



BARNARDO SERVICES FOR FAMILIES IN TALLAGHT



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This series of papers, written by practitioners, is offered as a contribution to the development of social work practice. The aim is not to present definitive statements on particular themes or areas of work, but to describe in the words of practitioners of all levels of experience, training, and skill, the work which they are actually undertaking.

As a national voluntary organisation, Dr. Barnardo's has the advantage of encompassing a variety of settings and methods in the care of children and families. With this advantage we acknowledge the linked obligation to make known our work and to share our thinking and experience.

In Ireland Barnardo's works closely with health boards, other statutory authorities and voluntary agencies to provide a wide range of family and community-based child-care services.

BARNARDO'S SERVICES FOR FAMILIES IN TALLAGHT

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Preface

Since the Barclay Committee Report 1982 on 'Social Work Role-and-Tasks' much has been written about the need to develop neighbourhood services responsive to local needs, which actively involve people in determining what they want, how they want it and what they can do to improve conditions for themselves and their families. This paper describes how a small group of Barnardo staff in Ireland worked with families living on a large estate on the outskirts of Dublin and other voluntary and statutory agencies in the area to develop much needed services for families, who feel isolated and sometimes forgotten. Resources were scarce, but imagination, creativity, openness and the willingness to be honest with parents and to learn from their views about their needs and what does or does not help them has led to the development of a network of services in which families and professionals work together to ensure that children are not disadvantaged.

The report describes how the different elements of the service evolved. In these times of ever diminishing resources, there are useful lessons, and approaches, which other agencies may wish to consider, when developing their own services for children and their parents. The final sentences in the concluding chapter sum up what this small group of staff have achieved.

"Lack of financial resources has not only spurred everyone's imagination in terms of finding alternative ways of meeting needs, but it has also ensured that the project has maintained an urgent sense of priority and co-operation with other agencies. The staff see themselves as part of the resources available to the residents of Tallaght and they have relevant training experience, knowledge, and skills which can be used to meet the needs of Tallaght's children and their families".

The staff of the project have produced another paper "Working With Pre-school Children" which describes how pre-school playgroups were developed in Dublin and Tallaght between 1973 - 1981. This report is available from The Library, Barnardo's, Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex IG6 1QG. Price £2.00 including postage.

Nora Dixon
Co-ordinator
Research and Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Tallaght is one of the fastest growing towns in Europe. Situated eight miles south of Dublin city centre, it was once a rural village, and in 1951 had a population of 350. In 1970 Tallaght was designated a new town in the Dublin Development Plan, and by 1984 it had a population of 70,000, which is 70% of its projected total population. About one third of the population is under the age of 18 years. Over 100 industrial estates provide employment for about 5,000 people.

Housing types are mixed, as follows:-

Private	76%	Terraced	53%
Weekly tenancies	17%	Semi-detached	45%
Tenant purchase	6%	Detached	1%
		Flats	1%

Ninety per cent of houses have three bedrooms.

The majority of people living in the area have either been rehoused from more settled inner city areas, or are young married couples coping with large mortgages. The build up of housing and population outstripped the provision of structural and supporting services. Apart from the provision of schools and churches, the area is notably lacking in transport and telephone facilities, shops, parks or playgroups, community centres and meeting halls. All of the main facilities and services, banks, police station, post office, child clinic and health centre are in the old village part of Tallaght, which means that most people living in the outlying estates have to travel from one to three and a half miles to these facilities. Bus services to and from Dublin are inadequate and expensive. All services are from the outlying estates to the village centre or to Dublin; the estates are not linked by bus routes.

The local authorities, Dublin Corporation and Dublin County Council, perceive their main responsibilities as the provision of housing and the Council's community development function is one of grant aid and co-ordination of local community organisations.

The Eastern Health Board has a responsibility for the overall development and co-ordination of health and social services. The Dominican Order which has had its Priory House in Tallaght for centuries, has been responsible for the development of schools and has encouraged services aimed at community development. The major voluntary agency is Tallaght Welfare Society, founded by the Dominican Fathers in 1969. It provides some direct services, such as voluntary transport and a welfare and information service, and has an informal co-ordinating role for voluntary welfare services.

The Development Of Barnardo's Work In Tallaght

Barnardo's and the Tallaght Welfare Society started working together

in 1977, when the Society's Director approached Barnardo's for assistance in developing pre-school activity in Tallaght. He was aware of the large number of young families coming to live in the area, and was concerned that many were living in isolation from their extended families and that young mothers were under stress. The Tallaght Welfare Society, the Area Health Board and Barnardo's entered negotiations in 1977 about developing work with pre-school children and their families, including a day nursery, which was to be built in 1980. In the meantime, Barnardo's recommended following a model used previously in Dublin Inner City, i.e. providing one person to act as a community playgroup organiser who would initiate and support a number of play groups for pre-school children which could be run by their parents, in the Tallaght area. It was thought this would make the best use of Barnardo's limited resources. The first community playgroup organiser was employed in November 1977, working from the Tallaght Welfare Society's offices.

One of the community playgroups started was based in a local authority ground floor flat at Avonbeg, which was rented to a local priest for community purposes. After a year, when the playgroup found more suitable accommodation in a local school, another project worker was employed by Barnardo's to run it as a Neighbourhood Resource Centre. She helped to set up a number of children's groups in the flat after school, a regular summer play scheme, a toy library for community playgroups, and an advisory service.

Discussions which had begun in 1977 with the Tallaght Welfare Society and the Eastern Health Board led to Barnardo's accepting responsibility for the management of a day nursery, attached to a purpose-built health centre within walking distance of the flat, which was completed in March 1980. The day nursery was to cater for families where either the children had special needs requiring the help of professional staff, or the parents had severe social, medical or psychiatric problems and therefore could not encourage appropriate development in their children.

In 1979 a gift from a local Lions club enabled Barnardo's to extend its toy library service to provide a home visiting service to the families of handicapped children. This was run by a third Barnardo's worker, who was also attached to the day nursery to develop work with parents and volunteers.

Tallaght Project's Work Today

The range of Barnardo's services for families in Tallaght now includes the community playgroup advisory service, the Neighbourhood Resource Centre at the Avonbeg flat, the Millbrook day nursery, the toy library service, a parents advisory service and support to a Health Board community service in the centre of Tallaght. The project which began with a community playgroup organiser now has a team consisting of a project leader, a nursery supervisor and four nursery assistants, and four project workers. Diagram 1 indicates the direct and indirect services offered by Barnardo's.

Barnardo's Services for Families in Tallaght

DIRECT SERVICE

Day Nursery
provides day and sessional care for children with special needs

Neighbourhood Resource Centre, 'Drop-In'

Advisory Service:
families referred by other agencies

Education for parenting -
courses, workshops, family sessions

Toy Library:
Parents, and professionals, referrals from community playgroups and families with children who have special needs

INDIRECT SERVICES

Community Playgroup Advisory Service, Tallaght

After-School Groups

Recruiting, training and support of volunteers
who run playroom in St Dominic's House, 'Drop-In'

Summer Playscheme for 4 - 7 years old

Aims Of The Project

The aims of the project have been formally stated as follows:-

"The project recognises the importance of the child within his family and his community, and assists parents and their children to develop within that community. The project's specific objectives include:-

- (a) To encourage parents to recognise and develop their own skills and so develop confidence and respect.
- (b) To provide aid and support to families in times of crisis that will enable them to continue functioning as a family in the community.
- (c) To advise parents on the setting up of facilities for children in the community, and provide training courses and back-up facilities and support."

The Role Of The Project Leader

The project is made up of several linked activities. Each worker is expected to carry prime responsibility for one aspect, but to share with the project leader the tasks of planning, co-ordinating and using their obvious creativity to develop the activities. They advise her about expressed and emerging needs, problems encountered, and their ideas about responses. The project leader listens, gives advice, notes, comments and appreciates their work. Having an overview of the project as a whole, the project leader may also highlight relevant issues. She is the link person with the rest of the Barnardo organisation, and concerned with public relations with outside agencies. Also she participates actively in various committees and enquiries set up by government and other bodies, representing the project's views about the needs of the Tallaght area's young families.

The project leader has a deep conviction that work undertaken with children must include parents as far as possible. Many parents have skills they are unaware of and professional staff can recognise and build on these skills. This helps parents to have confidence in themselves and to develop personally as individuals and in groups. She believes it is important for parents to feel a sense of ownership of the activities in which they are involved.

It is very important to choose the right staff to undertake this type of work. They have to believe in the project's philosophy and have appropriate training, skills and experience. Staff play a part in identifying needs which can be met alongside parents and other agencies. The project leader is well aware of the level of stress that this type of community work places upon staff. Team meetings and individual sessions with staff are essential for supervision, direction and counselling. She encourages staff to approach her at any time and enables them to be open about their difficulties. They share the burden together. The strength of the project lies in its sense of purpose and having the right staff in post.

Examining The Work of The Project

During 1984 four project staff worked with the Barnardo Research Liaison Officer attached to the Irish Division in undertaking a study of the content of their work. The material presented in the following chapters is based upon this exercise and from staff records relating to the community playgroup advisory service, the neighbourhood resource centre activities, the day nursery and the toy library service.

2. THE COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP ADVISORY SERVICE

Community playgroups

A group of parents wanting to establish a playgroup in their part of Tallaght may come together spontaneously, or be brought together by a local community worker or parish priest. From their own number they elect a management committee and a leader. The leader takes charge of running the playgroup on weekdays during school term time with the help of other mothers on a rota basis, usually on a ratio of leader plus two mothers to twenty children. Fees are usually kept low so fund raising activities are organised by committees to cover expenses of rent, heat, light, equipment, insurance, snacks for children and training courses and workshops for leaders and helpers. The playgroup may apply to Dublin County Council for small grants towards expenses.

The committee makes decisions about which children are admitted, usually from a waiting list, but in special circumstances emergency admissions are taken. Parents are discouraged from bringing children under three years of age to the playgroup, or from having their younger children present when they take their place on the rota.

