

The Adult Learning Information Center — An Information And Referral Center For Post Secondary Education

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In February, 1975, Cooperating Raleigh Colleges, a consortium of four senior colleges and two junior colleges in Wake County, and the Wake Information Center of the Wake County Public Libraries submitted a proposal to establish an Information and Referral Center to serve as a collector and disseminator of information concerning all postsecondary education programs within the community. As a means of extending post secondary education to a broader public, the idea for such a center developed from that public's need to have available comprehensive information about all adult learning opportunities. The distribution of this information required a neutral setting where professional counseling was available.

Through a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education, the proposed center, the Adult Learning Information Center, is now a reality. The Center began operation serving citizens on August 6, 1975 in the Olivia Raney Library in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina. Within the library, the Center occupies an area adjacent to the Wake Information Center, a service point of the library where the public comes to register

to vote and to obtain information concerning community services, maps, bus schedules, etc.

Because the purposes, mission and many of the details of the concept were developed in the proposal, the first major task to be accomplished following the receipt of the grant was the hiring of staff and the opening of the Center itself. After advertising the positions and extensive interviewing, Mrs. Rosemary Jones joined the Center as counselor/coordinator and led in opening the Center for operation in August. Mrs. Jones holds a professional degree in guidance and counseling and has extensive experience in educational, financial aid and vocational counseling. In September, 1975, a library assistant and a secretary were secured to complete the staffing arrangement. Supplementing the staff is Mrs. Carol Reilly, Wake Information Center Librarian, a person with wide knowledge of and contacts with community agencies and organizations as well as experience as a reference librarian.

From the start of the Center concept formulation, many persons were involved. With the opening of the Center, an advisory committee composed of those

persons who plan and present programs was initiated. It has met regularly, studied the Center operation and provided valuable suggestions for its program.

A long-term objective of the Center calls for the advisory committee to plan jointly in the area of adult learning programs. The Center has not as yet moved to that point; however, various elements of the post secondary education community which have had no consistent previous contact or communication in the past have been brought together for discussion and interchange of information. These include the traditional higher education institutions, a technical institute, two proprietary schools, various community agencies which offer education programs, and a representative of the business and industrial community. As these persons come to know one another and develop a working relationship, hopefully they will address themselves to community post secondary education needs.

Extensive publicity efforts have included newspaper articles, television programs and spot announcements, radio interviews and announcements, speeches and numerous visits to individuals, groups, and agencies providing services and information to adults. As a part of these efforts, the creation of a Center image has been an objective. A distinctive logo was created and projected through the media and in print.

As outlined in the original proposal, the immediate objective of the Center is to provide services to citizens of Wake County in three areas: complete, accurate, and understandable information about learning opportunities; referral to specific agencies and individuals providing the needed services; and, when needed or desired, the opportunity to explore interests and alternatives through the counseling service.

A main task of the Adult Learning Infor-

mation Center staff appeared to be the acquisition of specific information concerning educational opportunities in the local area and the updating of school catalogs and other reference materials. Institutions and agencies offering programs have been contacted and have agreed to provide information on a continuing basis. Thus far, seventy two such agencies and institutions have been identified as providing educational programs in Wake County. These materials have been indexed and organized for easy retrieval, and center staff and reference librarians instructed in their use.

Information concerning local educational opportunities ranging from graduate degree programs to special interest and hobby courses has been collected and organized into chart form for use by clients consulting the Center for assistance. In addition, information has been compiled in booklet form with additional explanatory material for distribution to and use by individuals working with agencies attempting to provide information and counseling services to adults. The "Guide to Educational Opportunities in Wake County" has been distributed to the counseling centers at the colleges and vocational schools, continuing education and career placement department at the colleges, Veterans' Administration Office, Employment Security Commission, Vocational Rehabilitation Center, Education Office of the AFL-CIO, Evening Optional High School Programs, personnel officers and education officers in business and industry, high school guidance departments, and branch libraries, to name a few. The response to the "Guide" has been immediate and very favorable. Additionally, materials concerning special programs for adults such as external degree programs, College Level Entrance Examination Program, correspondence and independent study courses, high school completion programs, and

materials concerning careers and test preparation have been collected. Financial aid information and applications are also available through the Center.

The Adult Learning Information Center has sought to augment but not to duplicate materials already in use in the central library. The Reference Department provides valuable services to the public through the Job Information Service, ready reference materials, test preparation booklets and vertical file materials.

During the period between August 6, 1975, and January 31, 1976, the Center had approximately 1256 contacts: 682 individuals sought the services of the Center by telephone, walk in or appointment; 574 received information through groups to whom a representative of the Center spoke; and an additional 95 were contacted by the Center to serve as referral and resource people. The number of clients consulting the Center increased markedly during the first two weeks in January. During that period 138 people contacted the Center by telephone, walk in, or appointment, representing a 178% increase over the previous months.

The objectives of the Center as enumerated above include the dissemination of information to as wide a public as possible: high school dropouts, minorities, women, senior citizens, and veterans as well as adults interested in traditional college degree programs. In the first six months of operation, individuals in all these categories sought and received services.

