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BARNARDOS



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BARNARDO'S CHILDREN'S BUS
AND
THE MOBILE EDUCATION PROJECT
PROGRESS REPORT

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PREFACE

This report describes the work of Barnardo's Mobile Education Project since its establishment in September 1986.

The project consists of two double decker Children's Buses, which have been converted to act as mobile preschool premises. Three staff work on each Bus, a project worker, children's bus assistant and a driver. Another project worker is responsible for setting up a mobile Toy Library and deputising for the project leader in her absence. The project secretary carries out administrative duties, works with the children and participates in the overall work of the project. The project leader is responsible for developing and co-ordinating the work of the project. The growth of the project team, the acquisition of additional resources and the aims of the project are described in this report.

Mobile services are not uncommon in Britain, but are relatively rare in Ireland. This report also outlines some of the difficulties as well as the advantages inherent in the provision of such services.

Barnardo's have been operating a Children's Bus since 1974. An account of the work undertaken between 1974 - 1986 is presented in Part I of the report. Parts II and III detail work completed in the first year of the Mobile Education Project.

Apart from those with a special interest in mobile project, it is hoped that this report will be of interest to others working in the preschool area, particularly those involved with the travelling people and with community playgroups.

PART I

EARLY WORK ON THE CHILDREN'S BUS

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1. THE EARLY YEARS ON THE CHILDREN'S BUS

1974 to 1976

At the time the Children's Bus idea was conceived, Barnardo's was providing a social work service in Ireland. The Children's Bus work emerged from the desire to become involved in some community work which could run parallel to the casework service being provided. There were several areas where community resources were limited, particularly preschool facilities. It was decided that a Children's Bus could be used to provide a preschool service to children in two such areas, Rialto in Dublin 8 and Sheriff Street in Dublin 1. The Bus was purchased from Coras Iompair Eireann, a semi-state body providing public transport services in Ireland, and converted by the Eurobus Company, Co. Dublin, so that it could be used as a suitable preschool environment. Voluntary Services International painted the outside of the Bus. Two members of staff were to work with the children and a driver was also recruited.

Parents in each area were invited to register their preschool children, between the ages of 3 and 5 years. Children were selected on the basis of age, ie: those who were due to begin attending primary school in September 1974 and whose birthdays fell in July and August were given priority. The Bus began in Rialto on 21 January and in Sheriff Street on 18 February 1974.

Initially only a few children were taken on the Bus, to allow ample time for 'settling in'. Gradually the number increased to sixteen in each area and waiting lists were started. The sessions lasted from 10.00 am to 12.15 pm in Rialto and 1.15 pm to 3.30 pm in Sheriff Street.

Five pence from each child helped cover the cost of providing a snack, although children who did not pay were not refused. Apart from the activities on the Bus, children were also taken on outings, to the Zoo, farms, the park and the seaside. It wasn't only preschool children who were interested in coming on the Bus, which was brightly painted and quite attractive. Older children, anxious to come on board, often had to be discouraged from distracting the younger ones. Quite soon the Bus became less of a novelty.

By June 1976, there was an increasing recognition that mothers of the children who had attended were interested in what was happening on the Bus. Like most adults in Ireland, they had not attended a preschool service themselves and had not realised that learning could be 'such fun'! Staff felt that if parents were to become more involved, greater benefits would accrue. Due to space restrictions on the Bus, a home visiting programme was organised. It was decided that one member of staff would concentrate on the children from Rialto, while the other would focus more on the children in Sheriff Street. Each divided their time between working with the children on the Bus and visiting them at home. To involve the mother and the rest of the family in the various activities the children were doing on the Bus, books and equipment were brought to the children's homes.

These visits also allowed staff and parents to discuss the children's progress. Furthermore home visiting children whose older siblings had attended the Bus and were now going to school enabled staff to keep in contact with how they were progressing.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP WORK

1976 to 1986

A number of developments took place during this ten year period. The following is a brief summary of events.

As a result of the increasing interest and involvement of mothers in the work, staff began to encourage them to consider starting their own community preschool playgroups. By 1976, several mothers had attended preschool playgroup evening courses. The Irish Preschool Playgroups Association organise and run courses for those interested in becoming involved in playgroups. The Community and Environment Department of Dublin Corporation was also involved in encouraging community development. Barnardo's and Dublin Corporation agreed to work together to help parents set up and run their own preschool playgroups. It was decided that the Bus could be used as a resource for parents interested in pursuing this aim. Barnardo's agreed to act as employer for a community preschool playgroup organiser. Dublin Corporation provided 100% funding for this position. The role of the organiser was to help parents find suitable premises and equipment and to offer support and advice on an ongoing basis.

In September 1977 the role of the Children's Bus changed. It became a place where parents could learn how they might run their own playgroup in local premises. Once this was achieved the Bus could move on to other areas, to help set up further playgroups. In this way the Bus could be instrumental in setting up preschool playgroups in several areas, thus giving many more children the opportunity of preschooling.

This change of policy is significant in that it reflects the philosophy of discouraging dependence on services. Instead, the experience and knowledge parents have of their own children is recognised and ways of giving away skills have become the paramount aim.

In order to use the Bus as a resource in this way, staff worked closely with parents and the playgroup organiser for a period of three months on average. Initially, children would begin attending the playgroup sessions on the Bus. In general, the children were allowed a period of time to settle in their new surroundings, (the length of this period was determined by how quickly the children settled - this usually took two or more weeks). During the next stage the parents took turns in spending time on the Bus, observing and learning from the staff. Checklists to develop observation skills and highlight important points were sometimes used during parents first visits. During the final stage, parents became more involved in the running of the sessions. Ideally, before the Bus moved on to another area, it was hoped that parents would assume responsibility for the running of their playgroups on the Bus, and that staff would withdraw to the background, only providing advice and encouragement when needed.

In reality, while parents did seem to gain from working with staff on the Bus, they were not usually taking full responsibility for running the playgroup session by the time the Bus was due to move on to another area. This in fact prompted a review of the needs of parents and the aims and methods used to meet these needs in 1986 - 1987. (See Chapter 8).

In recent years staff also ran courses for the parents covering issues

relevant to setting up and running a playgroup. These included:-

- i) The Importance of Play in Early Childhood.
 - ii) The Development of Children's Language.
 - iii) Selecting and Using Equipment.
 - iv) Organising Space and Layout in the Playgroup.
 - v) Preparing Children for School.
- among other topics.

These courses were usually run in the evening to facilitate parents. The Bus often returns to an area or goes to a new area simply to run a refresher course for parents already involved in running a playgroup. This method of working was successful in that the Bus helped many playgroups to become established in Tallaght, Blanchardstown, the Inner City and Dublin 1 area.

Between 1977 and 1986 the way in which the Children's Bus was involved in helping parents to set-up community playgroups varied somewhat, depending on the needs of different areas and the increasing benefits of hindsight, as the year progressed.

