

Running a household economically in times of crisis

by Elisabeth Willi, home economics teacher and psychologist

Even in prosperous Switzerland, people can become unexpectedly unemployed due to company closures, wage cuts or illness. Previous crises and today's Corona crisis leave many traces. Through no fault of their own, household income no longer covers expenditure, bills can no longer be paid and the family budget gets overstretched. Strokes of fate such as separations or deaths also often reduce income.

But even in such difficult times, there is always room to take initiative to secure one's livelihood. People can do much more themselves than they realise, e.g. by carrying out some of the work themselves, by crafting products or doing minor repairs. Many things people did themselves as a matter of course in earlier times, we no longer give a thought to today, things lie idle or we have not (yet) acquired them.

Not only for the unemployed or those affected by short-time work, but also for the working population, handicraft activity can be a source of recreation, an enrichment. In their spare time, the younger generation might experience model activities of older people, when doing work together and handicrafts – something that can be important especially in view of a less secure professional future. If a young child already experiences how mother and father are hammering,



(Picture lw)



(Picture mt)

pottering, sewing, gardening or renovating *with joy*, working hand in hand, and also letting the children help and guiding them age-appropriate, this is the best prophylaxis for difficult times. Practical work always includes mental work, and it is rewarding not only in times of need.

A friend of mine often told me how he hammered, nailed and painted with his grandfather. He was patient and at the same time made sure that the work was done well. Afterwards, the two of them would heat their sausages on an old stove. Today, the friend still draws on this relationship and particularly on the mood of those days. He asks his colleagues or other craftsmen for advice and is able to come up and carry out many things himself; on the one hand it is pleasurable and rewarding and on the other hand it is cost saving.

One of our neighbours has been passionately renovating his house for years. He had to put his tools out of the way of his then two-year-old son because he had set his mind to join in but it was still a bit too dangerous for him.

Many a reader could add similar examples. It is good to be able to acquire manual skills and knowledge when the need is not yet so great. Then one can successfully draw on it when necessary.

I would like to give another example from my professional experience as a home economics teacher. When NATO's first war of aggression

was launched on European soil in 1999, it was clear that this would change our lives in the years to come. Just like today, there was a danger of supply shortage we might be facing. Back then, together with two other experienced home economics teachers, I offered a basic cooking course aimed mainly at adult women – one man took part also – who had not had the opportunity to be systematically taught the basics of cooking, either in their families or in their general education. Most of the participants had completed their qualifications, were well established in their professions, had experiences of living in a shared flat but had a lot of catching up to do in terms of household management. – In a follow up, we also held day courses in preserving fruit and vegetables.

Today, many years later, some of the former participants have started a family or live in a cottage with a garden. With satisfaction I notice how former students and "city plants" have become capable housewives. They did not acquire these skills from their mothers, but in adulthood and today they are wonderful role models for their children.

In spring 2020, during the first lockdown, many families and couples made their own bread and pastries again. There are countless tasty menus made from simple staple foods that taste so much better and are a lot healthier than convenience food from the supermarket. By having a go at the tried and tested as well as the new, the enjoyment will grow about all the accomplishments.