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A Community Project in Notting Dale

Roger Mitton
Elizabeth Morrison





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ALLEN LANE THE PENGUIN PRESS

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Contents

FOREWORD	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xi
INTRODUCTION	xiii
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE	xvii
1 Notting Dale	1
2 The Family Study Before the Project	10
3 The Growth of the Nottingwood Group	24
4 Treadgold Street	53
5 The Move to Independence	92
6 The Group on its Own	108
7 The Family Study Committee	136
8 Community Work in Notting Dale	151
APPENDICES	
A An Example of the Workers' Help	173
B Records in a Community Project	175
C References	184
D For Students and Teachers of Community Work	185

Foreword

The very processes by which the project described in this book came into existence, strove to find its identity and to assess its consequences, are in themselves an example of community development. It is easy to think of an omnipotent committee disposing of resources, clear about policy and moving steadfastly towards a goal. This was not the experience of the little group of private people who first came together as a committee in the late 1950s, without an organization or resources, and struggled to think out whether there was anything which they could usefully do to lessen the social ills of North Kensington.

The first stage from 1962 to 1963 became possible thanks to the imaginative response of Sir Donald Allen and the generosity of the City Parochial Foundation. This initial exploration and the conclusions drawn from it were published as *A Troubled Area, Notes on Notting Hill* by Pearl Jephcott. As a result, the Committee decided to try to undertake a community development project in a small part of the area to demonstrate the extent to which local people were capable of and willing to take action about the things that troubled them most in their daily lives, and thus to some degree to lessen the social malaise, the oppressive sense of powerlessness, in the neighbourhood. To do this would mean skilled workers and other resources, together with systematic recording of the experiment so that the results, whether negative or positive, might be useful elsewhere. Once again, the City Parochial Foundation was willing to back the experiment in this its operational phase.

This book is the record of that phase. It shows the struggle to discover where, how and at what points small interventions might have a 'multiplier effect' and strengthen local people's ability to act for themselves. Inherent in this struggle were initially clear, then uncertain, then conflicting views about the nature of community development and about the proper responsibilities of a committee in such a project. These conflicts were not resolved, nor could they be, since they spring both from little knowledge in a comparatively new

Foreword

form of social action and from differing philosophies about ends and means. The record of such struggles is itself valuable in helping to chart a map for other experiments.

The writing of this book has not been easy because of changes in the key field workers during the project. Helen Sheils left in 1964 to return to Australia and Elizabeth Morrison did not join it until two years later. But above all, Ilys Booker's tragic death in 1968 meant that the person who in her time was the mainspring of the project, and a leading figure in community development in this country, was not able to write the account when the project ended. Moreover, systematic records were only available at some points and not others. This created an exceptionally difficult task for the authors, Elizabeth Morrison and Roger Mitton (who worked on the project intermittently as a volunteer from 1964 and joined it full-time in 1969). Their decision to gather tape-recorded interviews from as many people connected with the project as possible was the device which essentially made this book possible. In particular, the views of some mothers in the area show how oppressed they felt by the weight of 'they' on top of them; how excited to discover that they could create things that were theirs, that belonged to them; what new confidence this gave them and how determined they were to preserve what they had achieved with the project workers' help. Indeed, perhaps the two main lessons of this project are, first, the degree of sensitive understanding needed by the field workers to nurture collective confidence in those who have never known it; and, secondly, the nature of the long-term support that may be needed before confidence and 'know-how' are self-perpetuating.

From time to time during the project, efforts to recruit a male full-time worker failed. It may be that the social culture of Notting Dale made it difficult for Ilys Booker and her colleagues to get together groups of men, so we do not know to what extent the course of events would have been different if they too had taken part. Nonetheless, both in spite of and because of what the project demonstrates, this record is full of useful guide-lines for others, and of teaching material too.

The Committee is especially grateful to the City Parochial Foundation for making the whole project possible, and to Mr Woods, its Clerk, for his constant support and understanding; to some mothers in Notting Dale to whom it owed its life; to earlier field workers, especially to Helen Sheils, Pat Foster and Tricia Maher as well as to the vivid memory of Ilys Booker; to Elizabeth Morrison and

Foreword

Roger Mitton for the unfailing and effective enthusiasm with which they have written this book; to Peter Willmott for his kind skill in using the pruning knife so that the reader might see the wood for the trees. The Committee would also like to acknowledge the secretarial help of Mrs Sheila Miller and Miss B. Hems. Finally, as Chairman of the North Kensington Family Study Committee, I gladly record the debt which the project owes to all the committee members, and especially to T. R. Batten, Muriel Smith and Eileen Younghusband, who gave much extra time as consultants as well as committee members.

JOY GODFREY-ISAACS
Chairman, March 1971

Acknowledgements

Our first thanks must go to the Committee of the North Kensington Family Study whose endeavours created the project in the first place and whose concern that the experience should be written up has made this book possible: Mrs J. Godfrey-Isaacs (Chairman), Dr T. R. Batten (from March 1966), Mr G. Godfrey-Isaacs, Professor Marie Jahoda (up to September 1965), Mr David Jones, the Lady Norman (up to September 1965), Miss Gwynedd Richards, Mrs Muriel Smith (from October 1969), Dr Faith Spicer and Dame Eileen Younghusband. Our thanks are due to them not only for giving us the opportunity to undertake what has been a most interesting task, but for allowing us much freedom in carrying it out and for continuing to support us long past our optimistically estimated dates for completion.

For help with writing the book, we are indebted most to Mrs Muriel Smith of the London Council of Social Service and to Mr Peter Willmott of the Institute of Community Studies. Muriel Smith, through her wide experience of community work and her close friendship with Ily Booker, has contributed a subtle and sensitive interpretation of many parts of the story. Her unflinching interest in the book, from the beginning, has done much to sustain us through particularly difficult periods of the work. Peter Willmott saw the book when the first draft was nearing completion and generously offered to help revise it into its final form. Appreciative and encouraging while not tempering his criticism, definite but undogmatic in his suggestions, he has been an ideal editor. The presentation and style of the book owe much to his help. Our thanks go also to our three other advisers, Dame Eileen Younghusband, Dr T. R. Batten and Mr David Jones. All have been prompt in reading and commenting on passages we have sent them and all have been prepared to give time for discussion with us. We are most fortunate to have had thorough and stimulating criticism from people with their wide knowledge of community work. Our advisers, of course, have not always agreed on the issues raised by the project, and though we have tried to take account of their main points, the views expressed are not necessarily theirs.

A large number of people who took part in the project have contributed to this book. Unfortunately it was not possible to interview everyone who took part and we must apologize to any people who

Acknowledgements

would have liked to give their views but who were not invited to do so. We wish to thank all those who helped us, some by being interviewed (though not all those interviewed are quoted in the book), some by reading and commenting on parts of the draft, many by doing both. They are: Miss Susan Adams, Rev. Geoffrey Ainger, Mrs Anderson, Mrs Barnet, Miss Beckett, Mrs Brett, Mrs Carrick, Mrs Carson, Mr Donald Chesworth, Mrs Clarke, Mr George Clark, Mrs Clements, Mrs Cottol, Mrs Curno, Mrs Dortel, Miss Pamela Elmes, Mrs Enright, Mrs Fenbury, Mrs Finkel, Mr David Forrest, Mrs French, Mrs Goddard, Mrs Hayward, Miss Rita Hayward, Mrs Hewitt, Mrs Holmes, Mrs Houston, Mr and Mrs Humphrey, Mr Charlie Humphrey, Miss Linda Humphrey, Mrs Ingram, Mrs Jeffrey, Miss Pearl Jephcott, Mrs Kelly, Miss King, Miss Laing, Mrs Lawrence, Mrs Maggs, Mrs Malcolm, Mr and Mrs Manders, Rev. David Mason, Mrs Massey, Mr Sidney Miller, Mrs Okunola, Mr John O'Malley, Mrs Paterson, Mr and Mrs Pryke, Mrs Rawlins, Mr Adam Ritchie, Mrs Robbins, Mrs Robinson, Mrs Smith, Mr and Mrs Pat Smythe, Mrs Spinks, Dr Tanner, Mrs Thompson-McCausland, Miss Vandenburg, Mr and Mrs Vary and Mrs Viney. We have received helpful letters from Mrs Van Voorhis and from Dr J. R. Kidd of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. We have also benefited from the comments of the following people who read the second draft: Mr Peter Baldock, Miss Joan Cooper, Mr Nicholas Derricourt, Mr George Goetschius, Professor Marie Jahoda, Mr Lionel Morrison, Mr Michael Perrin, Mr Don Ross, Mrs Helena Sheiham and Mr Bill Taylor.

Typing the edited versions of over fifty interviews, several drafts of the book and a large amount of correspondence, was a considerable task, for the patient performance of which we thank Mrs Judy Cunningham and Mrs Anne Pyne. Several friends have helped by loaning equipment and the London Council of Social Service gave us the use of their duplication machine free of charge.

ROGER MITTON

ELIZABETH MORRISON

Introduction

The parts of cities which today command the concern of those who would work for social justice are not exactly slums, or at least not like the old ones. They are what have come to be called 'deprived areas'. Every city in the world seems to have them. They are places where more people live than there is room for, where the houses are in poor condition, where the families, though not all in poverty, are not generally well off, and where the people have more than their share of life's troubles. It would seem an obvious solution to pull down the houses and build better ones in their place. But this does not always work. Often the effect is just to move the residents to somewhere else no better. Even when they are moved into better houses, many of their problems remain. An adequate solution, then, cannot concentrate on the buildings and ignore the people. But what sort of work is to be done?

In Britain, there are the health, education and other social services. There are both statutory and voluntary agencies providing casework for personal and family problems. There are activities offered by churches and settlements, youth clubs and community centres. Many of these are concentrated in deprived areas. But although all these services were developed in response to a need, there has been growing uneasiness about them, and not so much about their individual failings as about their general style. Running through them all is a division between benefactors and beneficiaries. On the one hand there are politicians, civil servants, clergymen, professional social workers, youth leaders, committee members of voluntary bodies and the like who are providing the services. On the other there are local people who are receiving the services. This division has become the common target for a most ill-assorted band of critics.

There are those who see it as proof that all this work is just charity in different forms and they do not hold with charity – it robs people of the will to do for themselves. Quite different are those who suspect the services of actually perpetuating the poor conditions, since the aim seems more often to help people to put up with their

Introduction

lot than to encourage them to work for change. Different again are those who want the social services to work, and work better, but who see the division as a persistent handicap, for the services, they say, will never properly meet the needs until those in need at least partly control the services.

These diverse strands of discontent have knotted in a desire for 'participation'. The people who live in these areas are no longer to sit there and be done to. They are somehow to take part in the task of improving the conditions of their own lives. In the general enthusiasm for local participation it is easy not to see some crucial questions. Are local people capable of taking part? If they are, do they want to? Even if they are both able and willing, is it feasible? The small project which this book describes was an attempt at local participation. It found no simple answers – there are none – but its experience can be learnt from, for it encountered many difficulties which will surely be encountered elsewhere and it reaped some of the rewards.

Most of the book is devoted to telling the story of the project. To make it easier to read and not too long, some parts of the work are only summarized and certain characters and events have been omitted. There is only a brief summary, for example, of the work with social agencies and there is no account at all of the work with teenagers, though this did occupy several of the workers from time to time. The story is broken occasionally for discussion of some of the issues it raises for community work, and the book concludes with some assessment of the whole project. Only a few generalizations have been attempted and no comparison has been made with other projects. It is hoped that this book will provide the basic material for others to make such comparisons.

The principal worker in the project was Ilys Booker, whom many readers will have known through her work or her lecturing. Her untimely death in 1968 meant that the book she had intended to write about the project could never be written. This work was left to Elizabeth Morrison, Ilys's colleague in the latter years of the project, and Roger Mitton, an undergraduate at the time of the project who had done some voluntary work in it. Both of the writers were close friends of Ilys and they have consulted other friends of hers and drawn heavily on her notes and reports. At the time of her death, however, she had not left, in writing, any overall conclusions about the project or the beginnings or the outline of her own book on it. The writers, therefore, have not attempted to write Ilys's book and

Introduction

the analyses and conclusions are not necessarily those she would have made.