3. WORKING WITH TRAVELLING PEOPLE

DUNSINK LANE

In December 1981 Dublin Corporation requested that the Barnardo Children's Bus work with travelling people in Dunsink Lane, Finglas. Dunsink Lane is described in the report of the Travelling People Review Body as a hard standing site catering for twenty caravans. This is known as the Official Dunsink Lane site. Two fields across the road are also occupied by family groupings. It is surrounded by fields on both sides. The road leads to a rubbish dump, less than a half mile from the halting site. A permanent preschool service was planned, which was to be run by a trained teacher, with parents involved if possible. The Children's Bus was to provide an interim service and it was hoped that a pattern of parental involvement, if initiated, could be maintained when the permanent preschool became established.

Staff visited the families on the site and work on the Bus in Dunsink began on 11 February 1982. For a variety of reasons, there was an initial concentration of staff time and energy on meeting the children's needs. Of the eight children that were enrolled on the first day, two had epilepsy and one had a heart condition. Staff needed and sought medical advice from local Health Board staff. The Children's Bus created quite a stir, and as in the early days in Rialto and Sheriff Street, older children were also very interested in coming on the Bus and, at times, distracted the younger ones. It wasn't appropriate or possible to cater for these children's needs as well.

This initial focus on the children meant that there was less emphasis on involving parents. Furthermore while staff had previous experience of working alongside parents, there were important differences between the work in Dunsink Lane and the community playgroup development work in other areas. Firstly, parents themselves had not asked the Bus and its staff to help them to set up their own preschool. This meant that the aims and role of the Children's Bus there were on more traditional teaching lines. Also, staff had no previous experience of working with travelling people.

The parents accepted the bus, the children liked coming. It was agreed that the Children's Bus would continue to provide the service. In 1983, the Department of Education began to part-fund the service in a similar way to other preschools for Travelling children.

Five years on and the Bus continues to be a welcome daily visitor to the site in Dunsink, Monday to Thursday afternoons. Staff now know many of the parents well, particularly the mothers and have learnt much from them and their children about the important cultural differences that exist between travelling and settled people. The children's attendance figures have always been good. The main contributory factor seems to be that the children, although apart from their families, are still on site and both parents and children are reassured by the close proximity of the Bus to their homes. At various intervals during the school term, new children start and soon settle into the environment of the Bus, knowing their parents are only a few yards away. During the summer, staff discuss children's progress and school readiness with parents.

Jobstown Tallaght

In 1985 a Department of Education visiting teacher for travelling children, Sile Nunan, requested that the Children's Bus offer a preschool service to travellers living on an unofficial site in Jobstown, Tallaght. We were very keen to respond to this request. The unofficial, or side of the road sites are often occupied by a more transient population than the official sites. For this reason these travelling people have less access to educational and other services. The soft grass surfaces and often poor access to the unofficial sites usually makes these unsuitable as parking areas for the Children's Bus. The local County Council had put down a gravel surface at the entrance to the site in Jobstown although there were many potholes, making the entrance less than ideal, but negotiable.

After many visits to the site by staff and Sile Nunan, it was decided to hold an open day for families on the Bus in Jobstown on 22 November 1985. This was very successful. Parents enjoyed seeing the various pieces of equipment and activities on the Bus and the children were enthralled. The Bus began working in Jobstown. Due to other commitments at the time, it was only possible to offer one morning a week. Unfortunately because of the arrival of the bad weather and the deteriorating surface conditions the service had to be withdrawn in December.

Labre Park, Ballyfermot

Again at the request of a Department of Education visiting teacher for the travelling children, Miriam Fitzsimons, the Children's Bus began working in Labre Park, Kylemore Road, Ballyfermot. In 1968, Labre Park had 'hard standing for 39 caravans with one room dwellings alongside, community hall, school and caretakers' - 'Report of the Travelling People Review Body -Feb. 1983.' Labre Park is now a long row of small attractive houses with backyards and very small or no front patch. These houses are on a private road. The area is cut off on one side by a canal and a line of large electricity pylons and on the other side, by Bluebell Industrial Estate. Labre Park is the oldest local authority traveller site in Dublin.

The Children's Bus sessions in Labre Park began on 31 January 1986. Because of other commitments, it was only possible to offer Friday sessions until mid April, when they were increased to Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Initially, the Bus was parked in the community hall area, but this location proved unsuitable for a number of reasons. We were delighted when the parents of the children attending sessions suggested that the area in front of their homes could be used for parking.

The children enjoyed the sessions and attendance was excellent, with an average of twelve children each day and more on the waiting list. As in Dunsink Lane and Jobstown contacts with the Department of Education visiting teacher for the travellers and Dublin Corporation social workers were very valuable to the work on the Bus.

4. SUMMER PROJECTS AND OTHER WORK

Summer projects, otherwise known as summer playschemes are organised in many areas each year. The aim of these projects is to provide organised activities for children and teenagers during the summer months while schools are on holidays. Summer projects are usually run by local people within their own communities. Activities can include arts and crafts, fancy dress competitions, sports events and outings to the zoo, seaside and other places. The Children's Bus has been a feature of many summer projects over the years. Usually the Bus goes to an area on a prearranged day and children aged 3 - 7 years come on board, fifteen at a time. One or two of the local organisers of the summer projects often work with the staff on the Bus. The children enjoy drawing, painting, waterplay, making jigsaws, playing in the wendyhouse, matching card games and the other activities on offer. They take pictures and other things home, which they have made on the Bus.

Children's Book Week

Each year the Dublin Corporation Library Services organise a Children Book Week to promote children's interest in books. The children's Bus has worked with library staff to further this aim. Several schools in the Dublin area were visited by the Bus. Groups of school-children came on board to carry out various activities relating to children's books, eg: listening to stories, making pictures to represent each story and so on.

Playdays

The Children's Bus has also been used to give parents and children opportunities to learn more about the value of play experiences. Staff have introduced play ideas to parents and children together on the Bus which they can then use at home.

Talks and Courses

Talks and courses on issues relating to children's development have also been given on the Bus itself. The Bus can provide an ideal child-oriented environment in which to discuss with parents, ways of stimulating children's development.

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PART II

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
THE MOBILE EDUCATION PROJECT

5. THE PROJECT AIMS, STAFFING AND RESOURCES

Background

The Mobile Education Project became a separate project on 1 September 1986. Prior to that date, the Children's Bus was part of the Blanchardstown Community and Children's Bus Project, comparable in size to Barnardo's project in Tallaght, consisting of sixteen staff members offering a variety of services, many of which were based in Blanchardstown, a suburban area in northwest Dublin. In September 1986 both the Tallaght Project and the Blanchardstown Community and Children's Bus Project divided to form four separate projects. As a result of this the Blanchardstown Community Project and the Mobile Education Project were created.

