

Women's Institutes look toward renewal

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OLDS, Alta. — As the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada approaches its centennial in 1997, members are looking at ways to re-

new their organization and fill it with vitality.

The group has lost its pioneer spirit and tends to react to issues rather than initiate new ideas, said the president.

"If we are to grow we are going to have to make some changes or we will cease to exist," warned Jacquie Linde at the annual Alberta Women's Institutes convention.

While friendships keep the organization going, women's institutes across the country worry about their future as members age and fewer young women join because of other commitments, she said.



Linde

Part of the problem has been trying to offer something for everyone to keep members interested. The result is a feeling of being stretched too far, she told delegates.

"If our organization was growing at a steady pace each year we would have no problems. But like most groups, we lack members and the members we have lack the time and commitment," she said.

At the national level, the women's institutes had four strategic planning sessions this year to reinvent themselves and set goals and priorities.

Pressure government

One of the main priorities of the national group is to flesh out a campaign to pressure the government for a national food policy. Members will be provided with questions and background information to lobby government representatives to show they are serious. Canada can't survive if it loses its ability to feed itself, said Linde.

Another long-range priority will be children's issues. This will cover laws affecting minors, education, safety, abuse, children in developing countries, culture and affects of media violence. New program models will be developed for distribution to the provinces.

These ideas cost money and because of declining membership, fewer government grants and low return on investments, the national group's budget is running a deficit. To rescue the group members have set up the bail out buckets (BOB) campaign, led by a committee called "find us some money."

Beryl Ballhorn, Alberta past-president and national representative, said many local groups are successful fundraisers who donate the money to clubs and charities but forget to support their own organizations. With the campaign, which has a goal of \$1 per member a year, the groups hopes to alleviate some of its financial troubles.

The national group has also developed a mission statement saying: "The Women's Institute is an organization that focuses on personal development, the family and community action."