Much use has been made of quotations, some from people's writings and others from tape-recorded interviews. The idea of asking the local people to take part in writing the report came partly from Elizabeth's desire that they should have the opportunity and partly from the interest expressed by some of the local people themselves. Mrs Muriel Smith, one of the writers' advisers, suggested tape recording their views and including them verbatim, and it then seemed natural to do this with other people also, such as Family Study committee members and workers and people from other local organizations. The purpose has been partly to supplement the records on matters of fact, but also to capture that diversity in points of view which forms a large part of the difficulty and the interest of community work. With the quotations both from people's writings and from the interviews, some editing has been done. This was sometimes necessary with the written material because, with few exceptions, it was not written with publication in mind – the workers' records, for instance. With the spoken material, small corrections of syntax may have been made or sentences removed which seemed confusing or superfluous, though they have not been tidied up completely as this would have diminished their liveliness. Everyone who is quoted in the book has given permission for the quotations to be used in the form and the context in which they appear.

There are some people in the book whose names it would have seemed strange to alter. On the other hand, not all people wanted their real names in. Consequently, it was decided that all the names of places and of organizations, of Family Study committee members and of Family Study workers should be their real names. (Elizabeth Morrison was not married at the time of the project and appears in the story as Elizabeth Glover.) All other names have been changed. Since the writers were friends of many of the people mentioned, the exclusive use of surnames or titles such as 'the worker' or 'the secretary' would have seemed too formal, so first names have sometimes been used. At the same time, though most of the people in the project were on first-name terms, too much use of first names would have been confusing, so they have been used mostly for the workers. The name 'Ilys', incidentally, is pronounced 'Eye-liss'.

Chronological Table

This table of a few of the events described in this book is for the reader to refer back to, to help him sort out the sequence of events in the project.

The Notting Hill race riots and the origin of the Family Study	Summer 1958
Three experiments in self-help	Autumn 1962–Summer 1963
The beginning of the Blenheim–Elgin playgroup	Autumn 1963
The beginning of the Nottingwood play-group	Spring 1964
The beginning of the five-year project	October 1964
The Nottingwood group's first summer activities and Christmas bazaar	Summer and Christmas 1965
The combined summer activities and Pat Foster's departure	Summer 1966
Treadgold Street	July 1966–February 1967
The rota trouble	February–March 1967
Tricia Maher's departure	January 1968
The Motorway summer scheme	Summer 1968
Ilys Booker's death	December 1968
Elizabeth Glover's departure	March 1969
The end of the five-year project	September 1969

Chapter 1

Notting Dale

The Metropolitan Line emerges from its tunnel at Paddington to travel above ground all the way to Hammersmith, at first running parallel to the main line, then branching along embankments, and then carried on a long Victorian viaduct of dark brick. This line, between the stations of Westbourne Park and Latimer Road, roughly bisects the part of West London known as Notting Hill and more accurately called North Kensington. To the south of this line and some distance to the west of Ladbroke Grove are three blocks of council flats with a courtyard between them. Most of the people in this book live within three minutes' walk of this courtyard, and even the farthest are no more than ten minutes' walk away.

The name of the district is Notting Dale. Up to 1820, almost all the land to the west of Portobello Road and to the north of Holland Park Avenue was rural. In the next twenty years, the development of the south-west part next to Holland Park Avenue* began, and this ended with St James's Gardens. The houses here are large and elegant and were occupied by the wealthy classes. The area to the east of Clarendon Road, also for the wealthy classes, was developed around the middle of the century. The whole estate was owned by a man called Ladbroke and, as is obvious from the map, it was built to a single plan. These two areas have changed little since they were built, except that now many of the houses are being renovated and some converted into luxury flats, a development which is steadily creeping up from the southern end. Notting Dale, which is the district to the north of St James's Gardens and west of Clarendon Road, is markedly different, and so is its history.

Not long after 1820, some small brickmaking businesses established themselves in the district, the clay here being particularly suitable. They manufactured bricks and tiles and the district came to be known as the Potteries. (A kiln still stands at the southern end of Walmer Road, and the narrow road that follows the route of the old path to this area is called Pottery Lane.) They were soon joined

* Only the modern names of roads and places are given.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

by a colony of pig-keepers who had been displaced from their previous abode near Marble Arch and were attracted by the seclusion of Notting Dale. Tiny cottages were built in no particular order and thus a small village began. An inhabitant of the time explained, 'We most of us keep a horse, or a donkey and cart, and we go round early in the morning to the gentefolk's houses, and collect the refuges from the kitchens. When we comes home, we sorts it out; the best of it we eats ourselves or sells it to a neighbour, the fat is all boiled down, and the rest we gives to the pigs.'* Business flourished but the area, being low-lying and badly drained, became squalid and unhealthy. After a cholera epidemic in 1849 in which Notting Dale suffered particularly badly, Charles Dickens wrote:

In a neighbourhood studded thickly with elegant villas and mansions, viz. Bayswater and Notting Hill, in the parish of Kensington, is a plague-spot, scarcely equalled for its insalubrity by any other in London; it is called the Potteries. It comprises some seven or eight acres, with about 260 houses (if the term can be applied to such hovels), and a population of 900 or 1,000. The occupation of the inhabitants is principally pig-fattening. Many hundreds of pigs, ducks and fowl are kept in an incredible state of filth. Dogs abound, for the purpose of guarding the swine. The atmosphere is still further polluted by the process of fat-boiling. In these hovels, discontent, dirt, filth, and misery are unsurpassed by anything known even in Ireland. . . . There are foul ditches, open sewers, and defective drains, smelling most offensively, and generating large quantities of poisonous gases; . . . not a drop of clean water can be obtained; all is charged to saturation with putrescent matter. . . . Nearly all the inhabitants look unhealthy; the women especially complain of sickness and want of appetite, their eyes are sunken, and their skin shrivelled.†

The next fifty years saw the establishment of charitable organizations in the area, mostly schools and clubs, and the majority with a strong emphasis on religion and temperance. A proper road was built to the area (now Princedale Road) and a public park was laid out on the site of a large brick field (Avondale Park, opened 1892). Measures were taken to improve housing standards and reduce overcrowding. The pigs were evicted in 1883. The human population, however, was considerably enlarged and this impeded any great improvement in conditions. Expansion to the south and east was prevented by the terraces and crescents of the wealthy. A stream

* Quoted in Mrs Mary Bayly's book, *Ragged Homes and How to Mend Them*. Full references are given in Appendix C.

† Charles Dickens, *Household Words*.

Notting Dale

which had become an open sewer (its line is now followed by Lati-mer Road and Norland Road) and the railway embankment beyond it prevented expansion to the west. So the expansion was northwards, to the top of Walmer Road, where it met the border of the St Quintin estate, then open land. Of the new inhabitants, some were navvies who came to build the Metropolitan Line in the 1850s, some were gipsies who came and went for many years and finally settled in the 1870s, and most were people from central London made homeless by the destroying of old tenements to make room for more salubrious mansions. Many of the women worked in small laundries. The men were casual labourers, costermongers and rag-and-bone men. Quite a lot were criminals.

In the 1890s, Charles Booth wrote :

The Potteries, which occupied part of the ground now known as Notting Dale, seem to have been built on an isolated estate only accessible along a narrow muddy lane. Whether from this bad start or from some other causes, historical or geographical, the district has for long been the resting place for tramps entering London from the North or West, and gipsy blood is very evident amongst the children in the schools. . . . Some of its denizens might stay only a night, some a week, others months or even years, but as a general rule, sooner or later, they were accustomed to move on to St Giles's or Whitechapel and thence forth again as fate or fancy or fortune stirred them; and then some day Notting Dale would see them once more. The stream still flows, but of late the inward current has been met here by a stronger tide of a different character, consisting of the very dregs of more central London stirred up and dispersed by improvements or alterations involving the destruction of old rookeries, and the result is a perhaps unexampled concourse of the disreputable classes. As to this all authorities are agreed.

These people are poor, in many cases distressfully so, but there may be truth in the statement of one of our lay witnesses that 'in these bad streets there is generally money going; it is the way of spending it that is amiss'. The inhabitants are, in fact, rather criminal than poor, or if not strictly criminal, a very little removed from criminality. They form the most serious mass of the kind with which we have to deal; greater, probably, than any now remaining on any one spot in the central part of London.*

Elsewhere he says :

In 1898 the death-rate was 45.5 per 1,000 and infant mortality reached the appalling figure of 419 per 1,000.†

* Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London*.

† *ibid.*

A Community Project in Notting Dale

In this century, efforts by the Borough Council and local housing trusts have improved the situation. Notably, five streets called the 'Special Area' which were perhaps the worst in London for that combination of poverty and crime described by Booth have all been rebuilt. Nonetheless, a survey carried out for a council redevelopment plan for the Norland neighbourhood* in 1949 found :

The general condition of the properties within the Redevelopment Area is of low standard. . . . The majority of properties suffer from the following defects: they have basements; are structurally defective; are built on or too near the pavement lines; are built on congested sites with small back yards and narrow streets; are in multiple occupation without proper adaptation; lack bathrooms and have defective sanitation.

There is a general lack of social amenities in the Redevelopment Area. There is no theatre; no public hall apart from available accommodation at the Borough Council's Lancaster Road Public Baths; no cinema; totally inadequate provision of open spaces and outdoor entertainment; no public library, the nearest being the Borough Council's North Kensington Branch library in Lancaster Road; and no centralized market. †

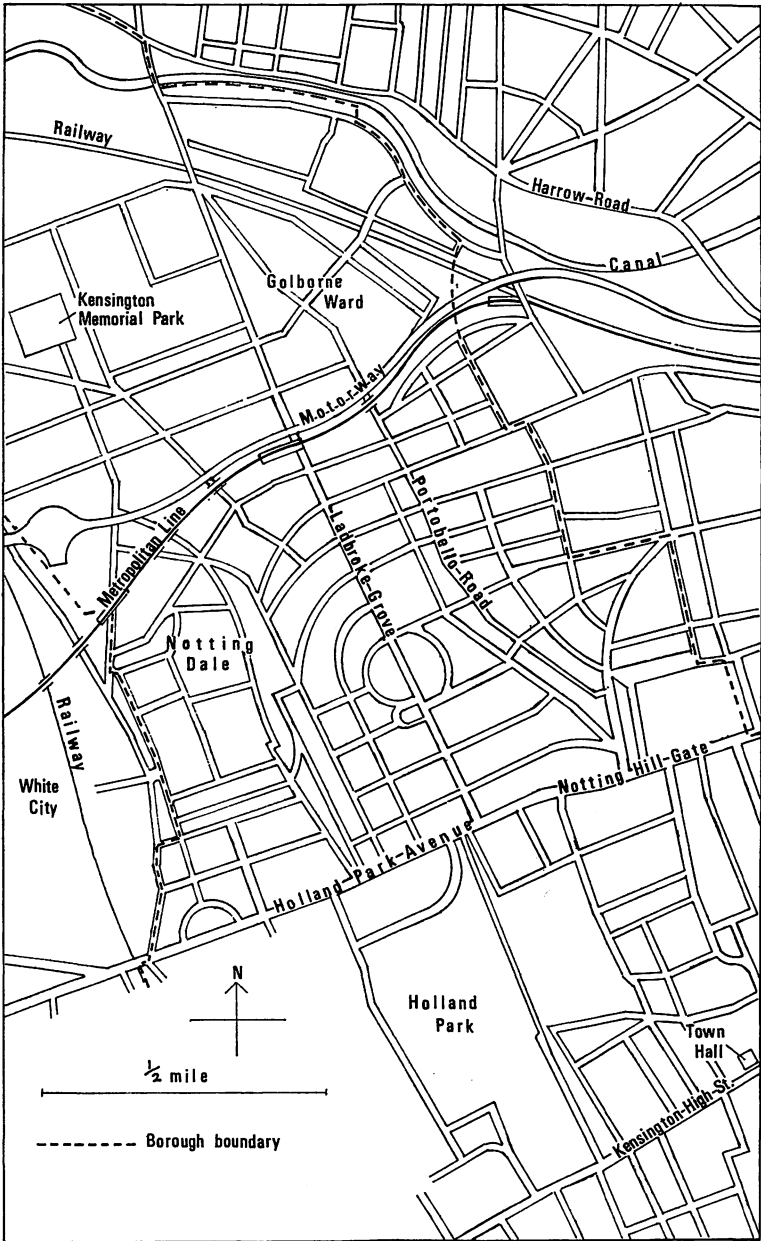
Notting Dale is in the northern part of the second richest borough in London, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. North Kensington has a long history of poor housing and overcrowding and contains the most overcrowded ward in London. ‡ It is traditionally an area to which immigrants to Britain have come, from Ireland, some from Europe, from Africa and, particularly in the 1950s, from the West Indies. The population is unsettled and has a lot of social problems, for which the services and amenities are inadequate. One example is that, whereas in South Kensington, for every tenth of an acre of public open space there are nine children, in North Kensington there are eighty-nine.** Notting Dale, though sharing many of North Kensington's problems, has more council and housing trust property and has had fewer immigrants over the last twenty years. Its population is in general more settled, some of its families going back for several generations.