Aims

The project began in September with four main aims. Firstly there is the broad aim of widening the knowledge and understanding of the needs of young children. All the work of the project is intended to contribute towards the fulfillment of this aim. Organising and giving courses, workshops and talks on child related issues constitutes some specific ways in which the project strives to achieve this aim. The Children's Bus can also be used in a variety of ways to further this aim eg: its involvement in Children's Book Week.

Secondly the project aims: to work in partnership with parents and others to enable them to develop services for young children. Working with parents to set up community playgroups for their children constitutes the main way of achieving this goal.

The third aim of the project is: to run preschool services for the children of travelling people and to involve parents, where possible. The work in Dunsink, Labre and Jobstown represent the ways in which this aim can be met.

Finally the Mobile Education Project was asked to: explore the potential for developing further Barnardo work within and outside the Dublin area and this was adopted as the fourth aim. The ways these aims were achieved during the months from September to the present are described in more detail in this chapter and in chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10.

THE PROJECT RESOURCES

The Children's Buses.

When the project started in September 1986 there was one twenty-seven year old double-decker Children's Bus which had been converted to act as a preschool premises. All the seats have been removed on both floors. Downstairs there is a dress-up area, toilet, child height sink, paint and chalk easel, work top area for playdough and other activities, Wendy house, model farm area, waterplay bath and an adult height cooker and some storage space. Upstairs has a book corner, shelving with a variety of activities eg: threading, matching cards, construction, pastering, jigsaws, montessori equipment, tables, chairs and mats for floor work. (A more detailed list of activities and equipment is given in appendix I).

The equipment and activities on the Children's Bus are chosen to develop manual dexterity, pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-math skills. The Bus is decorated to facilitate the development of the children's aesthetic awareness. All the equipment, pictures, plants and decorations are at the child's level and each object has its own place. The easy access to equipment and the sense of order on the Bus is conducive to the development of the children's independence. Giving the children opportunities to improve their concentration and social skills is also considered important and is reflected in the way the environment is organised.

It had been decided, due to the possibility of problems with the chassis, that this bus should be replaced. Coras Iompair Eireann, the semi-state body providing transport in Ireland were approached but they did not have a bus available at the time. The West Midland Transport Company in Birmingham were also approached and a double decker bus was bought and converted in West Midlands. It arrived in Dublin on 2 December 1986 amidst much excitement. This newer Children's Bus is not unlike its older counterpart, similar in layout but with some modifications eg: a running water as well as a manually operated system, a separate adult kitchen area complete with sink and small cooker. See appendix 1 for a plan of this bus.

Due to the demand for the Children's Bus, it was decided that a second Children's Bus should be acquired to enable the work to expand. Since this had not been purchased by December, the old bus continued in place of the second double decker. In this way it has been possible to have two buses on the road.

THE PROJECT TEAM

There is a team of nine in the project. Three staff work on each bus, a project worker, a children's bus assistant and a driver. Another project worker is responsible for setting up a mobile toy library and deputising for the project leader, when necessary. The project secretary carries out administrative duties, works with the children and participates in the overall work of the project. The project leader co-ordinates the work of the project as a whole. Qualifications of staff range from those in early education to psychology.

Although individual members of the team are all trained, additional training is often considered desirable due to the variety of the work we undertake. This year, for example, three members of the project attended week long training trainers courses to develop skills in presenting information, facilitating groups etc. Other training opportunities availed of included a course for teachers of travellers and another aimed at identifying learning difficulties in young children. Because of the increasing use of video, all staff attended a four part course to learn more about the making and use of videotapes. Attendance at the National Playbus Association Rally, in Surrey, England by the project leader also provided a useful opportunity to meet others involved in mobile projects.

6. MOBILITY - ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The advantages of mobile services can be many and varied, depending on the nature and area of the work. It is only for children and families with special needs that day care is provided in Ireland. Alternatively parents can enroll their children in one of the many private preschools and playgroups which exist particularly in urban areas. Many parents have turned to the idea of setting up community playgroups as an alternative to private preschools. Running community playgroups also provides an interesting and challenging experience for parents themselves. By using the Children's Buses as a model preschool playgroup on wheels, the same resource can be used to help set up community playgroups in different areas. In this way, many more children are reached than would be possible by simply facilitating small groups on an ongoing basis in the same area. The children's Buses therefore represent an extremely economic use of resources. In the present economic climate, the cost effectiveness of this type of service is particularly important.

However, it is not only economic considerations, albeit important ones, that makes mobile resources an attractive option. For a project that is committed to meeting the needs of people who wish to develop their own resources in their own areas, it can be more appropriate to work in premises that can be moved in and out of areas. The alternative is to buy or become involved in the complications of looking for and renting premises. There are of course situations where the buying or renting of premises is more appropriate eg: where space restrictions make it impossible to carry out specific types of work on a mobile premises or where a local community can take over a premises after a specific period. However these options are not feasible if, as with the Mobile Project, the length of time spent in each area can be six months or less.

A further advantage of mobility concerns the work with travellers - a population who are themselves mobile. To provide a service on site for the children of travelling people, it makes much more sense to do this in a mobile premises. It is possible that within a month or less a site could become almost completely empty as travellers move on to another one, as indeed was the case on one site on which we worked this year, Ballycragh, Tallaght. (See Chapter 9).

Finally, mobile premises are extremely flexible. Not only is it possible to use a Children's Bus to help parents set up their own playgroups each morning, from Monday to Thursday, the same Bus can also provide a preschool service to travellers in the afternoons of the same days and can be used as a premises for a course for parents or to promote children's interest in books, on Fridays.

As against these advantages there are of course, disadvantages. Buses have to be converted for use as mobile premises. This can be relatively cheap or very costly depending on the level of sophistication required in terms of facilities (eg. heating and cooking). There is quite a degree of expertise involved in the conversion work, space is obviously at a premium and meticulously exact planning is a necessity. This is time consuming and although, obviously worthwhile, is expensive in staff time.

Like buildings, the Children's Buses have to be furnished, equipped, maintained and insured. Unlike buildings, they also have mechanical parts which can and do go wrong, much to the frustration of staff and the

disappointment of children and parents. Problems as major as a head gasket needing replacement to something as minor as a failing bulb in a brake light can result in the cancellation of a session. Whatever problems may occur in buildings it is rare that a whole premises would become unusable. Arranging annual servicing, road worthiness tests and motor taxation are also additional activities for staff to take into account.

A further problem with double decker buses as work premises can be finding a secure, covered parking premises. Very few garage roofs are high enough to accomodate a doubledecker. Covered space is not necessary, but preferable. Luckily we have been able to park courtesy of C.I.E. in one of their garages.

Finally, there is a tendency for work undertaken on a bus to be seen as simply the provision of a child minding service as opposed to being educational in focus. First hand experience, however, usually solves this problem.

