

Adrian & Hillary Cotterill



When I started at Dorney, in December 1984, there were 3 full time members of staff and a volunteer. I have no images of Steph Moss or Carol who was assistant warden. We were initially given 12 months to prove that the Project was a viable proposition with its 25 beds to be a venture to develop its work among children and young people, whilst increasing usage and encouraging involvement with Eton College. Carol who was the new Assistant Warden and I as the new Warden, were sent to the annual winter conference of the Residential Centre Wardens conference, at Brookfield House in Victoria London, to glean how other centres were managing to increase their centres usage and find ideas which we could impliment.

I asked the Chariman Adrian Murray-Lesley who was Warden at the Edale Hope valley young people's conference centre, and another guy who was warden to a centre in Norfolk to visit Dorney to see what they could suggest. The problem they found, was that with only 25 beds it was less likely to be able to attract schools who needed more than 30 available bed spaces, where most centres got their main usage and income.



The Hackney Childrens holidays were already well established and we held a week in December, then two more separate weeks in the summer. These were

staffed by volunteers from Eton college sixth form boys; alongside the resident staff, and helped out by local volunteers in Dorney and the nearby villages.

There were also similar holidays run by two Oxford University Colleges from Exeter and Lincoln Colleges. They each ran 1 or 2 separate weeks in summer, as well as one week over the Easter holidays. The students themselves ran the holidays, while the staff provided the base, and the Projects minibus, and we often volunteered to help out with local knowledge and manpower.. I would do a midnight hike from the Vicarage over the common to walk along the river side at Boveney, and then back hopefully to enable the children to be tired enough to sleep. The helpers were nearly always tired, but we did suggest that some members of the volunteers stayed back to rest to enable them to help quieten the kids down once the kids were back bed time was announced.

My own forte was running party/parlour games which built up excitement and gradually became more quiet and sedentary. The games included the chocolate game:- Where a child had to put on hat, gloves, scarf and various clothing to eat a bar of chocolate by cutting it up with a knife and eating it with a fork. There would be a dice rolled throughout the group; and whenever a six was rolled, the chocolate eater had to swap with the child/volunteer who had shaken the six. It was a frantic game with many changes of player.

A game I was introduced to which remained a firm favourite, was called the 'Truth' game. There was one less seat in the room than there were participating people. The person in the middle (without a seat) said" Change places if you have....! This was the opportunity to find someone who had for instance cleaned their teeth. Each time a new question was asked the participants responded stood up and rush across the room to sit two or more seats away from where they began. At the same time the question asker would take one of the vacated seats, leaving somebody new in the middle to ask a different question.

The game would eventually end up with somebody returning to the middle for a third time, having to perform a forfeit, ie sing a

nursery rhyme, pretend to be a chicken, or a frying rasher of bacon etc. The skill was to keep changing the game before it became boring. Pass the parcel was included and various other games, some inside, some outside if the weather was reasonable. One of the favourite outdoor games in the summer was a version of rounders where a wet sponge was hit with the rounders bat, providing a soaking wet team game.

The indoor quiz was one of the regularly used activities, which we could photocopy and get the kids to chase around the centre counting and finding various clues. This was especially useful in bad weather. It was an idea which was offered and used at other Residential centres, from within the RCW's.

One of the improvements in the amount of usage was when we approached other faith groups and offered the Vicarages facilities and staff for their youth and other conference groups. The Jewish youth groups came with some brilliant ideas which we learned and used for other occasions. One group took the kids out on a wide game, travelling on foot from Dorney, across the Common to Eton Wick and Eton, and across to Datchet. Clues were set and prizes offered at various points, whilst cars were trying to catch the kids as they were finding the clues, to stop their progress when they were caught and transported back to the Vicarage. At the end of the weekend, certificates were created, spelling out something unique about each person, whether it was a personality trait, an achievement or the best at something ie telling a joke, washing up, getting up or some hilarious trait.

The game the Jewish Youth groups introduced which I have taken to using is called 'Clumps'. Everyone within the room had to think up a 'Secret' identity. They would not reveal this except to a Referee who recorded each persons Secret identity and sent them to join one of three, four or five groups. The referee would read the list of 'Secret identities' out in no particular order just once. Having done so one of the groups would choose a group they believed that a particular identity was in. It is imperative that even if the person with that identity was in the group asking, that

this was not revealed to their group. If the Identity suggested was in the group being asked, they had to stand up and join the group which discovered them. If the identity was not in that group, then the group who had been asked would then have the chance to ask another group any from the list of identities. The winner was the person whose group eventually had everyone in it. The identity was usually one forgotten by almost every one else.



