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Alberta Association of
Homemaker Services

Trends for the 1990's:
Keeping our Fingers
on the Pulse

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 In the past few years there has been a growing awareness that in mapping out the future for organizations, communities and society in general, that we need to learn more about the trends and the forces that will shape the decades ahead. The growing list of societal concerns can give us the impression that the 1990's will likely be the most worry-filled decade that mankind has ever experienced. Never before have we had so many problems to worry about!

1.2 However we can also view our growing list of worries as a sign of progress. Modern scientific and technological improvements have helped us understand more about how the world works and as a result we are now more aware of problems that we didn't know we had! Secondly our "progress" has tended to create new problems at the same time as it is finding solutions to old problems. Our hope of course is that the new problems will prove less onerous than the ones we are managing to solve. The sheer number of problems we seem to be facing can seem so overwhelming, especially when we appreciate their complexity. Our problems, and our trends, are also so interrelated that it is often very difficult to deal with one problem, or respond to one trend, in isolation from others.

1.3 Yet despite this complexity and the interrelatedness, we must press ahead and try to gain a better understanding of the forces and trends that will have a decided impact upon homemaker services in Alberta. But where can we begin? There is certainly a lot of trend information available, from the

international scene, from elsewhere in North America, from within Canada and fortunately from within Alberta. Yet it is important for us to appreciate that there is no magic formula or crystal ball that will help us know what is going to happen in the near future, despite what prominent "futurists" would like us to believe! Whatever information we can glean about the important trends, it is still up to us and an organization to ultimately identify what impact they will eventually have on our profession. There are no easy answers!

2.0 Some International and National Trends of Interest

2.1 In 1984 the Standard Research Institute identified 41 major problems confronting society. These included, in no particular order, the following:

- * Malnutrition-induced Mental Deficiencies Leading to Social Instability
 - Malnutrition during the prenatal period and infancy, leading to permanent mental and emotional damage.

- * Cultural Exclusion of the Aged
 - Elderly population is growing both proportionally and in real terms. In all countries, developed and developing the pace of change is leaving elderly citizens without participating roles and little meaning.'

- * Social Stresses from Advances in Biomedical Technology
 - access to life extending techniques now available but they are expensive and how will access be determined?

 - the social, ethical and rights issues relating to genetic manipulation techniques. What are the responsibilities of governments and individuals?

- euthanasia, abortion - responsibility - by whom?
for whom? to whom?

* Growing Conflict Between Central Control and Individual Freedom

- Individual choice reduced, civil liberties devalued by powerful regulations imposed by authorities.

* Increasing Conflict Between Material Growth and Rising Expectations of Material Prosperity

- Economic gap between rich and poor nations will continue to widen. Yet communication, trade and tourism increase expectations of prosperity, increasing the likelihood of instability and violence.

* Latent Urban Violence and Misery

- Cities in both developed and developing countries have been breeding grounds for social unrest and violence. In nearly all large cities throughout the world, the poor tend to be racially or culturally different than the prosperous, making the potential for tension and misunderstanding even greater.

* Persistent Malnutrition in Affluent Societies

- Social pressures and market driven group tastes and requirements for economic efficiency in the food industry will lead to serious persistent malnutrition among affluent populations.

* Teenage Alcoholism

- Most countries have witnessed an extension of adult drinking problems into the 13 - 18 age group. The causes are complex, but there is a lack of a meaningful role and acceptable challenges for teenagers in both Eastern and Western societies.

- * Lack of Functional Modern Skills in Adults

- Large numbers of adults lack the basic skills to function well in the modern society. Insufficiently literate and limited in financial skills. Raises serious questions about effectiveness of education systems in most countries.

- * The Growing Subculture of the Information Poor

- In modern society progress depends on access to organized information. The gap is widening between the information rich and the information poor.

- * Barriers to Large Scale Technological Innovations

- Increased difficulties will be encountered in implementing technological improvements in critical areas such as housing, efficient energy use, public transport, postal services.

- * Social Impact of the Changing Role of Women

- In many countries, the increasing participation of women in the work force has placed them in direct competition with men. Initially this forced women to adapt to male behavioral norms in business and communication, but gradually it is changing the very nature of institutions.

* Changing Family Norms

- In many parts of the world, family life has changed significantly in the past few generations. Increasing divorce and social acceptability of single parent families has been very important.

* Decreasing Utility of Higher Education

In many countries the formal educational system appears to be increasingly inefficient in training people. Universities are not seen as central necessities but increasingly as costly luxuries.