A typical session would consist of a period of free play for children during which leaders, mothers or rota helpers would interact with children to encourage them to explore and develop through play. The playgroup is often the children's first experience of mixing socially alongside their mothers for part of the time. The leaders conduct group sessions at which songs are sung or dramas acted or stories read. Children are encouraged to develop their independence and sense of order as the leaders, parents and rota helpers encourage them to wait their turn, share and return toys and equipment to whence they were found.

Usually in September most of the children in the playgroup go on to the infants' school if places are available, at the age of four, and a new group of parents takes over. A new committee and playleader may be elected as parents move on. Some remain as they have another child of the appropriate age.

The Role Of the Community Playgroup Adviser

The role of the community playgroup adviser is to offer advice and support to any new and existing community playgroups who request such assistance. She helps parents to recognise and develop their own skills, so that they can provide an interesting and happy playgroup experience for children and parents. She works closely with the Irish Pre-school Playgroup Association and will give advice and information on premises, insurance, health and safety management and committee procedures, parents' rotas, layout of premises in relation to space, the role of the playgroup leader, child development, equipment, activities, finance and grants. She also arranges and co-ordinates workshops and seminars.

Other Barnardo's Services

Community playgroups may call upon Barnardo services as well as the support of the adviser. New groups wishing to start a playgroup may use the Barnardo's Children's Bus, if available, for a period of three months. This converted double decker 'bus can be driven to any area, where its staff work closely with the adviser and the interested parents. A rota of parents is set up, two of whom attend each session in turn to gain experience of daily management, learn play and guidance techniques and gain insight generally into the objectives of a playgroup. A number of Tallaght community playgroups were set up in this way. Barnardo's toy library at the Avonbeg Neighbourhood Resource Centre is open to community playgroups at certain sessions for the loan of toys and equipment. This can be a valuable service when parents are deciding which equipment to buy first as they gather their resources, and when a playgroup admits children with special needs e.g. a handicapped child.

The Nature Of The Community Playgroup Adviser's Work

September 1983 - May 1984

The community playgroup adviser currently works with nine established community playgroups, three of which offer two sessions a day, with different leaders.

The playgroups differ considerably over premises used, facilities available, numbers attending, leadership arrangements, experience and skills of leaders and committees, and funds available. The nine playgroups are located in upper or lower floor rooms in community centres, classrooms in schools as yet not needed, in the upstairs of an estate house, and in a cottage and a hall in the foothills of the mountains on the outskirts of Tallaght.

The advisor's work varies from playgroup to playgroup but the tasks she undertakes can be categorised, as follows:-

(a) Advising groups of mothers to set up or maintain a playgroup

When requested to help to start a new playgroup the adviser sets up a meeting of interested parents after the initial contact has been made, or if necessary visits people individually to explain the concept of a community playgroup. She may then call on the help of the bus and the bus staff, as previously described, or if premises are already available, help the committee and leaders to establish it. Established playgroups may also need support to ensure the continuity of the playgroups as new committees, leaders and parents take over.

(b) Visits to playgroups

The adviser visits playgroups who request a service, getting to know and supporting the leaders, observing what happens at the sessions, providing information, giving advice on request.

The records of work undertaken by the adviser between January and May 1984 provide detailed information about the amount of time spent on routine visits, and the range of topics or issues raised during such visits to twelve sessions of the nine playgroups.

(c) Hours spent on visits to playgroups

The hours spent on visits in the period of five months varied from one and a half hours to a playgroup closed for much of the winter due to bad weather, to thirty nine and a half hours to a playgroup occupying three bedrooms in an estate house, which had little involvement by parents. Table 1. below indicates the amount of time spent with each group.

Table 1: Hours spent on routine visits to playgroup sessions (Jan-May 1984)

Playgroup session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Hours spent between Jan-May 1984 on routine visits	26	23	39	23	9	11	11	4	1	149

The range of topics and issues raised on these routine visits, either by the leaders, parent helpers or the adviser is illustrated in table 2. below which indicates how many times aspects of running a playgroup were raised between January and May 1984 at each of the playgroups.

Table 2: No. of times issues/topics raised on routine visits to 9 playgroups

PLAYGROUPS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
ISSUES RAISED										
SUPPORT OF LEADERS	20	5	17	6	9	12	5	3	4	81
DAY TO DAY FUNCTIONING	7	2	16	8	3	5	5	4	-	50
MOTHER'S ROTA	1	-	21	1	3	-	2	-	-	28
PREMISES	-	-	9	17	-	-	1	-	-	27
QUALITY OF PLAYGROUP	2	-	10	5	2	-	1	-	-	20
PROBLEMS AND ABILITIES OF LEADERS	3	-	8	-	1	1	1	-	-	14
PERSONALITY ISSUES	2	12	-	-	1	-	3	-	-	7
FUNDING ISSUES	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	3
COMMITTEE ISSUES	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2

As the year progresses from September through to July, the nature of the work undertaken by the adviser changes as each new committee and leader gains in experience, and as different problems arise. Patterns in the life cycle of a group are also reflected in table 2. Contact with a well established, smooth running playgroup, where some of the parents have been involved over a long period, because several of their children have attended, would raise only a few issues and the adviser's work would be related mainly to day to day functioning of the group and to the support of the leaders.

Support of the leaders

Playleaders are expected to carry much of the responsibility for the day to day running of playgroup, and they become the focal point for the whole group. Many are new to working with children other than their own, and may be unsure of themselves. They need encouragement and praise, and help to cope with criticism from other mothers. The adviser supports her, and makes a point of talking to her on every routine visit, recognising her role as different from the other parents. Also she encourages all parents to support the playgroup leader. If no appropriate course is available locally the adviser arranges an introductory course for leaders, according to Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association standards in consultation with IPPA.

Day to day functioning

The adviser observes daily routine in the playgroups, and tries to make leaders feel at ease in what they are doing. Advice is given in the light of her observations, bearing in mind the resources available and leader's own expectations. Advice includes matters relating to fire risks, health and safety, child development, management and play. She answers parents' and leaders' queries, always recognising the group's rights to determine activities for their own children. In the Republic there are no statutory regulations governing the running of playgroups.

Mothers' rota

The groups are meant to be community playgroups and they depend on the co-operation of the parents of children attending. The adviser may be called upon for advice, when a rota is not working well. Some parents with younger children are able to help shop and clean for the group. Others find the demands and illnesses of their children interfere with their rostered duties. Sometimes the personality of the leader may discourage parents from helping. The adviser helps to discover why the rota does not work well and suggests alternatives.

Premises

Groups may raise problems relating to the suitability or adaptability of their premises, difficulties in sharing the premises with others or the acquisition of new premises. The adviser explores possibilities and alternatives with the mothers, passing on the experiences of other playgroups, giving advice and information. She ensures that when a new group is searching for premises they are aware of all the factors

they should take into account e.g safety, accessibility. cost, storage, cleaning etc.

Quality Of The Playgroup

The adviser encourages the maintenance of standards within the playgroup by organising special courses and workshops to meet expressed needs and those she identifies, by encouraging visits to other groups, or by bringing external courses and workshops to the attention of the leaders. Matters relating to the adviser's own concerns about the running of the playgroup would be raised with great care with the leaders. If a group needs intensive help the adviser might call on the Children's Bus and its staff. On a more personal basis she suggests ideas or demonstrates ways of working with children and how various equipment can be used. She might also encourage the use of the project's toy library sessions where parents can observe and work with the toy library worker, the public library service and other activities.

A playgroup leader may be excellent working with children, but may not get on well with other parents or may even intimidate them. She may feel most comfortable in a highly structured setting and be unable to cope with other people's ways of working. Other leaders lack confidence; many are capable but need encouragement because so much is expected of them. Taking over the leadership from another can be a difficult transition, when the new leader is compared with her predecessor. The adviser's role is to encourage; she helps leaders to see the positives in their work, praising them for it, creating an atmosphere between herself and the leaders that enables them to expose their weaknesses and share their anxieties.

Personality issues

Whilst personality clashes or the exceptional influence of individuals within a playgroup do not occur frequently, they can be the cause of uncomfortable undercurrents within the group and crises can develop. As a neutral person the adviser can help. She can assemble all the relevant facts, as things can become distorted and exaggerated in such a small, close knit group of mothers. The adviser can try to see everyone's point of view and recognise people's feelings of hurt. She mediates between the parties involved and tries to help everyone restore their perspectives of the situation.

Funding issues

All community playgroups do their own fund raising through their committees, and the adviser is rarely involved in funding issues with well-established groups. With a new group, however, she makes suggestions for fund raising events, helping mothers with practical and technical matters. She also ensures that new groups know how to apply for grants.

Committee issues

In the first months the adviser plays an active part in explaining the role and function of the committee and the various officers within it, as many of the parents have had no previous experience. The treasurer is the least popular role and often the adviser encourages parents to share this responsibility with someone else. With new playgroups she may also help parents to compile a constitution. Sometimes there are problems, when leaders and committee are unable to work closely together.

The adviser's work is complex and diverse. She works at several levels, relating to the playgroup as a whole, interesting herself in the work undertaken with the children, and helping the adults who share the responsibility of running the groups. In addition she relates on a more personal level to some of the parents and their children about their own difficulties or problems. For example, one mother was extremely anxious about whether her physically and mentally handicapped child fitted in at the playgroup; another mother was approached to discuss her child's over boisterous behaviour. Over the period January - May 1984 the adviser had contact with individuals about their own problems at seven of the nine playgroups as follows:

Table 3: Summary of contacts with individuals arising from routine community playgroup visits.

PLAYGROUPS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL
NATURE OF CONTACT								
WITH MOTHERS ABOUT THEIR FAMILY'S NEEDS	6	1	1	2	1	5	2	18
WITH MOTHERS ABOUT CHILD'S NEEDS	9	-	1	3	1	1	1	16
HOME VISITS ABOUT CHILD OR FAMILY PROBLEMS	3	-	-	-	2	-	-	5

(c) Liaison with other agencies

Other tasks undertaken by the adviser are related to working with other agencies on behalf of the playgroups. These include relevant statutory officers, such as public health nurses, fire safety officers, speech therapists, social workers, those responsible for dealing with County Council grants, and community centre organisers with whom the adviser liaises or, if asked by the playgroup, negotiates. Voluntary bodies with whom she also liaises include parish priests, community workers, and organisations who can give useful advice such as the Tallaght Welfare Society. The work undertaken in this way can be on behalf of playgroups or individual families using them.

