

Goals defined

1979: International Year of the Child

By FRED A. BERNSTEIN

Designated the International Year of the Child (IYC), 1979 will begin a 12 month period of concentration on the special needs of children. But in Michigan, a committee formed by a Southfield homemaker has already been at work for more than a year.

Diana Thottungal formed Citizens for the International Year of the Child to define short and long term needs of children and parents and translate them into workable programs. Her group includes child care professionals and paraprofessionals working with the parents.

The goals of the IYC, as defined by the United Nations agency, UNICEF, are to heighten awareness of children's special needs among decision makers and the public, to mobilize support for existing child-oriented programs and to spur specific, practical measures with achievable goals to benefit children in the short and long term.

When Mrs. Thottungal learned in September, 1977 that 1979 was going to be the International Year of the Child, she decided she must act to assure that parents and children would take full advantage of the opportunities offered.

"In order to do this, I felt they had to participate in the planning stages as well as the programs and projects that would emerge during 1979," she said.

"So I contacted a group of like-minded people, professionals and non-professionals, and we formed Citizens for IYC."

THOUGH she is herself a layman in the field of child care, Mrs. Thottungal has done graduate work in human genetics and taught at City College in New York.



DIANA THOTTUNGAL

She has three children ages 7, 14 and 16 and has always been active in PTO groups in her children's schools. She was a member of Southfield's Citizen Advisory Task Force on declining enrollment.

"I feel that parenting skills have too often been undervalued and that's a primary reason why many women don't find it fulfilling to be at home raising their kids," she said.

She contends that parents have abandoned many aspects of parenting to outsiders.

"I would like parents to regain a sense of total responsibility for the child's well-being, a sense of con-

fidence and effectiveness when it comes to child-rearing."

According to Mrs. Thottungal, the citizens group does not itself sponsor child-oriented activities, but rather it seeks out groups and individuals with expertise in these areas and encourages them to act.

One of the ways that parents can gain confidence in their parenting skills is by having information they need made available to them by child care professionals.

Equally important, they need a chance to express their own needs and talk about what kinds of child care services would be most helpful to them. Programs planned by Citizens for IYC in coordination with professional groups and individuals will provide a forum.

MONTHLY subject themes on which conferences, workshops and other projects will be based have been designated including birth and infancy, the child in the family, violence and the child, children's culture, and focus on adolescence.

Within this broad framework, some of the most pressing problems facing parents and their children will be explored: Child abuse, special needs of single parents, problems of families with handicapped children and others.

Programs will fall into several categories: those having immediate direct impact on children and adults with responsibility for their care (parents, teachers, counselors and child care workers) public input and informational meetings and activities requiring long term research and planning.

Judy Schmidt, a secretary in the communications department of Southfield's Bendix Corporation, is coordinator to carry out the theme "Business and Industry and the Child."

"We are trying to make business and industry aware of the special needs of working parents in relation to finding quality child care for their children when they are at work," she said.

2 Self-management clinics help smokers and the overweight

A smoking withdrawal and weight control clinic has been put together by Larry Gettelman, who zeros in on self-management to help persons bring about change without strain.

The first of his course in two parts is set for 7:30 p.m., Friday, Jan. 12, in the YMCA, 28100 Farmington Road.

Gettelman is a Certified Public Accountant with Ford Motor Company and a certified physical fitness instructor for the Y.

He is also a reformed two-and-a-half-pack-a-day smoker who lost 50 pounds after putting into practice some techniques he devised.

"It's absolutely amazing," he said, "to find what we can achieve when we overcome fear of failure and the unknown. A few simple techniques and some usable knowledge can change our entire lives, from hard work to play."

His introductory lecture is without charge or obligation.

He believes his devices are fun ways

"The difficulties these employees face in this area have a direct impact on their performance on the job. We hope that business and industry will recognize these problems and respond with plans for on-site child care centers, and flex time."

Sharon Wilkerson, a doctoral student in the College of Nursing at Wayne State University, has been involved as well.

HER AREA of involvement is to plan a conference on health and medical care to be sponsored by the Maternal-Child Health Department of the College of Nursing at WSU. The event is planned for the spring of 1979 and will deal with the effects of illness on children and their families.

"The conference will focus not only on the child who is ill, but on the entire family, including other siblings who are often overlooked in the family's attempt to cope with the sick child," she said.

"Members of the nursing profession as well as parents who have had to handle this situation will take part in the conference," said Mrs. Wilkerson.

According to Mrs. Thottungal, the approach of her group will be two-pronged.

"First, we try to find out what parents and kids really need and then we approach child care professionals to ask them to help develop projects dealing with these needs," she said.

Up to now the work of the group has been sponsored by Children's Charter of the courts of Michigan, Inc., the American Academy of Pediatrics, Wayne State University and others.

"Although we can't build the parks or design hospital birthing room," she said, "we are finding the people who can and persuading them to work on these projects during the International Year of the Child."

For more information about Citizens for IYC call Mrs. Thottungal at 382-3194 or Judy Schmidt at 477-8134.

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