On balance, to achieve the aims which the project has set, the advantages of using mobile facilities by far outweigh the difficulties which can arise. In conclusion, for a functional, as opposed to area-based model of service delivery, mobility makes sense.





PART III

WORKING TOWARDS MEETING THE AIMS

OF THE PROJECT

7. WORK ON THE CHILDREN'S BUSES - AN OVERVIEW

When the project started out in September 1986, the old Children's Bus was in need of major repair work. This meant that it was not until October that the Bus was ready for the road. The replacement Children's Bus arrived in December 1986 and went on the road in February 1987. Usually eight sessions of two hours length are run morning and afternoon, Monday to Thursday each week, leaving staff free on Fridays to attend meetings, plan courses, prepare material etc. Both buses were used on Fridays during parts of this year. The following tables detail the areas in which each Bus worked, the length of time spent in each area and the nature of the work involved.

BUS I

Area:	Nature of Work:	Dates:	No of Sessions per week:
Killinarden Tallaght	Setting up Community Playgroup	Oct.86 Feb.87	2 morning sessions
Labre Park Ballyfermot	Preschool service for travellers Open day for parents	Oct.86 Feb.87 Mar.87	2 morning sessions 1 Friday session
Dunard, Cabra	Setting up Community Playgroup	Feb.87 June 87	4 morning sessions
Dunsink Lane Finglas	Preschool service for travellers	Oct.86 June 87	4 afternoon sessions
Blakestown	Summer Playscheme Work	July 87	6 sessions
Leixlip	"	"	4 sessions
Huntstown	"	"	2 sessions

Ballymun	Summer Playscheme Work	"	1 session
Donncharney	"	"	1 session
Ladyswell	"	"	6 sessions
Dunsink Lane	"	"	2 sessions
Ballybrack Nursery	"	"	3 sessions
Blanchardstown Nursery	"	"	4 sessions

BUS II

Labre Park Ballyfermot	Preschool service for Travellers	Feb.87 June 87	4 morning sessions
	Open day for parents	Mar. 87	1 Friday session
Ballycragh Tallaght	Preschool service for travellers	Feb.87 June 87	4 afternoon sessions
St. Joseph's Nursery Dun Laoghaire	Session for children attending nursery	Feb.87	2 Friday sessions
Brookfield Tallaght	Open day for children and parents from travelling and settled communities.	Mar. 87	1 day session Friday
Blanchardstown Day Nursery	Open Day		
Ballycragh	Summer Playschemes work	July 87	4 sessions
Glenasmole	"	"	2 sessions
Kiltalawn	"	"	6 sessions
Mountview	"	"	4 sessions
Corduff	"	"	6 sessions
Ballyfermot	"	"	2 sessions

Dun Laoghaire	Summer Playschemes Work	"	2 sessions
Labre Park	"	"	2 sessions
Cherry Orchard	Playday	"	27th July 87

Total attendance from October 1986 to September 1987	
Children	Parents/Siblings
1855	290

Requests for the Children's Buses are considered by the team as a whole. Where possible requests are met. There were six requests for the Buses which were not met during the period September 1986 to July 1987, mainly due to the fact that the Buses were already booked up for the months in question.

8. REVIEWING THE COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP DEVELOPMENT WORK

The beginning of September 1986 was spent reviewing requests, drawing up a schedule of work and making arrangements for mechanical repairs to be carried out on the bus. Once these practical aspects were attended to, attention was turned to other issues which were regarded as priorities. These included reviewing the way in which children's progress is monitored, discussing ways of involving parents of travellers in the work on the bus and reviewing the role of the Children's Bus in helping parents to set up community playgroups. This chapter summarizes the way in which the community playgroup work was reviewed.

The agreed aims of this review included:

- (i) Identifying what would be the most helpful way to use the resources of the Children's Bus and staff to help parents set up a community playgroup.
 - (ii) Having accomplished this, to consider how this information could be used to meet parents needs in the next area from which a request is received.
 - (iii) Considering how the effectiveness of the work in this area could be measured.
-
- (i) Identifying what would be the most helpful way to use the resources of the Children's Buses and its staff.

Earlier in the year parents in Dunard had been asked what they would find most useful in the process of setting up a community playgroup. They identified several areas that they felt they needed to know about in order to run a playgroup. These included learning about appropriate activities to do with children, having help with deciding what equipment to buy, knowing what approach to take with children, seeing how to set up a committee to run the playgroup and what to do if a child had an accident.

Community playgroup advisors were also asked for their views on how the Children's Buses could best be used to help parents. This was vital since the playgroup advisors work on a day to day basis, supporting community playgroups in specific areas. There were four Barnardo community playgroup advisors, Tilly Doherty, Fanchea Kirby, Ann Donovan and Margaret Quinn, working in the Inner City, and Dublin 1. area, Blanchardstown and Tallaght respectively. Ideas suggested by playgroup advisors included:

- working with parents before the bus moves into an area eg. discussing what involvement in a community playgroup means, showing video of how a playgroup is organised and run a day to day basis.
- helping parents to feel more confident about running playgroup sessions, eg. one advisor felt that traditionally, on the bus, children had already settled by the time parents became involved and that it could be difficult for parents to 'take over' from staff. Settling children is also a necessary skill.
- showing parents ways to prepare and plan work with children.
- discussing ways of giving children a sense of security in the playgroup eg. how to greet, respond and work with children.

- how to set limits on behaviour in the playgroup.
- working out ways of encouraging parents to become as independent as possible in the running of their playgroup.

Finally, from the experience of the bus work itself, some ideas had emerged of what would be important to pass on to parents before moving on to another area.

All were agreed that parents seemed to be gaining from the involvement of the Children's Bus and the courses staff were running. There was concern in the project, however, that because parents did not have full responsibility for the running of the playgroup sessions on the bus by the end of the time spent in an area, that perhaps they were not gaining all that they might from the bus and its staff. This fact needed careful examination. There were several possible reasons for this. Our experience told us that while one, two or at best a small group of parents were committed to becoming involved in setting up and running a playgroup, the majority of parents had not made this decision by the time the bus moved into another area. Consequently, not all parents saw the relevance of gaining practical experience running sessions or attending an evening course on issues related to the running of a playgroup. The fact that the focus was on children initially did not help this situation. It was certainly possible that parents' lack of involvement in settling the children made it difficult for them to assume responsibility in place of staff. The fact that the bus is a Barnardo premises and not their own probably did not help either. Another very real possibility was that the bus had not stayed in each area for a sufficient length of time for parents to feel confident enough to take over. Finally, difficult though it was, it had to be accepted that perhaps a conscious enough effort had not been made to give responsibility to parents.