Tabulation of data concerning the first 680 clients of the Center reveals a marked diversity in interest, educational level, age race and sex. Approximately 59% were female, 34% black, (the racial composition of the county is 22% black), 70% within the 20 to 40 age range, with 12% from 40 to 50 and 3%, 65 years of age or older. Educational level ranged from completion of the fifth grade to a Ph.D. Degree.

Clients requested information upon a wide range of subjects. The subjects of their inquiries are listed below in rank order upon the basis of frequency of requests:

- Vocational Training Program
- Undergraduate & Graduate Degree
- Special Interest — Enrichment
- High School Completion
- Financial Aid
- Refresher Courses
- Career Exploration
- Job Information
- Correspondence Courses
- Licensing Requirements
- CLEP
- External Degrees
- Test Preparation

In addition to providing information and counseling services, the Center makes referrals to specific individuals and agencies providing services. Referrals were made to approximately 40 agencies offering learning programs. Individuals were referred to admissions officers, college counselors, financial aid officers, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Veterans Administration, Social Services, vocational training centers, arts & crafts centers and the learning laboratory of the local technical institute.

In the first few months of operation, the Adult Learning Information Center has received recognition as a community service agency by organizations and agencies within and outside the community. With increasing frequency, individuals from agencies and institutions providing services to adults consult the Center or make referrals to the Center for educational information. This group includes Social Services, Employment Security Commission, Vocational Rehabilitation, counseling centers, civic clubs, and continuing education departments of local colleges. The counselor/coordinator of the Adult Learning In-

formation Center has been asked to serve on the Reading Task Force, the Refugee Resettlement Committee and the Education Committee of the Women's Equity Action League. She has been invited to attend meetings of such organizations as Goals for Raleigh/Wake County, Senior Citizens' groups, Public School Guidance Personnel In-Service training meetings, Pre-Release and Aftercare workshops for the Department of Corrections, and meetings of the Parents of Headstart Children as a resource person. The Center has been contacted by such diverse agencies as the Education Department of IBM Corporation, the Raleigh-Wake Personnel Association and Wake opportunities (Anti-Poverty Agency) for information.

The collection and interpretation of data was deemed of great importance in evaluating the Center's effectiveness, not only in identifying clientele served, but also in assessing unmet needs in the community for future planning. For this reason, the systematic collection of data began within a few days after the opening of the Center. Information is collected concerning each client serviced. Careful records are kept concerning programs and courses which are requested and are not offered in Wake County or within commuting distance of the county. As yet, the numbers in the various categories are small, but would seem to represent a random sample of needs, which, as the numbers grow, will be considered by agencies and institutions in planning programs for adults.

One way of evaluating the Center's efforts instituted by the staff was to solicit responses from the clients themselves as to the quality of service they received, the appropriateness of the referrals, whether or not the client acted upon the information he received, and the outcome of the action. In this regard, a follow-up procedure was begun in the first few months of operation which included a

referral card to be returned to the Center by the person to whom the client was referred and a follow-up questionnaire actually administered to clients by telephone within two months of the original contact.

In the first six months of operation, two clients have entered graduate programs in Library Science and Management Science; another five have entered degree programs in Early Childhood Education, Accounting and Business Administration and are receiving financial aid; one is taking two courses for renewal of her teacher's certificate and is receiving assistance through Vocational Rehabilitation; at least three are taking courses as special students in a college or university; one of these is an officer in a local union and is enrolled in a labor relations course; and one woman is exploring careers through taking a Career Planning Seminar for Women at the local women's college. Several individuals are reviewing in preparation for parts of the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and for a proficiency test in accounting for advanced placement at a business college. Approximately eleven have enrolled in vocational or technical programs. Four are upgrading their skills by taking courses in refresher typing, bookkeeping, and an L.P.N. upgrading program. One man is taking courses to assist him in setting up his own business.

Clients are enrolled in a variety of special interest-enrichment courses such as sewing, classical guitar, conversational Spanish, painting, ceramics, gymnastics and English as a Foreign Language. At least five clients are enrolled in a Learning Laboratory program preparing for the High School Equivalency Examination. Two women have already passed the GFD and have been awarded H.S. Equivalency Certificates.

During the spring of this year, three major projects are planned. The first, an Open House at the Center's location in the

library, is jointly planned with Wake Information Center, which is expanding its services and staff. The second is a "Post-Secondary Opportunities Day for Adults" to be held the latter part of March in the library. The Advisory Board for the Adult Learning Information Center has agreed to assist in the project by providing personnel and displays. During the course of the afternoon, repeated presentations will be given with general information about admissions, financial aid, counseling and testing services. The third project will be a Hobby-Enrichment Courses Opportunities Day in May. At that time the agencies and centers putting on these types of courses will be asked to come to the library with displays and literature about their offer-

ings. One major activity of the coming year is to involve members of the Advisory Board in smaller working groups aimed at making recommendations in the areas of assessing needs, publicizing programs jointly, and ways of facilitating the adult's return to an educational program.

Wake County is indeed an educational center with many and varied programs. From the number of individuals and groups consulting the Center, it may be inferred that the Center as a central source of information has brought some order and meaning to this educational maze and has opened avenues to learning not previously known to many adults in the community.



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