* The area bounded by Holland Park Avenue, Clarendon Road, Silchester Road, the Metropolitan Line and the West London Railway.

† *Norland Neighbourhood Draft Development Plan*, 1949.

‡ The Golborne Ward. *The Milner Holland Report on Housing in Greater London*, 1964.

** A statistic calculated for an exhibition by the North Kensington Play-groups Committee, 1966.



North Kensington

A Community Project in Notting Dale

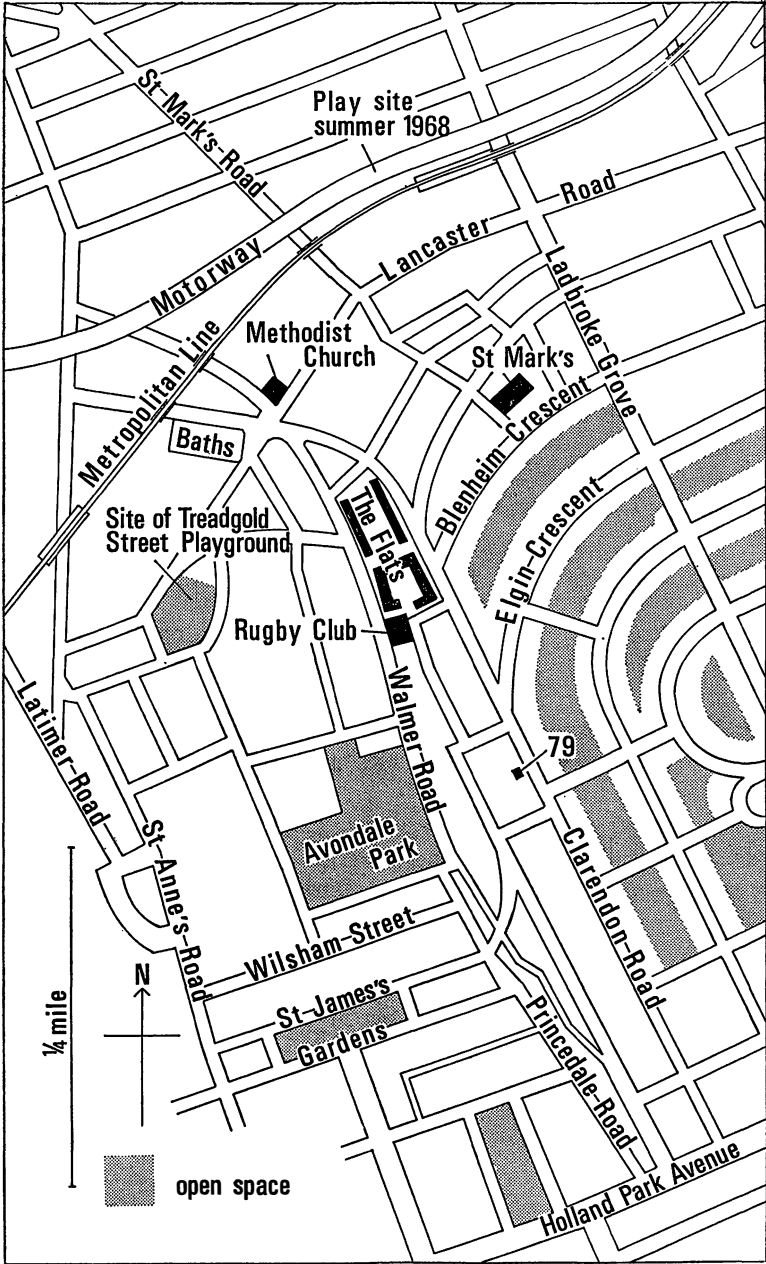
Most of the north-west corner of Notting Dale has been replaced by a Greater London Council housing estate and a concrete flyover, and the area alongside the Metropolitan Line on the south side is to be demolished under a council redevelopment scheme, though only a small part has so far been evacuated. At the present time, therefore, Notting Dale is an area about a quarter of a mile square bounded, roughly, by Clarendon Road, the Metropolitan Line, St Anne's Road and Wilsham Street. The population is between 4,000 and 5,000.*

The council flats which came to be the centre of the project are not themselves to be touched by the Council's redevelopment plan for the area, but large parts of their immediate neighbourhood will be. The following description, written in 1969, is of how the area was at the time of the project.

Clarendon Road was laid down as part of the Ladbrooke Estate and is consequently wide and straight. Walmer Road developed with the Potteries and is really a number of older roads joined up, so it is narrower and bends more. The two converge gradually till a sharp left bend at the northern tip of Clarendon Road brings them to a point. Between these roads, just before the bend, lie the flats – Nottingwood House, Allom House and Barlow House.

Nottingwood House is a structure from the 1930s, large and like a fortress. A small ball court with a few trees round it is surrounded on all four sides by a continuous wall of flats that forms a complete square except for a gap at the west end of the south side. Including the ground floor, each side has five floors and is about seventy yards long on the outside. Most of the flats have a balcony overlooking the ball court, but are entered from the outer side. Boxed-in staircases stand against the wall like buttresses, with balconies leading off to the small front doors. The stairs are of concrete. They are entered through a small brick arch and climb in flights of eight, two flights between each floor, making sixty-four steps to the top. There are no lifts. When the steps have been washed, or wet by the rain, they stay damp a long time. The whole building is built of darkish brick. The doors, the window frames, the drainpipes, the metal rails that run up the stairs and the wrought iron grilles in the wall are painted green. In all, there are 100 flats in Nottingwood House and about 400 people live in them.

* 1961 Census.



Notting Dale

A Community Project in Notting Dale

One storey lower than Nottingwood and to its northern side, facing each other across a space of grass and tarmac, stand Allom House and Barlow House. They are both long and rectangular and, except that Allom House has one staircase more, they are almost identical. They were built twenty years later than Nottingwood, but the main principles of the design are the same. The flats are reached by concrete staircases, which project some way from the wall on one side giving the same buttress effect, but these stairways are boxed in completely and the doors of the flats are inside the building. The windows are in orderly rows, large, metal framed and painted cream. The walls are of brick like Nottingwood, though not so dark.

Between these two blocks of flats, next to the walls, lie small gardens, some cared for diligently, others not at all. These gardens are bounded by chain-link fences and tarmac paths, leaving a space in the middle about eighty yards by thirty. The northern half of it is a tarmac courtyard surrounded by concrete posts and chain-link fencing ten feet high. The southern half is a large square of well kept grass and trees. The Borough Council, who owns these flats and this land, does not allow the residents to walk on this grass, so it is surrounded by a four foot fence.

It is just after the flats that Clarendon Road bends to cross Walmer Road and these two roads, with the flats, form a small triangle of terraced houses with shops on the ground floor. There are three butchers, three grocers, two greengrocers, a baker, a chemist, a drycleaner's, two hairdressers, shops selling second-hand furniture, children's clothes, electrical gear, a post office, a betting shop, a café, a pub, 'Dolly's, the worker's florist' and 'A. E. Allen, waste paper, rag and general merchants'.

Of the six corners formed where Clarendon Road, Walmer Road and Lancaster Road all cross, three are occupied by small shops with flats above, and the others by three public buildings. One is a Methodist church. As well as housing the actual church, this building contains a variety of other rooms and a large basement hall and is used for youth clubs and other gatherings and occasionally public meetings. This labyrinthine arrangement is matched by the exterior which is a collection of spiky roofs and pointed windows in the Victorian Gothic style with a small sharp spire on the corner. Opposite stands a pub. Wide, bow fronted, with heavy cornices and a parapet planted firmly on the top, its business is evidently more worldly than its neighbour's. And the third is a public baths. Built

Notting Dale

at a time when baths in the home were a rarity, it has baths for washing as well as baths for swimming, and also a public laundry still much used.

Apart from another council estate, the rest of the area's houses are in working-class terraces with some small blocks of flats, many of them housing trust property. There are some schools and churches, a park, a new clinic opposite Nottingwood House and a youth club called the Rugby Club from its association with Rugby School. Down side roads and mews are many small workshops, garages and spare-part dealers, and the yards and stables of rag-and-bone men. It is in this area that the people in this book conduct most of their daily lives.

Chapter 2

The Family Study Before the Project

In the summer of 1958 there were race riots in Notting Hill :

On the night of Saturday–Sunday, 23–24 August, three incidents occurred to start the main disturbances around Notting Dale. In the first, a coloured man was attacked at a public house in Notting Hill by some white men, who struck him with ‘dustbin lids and broken milk bottles’. They escaped without trace. At one o’clock that morning milk bottles were thrown at the windows of two houses occupied by coloured people in Bramley Road, in the centre of Notting Dale. Between three and five the same morning, in various parts of Notting Hill, six West Indians were attacked and badly injured by teddy boys wielding iron bars. Nine youths were arrested, all of whom except one (who was from Acton) came from the White City estate area in Shepherd’s Bush. It was they who were later sentenced to terms of imprisonment of four years each. They were stated in court to have admitted that they were ‘nigger hunting’, by which they meant looking for coloured men ‘to beat them up’ . . .

On Sunday night, 31 August, a crowd of 200 whites gathered in Bramley Road and started to shout at coloured people. The crowd later grew to about 700; fifteen whites and four coloured men were arrested, but not before two police cars had been damaged. . . .

The national papers of Monday, 1 September, splashed the story of the night’s incidents, many of the reports being distorted and misleading. Monday night began with a number of incidents in the Notting Hill area, one of which was the first and only effective fascist meeting. Some teddy boys were directly addressed and stirred up by speakers and they moved off in an excited state. Crowds moved through the area, but none were more than 200. Altogether about 700 people were involved. Some coloured people were carrying knives and retaliating by throwing milk bottles from the upper storeys of houses but in general they appeared to be frightened and to be avoiding notice. Several people were injured, the windows of five houses were smashed and a door broken down. A roughly equal number of whites and coloureds were arrested – eighteen white men, two white women, and eighteen coloured men. The coloured men were generally older but there were many white adults involved in the incidents. Those arrested were from North Kensington and Maida

The Family Study Before the Project

Vale, with a few from Shepherd's Bush. But the police, who were out in force, were concerned mainly to confine the trouble within limits and did not enter the main body of the crowds.*

The riots subsided early in September and, soon after, the Mayor of Kensington set up a committee to investigate the cause of the troubles and the steps which might be taken to prevent a recurrence. This committee was largely composed of clergymen and social workers from voluntary agencies. Among its members was Mrs Joy Isaacs, a school care committee worker, and it was chiefly due to her work that a subcommittee produced a report on 31 October.

Since the majority of those convicted in the race riots were young men, blame had been fixed on the teddy boys. The writers of this report, however, made it clear from the beginning that the race riots and general juvenile violence of the area were merely symptoms of deeper troubles. Neither the 'youth problem' nor the 'race problem' could be tackled in isolation. Any action that was undertaken, therefore, should not be directed specifically at either of these problems, but at a more general improvement of North Kensington. Although the project that eventually came out of this had its origin in the race riots, it was never intended that it should concentrate on race relations. The other main point made in the report was that not enough was known about the area. The suggestion, then, was that research should be carried out, possibly by some academic institution, and at the same time some practical measures should be taken. This sort of project was called 'action research'. Apart from a suggestion that the social services could be better coordinated, no specific practical measures were recommended, but the general idea was of 'a combined sociological and social welfare operation'.

In time, the Mayor's committee ceased to meet, but Mrs Isaacs, in the course of her work for the subcommittee, had formed a small working group consisting of herself, her husband Godfrey Isaacs, Dame Eileen Youngusband and Dr Faith Spicer, who ran a clinic in North Kensington. This group met frequently and consulted many experts in sociology and social work. They were continually reviewing their plans for a project in North Kensington, and it is interesting in view of later developments to find, in some notes of December 1958, the sentence, 'Build up community

* James Wickenden, *Colour in Britain*, pp. 40-42.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

action and spirit to help each other, and develop whatever natural talent there may be in the area for leadership and action.' The final proposals, written in May 1959, were for 'a preliminary survey to collect accurate and up-to-date information about the range and nature of the problems present in the area and the statutory and voluntary social services available to cope with them', followed by 'a comprehensive operational research study directed towards effecting an all round improvement in the environment and behaviour of the people living in the neighbourhood'. The scale of these early plans is made evident in a set of notes which suggest a team of three or four workers for the research and six for the practical work.

It was almost two years, however, before any of this work began, and then on a smaller scale than the plans had envisaged, the reason for the delay being simply that such a project needed money, which was hard to come by. Part of the trouble was that a university group was doing a small survey of the economic condition of the area and it was feared the two might overlap. Another difficulty was in gaining the active support of distinguished and influential people since, though favourably disposed towards the project, they were usually too busy to offer much help. An exception was Dame Eileen Younghusband, who had great interest in the project from the start. The Lady Norman also joined the small committee, and later Mr David Jones and Dr Marie Jahoda, who agreed to act as consultant for the survey.