Reflecting on the overall experience and considering the views of parents and advisors, it seemed that it would be most helpful if parents were actually taking responsibility for running their own community playgroup on the Children's Bus before it moved to another area. In this was parents could actually experience the running of a group while still having the daily support of staff. This aim would only apply to requests to help set up a community playgroup and would only be pursued if regarded as appropriate by parents, playgroup advisors and bus staff. The way in which this aim could be achieved would probably vary, depending on the needs of an area.

(ii) Putting the ideas into practice.

The request from parents in Dunard provided an opportunity to put suggestions into practice. A four part Introductory Course for parents was planned with the playgroup advisor, with the following goals in mind:

- (i) to explain exactly what is involved in a community playgroup.
- (ii) to outline the roles of the Children's Bus staff and the Community Playgroup Advisor in helping parents to set up and run their own community playgroup.
- (iii) to allow parents time to get to know each other and to consider whether or not they would like to be involved.
- (iv) to make parents aware of the health and safety issues involved in using the Children's Bus.

Once this course was completed it was felt that it would be best for both parents and staff to work together on the bus from the beginning, with the children. In this way the children could get to know both staff and parents. It would also give parents an opportunity to see that children need time to settle into new surroundings, regardless of the adults present. Before leaving an area, it was felt that it would be important for parents to actually run the sessions themselves, with staff in the background, in case help was needed. It was considered important to build in opportunities for parents and staff to review each session.

Finally, while the playgroup was running on the bus during the day, information on various aspects of running a playgroup was given through a course held one evening per week. Unlike previous courses, the content for the first half of the course was determined by considering exactly what parents needed to know about in order to run the sessions. Topics included:

- preparing for the playgroup session
- coping with the children arriving and going home
- judging children's readiness for participating in activities.
- making decisions about how to facilitate children to work individually
- organising 'breaktime'
- setting limits on the children's behaviour

Later sessions focused on learning more about play, equipment, expanding parent's repertoire of activities they can carry out with children individually and in groups, and so on.

Various methods were selected which could best convey information eg. role play, group discussion, talks and video. In order to obtain appropriate video material, video tapes were made of groups of children with whom staff were working and with parents running a community playgroup in which the bus had been involved some years previously. A good deal of time was spent making videos, as it is considered to be a most useful and accessible medium.

The introductory course began in February and by the end of the four sessions, fifteen parents applied to become involved in the playgroup. The plan of working with parents, two at a time during the day and running a course at night was followed. Attendance at the evening course was initially quite poor, but gradually improved, particularly when the time was approaching for parents themselves to run the sessions.

During the month of June, the parents themselves began running the playgroup sessions on the bus. Sessions were reduced from two hours to one and a half hours to allow thirty minutes for staff and parents to review the session each day. By the end of June parents were very happy that they had reached the goal of running the playgroup themselves and commented that they would not have learned as much without this opportunity. In July staff accompanied the playgroup leader, whom parents had elected, on a shopping trip to buy equipment for the playgroup, which will start again in September, in their own premises.

(iii) Considering ways of evaluating this work.

Before leaving Dunard, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire so as to provide some feedback on the work carried out in their area. Their

views on what they found most useful and which methods of conveying information they preferred will be helpful in planning future work. Consideration will be given to ways of assessing the effectiveness of the work more objectively and these ideas have been discussed with Nora Dixon, Barnardo's Research and Development Co-ordinator and Christine Mulvey, Assistant Director, Republic of Ireland. This has been very useful and it is hoped to draw up a plan of evaluation which can be put into operation at the earliest opportunity.

9. EXPANDING THE WORK WITH THE TRAVELLING PEOPLE

The arrival of the replacement bus enabled us to increase the time spent in Labre Park. This work was going extremely well with high attendance figures, a waiting list and obvious goodwill from parents. Committing the bus to Labre in the afternoons was considered, as in Dunsink Lane and by doing so, free the morning sessions for community playgroup or to meet other requests we might receive. However it seemed unfair to make this decision without consulting parents who may have become used to the morning sessions and were possibly arranging their own time accordingly. While parents did not have particularly strong views on this issue, when asked, they did express a preference for the morning sessions to be continued.

In September Sile Nunan, visiting teacher for travelling children, requested the project to provide a preschool services in a new halting site in Ballycragh, Tallaght. This site is built quite a distance from housing, shops and other amenities. It was hoped that the Children's Buses, by providing a service for the children and their families would help to establish the site as an attractive area for travellers to settle. Due to other commitments, it was not until 23rd February 1987, that it was possible to hold an open day on the bus in Ballycragh and ten children were enrolled. Sessions began the following day and continued for four afternoons a week, until June. The children were delighted with the bus and became eagerly involved in the various activities provided. Within a month they demonstrated a clear understanding of rules of the bus and had become well able to work quite independently.

Unfortunately, due to a combination of mitigating circumstances, families began to move out of this site and the numbers of children attending the preschool on the Children's Bus decreased. A review of the commitment to Ballycragh led us to the conclusion that unless the population on the site had increased by September, this service would not be continued in Ballycragh. It was agreed that the situation should be reviewed again in December 1987.

In keeping with our aim of not only providing a preschool service to the children of travellers, but of involving parents where possible, the following decisions were made:

1. to try to get to know parents as well as possible,
2. to concentrate less on keeping written records of children's progress and to focus instead on visual recording methods which would be more accessible to parents.

In an effort to give parents an opportunity to come on the bus to talk with staff, we held an open day in Labre Park in March. Both Children's Buses parked in Labre, one for the children and one for the parents.

In Ballycragh, during the first month of the children's attendance a videotape of the session was made and shown to parents. This exercise was repeated in Dunsink Lane. Photographs of the children working on the bus were also given to parents. During the year, staff called frequently to trailers or houses and parents have been on the buses. Good relationships have been developed with parents.

As part of a Health Education Bureau project, parents in Dunsink Lane were invited to a series of five Friday meetings on the bus, during which video tapes on topics such as play and food and nutrition were shown and discussed. Parents have expressed an interest in continuing in the group.

The setting up of a Mobile Toy Library service for travelling families, preschools and schools involved with the children of travellers is also planned. Decisions are presently being made as to the most appropriate equipment to include. Staff in the project have made games and equipment with the travelling children in mind and have collected books reflecting traveller culture. At the Association of Teachers of Travelling People Summer Course parental involvement was discussed, which enabled staff to explore this topic with others working with the travelling people.

Through home visits carried by staff much has been learned about travellers' culture and lifestyle from parents. This is essential to providing a good service for the children. Ideally parents could become more involved on the buses, if they so desired. Knowing parents better will hopefully lead to their increased involvement in the future.

10. MEETING REQUESTS FOR COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

The Mobile Education Project meets requests for courses, talks and workshops.