In the period January - May 1984 contacts were made with other agencies on behalf of six of the nine playgroups. The number of contacts with agencies, which included social workers, health visitors and parish priests, varied from one to eleven.

(d) Organisation of courses

Another area of work undertaken by the adviser is helping to organise courses, negotiating the subjects covered with the IPPA and the Vocational Educational Authority. The main course offered in this way leads to participants' qualification for the IPPA certificate of attendance. Ten weekly sessions cover setting up and managing a playgroup, basic needs for space equipment, child development, practical application of materials, language development, safety, toys and equipment, and music and movement.

She also organises short courses and workshops on a more local basis to cater for the specific needs of one playgroup or several neighbouring Tallaght playgroups. Examples of this include an arts and crafts workshop on making simple Christmas decorations with children, and a series of talks given by other Barnardo's project workers.

(e) Internal Liaison

The adviser works closely with other Barnardo's workers within the Tallaght project and other similar projects at Blanchardstown and Dublin 1, and the staff of the Children's Bus. Some of the families using the playgroups may also be known to the day nursery staff, and the toy library service, which cover the same wide catchment area as the community playgroup advisory service.

Like all project workers, the adviser keeps records of her work and discusses it fully with the project leader, who advises and co-ordinates her work with that of the rest of the project.

(f) Summer Play scheme

The Community playgroups adviser is also responsible for helping a group of mothers in the Dodder area of Tallaght to organise an annual summer playscheme. The project has assisted this scheme for seven years, which in 1984 became part of the adviser's role. This scheme is offered to children between the ages of four and seven, whose parents are prepared to help organise and run it, with the adviser's support.

Comment

Without the assistance of the community playgroup adviser, mothers wishing to start their own playgroup in this densely populated new

town would be unable to receive such a high level of support from the Irish pre-school Playgroups Association, who are able to employ only two advisers to cover the whole of the republic. Bearing in mind that many mothers using playgroups have several children under five, are removed from extended families, are often short of money, relatively immobile, and isolated, the satisfactory experiences gained from good playgroups is of vital importance.

The adviser's role has evolved over the last seven years from one of organising the development of playgroups on a geographical basis, to advising those already in existence who request the service and encouraging more to start. In the process of that evolution the role has expanded to include giving help and support to individual children and families. In addition, Barnardo's Tallaght project has increased the range of its services, and these have also become available to playgroups.

The adviser has to be flexible and have a wide range of skills and knowledge. The work undertaken is diverse and complex. Each playgroup is different, and the CPA operates within several systems. For example each playgroup is itself a system, the CPA is a part of a total Barnardo's project concerned with Tallaght's families, and of a training and preparation system with the IPPA. Also she is a vital link to local authority services and voluntary bodies. Besides these activities the CPA has to relate to children and adults equally well, and to individual families, who might present problems and difficulties to her long before they reach crisis point.

3. THE NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOURCE CENTRE, AVONBEG

Background

During 1978 a local priest in Avonmore negotiated the lease of a ground floor flat in one of the fourteen three storey blocks from Dublin Corporation. The rent of the one bedroomed flat, which was to be used for community purposes, was a nominal 25p per week. It consists of two rooms, a bathroom and kitchen. Situated next door to the estate's rent office, it became a focal point.

The Development of Services and Activities

The flat was first used as a base for a community playgroup in the weekday mornings in school term times. The parents who used this service suggested that there was a need for a summer playscheme for four to seven year olds in the Dodder area. There were already schemes in operation in Tallaght for older youngsters. A very successful scheme, funded and organised by a Barnardo's worker was run in the summer of 1978. The parents of some of the fifty children who had used the summer playscheme asked for similar activities to be run during the winter months. The local priest renting the flat agreed for such a group to be run at the flat at Avonbeg in the afternoon, when it was not in use by the playgroup. The project worker planned, organised and sought funding from Barnardo's for a weekly session offering arts, crafts, educational equipment and imaginative drama to a group of twenty 4 to 7 year olds. A long waiting list quickly built up without advertisement, and the project worker offered a second session, if parents were prepared to help running them both. In her own words, "At times I felt like a saleswoman bringing along a service, showing how it operates, how successful it was. Parents began, in a sense, to buy the service."

On another afternoon the flat was used by a mother and toddlers group. Two mothers with four children started this group with the help of the Barnardo's worker. Gradually numbers built up to nine mothers and twelve children. The project worker supported them, offering advice and giving examples of how the mothers could cope with and provide stimulation for the children through play. In time the group moved on to form their own community playgroup in premises elsewhere.

Through her work with parents who had become involved in running the two afternoon club sessions for 4 to 7 year olds, the Barnardo's worker had become aware of the need for an informal advice and information service. At the clubs parents had started to discuss personal problems with worker, relating to marital relationships, coping with finances, and child related difficulties. Parents had been asking for advice about budgeting and information about housing and welfare rights. In consultation with the Barnardo's project leader and other welfare agencies it was planned to start a service which could offer local people the opportunity to seek advice easily. This would provide a service for those who were in the middle ground between those needing a professional social work service and those who were able to use the existing advice and information services.

The flat became available in 1979 for morning sessions, when the community playgroup moved on to more suitable premises in a vacant classroom at a local school. This prompted the organisation of a specialist drop-in advice service, open on the same two mornings as the rent office. Posters advertising the new service were strategically placed over the estate. Response was slow at first, but gradually residents who called in for a chat and refreshments presented the worker with various problems and difficulties. It was never intended that she should duplicate a service already offered in the area, so that where appropriate the worker would refer someone to another service, sometimes liaising with the agency involved at the request of the person being referred. The flat became a neighbourhood resource centre, which parents would use when the children were not present. It provided a non-threatening venue, where parents could come when they wanted to meet each other or consult with the worker on any topic related to children or families. From the start parents were encouraged to call in to talk about their perceptions of the area's needs as well as their own. They were welcome to relax, make tea or coffee, and get to know the Barnardo's worker.

The Role of the NRC Worker

The worker explained to residents calling in that her role was to advise and make it possible for them to meet some of their needs by developing activities for their children and themselves. This meant that she first had to identify needs to be met and in the early stages, assist, support and organise activities which could act as a springboard to others. It was hoped that as activities were started, parents would support and participate in running them.

Between September 1980 and 1982 the original project worker was away on a social work qualifying course and a temporary worker enabled more activities to be added at the NRC; a ladies club on one evening for mothers to meet socially, an independent mother and toddlers group moved in, a toy library session was available on Fridays to community playgroups, and children who had outgrown the 4 - 7 year old after school groups, were formed into a club for 8 - 10 year olds. They were joined by children from the waiting list, who had not been able to attend the 4 - 7 year old sessions, because of lack of vacancies.

On the return of the project worker in September 1982 the children's clubs were re-organised to provide one group for 4 - 7 year olds, a junior 8 - 10 year olds club for children aged 8 - 9 years, and a senior group for 9 - 10 year olds. A youth club was opened for 11 - 12 year olds in the evenings from 5.30 p.m. - 7.30 p.m. During the project worker's absence parental involvement in children's activities had declined.

A Move Towards Parental Management Of Children's Activities (September 1982 - 83)

a) Summer playschemes

Full parental participation in the planning, management and organisation of activities for children was achieved gradually.

As early as 1979, when clubs were first started for 4 - 7 year olds, it had been apparent that demand could not be met by the project worker alone. Some parents were willing to assist her on a rota basis, as once they were convinced of the value of the activity, parents were prepared to help. Through these and the summer playschemes a number of parents built up experience in planning, management and organisation. Parents of children using the summer playscheme had elected committees to deal with the administration of playschemes, and fund raising. They had made their own application to the County Council for grants, under the guidance of the project worker. In 1980, for the first time, mothers and fathers worked together on a community activity for their children. However, with the departure of the project worker parental enthusiasm waned. The temporary worker had preferred to concentrate her efforts on developing activities for parents and running the children's activities herself. The few parents who had remained involved in the organisation of the 1981 and 1982 playschemes resented being left to do all the work, and felt as though they were taken for granted by other parents. There was undoubtedly a connection between parents' waning enthusiasm and the disruption in their relationship with the original NRC worker. The permanent and temporary workers' styles and priorities were different. A relationship of deep trust had developed between parents and the original worker, based on her commitment to parental involvement with their own children.

On her return, the project worker met with the summer playscheme committee, who had been held together by another permanent member of staff. At the meeting they realised that though many parents had participated on a rota basis, only a few had been involved in the planning, organising and fund raising. Later that month the worker chaired a meeting a parents of children eligible for the next playscheme. A letter had been sent to them in advance stating that if parents did not contribute in some small way towards the organisation and planning their child would not be catered for at the next summer playscheme. Thirty five of the forty five parents invited attended, and a further five sent apologies. The Sunday afternoon meeting was handled very firmly by the worker, who explained that the summer playscheme did not have to take place, she did not have to run it, nor provide support for a service, if it was no longer wanted. She told them that unfortunately the 4 - 7 years old were not capable of organising or planning a playscheme themselves, and they were relying on adults to do it for them. The meeting was successful, as all parents went on to commit themselves, in writing, to some task related to organising the playscheme. A committee was elected to be responsible for the administration and the other parents took responsibility for raising the funds. All parents wished to have events at which they could raise money, get to know each other and provide experience of working together. At the end the worker felt that parents had appreciated the positive and direct approach about support, involvement and commitment.

