

Mid-life rebirth

Struggling to cope with rusty tools, sapped courage

By SHEILA MCCARTHY DUNNELLS

September, for many women, regardless of the fiscal time-clock, marks the official beginning of a new year. It's really very simple. When school starts a new year begins.

In mid-life, when schools swallow up the last, youngest child, there is frequently a re-birth for the mother. She faces a new year and a change in her life. No one is depending on her anymore.

The renaissance often begins with the question "What will I do when the children grow up?"

Many women find there is no answer to this question. Instead of the euphoria they expected to feel at the moment of freedom, there is panic.

Too many women feel that they have spent all those years doing nothing more marketable than baking brownies; nothing more supervisory than running a car pool. In short, they have talent, but their skills are rusty, their courage is sapped.

For many, paralyzed by insecurities,

it is a lonely time. Much has been written about this time in a woman's life. Some authors call it the "empty nest syndrome." Gail Sheehy dealt with it in "Passages".

A group of women in Birmingham have acted upon the special need of women at this time in their lives. To help women, of any age, who want to change directions, the Birmingham Community Women's Center was conceived.

IN THE PLEASANT and relaxed atmosphere of the Women's Center, located in the former Barnum School on Purdy St., Colleen Heimstadt, a counselor at the center, spoke of the women who seek out the center's support groups and the needs that bring them.

While support groups appeal to many types of women, there is evidence the basic desire is the same, to change the direction in their lives, she explained.

There is the woman who is secure in her marriage, but feels insecure about the quality of her life. There is something missing and she needs to talk about it.

It has appeal for the woman who attends from a feeling of discontent, restlessness, Ms. Heimstadt added. She has been successful in a limited way, but wants a new direction for her energy.

There is the woman who is tired of

volunteer work, or said "yes" to one too many community jobs that were dull or unfulfilling. She now wants a broader dimension in her life.

A less happy group is the large number of women who are married to men

who are threatened by an involvement on her part outside the home. Unfortunately, said Ms. Heimstadt, for financial reasons she will not leave the marriage. Counseling is out of the question. It is, she said, for them a dead-end situation. The marriage is stagnant and so are their lives. Such women need an outlet, a safe place to talk.

"For all these women," she said, "the Center is a safe place to go and talk about their feelings. Here she can, in confidentiality, explore her options with other women who will be supportive of how she is feeling."

Ms. Heimstadt holds an M.A. in Adult Counseling. At the center she directs one of the support groups. "It is not

group therapy," she said as if to answer those who might have negative feelings about group therapy.

Musicale offers teacher registry

This fall the Birmingham Musicales of the Michigan and National Federation of Music Clubs will again offer its services as a registry for local music teachers.

Those interested in having their name included on this list of available teachers, and those wishing to obtain a name from this list, should contact Mrs. Ted V. Linabury at 852-8626.



There are dozens of reasons for the feelings of discontent, hopelessness, and restlessness that many women feel just when they expect to experience euphoria at the moment of freedom. Helping them stand up during the crisis is an important topic at the center.

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