The following is a list of these given from September 1986 to June 1987:-

Title/Description of Course:	No. of Sessions:	Requested by:
Community playgroup course Dunard, Cabra.	Feb. to June 87 12 sessions	Maura Kenny, Community Playgroup Advisor and parents in Dunard as part of work to set up a community playgroup.
'Preparation for working on the Children's Bus' and 'Community playgroup activities	June '87 8 sessions	Margaret Quinn, Community Playgroup Advisor and parents in Killinarden, Tallaght.
'Working with the Travelling People' - A.T.T.P. conference.	April '87	Sile Nunan, Chairperson, A.T.T.P.
'You and Your Child' This is a series of videotapes being developed for young children	2 separate sessions with two groups of parents in Blanchardstown and Dunsink Lane.	'You and Your Child' Health Education Bureau Project
Encouraging the development of children's independence as part of a course organised for parents involved in community playgroups.	1 sessions	Maura Kenny, community playgroup advisor

Title/Description of Course:	No. of Sessions:	Requested by:
'Making Sense of Children's Behaviour'	2 sessions	O.M.E.P. for staff & parents involved in preschools & daycare
'The Development of Young Children'	1 sessions	Sr. Regina, Community Worker, Corduff
Ditto	1 session	Sr. Nuala, Community worker, Huntstown, Clonsilla
'Coping with Children's Behaviour'	1 session	Sr. Monica, Public Health Nurse Clondalkin
Ditto	3 sessions	Elizabeth McGovern Principle, Rutland St. School Project
'Choosing Toys for Christmas' with sessions presented with Tricia Hudson, from Blanchardstown Community Project	1 session	Blanchardstown Public Library, Ballybrack Day Day Care Centre
'The Development of Children's Independence and the Involvement of Parents in Community play-groups. St. Fintan's Cabra.	1 session	Maura Kenny, Community Playgroup Advisor.
'The Development of Children's Play'	1 session	Parents considering fostering children, Ballymun.
'Overview of Children's Development	1 session	Chris Mulvey Focus Point Drop-in centre for Women, Eustace St.
'Potential Involvement in preschool'	1 session	Sile Nunan, Chairperson, A.T.T.P.

One of the difficulties in meeting requests for talks, courses and workshops is that all of the members of the project already have a full workload. For courses to be presented jointly by the team, it has been found that planning the content together tends to reduce the workload on individual staff members.

CONCLUSION

For those involved in the Mobile Education Project, this year has been a challenging, demanding and satisfying one. Unlike other new projects, the previous work on the Children's Bus provided a basis from which to learn and expand the work. Much has been learned from the involvement with children and their parents, both in the Children's Bus and in the various schools, community centres, houses and flats in which talks and courses were run. We are grateful for these learning opportunities they have provided us with over the past year.

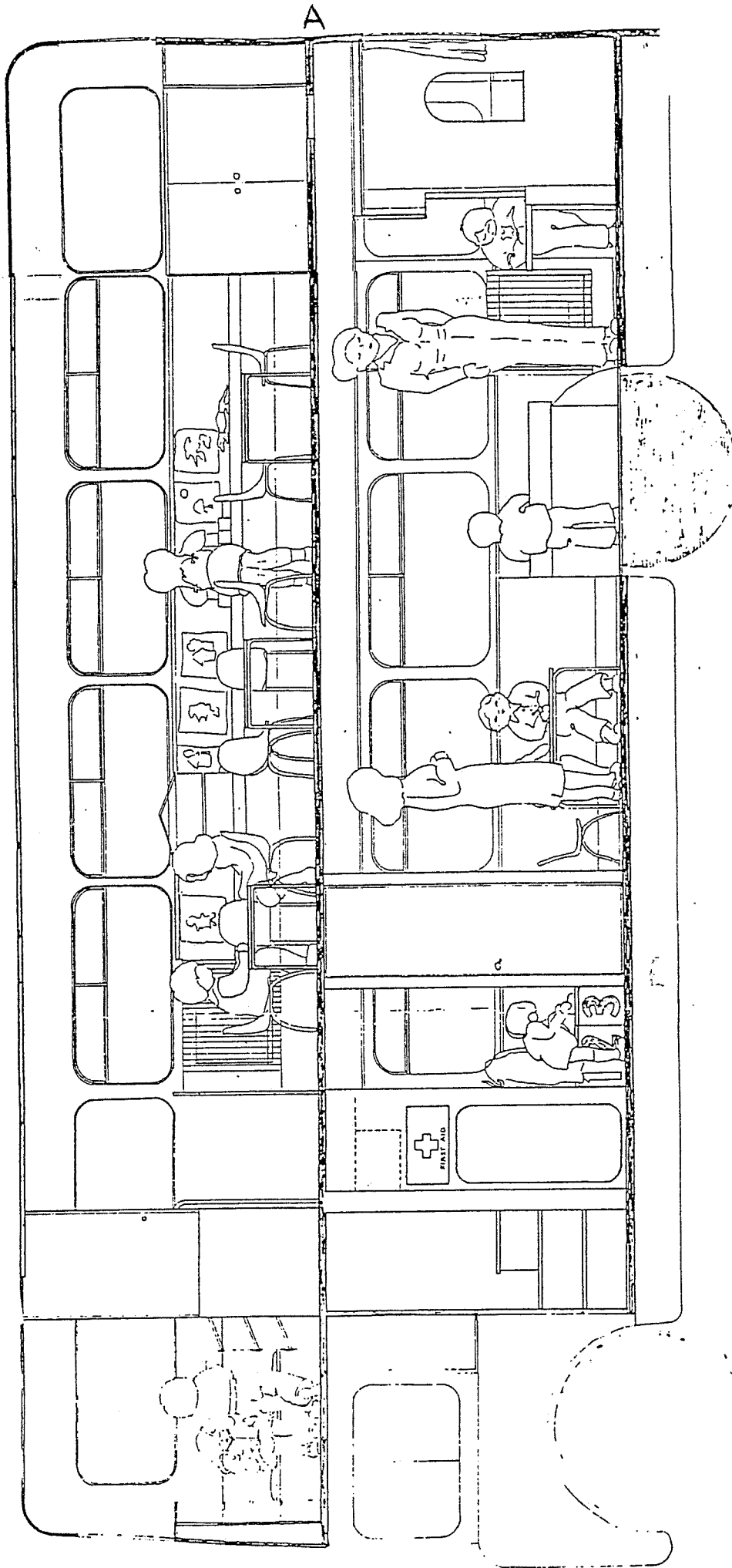
We are grateful for the support of staff in other Barnardo projects, particularly Community Playgroup Advisors, Ann Donovan, Fanchea Kirby, Tilly Doherty and Margaret Quinn, for their ideas and suggestions. We were also delighted to work with Maura Kenny, Community Playgroup Advisor, Dublin Corporation, for a large part of the year. We received valuable advice and help from Pat Redmond, photographer and Richard Fitzsimons, video-maker during the year. We are also very grateful to C.I.E. for providing us with parking facilities for both of our Children's Buses.

