



As the family living program assistant at Berks County Extension, Patricia Gallo (Trixie) heads a group for stay-at-home mothers called Moms-at-Home.

Moms-At-Home Organize Monthly Get-Togethers

LOU ANN GOOD
Lancaster Farming Staff
LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — A growing number of moms are opting to put their careers on hold and stay at home to raise their children.

"While some people view this exodus back to home as a backward trend, it isn't," said Patricia Gallo (Trixie) who is a family living program assistant for Berks County Extension. "Instead it offers the option for women to choose to stay at home or have a career without feeling guilty."

With this decision, many mothers face new obstacles because they are — well — unique.

They usually hold a different perspective on many issues than moms who juggle both career and home responsibilities. They often feel alone in their viewpoints and miss the camaraderie they had shared with fellow employees.

One mother who gave up her career as a biological research scientist to raise two children called the Berks County Extension and asked, "Where is a support group for full-time mothers?"

She was new in the area, away from parents and friends. She wanted to meet other women, like her, who were devoted mothers, and faced adapting to a family income that was cut in half from giving up her job.

Trixie, as she prefers to be called, said that this was the first call she received in her job as a family living program assistant for the Berks County Extension. Surprisingly, one week later, a second call came in for an identical request from a woman who did not know the first caller.

Trixie decided to meet with the callers and discuss some of their concerns.

The most prevailing concern seems to be the desire to meet other mothers like themselves.

In the next extension newsletter mailing, Trixie included a little write up about mothers who stay at home. She added a clip and mail coupon and asked if there were other mothers interested in joining a support group.

Twelve mothers wrote to say

they were interested. To plan a support group, Trixie asked the respondents why they decided to stay home, frustrations they faced, and why they thought they could benefit from a support group?

"Child care is a large issue," Trixie said. "Who pays and what is proper care? The government has fantastic ideas but assume all mothers are working. They aren't. These are the mothers we want to reach."

Trixie set up her first meeting in July with the woman who had called in with the original request for a support group.

Together they came up with ideas and a format for a support group. They decided the group would meet once a month, alternating between day and evening meetings.

The day meetings would be held in a home or at a park or play area where mothers would bring along their children. Trixie would distribute parenting information and an informal exchange of ideas would be shared. Some subjects would deal with keeping children busy, self-esteem in children, nutritious snacks for children, and subjects the group suggest.

The evening meeting would be a sit-down meeting that focuses not on mothering but on being a woman.

Trixie said, "The problem these women expressed is that they often become so wrapped up in being a mother 24 hours a day, that the woman inside — the spouse, the lover — tends to get buried."

Women's self-esteem is one subject for an evening meeting. This week an evening meeting was held with the theme on "Fanning the flames to keep romance alive in marriage."

"Often, when children come, the first thing to go is romance," Trixie said.

The women filled out a survey that asked them to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how they rated their romance b.c. (before child) and a.c. (after child).

The participants shared tips they found that worked in adding more romance in marriage.

"Although a lot of parenting

material is available from Penn State Extension, not much is published on subjects such as romance," Trixie said.

She researched the subject, and found the 14 women who attended the meeting were eager to share their ideas.

"I'm amazed," Trixie said of the participants' bonding. "The group just clicked from the beginning. I've never seen a group of individuals click together so quickly."

The first meeting had only three participants, the next 14, and now there are 70 women who asked to be on the mailing list.

Despite this positive growth, Trixie said that there are many things that still need to be worked out.

For the day meetings, the group needs a large place where children can play with the other children. Trixie is looking for a hostess that has a large play area or has access to a community building or park.

There is no charge for the meetings at this point, but a minimal charge may be needed in the future to pay for the mailings.

A great concern is that Trixie's job with the extension is only part time and is funded on a non-permanent basis.

"I am not an extension agent but a family living program assistant," said Trixie who graduated from Liberty University with a B.S. in home economics. She began working for the extension in July 1993.

Trixie and her husband recently celebrated their second wedding anniversary.

"I was raised by a mom who stayed at home, and my husband and I decided that when we have children, I will be a stay-at-home mom. However, we both decided that it is important for me to focus on career for quite a long time before we have children."

Berks Countians who are interested in the Moms-at-Home support group or to arrange a speaking engagement, should contact Trixie at (215) 378-1327. Those outside of Berks County should contact their county extension office listed in the phone directory under Penn State Cooperative Extension.

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