



Westway Nursery Association

A.G.M October '82

Now we are nearly ten...

It has been a busy year for Westway Nursery Association, and this Report shows the range of activities we have been undertaking. We have not only been managing Maxilla and Longridge Road Centres, but also developing new proposals in Earls Court, Lancaster West and, with Kensal Under Fives Group, in Swinbrook. The development work has a strong foundation in Ann Holmes' study of Under Threes provision in the Borough pointing out the areas of greatest need.

This April it will be ten years since the first meeting out of which our Association sprung was organised by local community groups. The first General Meeting to establish Westway Nursery Association was in October 1973, so officially we shall be ten in a year's time. But now seems the right time to review what we have achieved and to consider what we should be doing in the years to come.

It is good that in Maxilla and Longridge Road we are not simply sitting back and watching the years go by. The workers in both Centres have to keep asking whether the services they offer are still meeting the requirements of parents and children. Longridge Road has discussed a report on its first two-and-a-half years of operation. Maxilla is currently checking with parents whether the hours and the services are what parents want. Maxilla, too, is engaged in a lengthy process of reviewing its aims and management structure.

Across all the Association's work we have to face up to the difficult questions about what kinds of activities are most appropriate for children of different ages and different kinds of involvement in nurseries. For most of what we do we cannot call up advisory and support services like those which an Education Authority has at its disposal. We are thrown back on our own devices. The responsiveness of our Centres and the nature of the Association as a voluntary body throws a lot of pressure upon the staff, and all our members and 'customers' are very grateful to them, even if in the rush we don't say so often enough.

The continuing work and new developments are taking place in the context of public expenditure cuts and a society which is making life harder for most of us, for parents, staff and committees.

The changes in our society are forcing us to review what the tasks of a community organisation like ours are. Is it our job to make up for the cuts in provision by central government and local authorities? How effective are we in pioneering not only the most helpful forms of organisation, but also the kinds of child care and education which are best and most appropriate for our children?

Whatever else, we have to remind ourselves that this Association is a fair-sized operation responsible for 45 workers and expenditure approaching a quarter of a million pounds a year. The responsibility falls on committee members meeting and working in their spare time - we are all grateful to them for everything.

MAXILLA NURSERY CENTRE...

Our work with the 36 children under the age of three, has been funded for the last five years by the Department of the Environment and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea under the Urban Aid programme.

The grant expires in March 1983 and we have recently submitted an application for further funding to the Department of the Environment.

This new application includes the following changes/proposals: increased pay for uncertificated staff, one full additional administrative worker so that the Co-ordinator could then be released to do more work with parents and re-organise the Parents Centre activities, one nursery officer in the toddler room to replace the member of staff given by the toddlers to the baby room and an upgrading of the Administrative and Finance Officer.

The Borough has made us its Number One priority to go through to the Department of the Environment where we will have to compete nationally with other schemes.

It is possible that we will not hear whether our application has been successful until just before March next year when the grant expires. Should we be unsuccessful we would then have to place an application for funding before RBKC.



Since the last AGM the numbers of children we have been able to offer places to has increased by four with the opening of the new baby room extension.

We have now been fully operational since September 1981. The room was officially opened at the last AGM by Mary Mares, the retiring Day Care Officer for Kensington and Chelsea.

The capital cost of the extension was funded by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the Department of the Environment under the Urban Aid programme and Campden Charities. The total grant came to £34,916.

There are four full time nursery officers, three qualified and one unqualified, and an unqualified officer for three hours daily. We have twelve babies at present ranging in ages from six weeks to 18 months.

Apart from having a few initial hiccoughs and snags (which frequently happens with new buildings) - for instance, not being unable to open the louvre windows unless you were on stilts, the children and staff find the space we now have wonderful, and we can provide a larger range of activities at any one time.

We use the old Baby Room for activities in the morning and afternoon, for example, water, sand, paint, dough, paddling pool, climbing activities and many variations of painting such as finger, foot and hand.

Now having the use of extra space and a garden, we find that the older babies (12 months onwards) can do messy activities sometimes, without the very small babies crawling into the activity. It is also useful for a small group of children at any one time.

Since the summer, the babies have had their own garden directly outside the extension, which we have had turfed and plants put outside. The concrete is also very useful as most of the babies sleep outside in prams, which they benefit from a great deal.

Parents Centre...

We are in the process of setting up some new workshops in the Parents Centre. Keep fit, legal advice sessions, 'Your Children and their Health', a steel band on Thursday afternoons and, hopefully, dressmaking and craft classes. On a Wednesday afternoon, Ann Thomas, a qualified social worker from Westway is organising group discussions and films for parents.

We have recently sent out a questionnaire to all parents whose children attend Maxilla and who are on the waiting list in order to see if the Centre is still providing the service they want.

I hope to have the results ready by early November.

LONGRIDGE ROAD...

The Under Fives Resource Centre has now been open for three years, over which period it has been used by approximately 300 families.

The data obtained in our own survey of families in Earls Court, the information obtained from monitoring and analysing the use of the Centre, and the recent census findings have all tended to corroborate each other.

Earls Court is distinct even compared with most neighbourhoods in Central London. It has two major constant features. On the one hand, there is a large number of hotels and restaurants demanding cheap and ready labour. On the other, there is a heavy concentration of cramped 'furnished' accommodation in the private rented sector. It also of course occupies a very desirable location for those working in the capital's centre.

The largest regular attendance has come from those in the 1-2 age group, and it is felt that there would be much greater attendance by the under Ones if the Centre was not used by over Twos. The evidence we have suggests that the majority of those with over Twos would like some more specific form of nursery provision.

The ILEA are currently considering our Urban Aid application for a Nursery Centre for 2-5 year olds. Should this application be successful the Resource Centre could probably most usefully concentrate on the Under Twos in the future.

Mothers of young children in the area tend to have lived there for some time prior to having their children. Those from the better off English families are likely to move out of the area fairly soon afterwards: for most of the rest, the supply of publicly rented housing will determine when and where they move. Of those who have used the Centre on a regular basis, approximately half were living in one room when they first came to the Centre. Further, the features of the area tend to mean that children in the 2-3 age group (usually at their most demanding) are living in the worst material conditions.

It has been interesting to note that among our users of UK origin, most use the Centre predominantly as a means of meeting other mothers in the kitchen, whilst getting some respite from their children in the playroom. Conversely those from overseas tend to see the Centre primarily as somewhere they bring their children to play, and the mothers themselves spend most of the time in the playroom.

The Centre has run many specific activities as well as the general drop in sessions. These now include swimming, a mother and baby group, craft and Spanish classes and a Health Visitor's clinic each week and a Doctor's clinic once a month.