* Loss of Political and Social Cohesion

- We need a sense of shared purpose to achieve a balance between individual desires and community well being. A weakening has occurred, so that there is more turning inward to personal interests rather than collective interests. High mobility and the replacement of the extended family have contributed to this.

* Institutional Barriers to Solutions

- We tend to compartmentalize our lives - school, work, home, church with the result that it is hard to develop a comprehensive approach to problems.

* Chronic Unemployment and the Absence of Replacement Activities

- We have come to accept higher levels of unemployment as being necessary in a modern economy. As well we have little ability to use our leisure time constructively.

* Social Effects of Redefining Legal Liability

- We have increasingly resorted to the courts to seek redress for real or imaginary grievances. Professional judgement and risk taking have been distorted because of the fear of ruinous legal action.

...And this is just eighteen of the forty-one listed!

2.2 The United Way of America recently also got into the trend business and they identified their "nine forces reshaping America". Here are their "big nine".

* The Maturation of America

- Maturing of the baby boomers and the growth of the over 65 population - more active and more affluence than ever before.
- The proportion of middle aged Americans will increase sharply in the 1990's.
- While the proportion of 65 to 74 year olds will remain stable the number over 75 will increase dramatically.
- The median income of families will continue to grow and savings will increase.
- Businesses will increasingly offer older workers flexible work schedules and retirement options in an effort to reverse the trend to early retirement.

- Political activism will be more pragmatic and measured reflecting the maturing of the American society.

* The Mosaic Society

- A move away from a mass society to a mosaic one. distinctive identifies will be reinforced.
- Growth in U.S. population will be increasingly dependent upon immigration, with a greater proportional growth among minorities.
- The urban, minority underclass will continue to grow and their economic situation will continue to worsen.
- The labour force will be increasingly multicultural and multilingual.
- Child care benefits and flexible hours will be more available in the work and while workers will have more choice in their benefits they will have to meet an increasing share of the costs.

* Redefinition of Individual and Societal Roles

- There will be blurring of the boundaries that have traditionally defined the roles of the public sector versus the private sector, as well as individual versus institutional responsibilities.
- Growth of "privatized" services previously provided by governments.

- A suggestion that businesses will become more directly involved in social issues.
- Increasing growth of the self-help movement.

* The Information Based Economy

- Information technologies are beginning to create a new pattern of economic and societal organization.
- Much more electronic gadgetry - technological "haves" and "have nots".
- More home computers and people working from home.
- Concern about individual privacy.

* Globalization

- Movement of products, capital, technology, information and ideas around the world will increase.
- U.S. prosperity will be increasingly dependent on the economic well-being of others.
- Third world debt will become increasingly important.

* Personal and Environmental Health

- Quality of life issues will emerge as key areas of public concern; an increased attention to the link between personal behavior and disease risk.

- Quality of and access to health care system will continue to be questioned.
- Interest in resolving the issue to providing long term care will grow.
- Potential abuse of medical technology will become a focus of concern.

* Economic Restructuring

- Rather similar to globalization trends.

* Family and Home Redefined

- Many functions that once were handled predominantly by families - such as meal preparation and child care are increasingly offered as services.
- At the same time activities formerly available outside the home, such as shopping, and viewing movies have been brought into the house.
- Family has become a much more diverse institution with many single person households, single parent families and two income families. In a rapidly changing, often chaotic outside world the family will grow in importance as a stabilizing force. Yet at the same time the evident stresses may make the family less able to fulfil its support giving role without outside help.
- The number of temporary employees and home workers will increase.
- The divorce rate will decline, and the growth in the number of childless, married couples will slow.

* Rebirth of Social Activism

- The public agenda pendulum is swinging back to social concerns. Environmental issues, pervasive homelessness, lack of affordable housing, racial tensions and extensive child poverty are issues that will gain increased attention.
- Less tolerance for business actions that are seen as being harmful to society.
- Family violence will remain a critical problem.
- Violence by young people will rise and the concern about substance abuse will continue.

3.0 Alberta Trends

3.0 During the past two years the Community Trends Working Group, made up of representatives from the provincial government, municipal government, Board of Health and community agencies, have put together two valuable documents entitled "Tracking the Trends". In particular the publications have focused attention on seniors, youth and families with children. Through a series of questionnaires and focus groups about 160 "key informants" helped the working group identify the major implications for the provision of human services for each of these three groups. Their findings were as follows:

4.0 Some Conclusions