From the time that the small group began seeking a grant up to the beginning of the work, the project had been known as the North Kensington Project. Then, for the purpose of administering the funds, it became a registered charity under the title of the North Kensington Family Study. This name is rather misleading since, though the first part of the work was to be a study, it was never intended specifically as a study of families or of family life. The name was chosen to emphasize that the project would not concentrate on immigrants or on any particular age group. The name has remained, however, even though it later became more of a misnomer when the study was completed and the practical work began.

THREE EXPERIMENTS IN SELF-HELP

A grant for the preliminary survey was given by the City Parochial

The Family Study Before the Project

Foundation, and in May 1962 the Committee employed Miss Pearl Jephcott, a person of much experience in social research and author of several books. She finished the work in November 1963 and wrote a book entitled *A Troubled Area, Notes on Notting Hill*. Since she had only eighteen months in which to complete the work and write it up, it was not a thoroughgoing social survey but rather 'a brief and impressionistic study'. Concentrating on an area within a radius of about seven minutes' walk from Ladbroke Grove Station*, she described the numerous and diverse problems of North Kensington and made many suggestions for the area's improvement. Part of her task was to find out what ordinary residents of the area felt about it, and out of this came some experiments in community self-help. The suggestion was made in a letter she wrote to the chairman of the Family Study Committee after the first five months of her work:

I should say straight away that I have been most disturbed by what I have seen, and I do not think I have met a single person in a responsible position who regards the state of this part of London with equanimity. I refer particularly to the shocking housing; to the extent of marital troubles, of involvement with the police, of living on National Assistance; to the constant shift of population, and to the lack of any real contact between migrants and the local community. . . . Slum appearances and attitudes that have vanished in, for example, a working class area like Bermondsey, are still a commonplace here. I get the impression that the problems have been identified. The difficulty is to get effective action on so many and such interlocking issues. . . . My contacts with the residents in general suggest that there are certain households who, given some lead (perhaps by members of our Committee) might get small groups of tenants based on geographical proximity to tackle short-term objectives.

The involvement of the local people in self-help schemes was an idea which the Committee had had from the first months, this being expressed, for example, in a letter of February 1960 from the Committee to the City Parochial Foundation:

It became apparent . . . that to alleviate the serious problems in the whole area it would be of great assistance to produce a blueprint with the idea behind it, not of merely imposing on the community more social workers, better clubs, or other piecemeal help, although this, of

* She referred to this area as Notting Dale. The present authors use the term to refer to the district described in Chapter 1.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

course, it is realized will help, but to try to work, not on the community but with the community, in getting them to help themselves.

Three schemes were undertaken :

Those selected for experiment were intended to be relatively simple ones, and the action involved was to be in keeping with local life in that it would not necessitate people joining any society and would not require very protracted effort on their part. The three problems finally chosen were ones which residents had referred to frequently. They had spoken of the loneliness of so many old people; of the unsightliness of the dustbins; and of the lack of outdoor play space near at hand.*

For the first experiment, Pearl Jephcott had the help of Miss Gwynedd Richards, an experienced social worker who gave voluntary help and who later joined the Family Study Committee. They visited twelve old people in November 1962 to see if they would like to receive Christmas parcels. They then contacted about twenty households in the same area and asked if they would help to make the parcels, either by donating goods or cash or by helping with sewing and knitting. Sixteen agreed to help. As one helper remembers :

We met in the Portobello Road in a two-roomed flat in which a husband, wife and baby in a pram lived on one side with a curtain down the middle and another woman lived on the other side. We met in the middle to make these Christmas parcels. It involved an enormous amount of work. I went to the Church Army and we collected quite a lot of materials. Pearl did a lot of visiting of the coloured people who all stitched up lovely machine-made shirts with palm trees and bananas up the back for the old-age pensioners whom we were to give things to. And lots of coloured children arrived and did cards. Not one coloured person would go round with the bag of parcels because they were afraid of what people would say. So a friend and I delivered them. We both got pneumonia soon afterwards.

The second problem tackled was the rubbish which accumulated in front gardens and on the street because the dustbins provided were not enough for the number of people living in the houses. The Family Study arranged an experiment to see whether paper sacks could be used instead of dustbins. The paper manufacturing firm of Bowaters provided the metal stands and enough sacks for a three-month trial. The Borough Council's refuse disposal staff agreed to cooperate, and the Kensington Housing Trust undertook

*Pearl Jephcott, *A Troubled Area*.

The Family Study Before the Project

the experiment with some of its houses. The residents had no trouble using the sacks and the scheme was generally agreed to be a success. The Kensington Housing Trust has since adopted this method of refuse disposal at all its properties, but the Borough Council has not undertaken the experiment in the whole of North Kensington since it is considered to be the landlord's responsibility to provide the means of refuse disposal.

The third experiment arose from Pearl's observation that there were a number of small green spaces in North Kensington which could be used more than they were. The experiment was in establishing playgroups for small children. Two sites were selected. One was a large communal garden of grass and trees between Blenheim Crescent and Elgin Crescent which exists for the sole use of the residents of the terraces which back onto it. The other was a plot of grass lying behind a block of Church Army flats in Basing Street. Permission was obtained to experiment with playgroups on these sites, and in the spring of 1963 Pearl convened a small committee of local residents and social workers who were concerned about play provision for small children. Health visitors and representatives from the Save the Children Fund were at the first meeting of this group, which came to be called the North Kensington Playgroups Committee. The salaries of the playgroup workers, one for each group, were paid by the Save the Children Fund and other funds were provided by the Family Study Committee and administered by the Playgroups Committee. The two playgroups, open for two-hour sessions, ran for a trial period of thirteen weeks – twice a week in the Gardens, three times a week in Basing Street – before closing for the school summer holidays. The numbers of children were small, but those who attended enjoyed it, and some of the mothers took an interest, especially at Basing Street.

THE BEGINNING OF THE PLAYGROUPS

Of the three experiments, the playgroups offered the most promise of continuing support from local residents, and so, partly for this reason and partly because of the acute shortage of provision for small children in North Kensington, the Family Study employed a worker to experiment further with establishing playgroups, if possible with greater involvement of local residents. Miss Helen Sheils, an Australian with the rare combination of training in both community development and nursery work, began in October 1963,

A Community Project in Notting Dale

two months before Pearl Jephcott left, which gained her a useful introduction to Pearl's many contacts in the area. Helen described in a later report* the method she employed in this work :

In the ordinary way, a community development worker would begin his work with the people of a neighbourhood with an open mind about what sort of common needs and possibilities of community action might emerge from the local discussion that he was concerned to foster. He would, too, be inclined to work along with the structure of indigenous leadership that emerged in the course of this sort of discussion, rather than impose a pattern to which he required community initiative to conform. And in helping a community group to achieve the wants that it defined (for example a community hall for club meetings and bingo, or a pedestrian crossing on a busy traffic street used by children), he would be ready to act as a resources person (for example if nobody locally knew what government department to approach), but would probably choose not to put himself at the point of action, or of responsibility for deciding on action.

In these two community playgroup undertakings, by contrast, the agency and its worker, with advice from its Playgroups Committee, started from the assumption that play provision for children was an important felt need in each of the neighbourhoods chosen for work. The worker's initial discussions with parents and neighbours confirmed this to be so, and work would not have gone forward there had there been a marked lack of local interest; but the choice of this focus of community effort was nevertheless the agency's, not the community's. Secondly, in helping the community to meet this need, the agency was offering the services of a worker who could herself provide the essential resource for meeting it, namely her skills as nursery school teacher or playgroup worker. These represent considerable modifications of the element of community initiative and responsibility involved in the undertakings.

The Save the Children Fund were happy to continue running the Basing Street playgroup in temporary winter premises, and had plans for building a permanent playhut at the Basing Street site, but they declined to keep a worker for the Blenheim-Elgin Gardens group as there was no winter accommodation they considered adequate. The Family Study, however, were taking an increasing interest in playgroups and were keen that the Gardens playgroup should continue, so it was to this that Helen Sheils devoted her energy in her first months.

* Helen Sheils, 'Community-based Playgroups', September 1964.

The Family Study Before the Project

Her first problem was the lack of good premises. There was a small studio hut in the Gardens and this she obtained at a low rent. She had an electric fire installed, repaired the roof and cleaned the place up, being helped in this considerable task by some residents of the houses nearby. She visited many of the families who were entitled to use the Gardens, many of whom had been unaware of their right to do so, and delivered letters explaining the purpose of the playgroup, asking for help to get the hut in order, and calling a meeting of any mothers who were interested. Twelve mothers came to the meeting and it was decided to open the playgroup for three afternoon sessions per week of two hours each and to make some small charge for orange juice, plasticine and the like. They also suggested that Helen should have the help of at least one mother during playgroup sessions, so a rota was established for this purpose. This meeting was in December 1963 and the Blenheim-Elgin Playgroup, as it came to be called, opened soon after.

The playgroup ran satisfactorily during the winter. Though Helen took the major part in starting and running the playgroup, she always intended that it should eventually become independent of her and of the Family Study, and a step was taken in this direction at the second mothers' meeting held in March, at which 'it was agreed that it would be useful to have a firm local committee that need not be dependent on the person (at present Miss Sheils) who runs the playgroup'.* A chairman, treasurer and secretary were elected, and a representative for the North Kensington Playgroups Committee. Another step was taken shortly after when they decided to pay the rent of the hut. (This and the electricity bill had previously been paid by the North Kensington Playgroups Committee with funds obtained from the Family Study.)

This playgroup did not occupy all Helen's time in the first months of 1964. The Playgroups Committee,† at a meeting in February, suggested a number of sites in North Kensington for further playgroups and asked her to investigate them. She produced reports on ten of these sites and in April, on her recommendation, the Playgroups Committee decided that an experimental summer playgroup should be started at one of them, a place suggested by health visitors where a playgroup would be

* Blenheim-Elgin playgroup minutes.

† The term 'the Playgroups Committee' will be used to mean the North Kensington Playgroups Committee.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

particularly valuable. This was the courtyard between Allom House and Barlow House.

That this decision about Helen's work should be made by the Playgroups Committee is an example of the confusion that existed about the functions of the Playgroups Committee and its relation to the Family Study. It had been started by Pearl Jephcott as an *ad hoc* body to supervise the experimental playgroups of 1963. The Family Study allotted some money for this experiment and allowed the Playgroups Committee to administer it, but the Playgroups Committee never had funds of its own, and therefore never employed any workers. When Pearl left, she hoped that both those playgroups would continue (which they did) and thought it would be valuable if the Playgroups Committee also continued. She therefore urged Mrs Isaacs, the chairman of the Family Study Committee, to attend the Playgroups Committee meetings. Mrs Isaacs did this and in April 1964 she became Chairman of the Playgroups Committee, to prevent it collapsing, though it was not without misgivings that she did so. This made the Playgroups Committee look like a subcommittee of the Family Study, and some of its members thought it was, for they wrote Playgroups Committee letters on Family Study notepaper with the subheading 'Subcommittee Playgroups'. It also behaved in many ways as if it were a subcommittee, notably in receiving reports from Family Study workers and making decisions about their work. It may be that these decisions were intended rather as suggestions or recommendations to the Family Study Committee, for it often happened that the Family Study made identical decisions shortly after. (The decision that Helen should start this new playgroup, for instance, was made by the Family Study the following month.) But the Playgroups Committee minutes certainly list them as decisions. It never made decisions which the workers disagreed with – it was obviously in no position to do so – nor did it direct the workers in a way of which the Family Study would have disapproved. Nonetheless, since it was not a formal subcommittee, the members of the Family Study Committee felt they had no obligation and no right to supervise its operations (some of them knew almost nothing about it), but it looked and acted as if it were, and this tended to reinforce the bias towards playgroup work which persisted into the five-year project.

It was from this decision to set up another playgroup, then, that the first contact was made with the residents of the council flats,

The Family Study Before the Project

Nottingham House, Allom House and Barlow House.

Helen described this first contact:

It was one of those spring days that readily turn the thoughts of mothers and their young children to a green and pleasant place for outdoor relaxation, and the worker, visiting the estate, walked over to a small group of women who were talking with one another outside one of the stairway doors while their children played on the asphalt paths. 'Do you ever have any idea of starting some sort of playgroup on the grass for the young children, while the others are at school?' she asked. The women looked taken aback for a moment; not surprisingly, for one of them said, 'That's funny, that's just what we were talking about, just this minute. I stand out here to see that mine's all right, and she comes to keep an eye on hers. If we put them through on to the grass the caretaker roars at us.'

