

MONTANA'S KELLOGG — EXTENSION EDUCATION PROJECT

*Mary Lee Reese
Helena, Montana*

The Kellogg-Extension Education Project, or KEEP, as it is known in Montana, is quite simply a program of adult education. It is, however, a particularly relevant, innovative, and timely sort of adult education.

Since 1972, several thousand Montanans have been involved in some aspect of KEEP. KEEP was initially funded by the Kellogg Foundation and is administered and staffed by the Cooperative Extension Service at Montana State University at Bozeman.

KEEP offers one-week communications workshops about 4 to 5 times a year. These workshops involve leadership training in such subjects as basic communication skills, problem solving, and leadership styles, as well as seminars in economics, political science, and humanities. Workshop groups are composed of 30 individuals. Participants may come back a second year for more advanced instruction and review.

Conflict management has been identified as one area of interest by KEEP participants. To date, there have been three one-week workshops in conflict management.

Each year the KEEP program also offers a public affairs forum, which brings together community leaders and citizens to discuss timely and often controversial issues. The last forum discussed collective bargaining in the public sector.

The KEEP program that I was involved in was the study-travel program. This program combines traveling seminars with classroom experience. To date, there have been five study-travel groups of 30 people each. These groups meet on the Montana State University campus two or three weeks each year, for two years. The first year's study includes one week of travel within Montana, and the second year involves a national traveling seminar. The first three study-travel groups also included a third year of international travel. The last group traveled to the People's Republic of China.

KEEP brings together people with a wide range of backgrounds and interests and gives them the opportunity to learn from each other. They come to understand each other's problems and

concerns and to learn about life styles and communities different from their own.

KEEP has also provided the opportunity for me to broaden my horizons. For example, there was quite a controversy in Montana recently over the state institutions, the working conditions, the treatment and care of patients, low salaries, and so on. It is one thing to hear and to read about these things and quite another to see it first hand. We visited the prison and the state school for mentally retarded children. These were profound educational experiences for me. We also visited the Anaconda Copper Smelter, which gave me a whole new perspective on the working conditions some people have to endure.

KEEP also gives us the opportunity to become more aware of the issues facing our state and to become better informed about those issues.

Becoming informed and being more aware is only a beginning, however. Citizens need to be active. They need to participate in communities, in organizations, in government, and in business. It is often difficult to motivate people to participate and to get involved. Being an active involved citizen can be a singularly unrewarding job. KEEP has been a real morale boost, personally, because it has given me the opportunity to develop skills in working with groups of people. It has helped me be more selective in the tasks I take on and has given me the encouragement to continue my participation.

One of the most exciting parts of the program has been seeing the personal development of people in my groups as we went through the two-year experience together. One woman discussed how she had gone back to her community and started a continuing education program for high school dropouts. A man talked about how he had gone back home and worked to develop better water delivery systems within his county. The important thing about my KEEP participation is the fact that I would not be up here in front of this group talking if it had not been for my KEEP experience.

The KEEP program is the only one I know of that combines the adult education experience with the opportunity to develop skills in being a more effective participant in groups and community situations. It not only provides the opportunity to become better informed on the issues but also helps us to more effectively participate. It helps promote a better understanding between people, between the rural and urban residents, between bureaucrats and businessmen, between household managers and teachers. Most

important of all, KEEP has created a whole new core of committed, concerned citizens across our state, people who are willing to participate and get involved, to ask questions and resolve problems, people willing to work toward developing better communities and make Montana a better place to live.