Contact with Sr. Colette Dwyer and with Sile Nunan and Miriam Fitzsimons from the Department of Education and Ann Helferty and Betty Lynch from Dublin Corporation were helpful in continuing and developing the work with the travelling people. We also had very helpful contacts with Dr. Roy McConkey, Senior Research Officer with St. Michael's House, Elizabeth McGovern and others in the Rutland Street Preschool Project, Patricia McAadoo in St. Helena's Project, Finglas and Noirin Hayes in Cathal Brugha Street College.

Finally, our thanks to those in the Eastern Health Board (particularly in the Mobile Health Clinic Service) and Health Education Bureau for their interest and support in our work.

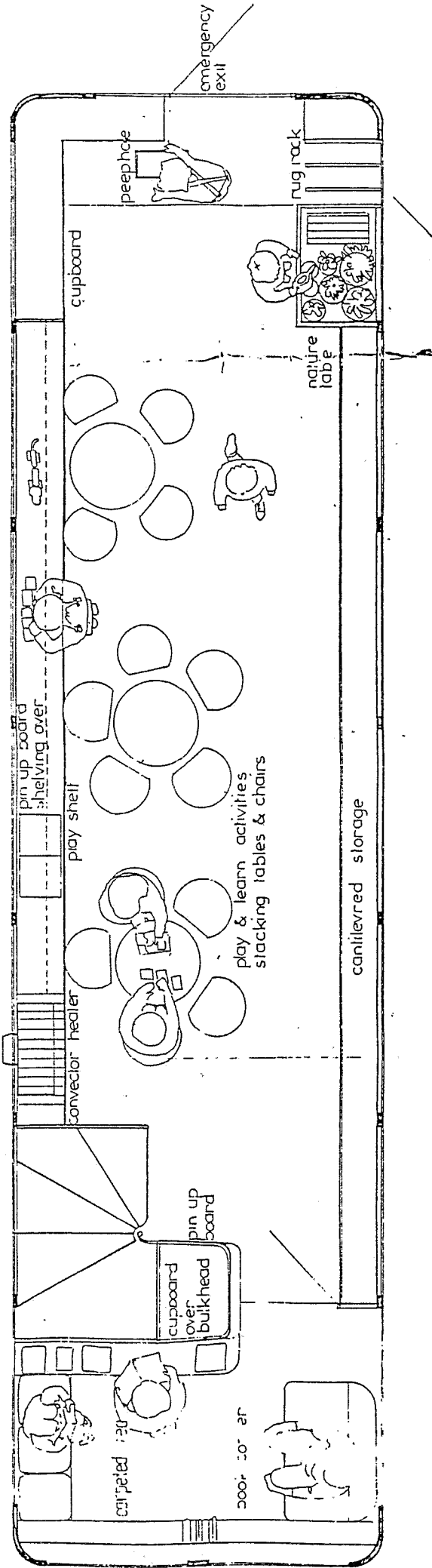
We have already received requests for courses and other work apart from our ongoing commitment to travellers and parents involved in community playgroups, which means we will be very busy until January 1988. No doubt the next term will bring even more requests. Meeting such requests not only allows us to develop the work of this project, but also enables us to consider potential work for other Barnardo projects. We look forward to the coming year in the project, which promises to be equally as exciting and challenging as the last.

