To be effective, program content must clearly and helpfully address the needs expressed by the target audience. But "packaging" is also vital. Where will the group or groups meet? Are there suitable meeting rooms at the ACS center? If not, use of a meeting room can be obtained at the "Y," a housing project, or some other public facility. Usually you can secure the use of such rooms without charge for a community service.

What time of year will the first seminar or support group be scheduled? Every community has favorable seasons, and seasons also when low attendance is guaranteed. For example, one ACS unit in Pennsylvania offered a health screening event on the weekend that the football season came to its climax. Few people came out. The same program, with the same advertising, in the same location during the spring attracted ten times as many people.

When will the group or groups meet? A support group for young mothers might best meet on a weekday at midmorning. A seminar on "Being the Parent of a Teen" might work well on Sunday

afternoons. A couples group might need to be over by 8:30 p.m., while a singles group might flourish by starting about 8 p.m. Some programs have found that they can get young professionals out to a 7 a.m. meeting over breakfast before they go to work.

How many times will the group meet? Although one-shot events might make it easier for more people to be present, adult education research indicates that for a program to have significant impact (especially in changing habits or attitudes) a number of sessions over several weeks is necessary. Lyman Coleman, author of the Serendipity materials, says that people will attend six weekly sessions more readily than ten or twelve weekly sessions. He points out that if a "beginners group" is rewarding, people may be willing to make a more extended commitment. Also, groups that meet every other week can be as effective as weekly sessions if the total number of sessions remains the same.

The more amenities included, the more attractive a group or seminar becomes. Something to drink, refreshments during a break, a notebook or folder, pencils and note pads, audiovisuals and handouts, name badges, and other such details, make the program more attractive and professional. See that participants have an opportunity to mix and get acquainted. Clearly identify in your printed materials the sponsoring organization and the staff, so that further contacts can be made and questions asked.

You may find that publishers and other businesses, especially those related to the topic of your program, would be willing to provide gifts or informational items (samples of their products) to distribute. These can add real value to your event as well as open the door to interesting partnerships.

With some target groups, child care is a crucial service. Young couples, parents and especially single parents cannot be expected to attend a class or support group if child care is not provided. Grandparents and older brothers and sisters are almost never at hand to watch the children. Baby sitters are difficult to find and costly. Quality child care is essential in your planning even if this means a slightly higher registration fee. Volunteers

are not your only source for child care, although this may be an ideal way to involve a teenager or a grandparent who feels she does not have other skills. You can also pay people for this service. The cost of a single baby sitter for six couples is far less than all six getting individual baby sitters.

Curriculum Resources

One reason that a family life program is within the reach of every ACS unit, is the vast number of curriculum resources that have been published. Most have detailed guides for the group leader and textbooks or other materials for the participants. More recently a number of resource centers have begun to produce packages that include videotape lectures by well-known speakers.

Many of the published curriculum resources use inexpensive audiovisuals overheads you can reproduce on a photocopy machine, flip charts, and similar items. The planning group must choose which curriculum resources to use, whether to follow one (perhaps in modified form) or to use two or three curricula together. Ask these questions, too: What supplies must be ordered? How long does shipment take? What are the publishers' policies concerning minimum orders and returning unused materials? Never plan to start the group, see who shows up, and then order materials. That appears inept to participants and guarantees a large number of unused materials if shipments are late.

Guest speakers can be used, even within the framework of a curriculum outline. For example, a nurse may teach one unit and a pastor another unit, instead of one instructor doing the whole thing. Karen Spruill, former director of The Mother's Center in Battle Creek, Michigan, used guest speakers exclusively in her programs. "You may be surprised at all the speakers you can think of," she says. "Who are the professionals in your congregation, and where do they work? Who are the respected women leaders in your town? Who are the women who have raised successful children, who have interesting hobbies, or businesses? Start a list of programs that you have seen offered in the newspaper, or by continuing education classes at the local colleges.

