

KEEPING

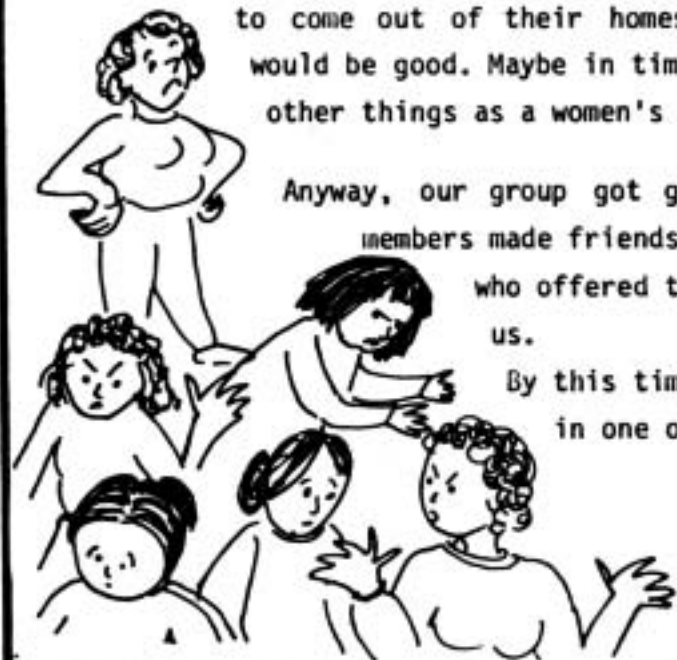
We organised a women's keep-fit group in our area, and we want to tell other women about it. This is because we see organising women as important. For us the experience has not been an easy one, because things have fallen apart quite a bit. So we want to tell about this, the problems we've had and the lessons we've learned.

Mostly to build again.

It all started with 3 of us sisters doing keep-fit at home. The woman who lives next door saw us exercising and wanted to join in. This got us thinking. We felt that we wanted to form a group that would last - so that we had a permanent group. We wanted to be all women - to do something new instead of just sticking to cooking and all. We thought if women start to come out of their homes for activities it would be good. Maybe in time we could organise other things as a women's group.

Anyway, our group got going as one of our members made friends with a gymn teacher who offered to come and instruct us.

By this time we were exercising in one of the member's yards because it was bigger. As more women in the area saw us they wanted to join in.



FIT

TOGETHER

So our group became bigger until we felt the best place to fit us all was the hospital parking lot not far from the end of our road. We organised to wear matching track suits to make us stand out more and show that we were all part of one group. Because we were moving to another venue we needed transport, and so we used to travel to the parking lot in one of the member's car. This turned out to be a big problem in the end as we were dependent on her for transport. When she withdrew, this meant we could no longer travel there.

SELF PROTECTION

Some of the women were afraid of the parking lot. As we did not want to lose any members for any reason we took along weapons (like candlesticks, a whip, a pair of nunchukers) to ensure that we could protect ourselves. We did not have any problems though.

A NEW TURN

One evening one of our members came feeling so depressed about her problems with her husband, we decided not to go out running but instead to sit and talk. So, almost by mistake our group took on a new development.

This started a good pattern. So from then on the same kind of thing was discussed, even while exercising. This particular woman's husband even fussed about her coming to keep-fit. We encouraged and supported her and now she's got her way and more. Now she even goes out with friends with his acceptance. Of course we hear husbands say: "You can go to keep-fit with

MEANS

ORGANISING

pleasure - as long as my food is ready on time!" One woman who was trying to get her husband to stay home more and spend some time with the children, was told: "OK, if you give up keep-fit." In the end she didn't give up keep-fit and he does spend more time with the children. Many husbands supported the group. So our discussions really helped.

We had some actual meetings but we did not form a structure as we felt we did not need it at that time. We decided to raise funds for equipment, so we had a raffle. One member said she was opening up a basement in which the equipment could be stored for any member to take out for a while.

Around this time we also had a Christmas party - mostly for the children in our street - husbands were also invited. The women organised it.

THE PROBLEMS START

It seems that too many activities of our group depended on one person. The member who had the car was also the member whose basement was to be used, and it was the same person who looked after the money. The Christmas party and raffle draw was at this same member's house and money is kept there. It seems that she became jealous when someone else also became friendly with the instructor, who she saw as 'her friend'. So she never went and picked up the gym instructor again.

As it was the end of the year anyway, it was difficult to organise against things falling apart like this. Everybody

PROPERLY

felt disheartened. People have started doing keep-fit on their own.

When we think back - going to the parking lot had been so good because we ran together, talked, exercised, maybe ran off to the shops, talking more. We seemed to handle problems then - like some of us wanted to go to a fair instead of keep-fit and others wanted to do keep-fit. We didn't want the group to split, so we did both - we did keep-fit and got to the fair by running there!

AND NOW?

We want to start again on a fresh footing. This time with a proper structure and organisation - keep proper minutes of our 'business matters'. We are starting to visit the old members to invite them to a meeting. At least we have learnt from our experiences, and now we can only try to build again - this time with no dependence on one person.

This time we won't rely on any member more than another one.