PLAN OF A
CHILDREN'S BUS



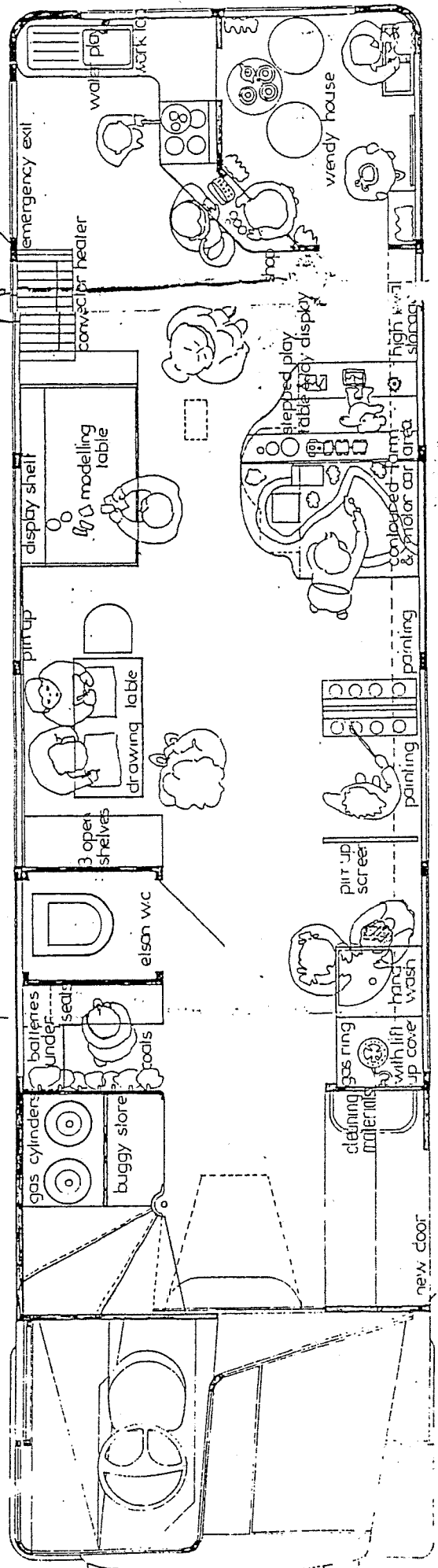


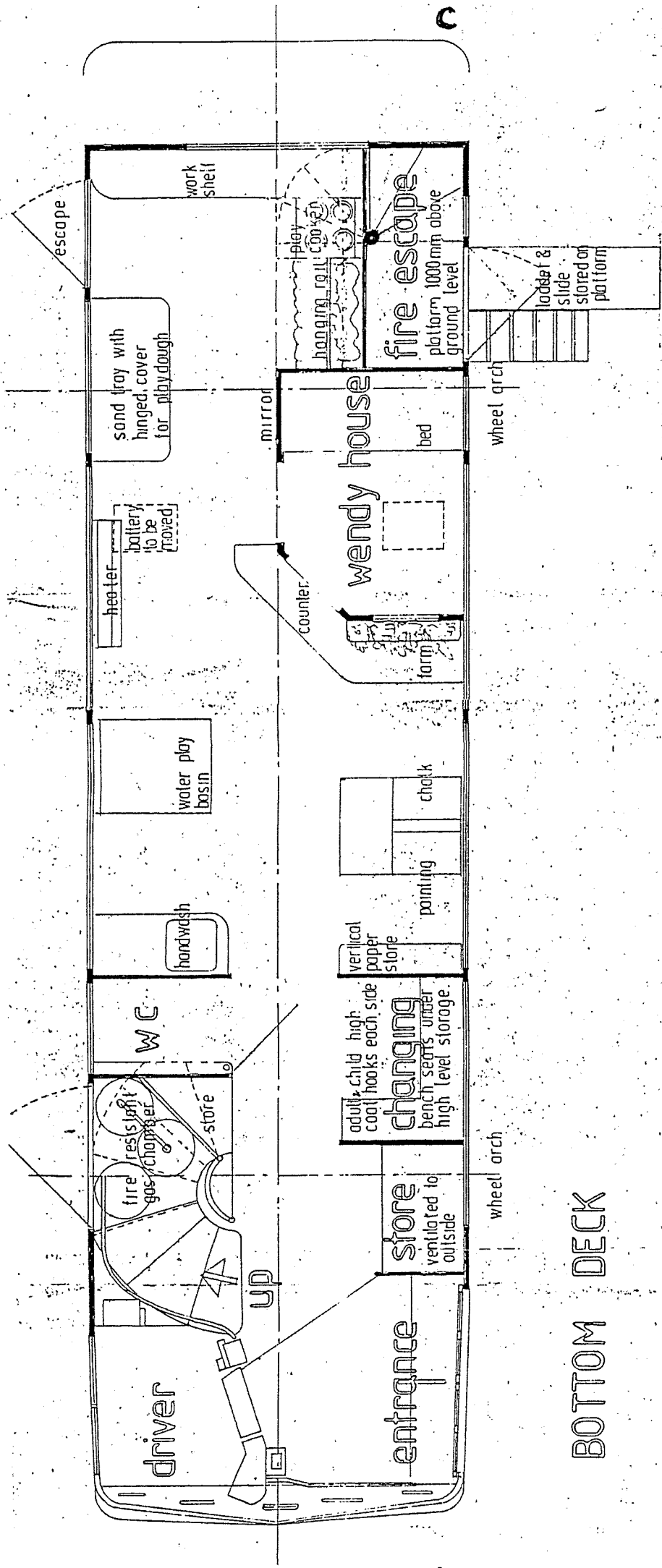
UPPER DECK



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LOWER DECK

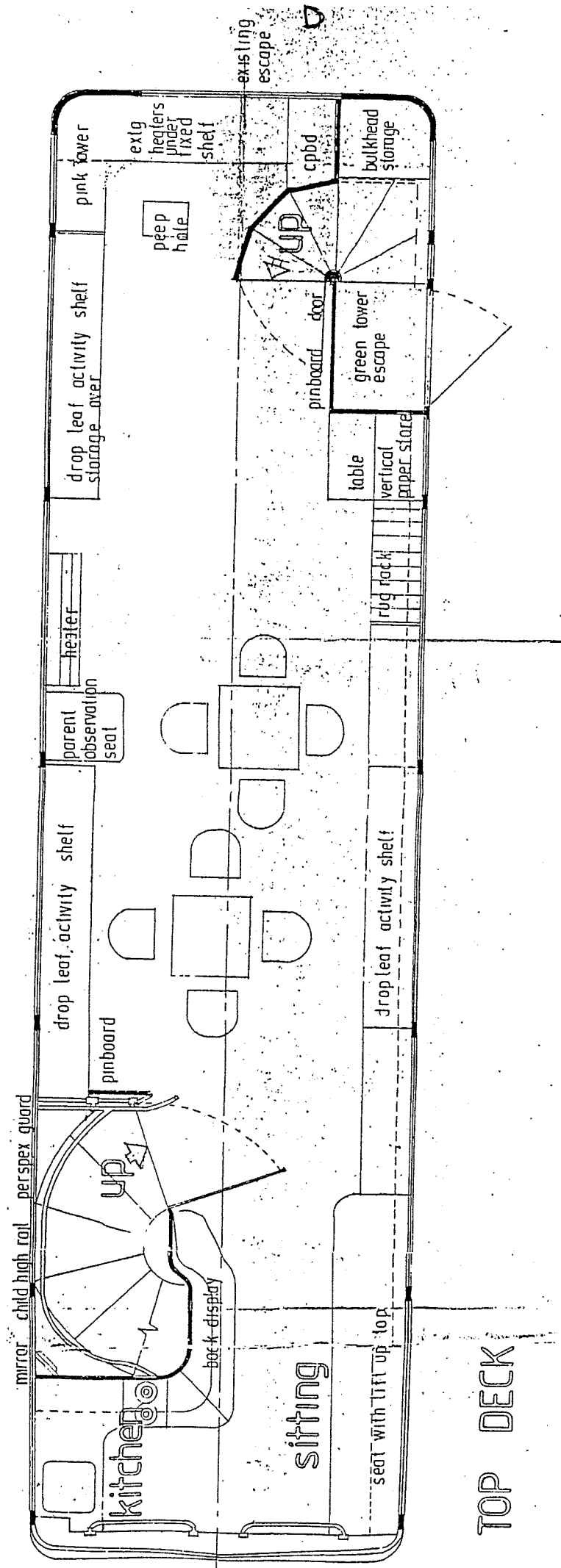




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TOP DECK



Activities available on The Children's Bus

UPSTAIRS:

1. Cylinder Blocks (4)
2. Pink Tower
3. Knobless Cylinders
4. Coloured Tablets

5. Number Rods
6. Geometric Solids

7. Geometric Cabinet & Cards

8. Touch Board
9. Wild Animal Models

10. Wild Animal Photographs
11. Magnet

12. Magnifying Glass
13. Mirror Book
14. Wooden Caravan & Jeep
15. Life Story of a Plant (cards)

16. Cutting Material
17. Pasting Materials

18. Crayons & Chalk

19. Wild & Domestic Animals (rubber stamps)

20. Metal Insets & Paper & Pencils
21. Graded Jigsaws
22. Graded Matching Cards
23. Association Exercises
24. Sound Games Matching Cards
25. Building Blocks
26. Large Lego
27. Briomec
28. Work Mats/Carpets
29. Library Corner
30. Maraccas
31. Bean Bags

DOWNSTAIRS:

1. Water Play
2. Painting at easel
3. Chalk at easel
4. Painting with sponge & Shapes
5. Playdough
6. Wendy House, T Set, Dolls, Dress-Up, Cooker
7. Farm Animal models on Farm Base
8. Blowing bubbles
9. Floating & sinking objects
10. Washing hands
11. Assorted Threading Beads
12. Peg Board
13. Clothes Peg Bowl
14. Washing a Table
15. Various Spooning & Pouring exercises
16. Shape Posting Box
17. Various Polishing exercises of Shoes
18. Magnetic Shapes for design
19. Bag of Buttons pairing exercise
20. Brushing Teeth
