

Ged & Sue Pearce's memories



A few thoughts and memories from Ged & Sue Pearce 1998-2008

We, along with Kathryn Pantrey, were responsible for the day to day operation of the Centre for 10 very full years. We had a host of valued volunteers and indispensable back office support in the shape of Pam Cannon and Vivienne Gibson. The extensive grade II listed building and beautiful grounds were maintained by Frank Westerndorp, Bob & Mark Cannon. The work of the Centre was underpinned by the sterling work of the local Parish Churches, the Oxford Diocese, Eton College, the Dean of Windsor and many others.

Being 'open for business' 7 days a week was quite a juggling act sometimes with a new group of up to 33 arriving within hours of the previous one leaving. Groups of children and young people with their leaders would be fully catered for with the exclusive use of three day rooms, seven bedrooms of mainly bunk beds and an acre of grounds with football, climbing frame, slide, basketball and picnic tables. We would juggle the

numbers to separate the boys from the girls in different halves of the house with access to their own power showers and toilets. The building was full of character, very homely and always kept in good order with beds made-up prior to arrival to emphasise the warm welcome



Always mindful of the purpose of the Project, we actively sought to encourage, support and accommodate groups such as:

Special-Needs Schools: The school would usually stay for a week and enjoy many local attractions. We would drive our donated Minibus and sometimes be the extra pair of hands on trips. The concentration of children with disabilities and health issues could prove quite overwhelming at times, but their acceptance, resilience and contribution was beyond measure, which was a credit to the school's staff whose contribution was something special to see in action. Underprivileged Children: This was a project funded, promoted and led by the students of Lincoln and Exeter Colleges for local underprivileged children. Two groups during the Easter holidays and two during the summer would each stay for a week. They too would visit many of the local attractions and especially appreciated the attention from

the students who would willingly play non-stop games on demand and supply copious amounts of ice cream! Many children would arrive in the clothes they stood up in, so there would always be a reserve of new clothes to save unnecessary embarrassment. Sadly, some of the children may have thought that lives were like that all the time and some would run away in the last day to avoid going back to their normal every-day.

Youth Groups: A huge number of mainly church youth groups would stay for weekends and would often travel from as far afield as Norwich. Most would devise an on-site programme and would use their time to have lots of fun as well as a focussed time exploring the Christian faith in an open and safe environment.



Specialist Groups:

From time to time we would be in a position to support charities working with groups of teenagers with particular problems. They could appear rather scary on arrival, but to see some very talented leaders work with young people with alcohol, drug and anger issues was amazing. Anyone found taking drugs for example would be deemed to have broken their agreement and would be escorted home immediately – even in the middle of the night. Another charity brought young teenage prostitutes from the West End having carefully teased

them away from their pimps in order to help them regain their self-esteem and independence. To see these street wise girls regain something of their childhood was remarkable.

Training & Conferences: Again our excellent facilities were put to good use for both residential and day training and conferences. Occasionally for example and with suitable warning, we would find Social Services exploring 'domestic abuse' and that would involve a group of actors acting out a violent and abusive scenarios, which were spine chillingly violent, aggressive and foul-mouthed. All in a day for some families.

Community Use: As mentioned elsewhere, the monthly Lunch Club hosted at the Centre was always a great opportunity to share news. The Parishes of Dorney, Eton Wick and Eton were great supporters and it was good to host any number of meetings, study groups and social events including a good number of 'fund raising' opportunities. The local Parish Council, Guides, Brownies and Youth Club were also accommodated during term time.



Overseas Groups: A number of overseas schools used The Centre as a base for their visits to the UK, which was always an interesting experience as they practised their English on us and we tried our best to share some of our customs and traditions. 'Toad in the Hole' always went down surprisingly well!

Cambridge & Oxford Rowers: During the winter holidays we would accommodate male and female rowing clubs to train at the Dorney Rowing Lake and the River Thames during an intense week of training. This produced valuable income for the Centre, which in turn subsidised our running costs. The Rowers day would start with a healthy jog followed by a rowing session in the morning and a further session in the afternoon. In the evening they would watch videos of themselves rowing! They would go out in some terrible weather, squeeze their physiques into our tiny bunks, eat us out of house and home, and enjoy every minute of their punishing schedule!

There is so much, much more to share, but some of the highlights for me included the personal impact of seeing so many children emotionally, physically and sexually abused surviving such despicable trauma. To the child who spoke their first word after so many years of silence. To the lives of the children and young people changed forever. To the middle eastern man who was passing by who knocked and asked if the Project was still in operation because it changed his life and if I visited the united Arab Emirates, I should go to either of the teaching hospitals and ask for the Head of Trauma, where I would be his guest.

Although we were careful not to proselytise our beliefs at the Centre, it was perhaps quietly obvious that all the work was underpinned by our Christian faith. This has prompted much fruitful discussion over the years with children and adults alike and we have been truly blessed in serving the children and young people throughout our ten years of service there.

Ged & Sue Pearce