Regular meetings of between twenty five and thirty parents were co-ordinated by the worker and it was decided that places should

be allocated on the scheme according to the regularity of parental attendance at meetings. It was also agreed that ten places should be allocated to day nursery children without any commitment by these children's parents. During the 1983 playscheme, parents operated many of the sessions on their own, and coped very well.

b) Afternoon club activities

Many of the parents involved in the summer playscheme also had children in the NRC afternoon clubs, who by 1983 had been attending for up to four years. The clubs had changed considerably. Many of the children attending had behavioural difficulties for which the worker provided back up support to parents and children e.g. over school attendance. The worker felt she could no longer provide activities for the various age groups in each club without the assistance of the parents. Thirty eight families were involved in the afternoon club and the youth club. Thirty two families came to a meeting she called, at which she explained her position and the reasons why she needed their assistance. Seven parents could not become involved, because of pregnancies and younger children. This was accepted by the other parents. Twenty five parents agreed to help, but felt they needed advice and assistance, knowing nothing about arts, crafts or the needs of other children. The worker agreed to organise a preparation course, to cover areas which would enable parents to provide what the clubs needed with confidence. She would continue to deal with situations of a confidential nature by offering family support and working with difficult children.

A community participation course, run over six weeks covered the following areas:-

1. Analysing community needs
2. Child development, 4 - 12 years
3. Arts and crafts
4. Community and school
5. Communication
6. Observation

A certificate of attendance was awarded at the end of the series to parents completing it. A few parents opted out after a few weeks. While they attended the course parents were involved in the practical day to day running of the club, two or three at each session, according to their preference. The parents admitted they enjoyed their involvement, and the children enjoyed having their mothers around. For some children it was the first time their mothers had shown any interest in their leisure activities. Three mothers approached the worker for help with literacy as they were unable to read or write.

The interested parents requested a second course to cover child development and observation, working together as a group and role play. They became a strong and committed group, asking questions about individual children and their development, and maintaining discipline in a group. By the end of June 1983, when the clubs closed for the summer parents were quite competent, with the support of the presence of the worker.

The clubs were resumed in September 1983, by which time the project worker had become pregnant. Confident of a negative reply, she asked parents whether the clubs should be closed during her maternity leave. As anticipated the parents declined, assuring her that they were quite capable of running the clubs, if they had the support of someone they could call upon in an emergency. They elected a committee with a secretary, treasurer and a chairperson and an assistant to each officer. Recognising the need for a leader, who would be responsible for opening up the club, and for providing security, continuity and consistency for the children, they elected a leader and assistant leader for each club. From then on the parents ran the afternoon groups, with the worker in the background giving advice about dealing with disciplinary problems and administrative techniques, such as opening and using bank accounts, keeping registers, recruiting children and filling vacancies from the waiting list. She maintained regular, impromptu visits to ensure that everything was running to a certain standard and that the parents were not getting into difficulty.

Neighbourhood Resource Centre Activities (1982-1984)

During 1982-84 the NRC was open five days a week, with a timetable as illustrated below.

DAY OF WEEK	MORNINGS	AFTERNOONS	EVENINGS
Monday	Drop In Advice Service	Senior 8-10 Club	
Tuesday	Drop In Advice Service	Junior 8-10 Club	
Wednesday	Mother & Toddler Group	Cleaning by Volunteer	5.30 11-12 Youth Club 8.00 Ladies Club
Thursday	Meetings (various)	4-7 years Club	
Friday	Toy Library Advisory Service		

a) Drop In Advice Service

This is run on an informal drop in basis, and it is meant to operate in a preventive capacity, not as a rescue service. There is no duplication of services rightfully provided by other services. No caller is obliged to come again even if asked, and

no-one has to give their name and address. People are encouraged to talk about problems they do not consider serious enough to present to more structured professional services. People who are reluctant to approach the professional services are encouraged and enabled to do so. The cornerstones of the service are that a professional worker is available to talk to without the formality of an appointment system, and there is no stigma attached to calling.

The only recording done is for monitoring purposes. Examination of records available for three short periods covering nineteen weeks in 1983 indicated that 74 calls were made by 27 callers. Of these 58 were made by 14 residents using the service between two and eleven times in the period.

The types of calls made were as follows:-

Social (dropping in for chat and refreshment)	14
Financial problems	10
To discuss parental involvement in clubs	9
Problems with children	8
Marital problems	8
Physical or health problems	6
Housing difficulties	4
Concern about their residents	4
Inappropriate calls	4
Requests for services not available	3
Practical problems	2
General enquiries	<u>2</u>
Total	<u>74</u>

N.B. Three callers presented more than one type of problem/topic.

The outcome of these calls indicated the following actions:-

No further action required, advice given	23
Discussion of problem or situation	16
Appointment made for further visit	9
Referred to another agency by worker	7
Caller advised to contact another agency	6
Information leaflets supplied	4
Worker liaised with another agency already working with family	4
Worker listened only	<u>3</u>
Total	<u>83</u>

N.B. More than one action may have resulted from a call.

The material indicates that there is a core of about fourteen people who used the advice service sessions regularly, some of whom were parents involved in other centre activities. About half of the calls were for specific advice or information or to discuss a family problem. One wonders how many families would in fact resort to statutory agencies, if this service were not

available, or perhaps more pertinently, how many families would fail to seek advice or support when they need it.

b) Youth Club for 11 - 12 year olds

When this club started in 1982 it consisted of one child who had graduated from the 8 - 10 year old club, and two who had graduated from the original 4 - 7 year old club, and the others were from the waiting list who had failed to reach the 8 - 10 year old club. The majority of these youngsters have difficult behavioural problems and the club is currently run by a newly appointed fourth project worker.

c) 8 - 10 year olds clubs

Children in this age group are divided into two groups for younger and older children, whose sessions are currently run by parents. A programme planned for each week in 1983-84 illustrates further the activities of these groups. (See page 21 for details). The topics covered include making soft toys, jewellery, Valentine and Christmas cards, collages, Easter chickens, patchwork; painting models; colouring games; modelling with clay; baking; and games of childrens choice.

d) 4 - 7 year old club

A programme of activities at sessions also run by parents illustrates the range of activities of the younger children. (See page 22 for details). The programme includes painting, modelling, cutting out, crayoning, story telling, playing with dough, games of their choice, and like the older children making collages, Easter and Christmas cards, decorations, soft toys and doing road safety exercises.

e) Mother and toddler group

The composition of this independent group changes as children reach playgroup age and mothers move on. The worker calls in approximately once a month to ensure that certain child care standards are maintained and safety precautions taken. The relationship between the worker and the group is good.

f) Social work undertaken with families using other NRC activities

Although families are always encouraged to use the drop in advice service at the NRC, some request a home visit by the worker to discuss highly confidential matters, or the worker may judge that a home visit is preferable. Following her return after qualification as a social worker, in a period of fourteen months, she made a total of twenty home visits to eight families, to back up their twenty six calls to the advice sessions at the NRC. Seven of the families had children attending the after school groups,

PROGRAMME FOR 8 - 10 YEAR OLD'S GROUPS

OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL
	1st Halloween Closed	5th Soft 6th Toys	2nd Christmas 3rd Holidays	6th Valentine 7th Cards	5th Baking 6th	2nd Easter 3rd Holidays
	7th Lollie Pop 8th Sticks & Matchsticks	12th Soft 13th Toys	9th Games of 10th Their Choice	13th Photo 14th Boards	12th Collages 13th	9th Games of 10th Their Choice
	14th Baking 15th	19th Christmas 20th Cards	16th Baking 17th Cakes	20th Modelling 21st Clay	19th Easter 20th Chickens	16th Patch- 17th work
24th Games 25th of their Choice	21st Nylon 22nd Twine	26th Christmas 27th Holidays	23rd Arts & 24th Crafts	27th Painting 28th Models	26th Easter 27th Cards	23rd Pot Stands 24th (pegs)
31st Halloween Closed	28th Colouring 29th Tufty Paper & Games		30th Paper & 31st Scissors			30th Jewellery 1st May Making

AVONBEG 4 - 7 YEAR OLDS CLUB PROGRAMME 1983/84

OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL
	3rd Painting & Clay Models	1st Christmas Decorations	12th Games of their Choice	2nd Cutouts & Crayons	1st Easter Cards	5th Ash Trays
	10th Varnishing Models	8th Angels for Christmas Tree	19th Collages	9th Valentine Cards	8th Games of their Choice	12th Tufty Road Safety
	17th Playdough Story Telling	15th Christmas Cards & Stocking	26th Rice Crispies	16th Dusty Bins	15th Soft Toys	14th Painting Road Safety Pictures
17th Games of their Choice	24th Making aeroplanes dolls & Painting	22nd Christmas Party		23rd Easter Chickens	22nd Soft Toys	26th Games of their Choice
						29th Pencil Holders

and all were living in the immediate vicinity of the NRC. The reasons for home visits would be:-
the confidential nature of matters to be discussed, fear of interruption, lack of privacy, lack of space at the NRC sessions, or because a more relaxed atmosphere was needed, or to ensure that the worker could be available to others on the drop in mornings.

Although now trained as a social worker, she had no brief to run a social work service, and had already established that she would not duplicate the work of other agencies. Residents did not actually identify her with professional social workers and for many families there is a stigma attached to seeking a social worker's help. At times, if a family were reluctant to see a social worker, the NRC worker would deal with a situation over two to four sessions. She prepares such people for a transfer, often arranging to meet other professionals with them.

From the worker's records it is possible to see the range of problems and difficulties the eight families discussed with her and the contacts made with other professionals on their behalf. Table 4 below indicates the range of issues raised, and the number of times they were raised by numbers of families.

Table 4 Summary of number of times themes raised by families during home visits and interview at NRC.

Theme raised	No. of families raising these themes	No. of times raised by those families
Child's behaviour	4	6
Child's health	4	5
Mother's health	4	5
Financial problems	3	5
Housing problems	3	4
Marital problems	2	11
Illiteracy of mother	2	3
Relationships with extended family	2	2

In the course of advising these families the project worker had contact with other professionals. On behalf of three families she had contact with teachers. Also she contacted social workers, housing officials and a psychologist on behalf of three more families. The total number of sixteen contacts in the period September 1982 and November 1983 was relatively low, because as a matter of policy the NRC worker encourages parents to work with other agencies themselves. The only circumstances in which the worker would establish contact with another agency on behalf of a family would be if she recognised the parent was unable to do so, or if it were inappropriate if she failed to do so, e.g. if as the worker she felt a great concern for the physical safety of a child.

