

Cornell Tenant Education Project

Regina Rector, Department of
Design and Environmental Analysis,
Cornell University

In recent years many housing developments have provided new homes for millions of families, but many planners, developers and others interested in societal problems are now realizing that this country's housing problems cannot be totally and completely solved by brick and mortar alone. People cannot be whisked from a slum neighborhood, deposited into a new and attractive apartment and then be promptly forgotten. This is substantiated by several crumbling examples of fairly new housing projects. Within a few years the slums had returned to the people. Without help, the adjustments to a new home, a new way of living and often to a new community are too much for many people to cope with. They need assistance in developing a feeling of "belonging" to the new community as well as a feeling of pride in that community, and an understanding of their neighbors. Without these factors it would be futile to try to teach them how to care for their apartments or help them to improve their quality of life.

The New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC) is an organization that realizes the importance of programs for the benefit of residents in its housing developments. This corporation was formed in 1969 with private monies for the purpose of building both low-

to-moderate income residential and commercial developments in urban areas. It is the largest developer of new housing in New York State.

The UDC was aware of the involvement of the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University with an existing Tenant Education Program in New York City. This program has a Home Economist and several trained paraprofessionals as teachers. Inspired by the success of this program, the UDC inquired if Cornell would be interested in preparing a similar program to be administered by non-professionals such as housing managers. A group of faculty considered the request and accepted the challenge. A proposal and contract was subsequently prepared and jointly funded by the UDC and the Ford Foundation through the Center for Urban Development and Research. An interdepartmental committee of seven faculty members was formed to carry out the mandates of the program.

The following subject matter areas are included in the series of seven 1½ to 2 hour sessions: an explanation of the UDC, orientation to the project and the community, tenant-landlord relationships, tips on moving, facts on the care of the apartment, household storage, the choosing of new, used and unfinished furniture, renovating old furniture, bud-

get decorating, money management (pay-check planning and credit), pest control and the wise selection, use and storage of food. The first round of trial teaching has been completed and the materials are now being revised into a new format that evolved during the trial sessions. Instead of a variety of methods and visuals as was originally planned, the new format consists of slides with a taped script, a list of anticipated questions and answers, informational handouts and a demonstration kit containing examples of items shown in the slides.

The suggestion for the new format came from both UDC management supervisors and the project managers. The committee agreed to try the suggested format with two or three of the sessions. This was done and everyone was extremely pleased with the result. The slides and tape hold the attention of the tenants to a much greater degree than did the original format. Also, the managers seemed more willing to attempt to teach the materials in the slide and script format. This format will be used in the second round of trial teaching in May, 1974. After the completion of the trial sessions and any needed revisions, a group of managers will be brought in for three or four days for guidance and training in the use of the materials.

Evaluation is an extremely important segment of the program. We need a measure by which to judge the success of our program. An evaluation of each session is in the form of a quiz game, serving as both a pre- and post-test. At the start of the session, each tenant is given

an answer sheet, and as each question with multiple choice answers appears on the screen, the tenant marks what he considers to be the most appropriate answer. These papers are then collected and the answers recorded. At the conclusion of the session, the answer sheets are returned to the tenants and the questions are again flashed on the screen, but this time with the correct answer shown. The tenants can correct their errors and discuss the questions. These questions will become a quiz game — just for the fun of it — when the managers conduct the sessions.

A final evaluation will be conducted several months after the completion of these programs by the managers. This will be for the purpose of measuring the degree to which the tenants have made use of the information presented in the sessions and ultimately the effectiveness of non-professional teachers. Comparisons will be made between tenant's answers to the quiz before each session and the degree to which he/she retains and uses the information later.

The outside funding for this program will terminate in the fall of 1974. After that we plan to continue the program with appropriate revisions and additions to better suit the needs of other audiences, and also to reflect the feedback from the managers, tenants, and evaluators.

The official name of this program is being changed in the final format from Tenant Education Project to Resident Information Program. All concerned felt that the new title was more appropriate.