The Borough Housing Department did not then give permission for the grass to be used, and in fact it never has, but it was possible to run a playgroup on the tarmac courtyard. Helen spent three weeks visiting a good many families in the flats whose names the health visitor had given her as having children under five. She felt the response favourable enough to justify a trial run and so, with some equipment bought by the Playgroups Committee, some given by local schools and some borrowed from the Blenheim-Elgin Playgroup, she began running a playgroup for three mornings a week.

One mother offered her pramshed for storing equipment, and several helped to carry the toys to and fro. The worker was usually left to run the playgroup alone, though in the later weeks some of the mothers helped in this as well. To quote again from Helen's report:

On the second morning, two mothers came and said, 'Well, it's quite nice for them, isn't it? What about if us mothers keep it going in the afternoons?' There seemed to be a group of five or six from the two small blocks associated with this proposal. They said, 'We won't have the sand and the paints. They can be put away and we'll just have the other things.' The worker said she would not be happy for the group to go on quite like that, because it was important for the children to have some messy things to use. 'What about keeping the sand out and putting the painting things away, for a start?' So a locally supervised afternoon session started, and continued on as a normal thing for the next three weeks. The worker sometimes came around on a visit from the other playgroup. Looked at from a professional standpoint of playgroup

A Community Project in Notting Dale

management, the standard appeared to vary a good deal. As a piece of social cooperation, and sometimes as a social gathering, it appeared to be a successful venture. Sometimes half the playthings were left stacked up near the fence, where they were put at lunch-time; seven or eight mothers would sometimes sit in a close group talking, not attending to the children except in an obvious crisis. Sometimes the things were well laid out, and the mothers there spent time near the children who were using a variety of things, and attended to them.

After the mothers had started running the afternoon group, they considered making a small charge to cover the orange juice and the sand and perhaps to buy equipment, and a charge of 4d. per child per day was fixed.

In the fourth week that the playgroup had been going, the staff were met with accounts of dissension and schism amongst the mothers. One difficulty was over turns for being in charge of the afternoon sessions, which the mothers had up till then organized amongst themselves in ways invisible to the workers. Almost always, most of the mothers from the two close blocks would know who was 'on' that afternoon, and who was keeping an eye on the place at lunchtime. But now the complaint was that some whose children came did not help, while some only came and sat out with the one on duty but never took the responsibility. There seemed to be two articulate groups at loggerheads on this issue, and the question of money divided them further, one of the leaders who cared for several young children saying she would have to draw out altogether because of the cost, and the leader of the other group commenting on this as a mean attitude. The worker talked to some mothers in both camps and said that there had not so far been a meeting to discuss these matters and that this seemed the time. She pointed out that some of the mothers from the farther block had probably never been asked to help in the afternoons. She had not asked them, and had the other mothers? A meeting time was fixed, and care was taken to ask all the mothers who often came to the playgroup. The worker thought it quite possible that the outcome would be the disintegration of the mothers' participation in the work. The meeting gathered around the closest doorstep to the playcourt. Nine mothers came. The dominant concern seemed to be to air views and adjust the arrangements without endangering the enterprise as a whole. A sliding scale of contributions was fixed for big families; the worker produced a rota board that would hang on the fence, and some mothers from the farther parts of the estate put their names down for afternoon as well as morning duty.

All agreed that the group should disband for the summer holidays, but were eager that it should continue the following term.

The Family Study Before the Project

The summer of 1964, then, saw the Family Study running three playgroups (the two just described and another, temporary one), and interested in a fourth (Basing Street), with the mothers involved in making some decisions such as when to open the playgroup and how much to charge and in helping the worker with the children. Running three playgroups, in addition to the visiting that was necessary, was too much for one worker, and Helen had the part-time help from May onwards of Miss Pat Foster, who was a trained nursery nurse and had had some experience of residential work in a home for autistic children.

THE PLAN FOR THE FIVE-YEAR PROJECT

In her foreword to *A Troubled Area*, Dame Eileen Younghusband wrote:

The various action experiments undertaken as part of the survey were not primarily concerned with providing Christmas presents for lonely old people or playgroups for small children or better disposal of litter, desirable though these are in themselves. The real purpose was to discover whether and under what circumstances small groups of people could be got together to work on some project of obvious benefit to themselves or their neighbours, and whether as a result there would be some growth in their ability to do things collectively, which in turn would extend and strengthen the network of social relationships.

The Family Study Committee considered the results of the experiments, especially the playgroups, sufficiently encouraging to apply once more to the City Parochial Foundation for a grant for a five-year project. In their application they described their approach to the work thus:

The North Kensington Family Study's approach to improving some of the conditions of life in the area is to work imaginatively with local people in ways that can help them to help themselves. Experience suggests that the goodwill and ability to cooperate in shared local effort that are by no means absent in the area often need impetus and support from a skilled professional worker if they are to come into operation and issue in effective undertakings. The first step in this approach is to isolate issues on which local residents can play a major part in bringing about reforms, given the necessary support. The professional worker's task will normally then encompass three stages for each community undertaking and it is important that each worker should be available on a sufficiently long-term basis to become known locally as a person who

A Community Project in Notting Dale

can be relied upon for help well into the second stage at least of each undertaking. These stages are:

- (1) The difficult first stage where intensive work is needed to mobilize local initiative and effort, help give it form and direction, and work closely with the people involved until ways of doing the day-by-day work in hand are established in practice;
- (2) A middle stage, sometimes long and sometimes short, where the new local group or activity is functioning, but needs regular help and backing by the professional worker; and
- (3) A transition to becoming a self-supporting organization or group (or a customary local activity), or to becoming sufficiently stable to be accommodated within a more routine pattern of responsibility to one of the permanent agencies working in the area.

The worker, then, was to initiate a number of small self-help groups to tackle problems that it was within their capabilities to solve, supplying much help in the early stages, but encouraging them to become independent as quickly as possible and then leaving them to continue either alone or attached to some other agency. It was on this principle that the playgroups had been established and it was hoped that they would soon become self-supporting.

The main reason for employing this method – and this was taken for granted – was that involving the local people and using local resources to solve North Kensington's problems was in itself desirable. It was also hoped that a 'springboard' effect would occur. The idea here was that the worker's help to a group in the early stages would enable it later to 'take off' on its own, perhaps recruiting new members, taking on new activities and even forming other groups. The project would then have started a chain reaction. It was hoped that the project would at least leave behind a number of local groups, running various activities, who could carry on without it.

The City Parochial Foundation agreed to finance a five-year project and the Family Study appointed Miss Ilys Booker. Ilys was a Canadian. Her work after the war had been in the Popular Adult Education Programme sponsored by the Government of Ontario. She had come to England in 1955 and had worked for the London Council of Social Service in advising community groups on housing estates, work which had resulted in the formation of the Association of London Housing Estates.* For eighteen months

* This work is described by George Goetschius in *Working with Community Groups*.

The Family Study Before the Project

she had done community development in the small town of Menfi in southern Sicily, supported by the Danilo Dolci Committee in the United Kingdom, and she was working again with the A.L.H.E. when this opportunity came to work in North Kensington. She was to begin work on 31 October 1964.

Chapter 3

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

ILYS'S APPROACH

The name of Ilys Booker was not new to the social workers of North Kensington when she began the five-year project in October 1964, for she had made a considerable impact in a lecture to the Notting Hill Social Council in May.* The lecture was on 'Local leadership in the community' and three points she made give some idea of her philosophy and method of work:

Leadership can be imposed by people who go into an area and stay there but who have not grown up there, or by people who move in and out of an area daily. This type of leadership is often commissioned by some organization, such as the Church. On the other hand, there is leadership exercised by ordinary members of the community, which can be called indigenous leadership. One can always find the first kind of leadership, but this indigenous leadership is often not at all apparent. I have been told that there is no indigenous leadership in North Kensington, but when I come to work here, I hope to be able to find some. There is no such thing as a place without leadership . . .

Social workers might think they know what the needs of an area are, but they are seeing these from their point of view as a child care officer or a probation officer or whatever they are. The people who live in the area have different opinions. (Young people do also, but nobody ever consults them.) It is essential to consult people about what they think their needs are. It is the greatest mistake to decide for other people what needs to be done . . .

It is the early stage of finding leadership that is so difficult. One has to work very slowly finding out what people want and helping

* The Notting Hill Social Council developed as a result of the race riots. Its monthly meetings provide an opportunity for the many people working on the social problems of North Kensington to meet, discuss and take concerted action on certain issues. It has initiated some social work projects. Its membership is largely composed of professional social workers, ministers of religion, members of voluntary organizations working in the area and, latterly, some members from community groups.

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

them to achieve it themselves. One tries to transmit one's skill to enable others to find their feet and exercise leadership. The function of the community worker is to become redundant.*

The term 'community development' is sometimes used to include all kinds of work whose general object is the welfare of a community, 'community' perhaps meaning no more than the people who live in a particular geographical area. In this use, workers in settlements or community centres, workers attempting to get public participation in a development plan, workers conducting a civil rights campaign, workers trying to improve race relations, workers coordinating the services or making them fit better the needs of the people served, as well as workers encouraging the growth of local self-help groups, might all be said to be doing community development. The term can be used more specifically, however, to refer to the kind of work whose object is to develop and assist groups of local people to take action of their own choosing in relation to their problems. It will be used in this specific way in this book, and 'community work' will be used as the more general term.

Community development was first applied in the 1930s and 40s in the developing countries which were undergoing rapid social change. It grew out of the realization that the reason why many schemes had failed, in agriculture, education, public health and so on, was that the ordinary people, on whose cooperation the success of the schemes depended, had not been consulted about what schemes they wanted and had not been involved in any important way in launching them and had therefore had no interest in making them succeed.

Local involvement was essential and could only be achieved, it was realized, by genuinely taking notice of what people themselves thought, so community development was designed to help people decide on and take part in schemes of their own. To give an example, a community development worker in southern Italy was himself of the opinion that a village's main problem was ill health due to poor sanitation. But what the villagers most wanted was a butcher's shop, since the neighbouring village had one, and they thought they should have one too. The worker, therefore, applied himself to helping them get a butcher's shop and then they

* This is a reconstruction of what Ilys said from the Social Council's report of the lecture. No transcript of the lecture exists.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

went on, together, to tackle other problems. Had the worker rejected their views about the butcher's shop and insisted from the beginning on the need for better sanitation, they would probably have ignored him. The main lines of the method are fairly well defined and several books have been written about it.*

There have always been two emphases in community development. Some people see it primarily as a way of getting things done – governments of developing countries, for example, have used it as a way to improve farming methods and thereby to increase prosperity. Others are more interested in the value of the activity to the people who take part, in the opportunity it gives them to develop their competence and their capacity for leadership. Obviously these do not exclude each other, but which one a worker is more interested in affects the way he works. Ily's interest, since she came to it via adult education, was more in what people get out of it. She had found the method to be appropriate in helping the groups which were formed on the new London housing estates of the 1950s and she was interested to see how it could be applied to a depressed urban community where more traditional methods had not met with complete success. She explained her version of it in a report to the Family Study Committee:

My first role is that of a resident in the area, using the services as all residents do and extending my connections with individuals and groups as I become familiar to people. My second role is that of a professional community worker who acts as the stimulator of ideas, helping people to crystallize the awareness of needs, problems and deficiencies. I am to act as the encourager and supporter of projects which might be started, giving a lot of time and attention to the group which is interested in taking some action, without actually accepting a place in the group myself.

My job is to help groups to accept more direct responsibility when they get under way and to work towards their independence, to be the supplier of some information and the signpost to information-getting in general, to clarify relationships between newly forming groups or between groups and the authorities, and to be the interpreter of local authority functions and responsibilities, of residents' rights and responsibilities, and of the distinctions in function of the local voluntary organizations, all of which it is essential to understand if rational action is to follow.

*See T. R. Batten, *The Non-directive Approach in Group and Community Work*; William W. Biddle and Loureide J. Biddle, *The Community Development Process*.

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

Whether one can play this role depends on a number of factors present in any neighbourhood setting. There is first the question of how one is viewed by members of the community. If one is merely a householder resident in the area, even if one states from time to time why one is there, it is most unlikely that anyone will come asking for something to be done. This is not only because this method of working for community integration is little known, but because it is in the very nature of neighbourhood life that relationships of any depth take long months, and often years, to mature. Superficial relationships are quite enough for chit-chat over the fence about 'this district', but are not likely to be rewarding as a means of encouraging group action, or at least not for some time.