Writing Objectives and a Budget

No plan is complete unless it includes a simple, specific description of expected results. What is the desired effect on those who attend? What are the criteria for success? You need to list expectations precisely, not to satisfy academic or bureaucratic urges but to help the program team, the ACS director and board, and the others involved to understand clearly what your new program seeks to achieve. This list keeps the program moving in the right direction, and it keeps the leaders accountable.

Grammar, language, even correct spelling, are not essential in writing a good objective. Three considerations are fundamental however:

1. Make it specific, not general.
2. Make it something doable, not abstract.
3. Make it measurable.

When you have reached this point, the planning group can work out a budget and schedule for the new program. The schedule provides specific deadlines for maintaining accountability, and the budget provides for realistic funding. This ought to include income generated by through registration fees, offerings at meetings, specially solicited donations, etc., as well as funds from the ACS budget.

Unless there is something specific about your target group that indicates otherwise, don't be afraid to charge a fee for your program. Most people consider "free" programs to have some kind of payoff or ulterior motive, and are unwilling to get involved. (What was your response the last time you got one of those "free trip to Florida" offers in the mail?) When programs are offered to the public with an appropriate registration fee or charge for materials, it enhances the value of the program. Charging a fee will actually increase attendance in most circumstances. There are obvious exceptions to this rule among some low-income target groups.

You will now have a document describing the needs, the target audience, the program design and curriculum, the specific objectives of the new program, and its working team, budget, and schedule which you can present to the ACS board.

After the board has voted approval, you can introduce the team in a news release for the media and in your newsletter. Now they must begin to communicate with the target audience.

Marketing Your Service

Many community service directors delude themselves with the thought that because there is a need for a particular program, once it is opened, people will come. It simply does not work that way! When your center or agency opens a new service or program for the community, it is imperative that you have a strong marketing strategy in place.

In planning a marketing strategy, the program team has many mediums of communication from which to select. They must choose carefully which to use. The situation in a specific local community, the kind of people they are trying to reach, and financial considerations all come into play. In any case they will have to pay for some of the publicity. They cannot rely on free advertising to produce results, although they should use free publicity in community newspapers and public-service announcements on radio and television stations to supplement the major advertising items.

The available media can be divided into three major categories: relational media, which feature person-to-person contact; formal media, such as direct mail; and public media, such as the newspapers and broadcasting facilities. Both small towns and target groups with low levels of education can best be reached through relational communication. Suburban areas, especially white-collar communities, are best contacted through formal means, and the public media most effectively penetrate the highly urbanized areas. The level of education, lifestyle, and residential area of the target audience will indicate what choices must be made in designing the advertising campaign for a particular program.

Relational media are simply organized ways of using word of mouth. Of course, word-of-mouth advertising is always helpful and not very costly. One can initiate an informal advertising effort simply by carefully informing the congregation on Sabbath morning and urging them to tell

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their friends, neighbors, and work associates. Better organized and more effective means include setting up telephone committees, going door-to-door to distribute information in housing developments with high concentrations of the target audience, and arranging to make in-person announcements at community meetings of various kinds.

Relational media will be much more effective if they are reinforced with a well-done brochure of some kind a handout to back up the word-of-mouth communication. Relational media cost little in terms of money but much in volunteer hours. Boards and committees will at times quickly decide to “save money” by relying on relational media, and then take no responsibility for providing the many volunteer hours necessary to implement their decision. This is one of the most common failures in the marketing of community service programs.

Formal media are the most cost-effective forms of advertising available to local ACS units. Of these, mass mailings (the kind of mailing addressed to “Resident” and usually done by a professional mail advertising company) are more costly and less effective than other types of mailings. However, they can be useful in getting public attention for a new program in a community where the ACS unit has not developed much contact over the years, or when the target audience is a group with which the organization has had no contact in the past. Since the response rate is usually about 1%, you must mail many thousands of pieces. This can be very costly.

Direct mail differs from mass mailing in that it is sent to specific addressees by name. These names may be obtained from a direct mail company according to your target audience, or from lists of people the church has contacted in one way or another over the years. For example, *It Is Written*, *Faith for Today*, *Breath of Life*, and the *Voice of Prophecy* can supply the names and addresses of people in specified Zip Code areas who have requested booklets on the specified topics over the past three or four years. If the interest coordinator(s) in your constituent church or churches has been systematically keeping a file of interested persons, this becomes a gold mine for advertising new programs.