Range Of Tasks Undertaken By NRC Worker

The nature of the work of the NRC worker has changed considerably over the period of her employment with Barnardo's, reflecting changes of style more than of content of NRC timetable, as parents gradually participated in and then gradually took over the management and organisation of children's activities. A vital aspect of the NRC's worker job has been to assess needs as they have emerged from one activity, and to set the pace for involving parents. Some of the service responses have been and remain of a specialist nature. Direct work with children and their parents has involved working within different systems, as part of the neighbourhood, as a member of the project team, as the catalyst in different groups, and as a link between residents and other professional agencies.

A proportion of her time had been taken up with administration, which includes recording and telephone contacts with other agencies, and meetings within and outside the project. It is necessary when undertaking a range of different activities, with different groups of people and with individuals, and when preparing for parental involvement to spend time carefully planning and carrying out commitments. Social workers who work with groups of people in this way are directly accountable to them. Without the normal protection of offices, appointment systems, receptionists etc. they are constantly exposed to demand.

Areas of work for the NRC worker include the summer playscheme, after school groups, home visits, parents' education programme, mother and toddler group, drop-in advice service, administration, meetings and project team meetings and supervision. It is interesting to note that in three different periods in 1983 of seven weeks between March and May, five weeks between July and August, and five weeks between September and October the range of work undertaken was different, as was the proportion of time spent on different activities. Variations in the range of activities and proportion of time spent on different activities are partly seasonal but also they reflect the changing demands upon her time as the nature of her work changes. During 1983 her work changed from being responsible for running various activities with the help of parents and organising other professional services, to helping parents to run activities and later supporting them to do so. As more of her time became available she was able to develop more professional services by visiting parents at home to discuss problems

relating to their children and families. The proportion of time spent on administration increased. This included reports of home visit and meeting telephone calls to parents or other agencies, dealing with maintenance problems related to the centre's premises, overall and detailed planning increased as the parents' training programme began and home visiting.

Comments

There is no doubt that a good relationship has been built up between the NRC worker and the Avonbeg neighbourhood, because she has been at the resource centre a long time. Her objective (and that of the whole project) was to assist the development of the community, by mobilising the parents to the develop specific services. Over wider community issues, such as obtaining grants for playschemes, she would advise parents how to exert their influence, pointing out which officials parents needed to contact or negotiate with. The project staff recognise they offer some services the community could not run themselves. People in the Avonbeg area would not be experienced or confident enough to cope with the kinds of situations arising in the drop-in centre. In those situations people seeking advice expect some kind of professional help, especially over highly confidential family affairs. Work at the NRC has been a continuous process of evolution, responding to newly recognised or acknowledged needs, and taking advantage of opportunities to run things differently and more effectively.

4. MILLBROOK DAY NURSERY

Background And Philosophy

When Tallaght Welfare Society first proposed that Barnardo's should develop pre-school activities in the area in 1977 a day nursery was being planned. The Eastern Health Board which is authorised under the Health Acts to assist the provision of day nurseries by local community agencies by contributing 70% of agreed running costs, was building a new health centre with provision alongside for a day nursery. It was to be the first state grant aided day nursery in the area, and Barnardo's was invited to manage it. Barnardo's felt that it would complement and increase its range of services as it had become obvious that some families could not use the help of the community playgroup service which necessitated all parents becoming actively involved. It was expected, nevertheless, that when providing day care service for young children, it would follow the philosophy of the community playgroup project and would at all times be geared towards meeting the needs of the child and family rather than the child in isolation. It would also incorporate the approach developed on the Children's Bus, with its constant awareness of the physical, emotional and mental needs of individual children at each stage of their development. Children would be encouraged to be independent, to develop their concentration self control and innate sense of order, to work and play on their own initiative under the direction of nursery staff. Parents would be encouraged to join in nursery activities and other Barnardo services. The nursery was opened in March 1980.

The Nursery Capacity

The building was originally designed to have a large central area suitable for sand and water play, painting, and large nursery equipment for the development of gross motor skills. Rooms off the central area provided space for creative and imaginative play, story telling, language and intellectual development activities. Within a year staff had identified the need for adaptations to the building. It took another year to gain agreement about what changes should be made, and a further year to obtain the necessary funding. These changes included subdividing the large central area to provide another small room and a separated entrance to the rooms not used by the children. Each group room now has all the facilities once offered centrally, the children have a fixed base in which staff have been able to create a more home-like atmosphere, and there is less traffic to disrupt work with the children. One room has been designated as the parents' room where they are able to meet together and make friends.

The nursery is staffed by a supervisor, four full time nursery assistants, a full time work experience person funded by a Youth Employment Scheme, a full time cook and part time secretary. The ratio of nursery assistants to children is 1:8½

The nursery officially caters for thirty four children from six months to five years. In practice, by agreement with the local Community Care Team, children under one year are accepted only in emergencies. Eight of the places are in a toddler nursery for children under 2½ years

of age, which is staffed by two assistants, one of whom is from a youth employment scheme. The remaining places are divided between three other groups each staffed by one nursery assistant.

Parent Involvement

There is a dedicated commitment to parental involvement in the life of the nursery and the care of the children. The nursery has a saying: "All parents are always welcome, but not all of the time". This sums up the kind of encouragement given to parents, which does not allow them to become totally dependent on relationships developed within the nursery.

The nature of parents involvement differs from parent to parent. Parents are invited to six monthly reviews held on every child in the nursery. Mothers are expected to attend with their child on first admission until the child has settled. Thereafter those who bring and take home their own children are encouraged to talk to staff, and they are welcome to use the mother's room or spend some time with their child's group. Parents meetings are held fortnightly on Wednesday afternoons with the help of the project worker, who is attached to the nursery. On alternate Tuesdays, there are baking sessions, when three or four mothers bake biscuits, cakes and prepare meals for freezing, under the guidance of the project worker. These sessions not only supplement the nursery's food budget, but they also provide simple cookery and budgeting lesson for the mothers. In addition, where a mother and child are referred for help to the nursery, part of the agreement on admission is that the mother spends one or two mornings in the nursery working with the family group key worker on specific tasks.

Referrals And Admissions

All children are referred to the nursery through the Community Care Team or other professionals working in the area. A Selection Committee consisting of representatives of social workers and public health nurses, a medical officer, a member of the Tallaght Welfare Society and the Barnardo Project Leader, meets once a month. Because it is the only day nursery of its kind in the Tallaght area, with its 70,000 population, Millbrook Nursery has become a specialised service, dealing mainly with emergency cases at crisis level. The type of referrals accepted include circumstances where one or more of the following applies.

1. Proven non-accidental injuries to children.
2. Suspected child abuse.
3. Severe psychiatric problems of parent(s), which could result in child abuse, neglect, or inadequate care.
4. Developmental delay where parents are unable, for some reason, to stimulate the child.

5. Children who have minor physical handicaps of speech sight or hearing where no other placement is readily available and/or the family are having difficulties in either coping with or accepting the handicap.
6. Severe parental stress with possible damaging repercussions on the child.
7. Parents of low intelligence, who have problems being parents where there is risk to the child of neglect.

An examination of one year's referrals between July 1983 and June 1984 indicates that 46 children were referred from 38 families. Over ninety per cent of them were referred by the community care team, (48% by public health nurses and 43% by social workers). Only 37 referrals were accepted. Seven were deferred for more information, and 2 were not accepted. As children are discharged at a rate of about one a month, the waiting list of urgent cases is lengthy. The length of the waiting list does not reflect the extent of demand for places however. When referring agents approach the nursery about a vacancy and discover the length of waiting time before a family can be helped, they are discouraged from referring any families who do not experience the most extreme difficulties and urgent requirements. Four of the 46 children referred were from sources outside the community care team, including a social worker from another voluntary organisation, which specialises in the care of retarded children, a speech therapist and a hospital doctor.

Referrals accepted met admission criteria as follows:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Proven abuse | 1 child |
| 2. Suspected abuse | 2 children |
| 3. Severe parental psychiatric illness | 11 children |
| 4. Child's developmental delay/ handicap of child | 10 children |
| 5. Severe parental stress | 11 children |
| 6. Parent unable to cope | 2 children |
| 7. Parent handicapped | 2 children |

The figures given above confirm that the nursery operates within narrowly defined criteria, helping the more extreme cases. The majority of children (32 out of 39) come from within three categories, where parent/child relationships have been considerably disrupted.

The fact that the psychiatric illness of a parent, usually the mother predominates has important implications for staff training. Nursery staff have had little input on training courses to prepare or equip them for helping parents who suffer in this way. Some coverage has

been given on an inservice course arranged in 1983. It is important for staff to have a good understanding particularly of depression, which occurs most frequently. Much of the depression is experienced by women reacting to family and environmental circumstances, but there are also other diagnosed mental illnesses among mothers.

The fact that only three of the forty eight children referred were known or suspected to have been subjected to abuse by parents present quite a different scene when compared with British nurseries. It was three years before the Nursery had its first admission of a non-accidentally injured child. This may mean that child abuse is less easily detected or that abuse of children is not so prevalent in Ireland with its social and religious values. However, given the social and environmental conditions in Tallaght, it would not be surprising if child abuse were more widespread.

Work With Children In the Nursery

The nursery is open from 8.30 a.m. - 4.30 p.m. throughout the year except for statutory holidays. Children may come from a wide catchment area within the Tallaght area, up to 3 ½ - 4 miles from the nursery. Where transport is required arrangements are made by the Health Board's home help organiser. If possible, parents are encouraged to bring and collect their own child to the nursery. Children under 2½ years enter the toddler nursery; otherwise they join one of the two other groups, depending on their age and the balance of the group. Siblings are placed in the same group. Children's needs are discussed with parents before they start at the nursery.