The worker, therefore, is in a somewhat anomalous position, especially in the early stages, for people's awareness of problems and any action that follows can only emerge in the time it takes for the various stages to develop. Self-help, local action, cannot be created to order. Quick action, if it takes place at all, usually does so on the initiative and drive of one person. Group involvement takes time.

The roots of social action have to grow and cannot produce a full-blown activity for the wishing of it. Indeed, if the community worker wishes to initiate some activity and does succeed, the questions whether it is wanted, by whom it is wanted, for what reasons it is wanted and whether it will continue on its own remain to be answered. It is well known that many a community development worker has seen needs – obvious, undeniable needs – and has tried to get them resolved, only to discover that the neighbours, the villagers or the little local group felt that *that* need had a very low priority.

This means that the worker has a choice between three courses of action. She can choose a problem to work on and try to organize action around it; or she can suggest a number of projects, further action depending on the response to these ideas; or she can wait and see what initiative emerges. The second course was taken in setting up the playgroups, and I think it is likely that in the first three years of this project it is this course we shall be following. The spontaneous development of an awareness of the problems and the interest to meet them through community action is not at all likely for some long period.

In another report, she wrote :

A community is not, of course, composed only of families and individuals. There are many different groups and although to the outsider they are not at all obvious, in time and through familiarity with many residents, a network of relationships appears. The community has many small clusters of kith and kin. The clusters in turn have

A Community Project in Notting Dale

radial arrangements of satellite persons and groups. The worker gradually becomes aware of these group relationships and begins to discover that there are some people with specific roles. There are those who represent the social norms and who are therefore reference points in the value system. There are the pace-setters, the critics, the innovators, the reactionaries. In fact, a whole series of classic roles exists. It is these clusters of relationships and their satellites which form the fundamental neighbourhood network which is indispensable to the development worker.

The worker may uncover persons who display interest or initiative, or such persons may themselves seek out the worker in order to be useful or to be accepted. Very often 'community leaders' of this kind emerge quite early. The worker cannot, however, be sure that in such cases he is in touch with the community's own leaders, and often he is not. Just as the worker cannot guarantee that the obvious needs which he sees are those which are seen by the members of the community, so the 'leaders' which he discovers or who present themselves early on may not be those upon whom the members of the community have conferred status or to whom they turn for guidance and direction. The worker accepts all the leadership which presents itself, as it appears. He does not reject any overtures of interest or initiative. He is aware that those who represent the sanctions, the community's own 'key people' will emerge. He must simply bear in mind that the rate and degree of self-involvement of the community will depend on the approval of the key people whether they are among the first to appear or not.

Some knowledge of the group relationships and roles in the community is necessary before the worker can do much about felt need in the community. This is necessary for two reasons at least. First, needs expressed by individuals may reflect the needs in general or, indeed, the needs about which the majority of the community would agree. On the other hand, they may be genuine needs which the individual sees and expresses but are more in the realm of personal needs or desires. An aspiring family may feel the need for better educational or employment opportunities locally, or may resent living next door to people whose standards of domestic care they feel to be inferior. These are perfectly reasonable comments but unless there is a general feeling about matters of this kind it is difficult to mobilize enough interest to resolve the problems. The second reason for knowledge of group relationships is to be able to use the community's own social structure and network for development. Whatever the defects of a neighbourhood like North Kensington and however disorganized it may be in some ways, as long as there is an established section of the population, a force for social action does exist; and there are poten-

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group.

tials equally strong in the less established section. But where are the strengths in the community? How can they be found? Really, the only possibility for answering these questions is to be a part of the community, to set out quite consciously to chat, to make friendly contacts and, by these means, as well as through careful observation, studiously to acquire as much general knowledge as possible in a short time.

The first thing that the worker must remember is that the community's strengths, that is the neighbourhood network, the individual qualities of leadership, are not visible at first but will come into focus. Next, the worker must know something about individual potentials and capacities. Generally, everyone in a group has a contribution to make. Even those people who display rather more negative than positive qualities contribute much to a group. The denigrator, for example, may not only help the group towards unity but may cause the group to examine its aims and methods more critically. Different personalities, different temperaments and different roles combine in a group to give vitality and form to group action. The variety of intelligence, experience, skill and knowledge in the group, when used creatively, is the real dynamic for positive action. But the worker must have some knowledge of these characteristics within the group if they are to be used creatively. In a situation like that in North Kensington it would appear that the strengths have not been used collectively for constructive ends. The problem is not that these qualities are lacking but that no one has helped groups to mobilize their resources for collective activity. So the worker must be aware of some of these factors present in the locality. Once again, it is not possible to identify them except through familiarity with individuals and groups.

Getting to know the area, then, was a major part of the first month's work. A friend of Ilys recalls:

Ilys's conscious tactics were to be seen about the area, to walk on a worked out basis so that she arrived at the school gates about the time the mothers were taking or fetching the children; to go to the launderette and sit about and talk there; to look at the area as she walked round so that she had a mental picture of the kind of people and what they looked like and of the kind of work they did; to get her face familiar to them and theirs to her. She spent a long time doing this and saw it as part of her work. She must have walked several miles a day when she started.

The project's base was a basement flat, 79B Clarendon Road. Ilys preferred a flat to an office as it was useful to have somewhere to invite people for informal discussion over a cup of coffee, or

A Community Project in Notting Dale

for a meal or a small meeting. She also sometimes spent the night there. She stayed there a few week-ends in the first months to see what happened then and to find out if it was a better time for making contacts. (In fact it was not. On Sundays especially, people kept themselves to themselves.) Even her walk to and from the underground station she would vary in a systematic fashion. She used whatever opportunities she could for opening conversations. She described this in one of her reports :

One technique used is to ask a great many questions and, when the opportunity presents itself, especially to ask 'Why?' The question may produce information or considered and balanced responses. On the other hand, it may produce replies which indicate prejudice, rejection of any possibility of changing the *status quo*, a lack of orderly thought process or some other conceptual failure. Furthermore, the raising of the question in itself often causes people to give further consideration to it and not infrequently results in new awareness. Each event and each encounter is a potential point for discussion about the area, its population, its communal attitudes, its strengths and its defects. In these discussions many opinions and points of view come to light about the self-image of various sections of the community, their images of each other and their views about voluntary agencies and statutory bodies. Many examples could be cited which have been used as points for discussion in the street, in shops or in homes. The following are fairly typical.

Tobacconists and newsagents put card advertisements in their windows in the customary way. Regular trips of observation show which proprietors (the great majority) put up cards excluding coloured tenants. Some interesting variations are displayed, such as, 'Sorry, no coloureds. Asians welcome'. Discussion with such proprietors shows that most of them dissociate themselves with the point of view expressed on the cards. When asked why advertisers should put 'Sorry', the usual reply is, 'They're probably not bad people. People don't want to offend them. They just don't want trouble in the house.' This is only one example from many which not only reveal contradictions in people's thinking (Indians and Pakistanis are not more welcome than West Indians or Africans - it is the Chinese and Japanese who are regarded as Asians), but which suggest that some people either will not admit to colour prejudice (Are they ashamed to acknowledge it?) or are subject to an ambivalence which they cannot explain.

One Saturday morning I watched three Marks and Spencer employees chase a man down Blenheim Crescent. They caught him and walked him back to the store. The large crowd which gathered was very hostile towards the Marks and Spencer employees. A num-

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

ber of people said, 'It's not fair,' and made it clear to the worker that they were angry with the store staff. Two men in the crowd were quite threatening, although they admitted they had only seen the chase. I pointed out that the man who had been caught had a carrier bag full of Marks and Spencer goods and asked if the circumstances did not suggest that he had had them without the obligation of payment. 'It's still not fair,' several people said, 'They're a bunch of...'. In several casual discussions later, around the working area, I related the incident. There were some interesting differences of view and many people agreed with the view expressed by the crowd. When asked if there was something particularly unappealing about Marks and Spencer staff, the general tone of reply was, 'They can afford it.' No one was prepared to speculate about what action he would take in a similar situation. This second example is an illustration of a very common attitude towards 'authority' and of the acceptance of the 'we and they' concept. Consideration of rights and wrongs, of rights and responsibilities or of cause and effect do not enter into the question.

As well as getting to know the area in the first months, Ilys tried to find out what focus there might be for local action by testing the response to a few ideas. For example, there had been several fires in the district, some with loss of life, caused by oil heaters. Many people in North Kensington used these, being a comparatively cheap form of heating, and the fires were caused by heaters which were cheap and sub-standard or not used properly – people would heat pans of water on them or carry them from room to room when they were lit. Ilys spoke to a number of people about this problem – the Borough Public Health Department, the Citizen's Advice Bureau, local health visitors and several shopkeepers – and went to great trouble to inform herself of all the details (her notebook contains pages about the different types of oil heater and the law on oil heater standards). It is impossible to say how much it was due to her work, but eventually a small campaign of public education was launched, chiefly through local clinics. Another problem she discussed was that of adolescents who could not keep a job or get the job they wanted because they could not read well enough. She discussed the possibility of remedial classes with the Youth Employment Officer, the School Care Organizer, the Children's Officer and local head teachers, as well as with local residents. Nothing came of these discussions with the agencies, and she found no strong feelings about it in the community. She felt it was not a promising focus for local action, therefore, so she did not press it further. In both these cases she was

A Community Project in Notting Dale

interested primarily in the response of other people, particularly local people, to the idea of doing something about particular problems and did not see it as her job actually to organize action on them herself.

In addition to getting to know the area and some of its residents, she made contact with most of the statutory and voluntary agencies in the first six months. Throughout the project she spent much time working with the numerous and diverse organizations in North Kensington, sometimes taking part as a full committee member and more generally in informal discussion with fellow-workers. Part of her aim was to interpret to the agencies the points of view of local people. For instance, her contribution to the Notting Hill Social Council is described by a fellow-member :

An important aspect of her role on the Social Council was that she was not an empire representative. In the social work world you have these vested interests and little empires. She was not representing a big statutory agency or prestige agency. Her prestige was entirely in terms of her own achievements and personality and this gave her a freedom and authority. She could remind the Social Council of the perspective and values which she was involved in in Notting Dale, that you must not lose the individuality and dignity and the initiative of ordinary people as you do them good. Also I think she brought a level of common sense in judgements about Notting Hill, on the one hand against any tendency towards impersonal bureaucracy, but on the other hand against suppositions, rather wild suppositions, of Notting Hill being seething with revolutionary fervour. She knew it too well.

As well as interpreting local views to the agencies, she was trying to build bridges between agencies and local groups. The reason for this was that if any groups should become established for a long period during the five-year project, they would have to make some relationship with the agencies already existing. This would require that the agencies be prepared to make some relationship with them, and Ilys began working towards this from the beginning. Unfortunately for this book, however, she wrote hardly any records of her work with organizations. This was partly through lack of time, but it may also have been because, though she saw the organizations as part of her work, she was not working with them quite in her capacity as community worker. For example, her role on a committee, though similar to her role with a local group in that she would clarify issues, supply information

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

and so on, was different because she was a participating member, trying to influence policy, casting a vote, taking some responsibility for decisions and so on. If her role was primarily that of fellow-member rather than detached worker, therefore, it may not have seemed so natural to write records on this as on her work with local people. This may also be a reason why she said little about it in her reports to the Family Study Committee. For whatever reasons, the records do not exist, and other documents such as minutes of committee meetings are not adequate material from which to write an account of this side of the work. This book, therefore, is about what was done with local people, and the work with organizations will be described only insofar as it comes into that story.

CONCENTRATING ON THE NOTTINGWOOD GROUP

Although in some ways Ilys began as if from scratch, making her own contacts with local people in the shops and launderettes, forming her own impressions on local attitudes and trying out ideas like the oil heaters and the remedial reading, there were already two playgroups in existence attached to the Family Study and this had an effect on her work. One was in the Gardens between Blenheim Crescent and Elgin Crescent. The other was in the courtyard between the council flats. These two playgroups had reopened after the school summer holidays of 1964 and moved indoors when the weather became too bad for outdoor play. The Blenheim-Elgin playgroup still had its hut in the Gardens, and the Nottingwood playgroup, as it came to be called through its proximity to Nottingwood House, had found a room in the Rugby Club, the large youth club nearby. This room was not ideal, as there was little storage space for the toys, but the expenses were small.