Public media are the most expensive forms of communication and the most difficult to utilize. When a ministry decides to purchase ads in a newspaper or spots on a radio station, it should also seek professional counsel from someone other than the sales people at the publishing or broadcasting company; otherwise they risk wasting large sums of money. Public advertising is so highly complex and sophisticated that even professionals fail more often than they succeed, especially in the marketing of services or entertainment. Few advertising professionals understand the unique factors involved in marketing a nonprofit service.

Where can an ACS unit get good advice without spending money on consulting fees? First, try to set up an appointment with one of the best public relations firms in the area. These professionals often are willing to give one or two consultations at no charge for a volunteer, community service effort with a small budget. Second, see if the United Way or a major local nonprofit institution has a professional public relations director. This individual would not charge a fee for some advice and is often extremely knowledgeable. Finally, perhaps your sponsoring church(es) can find and obtain the aid of an Adventist public relations professional. These people are often willing to assist ACS, especially when a local leader wants to do something creative in the public media.

Perhaps one of the greatest misunderstandings concerning advertising involves searching for “the best method.” All communication experts agree that there is no one best method of advertising. Successful advertising always uses a mix of several media. When an ACS unit is communicating with a target audience in the community, it will need to put out a minimum of six different kinds of advertising. For example, in launching a new program, your team might choose to utilize: (1) word of mouth by the constituent congregation(s); (2) a telephone committee to contact names from the media ministries which have requested literature that indicates an interest in this type of program; (3) door-to-door distribution of a printed flyer in several apartment complexes with high concentrations of the target audience; (4) a mailing to the relevant names in your case records and

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from church interest files; (5) a mailing to relevant professionals in the area; and (6) posters in supermarkets and Laundromats. Of course, the specific mix used in each local situation must be based on the nature of the target audience, the funds available, the number of volunteers available, and local ways of doing things.

You have not completed the marketing task when the first program session has been held and a group has come out. You must utilize continuing, supportive advertising to keep those who have responded coming back. For instance, you might use a telephone committee to remind participants of each weekly group meeting, or publish a special newsletter for the program participants.

Helping Individuals

You have a group of thirty-five enthusiastic people at your weekly parent workshop. They regularly make appreciative comments. You've been receiving phone calls from people who want to know how they can join the group. In short, the new family life program seems like a success. But is it? Not if there are no requests for personal interviews and individual assistance resulting from the new program. It is this most important dimension that truly makes a difference in the lives of the families in the new program.

It is easy to somehow lose sight of this fundamental element of community service even when the program team includes outgoing, naturally friendly people who are enthusiastic and "bubbly." Positive relationships in group sessions and meaningful one-on-one interviews are two different things. In order to really meet the needs of families, your new program must get beyond superficial, friendly contacts and hear their deep, inner concerns. Only at this intimate level can significant personal and spiritual needs be identified and met. The specialized skills necessary to help people in this area are those of a trained counselor, therapist, social worker or psychologist.

When you start a family life program, the time will come when you will need the assistance of one or more counselors willing to see individuals who attend the group sessions and then ask for more help. As indicated above, there are a number

of ways to find professional counselors and get them to work with your ACS center.

Your ACS unit can make a difference in the lives of families! It can work effectively to prevent family breakdown in many households in the community! We have seen local leaders with vision and energy bring healing to troubled homes, as well as growth and encouragement to "average" families. ACS needs thousands more like them.

Resource Materials

Seven Steps to Starting a Family Ministry by Len McMillan is published by AdventSource. It is a step-by-step planning and organizational guide that enables a church Family Ministry Committee to get started successfully and conduct an effective program. You can order a copy from (800) 328-0525.

Family Ministry Resource Catalog. A complete list of resources that your leadership team can use in Family Life seminars. Call AdventSource at (800) 328-0525 for a free copy.