A programme of work is drawn up for each child by the worker in their group, who is known by the nursery as that child's key worker. The programme of work takes account of the child's history, personal circumstances, stage of development and medical and home conditions. Daily records are kept on each child of important features, events and significant behaviours. These are used later in reviews to trace children's progress. Staff plan their day with the children using the developmental material and equipment available, taking into account each child's individual needs and the balance of the group. The material and equipment is designed to encourage gross motor development, fine motor development, intellectual, social and emotional development. Also it is designed to develop self awareness, independence, concentration, language and creativity. Staff are aware that for a large part of the day the children are away from their own home and parents, so they ensure that children receive the affection, physical care and comfort they need.

Work Undertaken With Parents

a) In the nursery

Besides working with their children and nursery staff various activities are available specifically for parents, which in practice invariably means mothers. On Tuesday mornings some of the mothers organise their own keep fit sessions. On alternate

Tuesday afternoons the baking sessions (already referred to) are held. They are extremely popular.

Another important activity attended by mothers of some of the children is the mothers' group, held on alternate Wednesday mornings. The numbers attending each session varies from three to twelve. They are organised by the project worker attached to the nursery. The aim of the group is to offer learning situations in a non-threatening environment, where mothers can find more acceptable ways of exploring relationships, child development, budgeting and housewifery than having to ask directly for advice. These sessions are kept purposeful deliberately, and the mothers room is reserved Wednesday afternoon for the sessions. For the rest of the week mothers are encouraged to drop in and use their room as they wish.

In September the group changes as some children are newly admitted to the nursery, filling vacancies left by those who have gone to school. Regular meetings are held until the end of June. The first eight sessions are carefully planned by the project worker, starting with topics specifically related to children. It has been found best to start with a basic coffee morning, at which introductions are made. From experience staff have learned that basic rules should be clarified for the group so that misunderstandings do not arise later. Mothers may become friends and wish to make reciprocal child care arrangements. Nursery staff will not act as intermediaries nor will they discuss details relating to families on controversial issues such as fees and transport. Arrangements are based on each family's circumstances and staff will not discuss individual differences detected by the mothers.

After the first eight weeks, the project worker arranges topics chosen by the mothers. In the period September 1982 - June 1983 the following topics formed the basis of the sessions:-

- Sessions 1 - Introductions and announcements about programme
- 2 - A talk on child development from seven months to five years by a project worker
- 3 - A discussion about nursery routine led by the nursery supervisor plus a talk on safety in the home by a project worker
- 4 - A talk and discussion about bed wetting and asthma, led by a public health nurse
- 5 - A demonstration of cuts of meat by a local butcher
- 6 - A talk and discussion about toddlers safety and useful toys by the project worker
- 7 - Making Christmas stockings

- 8 - Making Christmas decorations
- 9 - A visit to the local fire station to explore fire hazards and prevention
- 10 - A talk on the development of speech and therapy by a speech therapist
- 11 - Making bookshelves for the nursery from kits
- 12 - A make-up demonstration and session led by the project leader
- 13 - Outing to a demonstration of cooking with fish
- 14 - Instruction in sewing simple garments by a nursery volunteer
- 15 - A showing of slides and talk about head lice and nutrition
- 16 - Another sewing session
- 17 - Another shelf-making session
- 18 - A talk by a public health nurse on childhood ailments, symptoms, treatment and diet
- 19 - An outing to a do-it-yourself shop to explore prices and measurements of kit furniture

In 1984 to date the subjects covered have all been different again, and show the extent of the interests mothers express and mothers' increasing maturity and confidence, as they ask for speakers on such topics as budgeting, coping with depression, relationships within the family and pre-menstrual tension.

However, the project worker makes considerable efforts to keep up the numbers attending. She also has to try to prevent the core group of mothers who always attend from acting as an exclusive clique. Dependency on the group can become one of the greatest problems. Many of the mothers go through all their lives being dependent on caring agencies, often displaying the same need for dependency as children. But they soon learn that they are accepted and they have no need to hide any of their circumstances. Many women are mothers from the age of seventeen - thrust suddenly from childhood into parenthood.

The parents' group offers a growth point to individuals because it offers nurture to the mothers. Its goal is personal independence for the individuals in it. While it provides workers with knowledge of what the parents experience, it can also offer the women opportunities to have experiences they perhaps missed out in childhood e.g. in learning about cheap play materials they can get down on the floor with the worker and play themselves. It

also provides them with basic knowledge they need as mothers which they previously lacked.

b) Home visits to families

Families may have problems which mothers are unable to discuss at the busy nursery or in parents' groups, so they may request a visit at home. In addition the nursery staff may have queries which should be taken up privately or due to an emergency. Nursery staff have comparatively little time available to talk quietly to parents, so these have been carried out by the project worker who attends the mothers group. The nature of themes raised on these visits has changed. In the period January - June 1983 she visited fifteen families at home on twenty occasions and had talked at length to five other mothers at the nursery on eleven occasions. On these visits and contacts a range of themes were raised. The list below shows the types of themes raised and the number of families who mentioned them on the project worker's visit.

Queries about the child at the nursery	9 families
The health of the child	8 families
The parent's management of the child	6 families
Parents' activities at the nursery	6 families
Financial problems	6 families
Marital problems	5 families
The health of the mother	4 families
Relationship with the extended family	2 families
Housing problems	2 families

Most of the issues were raised more than once by some of the families.

For the same period in 1984 January - June, the number of visits made to fourteen families had increased to thirty two.

The issues raised by families were as follows:-

Queries about the child in the nursery	3 families
The health of the child	4 families
The parents' management of the child	5 families
Parents' activities at the nursery	8 families
Financial problems	2 families
Marital problems	3 families
The health of the mother	4 families
Relationships with the extended family	3 families

Unlike 1983, housing problems were not raised in 1984, but issues not raised before included the following:-

The child's development	5 families
The child's future education	2 families
The mother and child's relationship	2 families
The child's relationship with siblings	3 families
Practical problems	4 families

Overall, several changes were reflected between 1983 and 1984. Families being referred to the nursery in 1984 faced more severe problems with their children. More mothers were attending the mothers' group sessions. Families faced increasing pressures as unemployment increased, food costs rose and delays in receiving welfare benefits, due to shortage of staff, were felt.

Working with Volunteers

Part of the brief given to the project worker attached to the nursery on appointment was to recruit volunteers to help staff at the nursery. She has successfully recruited up to ten volunteers, who help on a rota basis by running a creche for the younger and older children of mothers attending the Wednesday group and the baking sessions. In emergencies they can also provide temporary cover for nursery staff, and they look after small numbers of children to enable staff to hold meetings.

Once recruited, mainly by word of mouth and personal recommendation, the project worker has individual sessions with volunteers to discuss such things as the importance of confidentiality, Barnardo's policy regarding care and control methods. They attend a thorough preparation course. Thereafter she meets the volunteers as a group every six weeks. In these sessions she uses visual material to focus on different issues such as handling difficult situations with a young child, attitudes towards discipline, the use of various types of equipment.

Volunteers are of widely differing ages. They come from a variety of homes with different attitudes towards discipline. Handling difficult situations when fiery tempered parents are present can prove to be awkward unless volunteers are properly prepared for the situations they may be faced with.

Working With Other Agencies

A considerable amount of work is undertaken with other agencies, particularly by the nursery supervisor, the project worker attached to the nursery and the project leader. This may take the form of sharing, or obtaining information about children and families' circumstances, making arrangements for visits or meetings, locating resources for families or mediating on their behalf, liaison with training bodies, or establishing patterns of work together.

Contacts by the nursery staff with other agencies are logged daily in a diary and summarized in weekly returns. During the period January - June 1984 a total of 230 contacts with other agencies were made. Table 5 indicates the range of contacts and intensity.

Table 5 Summary of nursery's contact's with other agencies

Agents	No. of contacts	Percentage of all contacts
Social Workers (Health Board, Corporation, Barnardo's & St John of God)	98	43%
Health personnel (Public health nurses, clinic doctors, general practitioner)	59	26%
Specilaists (Psychologists, speech therapists)	26	11%
Education personnel (Head of special school, teacher for the deaf)	12	5%
Transport organiser & volunteers	7	3%
Maintenance personnel (Health Board & Barnardo's)	8	3½%
Voluntary welfare organisations	4	2%
Community welfare officer	2	1%
Training supervisor & tutor	2	1%
Nursery volunteers	2	1%

The nursery has infact become the central focus for a number of agencies working closely with the families of the children attending. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly someone is available at all times during the day with whom information can be shared and passed on. Secondly, the nursery has built up a reputation for reliability; if information needs to be shared with several agencies, it will be done that day by telephone call or letter. Over the last three years, it has become generally well known that the nursery identifies thoroughly any child's needs and will mobilise additional services e.g. psychological tests, speech therapy, family planning advice for mothers etc. The work undertaken with other agencies makes heavy demands upon the nursery supervisor. Part of this work includes co-operating with various training and manpower organisations, such as ANCO, Manpower, Tallaght Welfare Society and nursing training officers by arranging for students and young people from employment schemes to visit the nursery to observe young children. It has become increasingly difficult to meet requests of these organisations, which

have implications for the use of the supervisor's time and the nursery's daily routine.

Future Development

A number of important changes, which are the result of four years of learning and experience, will be implemented from September 1984. As the nursery's service has become increasingly specialised, offering help to families from the wider Tallaght area, who experience the most extreme difficulties, it has become increasingly conscious of its inability to offer assistance to families who need less intensive help, but are vulnerable nevertheless.

In the future more children will be admitted by having one group working with children on a sessional basis. The morning group (9.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.) and the afternoon group (1.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.) will each be for eight children, who do not need full day care, referred through the Selection committee. The nursery staff will operate these sessions and the full day care groups on four week days. On Fridays one nursery staff member will continue to care for a small number of children who require special additional attention. Other nursery staff will do home visits, attend nursery and project staff meetings, have planned support and supervision sessions, do their planning and written work, and have lunch together informally with other project staff.

Nursery staff have been unable to develop fully the links between the children's homes and families and the nursery. In future regular home visits by nursery staff will become part of normal pattern for families being helped, and all mothers will be invited to join the group for one morning a week to be with their own and other people's children.

