

Hospital Playscheme

Margaret Jenkins

I look around my room today and I see stacks of magazines. Twenty-five years ago they would have been our PPA monthly CONTACT. Today they are Patchwork & Quilting. Yes, times have changed and I certainly have moved on but have never forgotten and am eternally grateful for what PPA did for me. As one of the County Development Officers my job description was wide. I was naïve to say the least and in the early days did not feel I warranted my pay. I remember trying to rack my brain how best to use my time so that my monthly work diary looked respectable. I listened to Marjorie Dykins' every word and read as much as I could, I thought about my experiences and what I felt I could do to raise an awareness of PPA and the Playgroup Movement in Gwent.

One of my experiences was having to wait in the antenatal clinic with many other women of all types and from a very wide area. There were no magazines or even a place to have a cup of tea. Children ran wild and their mothers' blood pressure soared.

An idea was developing in my mind. Perhaps HELP was needed here

I first approached the clinic with some of our magazines – the receptionist would see if they were suitable!!! A couple of months later I returned with some more. The first consignment was on the tables and had obviously been well thumbed. I had passed the first test and continued to drop off magazines for about eighteen months getting to know the receptionist quite well. I asked such questions as 'Was there a toy box for small children?' 'No, that would be difficult to manage' I was told.Lots of excuses followed and the parting shot was that they would contact me. The dreaded Consultant would have to be spoken to. Months went by. No message.

At the same time the Abergavenny Branch was developing and had strong foundations and good leadership. For reasons I cannot remember, maybe the All Wales Mental Health Strategy, I had a meeting with a gentleman in Nevill Hall Hospital and before leaving I mentioned how we had been interested in the idea of setting up crèche/play facilities in the ante natal clinic. He was the right age to accept this and gave me advice on how to set about it via him. WHO WAS THIS MAN? He turned out to be the Chief Executive for North Gwent. I must have done something right to get into his office. I vividly remember him telling us what his job entailed and just how important he was!

After that things moved very quickly. Anne Robinson, Branch Chairman and myself were summoned to be looked over by the Consultants and given the go ahead. Could we deliver? It was time for Anne to move on and a new enthusiastic but raw Branch Chairman by the name of Wendy Hawkins chaired the meeting. I think her first.

Did we have the backing of the Branch? Believe it or not there were objections but there were considerably more in favour of the project. We would go ahead. There was to be a rota of volunteers and we had money from Wales PPA to appoint a Play Co-ordinator. A supply of toys came from begging letters. We had a room adjacent to the waiting room – I did not know if this would work. I helped at a number of sessions and it was a great success, many of the children not wanting to go home.

A few months later Play Co-ordinators were employed by Newport Borough. They had strong links with PPA and they wanted to start a scheme in the Royal Gwent, a much larger hospital in the South of the County. I explained how long it had taken but we made the initial move. I really could not believe my luck. The Chief Executive from North Gwent had moved South! He had told me how important he was at our first meeting and so it appeared he was. This playscheme took a matter of months to set up and was very much needed.

At these playschemes there was an opportunity to speak with mums, dads or even grandparents, about the value of play, often putting them in contact with a nearby playgroup.

All who took part in these projects felt a tremendous sense of achievement but I firmly believe that it was the mothers and children who benefited most.

I look back at my time with PPA with very fond memories and by the time I resigned there was certainly no need for me to have to think of things to do.