It had been known for several months that Helen Sheils was to return to Australia in November 1964 and in June the Family Study Committee had discussed whether Ilys's colleague should be a second community worker or a playgroup specialist. Pat Foster, who had been helping Helen with the playgroups, was staying on, but the Committee decided that the playgroups needed another professional playgroup worker, though it was hoped she would involve the mothers in the work as Helen had done. Mrs Pat Seddon was appointed, who had had much experience with children though none in community work. She began in November.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

The major part of the work before the five-year project had been with playgroups and there were some indications in the first year of a continued emphasis on this. The Family Study was employing two playgroup workers and subsidizing the two existing playgroups in other ways, and the chairman and some members of the Family Study were also chairman and members of the North Kensington Playgroups Committee. A further indication was that, in the spring of 1965, the Family Study accepted a suggestion from the Greater London Council that Pat Seddon might establish a playgroup in the children's part of Kensington Memorial Park, a large park in North Kensington about fifteen minutes' walk from Notting Dale, the G.L.C. providing premises, equipment and the worker's salary. She began this playgroup, working jointly for the Family Study and the G.L.C., but it became apparent shortly after that she held a different view from the Family Study about the involvement of mothers in running a playgroup, regarding this as secondary to the provision of a much needed service, and it was because of this difference in view that she left the project in June. The question raised by her departure of whether to appoint a playgroup worker or a community worker raised the general question for the Family Study of what part in the project playgroup work was to have.

Although Helen Sheils's work had been specifically to establish playgroups, and although there was a need for playgroups in North Kensington, it was primarily as experiments in self-help that the first two playgroups had been started, and it was a question whether setting up playgroups for their own sake was the Family Study's function. The question of whether setting up playgroups should be part of the project was raised at a committee meeting in June and gave rise to some conflict of opinion. Ilys was clearly surprised and puzzled by this conflict, for she wrote some pages of notes to clarify her thoughts.

According to these notes, she had told the Committee that it was not *her* job to set up more playgroups, and she had meant by this that, if playgroups were to be set up, this should be done by someone else because, first, her job was as a general development worker, and secondly, the project, as she understood it, was trying to encourage self-help in the community whereas organizing playgroups, she maintained, was not necessarily doing this. The Family Study, therefore, though under an obligation to keep going the playgroups it had started, should not be trying to establish new playgroups.

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

Some members of the Committee were upset and said that, by advocating this policy, Ilys was taking away the job of the North Kensington Playgroups Committee. This bewildered Ilys since she thought that by separating the Family Study from playgroup promotion she was doing precisely the opposite, that she was leaving this job entirely to the Playgroups Committee. Why, therefore, did they feel she was taking it away? She suggested the answer in her notes:

Do they regard the Family Study and the Playgroups Committee as the same organization? To me they seemed separate because the Playgroups Committee was set up to interest itself in one specific part of the work in the area, i.e. playgroups. It has its own officers and bank account; its representatives (other than the Family Study ones) are interested particularly in playgroups. Perhaps the relationship between the Family Study and the Playgroups Committee is not clear.

This was in fact the problem. Because of its links with the Family Study, some people saw the Playgroups Committee as that part of the Family Study concerned to promote playgroups. If, therefore, the Family Study ceased to promote playgroups, as Ilys was recommending, it seemed to them that the Playgroups Committee would have nothing to do.

The decision was made, however, that the Family Study would not set up any more playgroups, though the salary of a playgroup worker would be provided for the Blenheim-Elgin playgroup and Pat Foster would continue to be employed as the Nottingwood playgroup worker. The separation of the Family Study from the promotion of playgroups made it clearer that the Playgroups Committee was a separate body with its own functions. Since it does not come into the story again, its subsequent history is summarized here.

It met about once a month, heard reports on the progress of various playgroups and offered what suggestions and help it could, but it could not do very much since the members did not have a lot of time and the committee had no financial resources of its own and therefore no employees. What it could do, however, was to publicize what playgroups there were and what playgroups were needed in North Kensington, hoping thereby to stimulate action by those bodies that did have resources, and so it organized an exhibition, with help from the Save the Children Fund and the Family Study, which was held in the three Kensington Public Libraries in May

A Community Project in Notting Dale

1966. It then wished to employ a worker who would investigate possible sites for playgroups and help the residents to establish them, but the money for such a worker could not be obtained. This left the Playgroups Committee once more in the uncomfortable position of having a desire to promote playgroups but no resources with which to do it. In 1967 the Inner London Pre-School Playgroups Association set up a branch in the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The Playgroups Committee was not immediately eager to go along with this organization since it was doubted whether the Pre-School Playgroups Association, with its emphasis on the educational aspect of playgroups and its insistence on certain playgroup standards, was the most appropriate organization for the residents of North Kensington. Its general aims of playgroup promotion, however, were the same as those of the Playgroups Committee. It also had a worker. The Playgroups Committee therefore felt itself superfluous and it held its last meeting in March 1968.

One effect of the work done before the five-year project, then, had been to leave behind in the minds of some committee members the idea that the Family Study would continue to set up playgroups. It also had a second effect which was, in the long run, more significant than this, for it provided, in the Nottingwood playgroup, the focus on which most of the work with local people came to be concentrated. When Ilys began to devote more time to the Nottingwood group in the summer of 1965, it was not obvious that this would make it the focus of the whole project. (Ilys herself, since she continued working with organizations and other local people outside the Nottingwood group, did not regard it as such for a long time.) Perhaps for this reason, the step was not really thought about. It was not a decision which Ilys made at a particular time nor was it the outcome of debate by the Family Study. It just seemed to happen.

Ilys, at the end of nine months' work, was not committed to working with any particular group or in any particular part of North Kensington and this was partly because of the approach she had been using. Her practice of community development put great emphasis on the worker's non-directiveness. She saw it as her job to stimulate thought and to offer her skills and knowledge to people wishing to take action; but she would not decide on the activity or organize people. The hope in using this method is that out of informal conversations about an area's problems there will develop a group of people wanting to do something. If there are enough

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

people about who do want to do something, then such a group is likely to develop. (This was so, for instance, on the London housing estates where Ilys had worked before.) If, however, people are not, of themselves, wanting to group together in common action, then clearly such a group is not likely to develop. Ilys certainly had informal conversations with local people, especially in the first year – with mothers waiting for their children at the school gates, with shopkeepers, with women doing their washing in launderettes – and examples have been given of what she learnt about local attitudes from them. It is not recorded how many conversations she had or what she said in them, but no group of local people wanting to do something developed from them. One does not know whether such a group would have formed if she had persevered longer with this extremely open-ended approach, but she turned her attention to working more with a group which already existed – the Nottingwood mothers.

That it should be the Nottingwood group was partly the result of the location of the project's flat. No decision about the form of the work had been made at the beginning of the project when the flat was taken. It was taken because its location seemed, at the time, as good as any and premises were hard to come by. It influenced where Ilys worked since she naturally got to know people down the road better than, say, people in the Golborne district half an hour's walk away.

More important than just being near, however, the Nottingwood group was showing promising signs of life. There had been little activity during the winter but in the spring, with the return of Pat Foster as their playgroup worker, the mothers had begun making plans for the summer. They were all working-class local residents – the sort of people with whom the project was supposed to be working, and also the sort of people with whom Ilys got on well. They were nearby and they were doing things. It seemed natural, then – so natural that no one questioned it – that Ilys should come to work with them.

At the same meeting at which the decision was made not to set up more playgroups, the Committee accepted this development by making a decision that the project should concentrate on Notting Dale rather than try to work in the whole of North Kensington. To say that an area was chosen is not to say that Ilys was given a section of the map and instructed to ignore all contacts outside it. Having made contact with one set of people, her next contacts were

A Community Project in Notting Dale

their contacts and so on, so that her area was defined by where those people lived. As one person put it :

She didn't see the area with a line drawn round it. It was more like a pebble in a pond which had ripples going out, and as far as they went out, that was the area.

THE NOTTINGWOOD GROUP'S COMMITTEE

Pat Foster had begun work for the Family Study in 1964 with Helen Sheils and had been off work with a quite serious illness during the winter but returned in May 1963 fully recovered. The Nottingwood playgroup was still running in the Rugby Club. The number of children was small but several mothers took turns to help the playgroup worker. The arrival of better weather presented the group with the opportunity to move back into the courtyard, though this involved a number of decisions. It demonstrates Pat's approach to the work that she took none of these decisions herself. Instead, by general assent, a meeting of the mothers was called late in May, to which seven turned up. This was a very informal affair, as can be seen from Pat's notes :

The playgroup was in progress in the same room as the meeting. It was very interesting how the mothers attended to any child's needs but still heard everything said at the meeting. The children accepted this situation very well.

Pat was asked to note down the decisions and her notes show the spirit of cooperation that prevailed at the time :

It was decided we should start running the playgroup outside next Tuesday, 1 June. On Friday morning Mrs Harris helps me to clean the pramshed belonging to Mrs Oates. On Friday afternoon Mrs Fairfield and Mrs Dalton help to clean and sort out toys at the Rugby Club. On Monday morning Mrs Draper helps to move toys from the Rugby Club to the pramshed. On Monday afternoon Mrs West helps to finish this. Mrs Benson loans us her pram to carry toys.

Three of the other decisions which she noted turned out to be of some consequence :

Mothers would like the group to continue during the summer holidays, though this will cause difficulty because the playgroup is held in the courtyard that the older children use.

When the group starts outside we shall need more large toys. A raffle was suggested.

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

It was decided we must keep a monthly rota in advance, so a monthly meeting must be organized.

The playgroup duly moved out to the courtyard, though returning to the Rugby Club on wet days, and the raffle raised enough for a piece of equipment costing £5, a durable wooden trolley whose parts could be rearranged to make a see-saw. Ilys remarked of this event:

This was very encouraging because, to the workers, it marked a change in attitude about play materials and about money spent on play. Until recently the concept of expenditure was restricted to the collection of small amounts (*4d.* or *6d.*) and seen in terms of payment upon attendance. The idea of a drive towards a collective fund for group purposes was a new one.

It was soon realized that, if the playgroup was to run in the courtyard during the school holidays, the older children could not be ignored. In fact they would have to be kept occupied, and thus developed the idea of a scheme of holiday activities for children of all ages. Pat reported this idea at a meeting of the North Kensington Playgroups Committee and asked for help in obtaining some materials which might be needed. The chairman and some of the members responded in the ensuing weeks by collecting expendable materials in such large quantities that the workers' basement flat was soon crammed from floor to ceiling with balls of wool, cotton reels, matchboxes, yoghurt tubs, egg cartons, scrap paper, buttons, beads and toys. Ilys had gone for a month's holiday to visit her family in Canada and to have a look at some community projects in the United States. As Pat recalls:

When Ilys got back from America, she was absolutely astounded. She could hardly get into the flat. She couldn't sleep in it. She couldn't get into the bathroom. She couldn't get anywhere. It was absolutely littered with stuff. I think she thought the scheme had gone far too quickly and she was rather worried about it.

Pat brought a friend along to help. Mrs Isaacs secured the regular service of two student volunteers and the occasional help of a seamstress and a carpenter. At least one mother per day helped Pat, working on a rota system. Some trestle-tables were loaned and a box of tools was donated and in late July, not without some apprehension on the workers' part, the summer holiday scheme began. It ran for five mornings a week for six weeks.

Ilys reported:

A Community Project in Notting Dale

The court was laid out very well. At one end the materials were placed for the smaller children. The box of dressing-up clothes was in one corner. The improvised wendy house was in the opposite corner. Easels, small tables and chairs stood about for them. Sand and water and the new see-saw were placed on a small patch of grass adjacent to the court. The centre of the court was given over to dolls' prams, carts and wheeled vehicles along with the tables for older children and craft materials. Most mornings a group of boys played cricket at the far end, setting up one boy to intercept stray balls. The girls (aged ten to fourteen) prepared and served the orange drinks, took the money, purchased the orange squash and cleared up afterwards. All the children helped to get out and put away equipment.

At one time over seventy children at once, with ages ranging from three to fourteen, were playing in the courtyard, which measures about forty yards by twenty.

The interesting point about the morning group with such high numbers was the absence of quarrelling and trouble. Some of this is certainly due to the fact that the school children are very accustomed to keeping an eye on the small children regardless of which family they are from, but much of it was also due to the spirit of freedom in the courtyard and the wide choice of materials and equipment.

There were also fifteen outings, some to places such as Hampstead Heath, Kew Gardens and Regent's Park Zoo, others to the parks nearby such as Holland Park and Kensington Gardens. Using public transport and getting group reductions kept the cost down, and the local outings cost nothing at all, so that even families with a small income could go on several. Between twenty and fifty children usually went on these outings, the younger ones generally accompanied by their mothers.

The summer holiday scheme, on the whole, went well. One mother remarked that in previous years there had been quite a lot of quarrelling between the mothers, largely over fights between their children, but that this summer, with the children kept occupied, there had been none. Another said there had been fewer children before the courts this year.