Project staff will use the under-occupied building on Fridays for specialist Mother and Toddler groups, a 12 week education for parenthood programme, and child development courses for parents and volunteers associated with the whole project. The families whose children receive full day places and do not require additional attention will be invited to participate in other activities associated with the project, such as mother and toddler groups.

In order to enable staff to give more time to plan and undertake planned work with individual children and their parents further changes will be made. The nursery will be open from 9.00a.m.-4.30 p.m., so that staff can spend half an hour together at the beginning of each day to review the previous day and plan the next. Established and proven volunteers will participate more in the running of the groups, specifically to allow the keyworker to work with individual children and their mothers in the nursery.

Comment

Over the last three and a half years the day nursery has developed a service which responds to the needs of children referred and their parents. A number of alterations have been made to the lay out of the building to provide an intimate, home-like atmosphere for children and parents. The work undertaken has been purposeful and changes have been made only after careful thought and planning. From September 1984 staff plan to build on the links established between the work carried out in the nursery with children and parents in groups and children's and parents' home lives by more individualised work at home. The aim of working closely with children with their parents is part of the whole project's aims, and it underlines the project's belief that successful and effective work with children cannot be undertaken in isolation.

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5. TOY LIBRARY ADVISORY SERVICE

Background

The aim of the project's original toy library service was to enable parents from the community playgroups to experiment before deciding which toys and equipment to purchase from funds, they had spent much time and energy raising. During 1979 the project leader was invited to speak to a self support group of parents of handicapped children about the use of toys appropriate to different stages of development. In talking with them she realised that striving to provide specialist toys for their handicapped child placed a great financial strain upon their limited resources. This could also affect other children in the family who did not receive the same treatment.

The toy library service was extended then to include parents of handicapped children in the Tallaght area, to help them realise that handicapped children did not necessarily need specialised toys. The gift of an estate car from a Dublin Lions Club in 1979 enabled the service to become mobile, thus adding another aspect to the service already offered at the weekly sessions at the neighbourhood resource centre in Avonbeg.

The current toy library service worker was appointed in October 1982. She injected fresh enthusiasm and built up the service to be an advisory as well as toy lending one. Although first opened to children who were handicapped, the service evolved to meet the special needs of more children experiencing mild handicaps, sensory defects, developmental delays and the needs of parents and children experiencing difficulties in their relationships. The number of children served increased gradually during 1982 and rapidly from October 1982 until in June 1984, it has reached its full capacity at ninety-five, with a waiting list of eleven families for the mobile service. These families are automatically offered alternative services, such as a mother and toddler group until the worker is able to accommodate them.

Toy Library Session (Neighbourhood Resource Centre)

The toy library operates at the resource centre each Wednesday morning between 9.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. on a drop in basis, and most Wednesday afternoons for children whose parents are able to bring them to choose their own toys. During one Wednesday afternoon a month the toy library is available to community playgroups. This session provides an opportunity for playgroup leaders and mother helpers to meet their counterparts from other playgroups and discuss items of common interest. It is also used to provide information on new publications or any other items of relevant interest. A small annual fee covers the wear and tear of toys, which some parents pay in installments.

When a new family is referred the project worker visits the home to introduce herself and explain how the service operates. She obtains a general picture of the family situation. At the toy library session she helps parents and children to select the most appropriate toys and

books for each individual child's stage of development. In many instances, parents need explanations of the relevance of those toys, the benefits gained through parents playing with their children and how children can develop through play. Families tend to want to borrow, at first, the attractive, expensive large toys. Many of these are given to the library, as other children, whose parents could afford to buy them, find their interest in them does not last and they have limited value. Nevertheless they are useful because many of the families using the service could not afford to buy them. In time, and under the guidance of the worker, parents are able to see the better value and extended benefit of more developmentally oriented toys, such as construction toys and jigsaws.

Many parents are apprehensive about asking about the various toys and equipment. At each session toys are laid out, so that workers and more experienced children and parents can demonstrate their uses. It is important for children and parents to attend together, because the sessions are learning situations for them. Also it enables parents and children to meet others. This service has demonstrated to staff the isolation of some parents of handicapped children. On one occasion a mother brought her four year old child to a session where she met another mother with a three year old child. Both children had hearing aids with a battery fitted in a shirt pocket. The children were very excited, when they realised another child had similar equipment, and the mothers share many other items of common interest.

As the centre consists of two rooms, one is used for the children, here they can play and choose toys. The other room is for the parents. They can have a cup of tea and chat to one another about the various toys and how their children get on with them. Parents can choose whether they talk to and gain support from each other or talk to the project worker.

The centre sessions are extremely busy at times. On average thirty toys are returned each week, and thirty four lent out, although this can vary from between 73 to 155 in one session. (Figures taken from records December 1983 - May 1984). Many children renew their loan of a toy for a further period. In addition to recording these transactions, the project worker may give particular attention to an average of eleven children per session, although this can vary between 14 and 57 children on a very busy day. The project worker uses this to monitor individual children's progress and re-assess their capacity to move on to more appropriate toys. Also it offers an opportunity to demonstrate to mothers how they can play with their children. On average nine parents seek the advice of the worker each session, varying from 16 to 51 on an exceptionally busy day. When a family attends for the first time, the worker tries to pay particular attention to them, making them feel welcome, introducing them to other parents and the system for borrowing and returning the toys. In fact until recently the worker has manned these sessions alone, but they have become too busy for her to cope, so volunteers have been recruited to assist. With current usage of the NRC, and the staffing situation it is impossible to extend the service to additional days, although the need to do so has been clearly demonstrated.

Mobile Toy Library Advisory Service

This service is available to families who are unable to attend the Wednesday session, because of distance, commitments to many small children or due to family difficulties. Only a limited number of 20 families can realistically be accommodated. The worker aims to encourage the families to use the NRC sessions as soon as they are able, so that another family may have the service and they can meet other families. She visits on average on a monthly basis, bringing with her toys to stimulate children mentally, physically and socially. She discusses with each family the stage of development the child is at and which toys will be appropriate for the stimulation of their development. On these visits she works with parents and children together, showing by example how parents can use the toys and books to the best advantage for their children. She analyses with the parent how their children's play has progressed since the last visit. She also encourages parents to make toys from items that can be found around the home, e.g. playdough, making mobiles and finger printing. The average visit lasts 45 minutes but this can extend into several hours if there is a particular problem. The frequency of visits is determined by the families' needs.

As work with the toy library service has developed parents and referring agencies have expressed clearly a desire to be guided about appropriate activities for children's stages of development. In the process of working to this end parents have raised many other important issues related to their child and family life.

An examination of the records of visits kept by the toy library visitor for the period January - June 1983 shows that she made 122 visits to 38 children in 33 families, and the following table indicates the range of issues raised, and the total number of families raising each theme.

Table 6 Issues Raised by Families

Theme raised	Total number raising each time
Child's health	18
Concerned about a child's development	22
Management of child	10
Attitudes towards child's handicap/difficulty	18
Effects on parents	17
Effects on siblings	7
Problems coping with current pregnancy	11
Respite care for child	5
Other activities/services for family members	20
Practical problems	8

The visitor has been able to observe attitudes towards children's handicaps and helped some parents to acknowledge and ventilate their feelings of frustration, desperation and failure. Some parents are able to do this without encouragement from the worker. With other parents, the worker may try to draw out feelings, unobtrusively helping them not to be afraid to let their feelings show.

Some of the children's health problems require frequent hospital admission, and painful treatment and the worker is able to discuss parents' feelings about this. This disrupts parents' relationships with the child considerably and has effects on other children of the family. It may also pose practical problems such as visiting the child, or looking after others, whilst staying in hospital with the sick child. The worker is aware of these stresses and can advise parents about them and help them to obtain various support services.

The worker has also been able to help parents to adjust their unrealistic or overly pessimistic expectations of their children's achievements. Some areas present particular problems of management by parents. They may experience difficulties with toilet training their child, or feel frustrated by the gap between the behaviour, speech, and understanding they expect from children at various chronological ages and what they observe in their own child. This gap can be increasingly stressful, as the child gets older. Her vast experience in working with children in playgroup settings helps parents to have confidence in her and her judgements.

Another area of work undertaken with some parents is to help them to acknowledge the needs of other children in the family and to cope with their difficult attention-seeking behaviour. Special attention is always given by the toy library worker to the brothers and sisters of children referred to the service. If they are close in age and would also like to borrow toys or books, they do so, and these are as carefully selected as the toys for the children with difficulties.

A mother's pregnancy with another child may also be causing stress for families, arousing perhaps fears about the health of the baby, and difficulties in coping with the handicapped child, as mothers become more tired. Here again the worker is able to advise about and activate other service provisions. The demand for respite care cannot be met, because the services available are fully stretched and inadequate to meet everyone's needs. No family would allow their child to be cared for by others unless they knew and trusted them. The worker is able to offer alternative relief by using other support services imaginatively e.g. a mother with twins, one of whom had severe brain damage, was encouraged to join a mother and toddler group. There the handicapped child was accepted and treated as other children. The normal child had the company and stimulation of other normal children. The mother was able to enjoy the company and support of other mothers.

Wherever she can the worker involves fathers in the work she undertakes. It is frequently mothers who bear the main responsibilities for the care and nurture of children, but fathers can be encouraged to play with the child. This helps fathers to develop more of a relationship with their children.

Referrals

In June 1984 seventy one children were using the toy library sessions at the resource centre, and twenty four children were receiving the mobile service. They had been referred by a variety of agencies, other children's parents and their own, as indicated in table 7.

Table 7 Summary of referrals to toy library service

Agent	Toy Library Service	Mobile Service
Public health nurses	20	5
St. John of God	10	4
Special class teachers	10	
Physiotherapists	8	4
Psychologists	5	
Speech therapist	4	
Social workers	1	2
Teacher for the deaf		2
Project nursery		3
Parish priest	1	
Another parent	3	2
Parents (self referrals)	9	2
TOTAL	71	24

The children referred had a variety of handicaps and difficulties as indicated below.

