

A National Adviser Remembers

Marjorie Dykins

Part of a message sent by Marjorie Dykins to the NEC, to Wales PPA Council Elect and to Field Staff in England and Wales, following her retirement as National Adviser in August 1987

In reviewing ten years as National Adviser, it would be unproductive and boring to list the number of travelled miles, meetings attended, mistakes made, places visited, reports written, trains missed, documents lost or misplaced, hotels frequented, hot-water bottles and nighties left behind, arguments won or lost, introductions made, places visited and welcomes received.

My last away-day job as National Adviser was to attend the National Eisteddfod in Portmadoc and help at PPA's tent on the field. One of the delights of an Eisteddfod is to listen to the adjudicators and in gentle rebuke to one competitor, a former Chief Bard said that it wasn't the job of a poet to tell us that 2 and 2 make 4. It was, he said, a poet's calling to be surprised that 2 and 2 always make 4 and hope that sometimes 2 and 2 could make 5.

So let me borrow that super illustration from the National Eisteddfod for it gives me themes on which to base some comments in this end of year, end of career report.

$2 + 2 = 4$ This is the certainty of statistics

I have spent a fair bit of my time using statistics for PPA's gain and I am now more than convinced of the value of this approach. Too often we describe our activities in such terms as 'successful meetings' or 'good courses'. If we cannot easily describe the quality content we can, at least, be number-specific. A playgroup AGM with an attendance of twenty could

be ‘successful’, because it could represent over 75% of the membership. A branch course with twenty attending could not be ‘good’ if it only represented attendance from five groups in a fifty group branch. How shall we give hard evidence on the scale of PPA’s contribution to the pre-school field, to adult education and to family support? I feel we should encourage the use of figures to support our quality objectives. Statistics give us the confidence and certainty to plead our cause and assess our results.

2 + 2 = 5 This is the seemingly impossible

One of the pleasures of my job as National Adviser was to be constantly surprised. Experience has taught me that, given sufficient support and thorough understanding of the implications, groups and counties would almost always find new officers. But I was constantly surprised when it happened, year after year and crisis after crisis. Why should we underestimate the commitment, skills and vigour of young parents? I think of those countless times when a bunch of quiet housewives tackled a County Council, no messing, challenging their views on the role of parents and on the needs of under-fives. With a combination of hard information and feminine (yes I’m afraid I’m a sexist!) skills, they pulled off the impossible time and again.

I think of the Treasurer of a PPA County Association who told me she had been called Minnie Mouse at school. This soft-spoken, apparently naïve, lady would not be diverted when asking for her county’s grant to be raised above £20,000. More recently, I heard of a first annual meeting of parents in a small country school. Some schools had found difficulty attracting the required number of parents to meetings such as this, but to the surprise of the head-teacher, it was attended by over 20% of the parents, and therefore quorate. The head-teacher did not know that an ex-PPA mum had used her skills and persuaded parents of the importance of their attendance.

The strength and potential of PPA over the 21 years that I’ve been involved has been to expect the impossible and to plan for it. And that’s how all progress is made which helps our society become a better place. Look back over your own PPA experience and you’ll surely agree.

I am writing this during the last week of my employment, and doing so

on a Greyhound bus on the old Santa-Fe trail through the Rockies. Memories of all the events to bid me good-bye come flooding back. It would be impossible for me to give personal and adequate thanks for all that came my way during last term. So I am winging my thanks and love to you all in this message.

August 28th 1987

Marjorie Dykins

(Marjorie was awarded an OBE in 1996)



Marjorie (Contact 1987)