One of the most frightening occasions we encountered was over an Easter probably in 1988 less than a year after Hilary and I were married. It was a Friday which happened to be the 13th. The students from Oxford with their group of kids chosen by Social services had enjoyed a week of fun and activities. The kids were aged from about eleven years to fifteen. There were some kids who had become romantically involved, and the students had unwisely decided to try a social experiment. They put together a punch, and told the kids that it had fizzy drinks, fruit juice, and some alcohol in it. We were unaware of this, and at this point on the last night before taking them home, they also showed them the Video of the 'Friday the 13th' horror film. The evening was not going well with kids who were convinced they were drunk, began losing their inhibitions, kissing people from the opposite sex, laughing and falling over and finally fights broke out. One boy had got into the kitchen and was waving a knife around, and a chair had been broken, which was being used for a weapon/shield. On top of this there was a 'Paranoia' and fear that

there was someone sinister outside, looking in the windows who may have been an axe murderer!

The students got frightened at the violent outbursts, and had lost control of the situation. Hilary and I had to try to regain control of the situation, and help the kids to realise that there was nobody outside who was threatening them. Hilary took the students while I got the kids into the minibus and drove them around the grounds to prove there was nothing to be scared of. We managed to disarm the two kids with the knife and broken chair, and calm them all down. It was definitely a dangerous situation, and one we will never forget.

One of the more unusual things I was asked to do, was to become a tramp/homeless person. I was asked to be as realistic as possible and meet up with a groups of teenage kids from a wealthy local town. To this end, I stopped washing and shaving and cleaning my teeth, for about a week. I drank cider and spilled it onto my dirty clothes and I slept in them. Then on the morning before I was to meet up with the kids on the Saturday morning, I set off early, to go and roll in some mud on the common between Dorney and Eton Wick. I was met on my way there, by one of the Executive Committee members who was a local Magistrate; and offered me a lift. I cannot remember whether I dared to explain I was in the state I was in or not.

Arriving back at the Vicarage, one of the kids was asked to answer the door when I arrived. I was invited to come in for something to eat and drink with the encouragement of the leaders of the group who were staying for the weekend. I was asked how I had got into a homeless state, and told them my story, and asked one of the kids for some money. I did give it back later, once I had been let out again and cleaned myself up, shaved and washed. It was an interesting and fragrant experience of life at Dorney, and one I feel certain will have challenged the young people I came into contact with and helped broaden their horizons.

One of the Old Etonians who had a great deal of time spent as volunteer after he had finished school, was Lord Andrew Frank. I

believe he lived and worked on site at the Vicarage in Dorney with Rev Ron Johnson. When I was newly installed as Warden, he persuaded me to assess his suitability to get his 'Equity card'. He did this by running a party during one of the Hackney childrens holidays, where he and some friends came as performing clowns singing, dancing, performing magic tricks and giving the kids a fantastic fun party.

One final thought before I finish, was of a cleaner we gained from probably 1986, by the name of Mrs Nellie Bennell. She lived in Eton Wick and came with excellent references from having worked at Eton College. She was a an incredible lady who worked long and hard to help clean, tidy and make up the 25 beds when ever they were needed. I would see her working so hard to do all this mostly single handed, although at times staff and volunteers would lend a hand. But she came with good humour and a willingness to do what ever was needed, and would transform the place in an incredibly short time. She had reached retirement age but wanted to carry on working and proved invaluable in swapping over between groups, making the centre presentable. She was a lovely kindly lady who made the Project's work possible in a clean and tidy state, before the chaos each group inevitably brought.

Other Photos of Adrian & Hillary's time at Dorney:



Various children from Hackney with Adrian at Windsor Safari Park. Some of the children holding a kitten, which I had, called Cleo, who became quite wild catching mice birds and even even baby rabbits.



Suzie Appleton and Paul Frostick were the first two who came for overnight respite care. After a couple of weekly over night stays with one on the parents staying with them, they were able to stay on their own with us at the Project. The evenings were supported with boys from Eton College who came to play games and do a variety of activities before they went back to the College before the night began.



Opening of the Adventure Playground.

The Adventure Playground, which was funded by a raffle; with the first prize a Volvo P1 sports car. This was donated by the father an old Etonians, after his son had died before he could inherit it. The boy had been a volunteer on the Hackney children's holidays, whilst he was at Eton College. His father recalled that he had loved working as a volunteer with the deprived children's holidays. A fantastic amount of money was raised for the playground.