Table 8 Summary of nature of problems of children referred

Nature of Handicap/Difficulty	Toy Library Sessions	Mobile Service
Mental and physical handicap	6	5
Mental handicap	18	4
Physical handicap	9	4
Sensory handicap	2	2
Developmental delay	17	4
Hyperactivity	1	-
Parent/child relationship problems	12	1

The toy library services now reaches families with a wide range of problems, and referrals come from a wide variety of agencies. This is a result of the recognition of the worker's skills and the extension of the service's reputation. In addition parents are willing to seek help earlier from a service, which is generic in nature and therefore less easily associated with the stigma of handicap.

Groupwork

Work undertaken with the siblings of handicapped children

- a) Early in 1983, the project worker ran a series of sessions for a group of teenage children with a social worker from another specialist voluntary organisation. This was to help launch a support group for the siblings of handicapped children. The aim was to encourage the teenagers to share their experiences of what it was like for them living in a family where a member is handicapped. Light hearted games, video recordings and magazine articles were used to encourage group participation at the beginning of session. Many facets of their experiences were aired, including among others, the family's initial reactions, their involvement in helping, changes the arrival of a handicapped child wrought within the family, over protectiveness and over indulgence by the family, their feelings about the reactions of outsiders, problems of puberty, the handicapped person's feelings, choices and rights, their siblings' likely futures, and the concept of normalisation applied to residential care and friendships.

Attendance of the group of seven youngsters, aged 12 - 18 years, fluctuated and insufficient trust developed over the six weeks for them to share openly with each other. But the workers were helped considerably in understanding siblings' needs and feelings and concluded that the age range, size and experiences of different handicaps were important, if similar groups were to be formed.

Interactional development group

- b) In early 1984 the toy library worker and another project worker held eight group sessions of two hours each with three families, whose six children had been referred to the toy library service at the resource centre. Its purpose was to help the parents to understand difficulties they experienced in interaction with their children through the medium of play.

Using inexpensive items - playdough, water, paints, jigsaws, construction toys and books - in a home-like environment, the workers could identify how the parents and children interacted, re-inforce what was developmentally helpful and encourage alternatives, when the interactions were not helpful either to parent or child.

The parents acknowledged that they had benefited from the experience in that they understood their children better and had

gained from sharing with each other. They agreed they needed to know more about the stages of child development and how to interact appropriately to assure progress for their children. However, they felt frustrated with the limited choices available to them and there were insufficient community playgroups in the area. Two of the families have since attended regularly a mother and toddler group connected with the project in Tallaght village.

Helping Hands Group

In 1981, drawing upon its experiences in the toy library service, Barnardo's had initiated regular meetings with parents of handicapped children in conjunction with the Tallaght Welfare Society. The purpose of the meetings was to help parents to identify their needs and how they could be met within the local community. A group calling themselves Helping Hands emerged. The toy library worker helped them to organise meetings and form a committee, and remained as an adviser to the group until June 1983. One of the most valuable schemes to develop has been a respite care scheme, whereby families offer day and short term care in emergencies. Until the group became independent in June 1983 the worker was often involved in helping to make arrangements for such stays.

Work undertaken with other agencies

A proportion of the toy library worker's time is spent working with other agencies, both statutory and voluntary. This is necessary for her to be able to locate and provide resources to the families using the service, and mediate on their behalf. Another vital function she fulfils is as an interpreter of other agencies to the families. During the period January - June 1983 fifteen per cent of her time was spent in meetings mainly with representatives of other agencies. She meets other workers in the Tallaght area at a regular lunchtime monthly meeting. The workers include public health and psychiatric nurses, social workers, psychologists, police, home helps, local doctors, priests and nuns from various parishes and the community welfare officer. They liaise formally and informally at these meetings. There is also a close working relationship with St. John of God, a large voluntary organisation offering a wide range of services to handicapped and retarded children and their families, including a special school, day centre, workshops, psychological and social work services.

In the six month period examined she met the social worker three times for their regular six weekly commitment to share their work with families they both visit, had three meetings to prepare for group work with the Teens Group. Also she met the head of the pre-school day care unit of another voluntary organisation catering for handicapped children. Less regular meetings are held with representatives of another similar organisation, St. Michael's House, and in January - June 1983 she had a meeting with their home visitor to mentally handicapped children and families. As community representative of the Irish Pre-School Playgroups Association she attended bi-monthly national executive meetings, and in the period examined she attended three such meetings and the annual general meeting. She also attended

a meeting of parents in another area to advise them about forming their own self-help group.

She made sixteen further contacts with other agencies directly on behalf of specific families. These included social workers (7), the staff of St. John of God (4), the staff of Helping Hands (2), and on one occasion each the home help organiser, a public health nurse, and the teacher for the deaf. Whenever parents feel able, however, she encourages them to establish their own contacts with other agencies. Her reasons for making contact would be because an emergency prevented the parent from doing so, or in order to discuss an aspect of her own work or with the family's permission seek advice.

The project worker meets representatives of several agencies so regularly in the course of her work e.g. visiting families, at lunchtime community workers meetings, that she does not have to go out of her way to contact them. She is regarded as a member of an informal team, along with physiotherapists, speech therapists, the teacher for the deaf, health board social workers and public health nurses. Many of these professionals would be known also through her work as the project worker attached to the nursery. They would share perceptions and thoughts about families' needs and situations, and objectives and assessments of the child's needs.

Hours Worked And The Range Of Tasks Undertaken By The Project Worker

Until September 1984 this project worker carried responsibilities for several aspects of the project's work. She ran the toy library service single handed, she organised group work with parents in the nursery, recruited, trained and supported volunteers and undertook the pilot programme of home visiting to nursery families, she assisted the running of a summer playscheme, and ran various activities with the Health Board social worker at another project in Tallaght Old Village.

Records of hours worked and time spent on various activities for the period January - June 1983 were examined, revealing several interesting facts.

a) Hours worked

Like other project workers, the pattern of hours worked is cyclical; September was an extremely busy month when she worked a considerable number of excess hours. (Weekly figures of 38 - 45½ hours). With the return to school she finds that mothers need more support following the summer weeks when they have become exhausted. In fact, the average hours worked over the whole period was 35½ hours a week, but half of the weeks involved working excess hours and half of the weeks (some of which included a bank holiday) taking time off in lieu. The project leader is meticulous in ensuring that staff record and organise their work in such a way that they take time off in lieu of excess hours worked, when it does not interfere with their regular commitments.

b) Tasks undertaken

The records indicated that over a six month period proportions of time on various activities were as follows:-

Toy Library Advisory Service		28%
Resource centre sessions	- 12%	
Mobile advisory service	- 16%	
Administration and preparation		21%
Work connected with the nursery		20%
Mothers group meetings	- 6%	
Shopping	- 4%	
Working with Volunteers	- 4%	
Nursery home visits	- 4%	
Unplanned contact with Nursery mothers	- 2%	
Organising creche	- 0.2%	
Meetings		15%
St. Dominics House		10%
Playscheme		3%
Project team and supervision		2%
Helping Hands		1%

Comments on the tasks

1. The toy library advisory service and work stemming from the nursery absorb half of the project worker's time.

N.B. In the 16% of her time devoted to the mobile advisory service she made 122 visits to 33 families.
2. Administration includes writing reports, contacting other agencies, preparing visual material for group work with parents and volunteers, planning, keeping accounts for groups and the toy library service. In the period examined tasks like these absorbed 21% of the worker's time. However, her work is very carefully recorded, and prepared extremely thoroughly. On four days of the week the worker is highly accessible to families and reserves Thursday for ensuring that the direct work done with them goes smoothly and efficiently. In addition the worker spends considerable time at home on administration to ensure this work is complete.
3. Volunteers help is essential to running the nursery adequately, and more recently the toy library sessions.
4. Work at St. Dominics House (the related project at Tallaght Old Village) by this worker and others in the project team included running courses for parents on child development, play, speech development, recruiting volunteers to help run creche facilities, starting parent and toddler groups two mornings a week.
5. Playscheme - included helping at swimming sessions where skilled and responsible adults had to be present.

6. Project team meeting and regular support and supervision are vital. Great flexibility is required of this worker, who has worked very creatively to develop work with nursery parents and has extended the toy library service. She has to work closely with the Neighbourhood Resource Centre worker. She and the community playgroups adviser also work closely together through their association with the IPPA, the playgroups' use of the toy library, and the playscheme. She plays an integral part in the daily life of the nursery, which demands regular and effective communication between her and all the nursery staff. The project leader and this worker, work together to co-ordinate the various activities.

Comments

This worker has helped to create a highly sensitive, imaginative and flexible service, which is easily accessible, highly visible and in great demand by families and other agencies. The service has an acceptable front in the form of lending useful toys, but in fact offers a comprehensive range of parent and child related sessions. Because of the range of activities undertaken by the project as whole, and by this particular worker, she is perhaps seen as a neutral person who is not automatically identifiable as a specialist or an expert. Finally she is extremely honest with the families she works with about what she does not know, and allows them to teach her what they know.



6. CONCLUSIONS

This project has evolved slowly in response to the needs of families living in Tallaght, who have been encouraged to express their needs. Staff have worked with them in developing different activities for both children and their parents. The following principles direct the project's activities.

1. The value of including parents in work undertaken with children.
2. The importance of play for the development of the child's social intellectual and motor skills and the enhancement of parent/child relationship.
3. Maintaining a balance within the project between careful strategic planning and allowing opportunities for staff to be creative and imaginative.
4. Staff are encouraged to experiment within the clear parameters of their different programmes.
5. When venturing into new areas of work, staff are honest with parents about what they can or cannot do and share their thinking with them.
6. All new ventures are carefully recorded and evaluated, so that staff can assess what is or is not helpful in relation to their work with children and families.

There is evidence that their success has earned them an excellent reputation and that demand for services outstrips their capacity to respond. Lack of financial resources has spurred everyone's imagination in terms of finding alternative ways of meeting needs. It has also ensured that the project continues to work on priorities and to develop co-operative relationships. There has never been a danger of these professional workers taking over the Tallaght area. The staff see themselves as part of the resources available to the residents, as they have some relevant experience, knowledge and skills which can be used to meet the needs of Tallaght's children and their families.