In the same report Ilys wrote :

An increase of initiative is noticeable. This is partly due to increasing experience and skill, and, no doubt, to the increased number of willing mothers. In July, for instance, there were seven mornings when mothers ran the group alone. During the last week of July, one morning when the weather was uncertain, Pat arrived, but no mothers turned up to

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

help. Pat got out the equipment and a few children came but the numbers were low. An hour later some children came to tell Pat that the group was in the Rugby Club. When she went over she found four mothers in charge of a group of more than fifteen children of all ages. They had looked at the weather and had gone straight to the Club. As Pat did not turn up they got the key to the cupboard from the caretaker and began the group without her. It is worth noting that about six months ago when the playgroup worker did not arrive, the mothers stayed about twenty minutes and went home without attempting to ask for the key.

There were other indications that the group was beginning to stand on its own feet. The mothers had four meetings during the summer, called by them not by the workers. They also opened a Post Office account in Pat's name for the group funds, for Mrs Bailey had taken it upon herself to run weekly raffles:

The playgroup was just beginning and they were desperate and there was no money coming in. We had a little bit of a jumble sale selling a few second-hand clothes and then we had a raffle in the flats to build money up. Then I went to see the landlord at the Lancaster and he said to me, 'If you want to run a raffle, you do so.' So every week I did a raffle on a Sunday morning and it was £3 10s., £3 15s. I used to give it to Mrs Conway and she used to give me the receipt every week to take it back to the landlord. That is when I first started speaking to Ilys and I suggested it to her, and she was more than pleased. Then she forgot all about the raffle because I was giving it to Mrs Conway and I was not saying anything about it to Ilys. They started banking it to build up so that they had so much to buy toys for the group. They paid for the trolley and things like that. Some time later Ilys came round. When she knocked at the door she put her two hands round me. 'Mrs Bailey,' she said, 'have you collected all that money over at the pub?' I said yes. It worked out I collected over £250 in one year.

Raising money for the playgroup became the group's main activity in the following months. The idea of a Christmas bazaar came from Mrs Isaacs, the Family Study chairman, and several of the mothers, with her and Ilys, met in the project's flat for one or two evenings a week making things for this. One mother has recalled, 'It was surprising how the mothers rallied round. I never dreamed that the mothers would pull their weight together, especially with Christmas so near and they had so much of their own home things to do,' to which her daughter added, 'It wasn't only the mothers who did that. A load of us used to go up to the flat with Ilys and she would have

A Community Project in Notting Dale

us sitting there making gonks and things.' Those evenings are remembered as being among the group's happiest times and it was in the course of them that Ilys, now beginning the second year of her work, began to be accepted by the mothers :

I think it was at that bumper Christmas we had and everyone really enjoyed themselves. They all mucked in and did their bit and she was doing just as much as everybody else. It was then that it got through to most people that she wasn't somebody that – you know – you had to be frightened of what you said.

The mothers took their time before they trusted Ilys. A lot thought that the North Kensington Family Study was something to do with family planning. Nearly all thought she was a welfare worker, and, 'All I'd tell a welfare worker is that my kid's got a runny nose or something like that. I wouldn't tell her my business.' Others have said, 'I thought she was just in charge of the playgroup,' and, 'I thought she was like the headmaster of a school. Pat was the teacher and she was the headmaster and Pat did what she was told.'

Mrs Travers, who joined the group at this time, has said :

I must have watched Ilys work for nearly a year and I kept wondering and wondering. I was very wary of Ilys at first. I have always said that I'm a bit suspicious of social workers. They come in and they want to know the ins and outs of everything and that's it, they just leave you. Anyway I was invited to a meeting because I had been talking to the mothers and they said to me, 'It's a good thing,' and I said, 'How long is it going to go on for – temporary or what's happening?' 'This is the thing, we've got to try and find out for ourselves,' they said. So Mrs Dawson invited me to go to a meeting with her one night and that was the first time I ever really spoke to Ilys.

At first I thought she was one of those nosey people trying to do something in the community and then letting it drop again, here just for the sake of finding out about the welfare and then saying 'Hello, goodbye and bugger you.' When I got involved I began to realize what good work she was doing. I realized by just talking to people and listening to Ilys herself at meetings when she discussed, 'Don't forget, you've got so many years to go and you can't expect to build a thing up in a day. These things must be started gradually. Start small and work your way up.' Then I thought to myself, 'That is a good idea. You're not here for your benefit, you're here for ours.'

The bazaar was held in December and raised £57. Ilys was good at practical tasks, especially cooking and gardening, and some little things like making paper flowers, so no doubt she enjoyed these

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

evenings as much as anyone. In some things, however, particularly sewing and knitting, she was more on a par with the less competent members of the group, and this helped her to become accepted. She was at the same time practising her professional skills :

These meetings gave an opportunity, rarely experienced by the women, to meet in a group to make plans. This was, from my point of view, an opportunity to begin developing skills in discussion and decision-making. Such skills are very difficult to acquire. In a few months, meeting weekly, it is not possible to transmit such skills easily, at least not within a group where no previous experience exists. I began then, at a very simple level. As such meetings were characterized by coffee drinking, chat and sporadic attacks on the subject for discussion, I tried to provide a framework for dealing with the business in hand, e.g. 'There are several things to talk about. Perhaps we should make a note of them,' or, 'Shall we have our coffee first and then talk, or should we get the business over first?' By this elementary approach the suggestion of order was introduced and then I was free, during discussion, to draw attention to a drift away from an agreed topic or to comment on the passage of time. Thus, while in such a setting the idea of committee procedure, agenda or minutes would be rather frightening, conjuring up notions of something official or formal, the introduction of the merest touch of organization helps to support the next step.

The next step is likely to be something in the nature of noting decisions, being sure that they are agreed by everyone and that any minority view is noted. This can be attempted by a worker at any stage as long as it is done without seeming officious, but the more familiar the worker is with the group membership, the more likely the worker is to know the best pace for the group.

Much the same is true of handling discussion. The worker is responsible for seeing that all points of view are heard, that no one dominates the conversation, that everyone understands the points being made, that any decisions are understood and agreed.

In transmitting skills, principles to be remembered are that direct tuition cannot be undertaken without a clear, specific request for it, that people do not learn by watching only – a skill is learned by practice, that practice is not possible until there is some confidence, and that confidence develops from observing demonstrations of skill by others, over a fairly long period, the time required depending on the complexity of the skill.

Ilys's handling of the meetings has been described thus by two of the mothers :

Ilys did not actually take part in the decisions. She used to organize

A Community Project in Notting Dale

the meetings and she would bring up points to discuss. If she thought there was something needed in the group that we had not thought about at the time, she would bring it up and we would discuss it. If she suggested something and we were not quite in favour, then the decision was up to us.

When we got talking we'd start building clouds and Ilys would say, 'To work quick you get nowhere.' We just wanted to say, 'Right, we want to do this and we'll do it,' but Ilys used to point out to us, 'Now take your time and think first and think it out. Do you really want to do this?'

The mothers' meetings resumed after Christmas and Ilys's patient work bore fruit in the spring of 1966. Of a meeting in March she noted :

During discussion about summer outings, Mrs Jenkins and Mrs Fellows reminded the group that the pre-school children had never had an outing to themselves and should have one, with their mothers this summer. Mrs Fellows said she thought it would be a good idea if people could pay their money for an outing over several weeks or months beforehand. This was accepted and led to a discussion about keeping track of this money, which would be yet another 'kitty'. Pat said she hoped someone else would look after this one and that she would be glad if someone took care of the children's daily fourpences for the playgroup. Mrs Fellows thought a treasurer was needed. I said I thought this was a good idea. The Post Office account was in Pat's name at the moment, but if there were a treasurer, the Post Office account could be in the group's name. This would mean electing a committee and having a group with a name. This was accepted by everyone but as there were many mothers who had not been able to come, it was suggested that we try for a larger meeting.

Two attempts were made to have a larger meeting in March and in April but there was a good deal of winter illness still about and a meeting of suitable size finally took place on 11 May. Pat and I had seen forty-five women personally in order to explain about electing a committee, and thirteen came. A committee of fourteen was elected which included some who had not been able to get to the meeting. This was the first occasion on which a duplicated note was circulated as a reminder and to provide a rough kind of agenda. It was headed 'matters the mothers have said they would wish to discuss'.

This committee was not restricted to mothers with children in the playgroup. The chairman was Mrs Travers, the youngest of whose five children was at school. Mrs Dawson, the secretary, sent her child

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

to a different playgroup and Mrs Conway, the treasurer, was a grandmother. Two of the mothers present at the time recall why the committee was set up:

It came about through raising funds. We had to have someone to look after the money and everyone had to know what was coming in and what was going out, who was spending what money and all this sort of thing. Before, I think Ilys looked after the money but Pat used to work out how it was spent, and then we decided, as the group was beginning to get going and was becoming self-supporting, that we would do it properly. It went very well. It was a new experience for all of us. I don't think any of us had done anything like this before.

Ilys suggested it. We should be able to stand on our own feet when she had finished, so we had to choose our own – the mothers had to choose who they wanted.

COMBINING WITH ANOTHER GROUP

The other playgroup established in the early days of the Family Study, the Blenheim-Elgin playgroup, was still running in the Gardens. For its first year it had had Family Study playgroup workers and, since the summer of 1965, it had been run by a local mother paid by the Family Study. It was not so flourishing, at this time, as the Nottingwood playgroup, so when the Nottingwood group had formed its committee and was planning its second summer activities, the committee of the Blenheim-Elgin group suggested that the two groups might combine for these.

The Nottingwood playgroup had moved from the Rugby Club to the courtyard in the spring. The mothers' rota was working fairly consistently and the number of children was between fifteen and twenty a day. A large proportion of these children were not from the flats but from the streets around. The summer holiday scheme was to be on the lines of the previous year's. The mothers' group was larger now and the project was better known in the neighbourhood, so even more children than last year could be anticipated. At Ilys's suggestion, the Family Study secured the help of a student volunteer who had helped the previous summer. The other resources, of money and materials, were to come from the mothers. They agreed that the Blenheim-Elgin group should join in and one or two joint meetings were held. Among other things, the mothers decided that the maximum price of an outing should be 3s., that families with more than two children going on an outing should be subsidized

A Community Project in Notting Dale

from the playgroup funds, and that, on major outings, 1s. pocket money be given to every child. Roger (the student) produced a list of possible outings and the mothers suggested several themselves, and from these the mothers selected the ones they wanted. One mother explains why they introduced the subsidies and the pocket money:

Where a mother has four or five kiddies and she has an unemployed husband and the kids are still at school and the mother is not working – and you know that she is genuinely not working – then you know that that woman needs subsidizing, and I think we all knew them well enough to know who needed subsidizing and who didn't. There was no bickering about subsidizing, none at all.

Each time we went on a day's outing, wherever we pulled in, Roger would be standing there and he would give each child a shilling, out of our kitty. Although they didn't all need that shilling, because their mums were there, we felt that there was still a chance that there could have been a kid without a halfpenny, so we couldn't afford to take the chance.

The morning playgroup ran as in the year before. Expendable materials were not in the same abundance, but this year it was the community's own resources that were being drawn upon. Ilys reported:

Three weekly raffles are run and bring in a net profit of about £7. This money-raising activity has now involved three publicans who run the raffles in their pubs. A greengrocer has made a generous contribution of fruit for a raffle prize and some of the women are trying to interest some of the other shopkeepers. In the meantime, a rag and paper dealer across from the flats is now extracting cloth cuttings etc. which come to him and turning them over to the mothers for use in making things for the Christmas bazaar. One team of dustmen, seeing the notice asking people to give scrap materials, toys etc. for the summer activities, filled up a carton with toys and bits and pieces they had collected on their rounds and gave them to the chairman of the mothers' committee for the playgroup.

All went well until about twenty adults and 100 children went on the outing to Regent's Park Zoo, travelling by Underground both ways. Roger described the aftermath to this outing in his report:

Considering the difficulties presented by such large numbers, both Pat and I thought it was managed very well. Consequently we were surprised and not a little hurt when we were overwhelmed by a multitude

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

of petty little complaints – ‘We had to wait too long to get into the Zoo,’ ‘We stopped for our lunch too early,’ ‘Roger’s a dozy bastard, doesn’t take the kids across the road at the zebra crossings,’ and so on. Very few of these were justified. All that this amounted to, in fact, was that most of the mothers were worried themselves at handling so many children on the Underground and so they cancelled all further large outings by public transport. This I didn’t mind, but being their scapegoat I confess I found hard to bear.

The remaining outings were those on hired coaches to places like Chessington Zoo and Southend, and though these were easier to manage, they put much more strain on the group funds. Increased numbers were one reason for these difficulties. In addition, the Nottingwood group and the Blenheim–Elgin group were not getting on well together. The Nottingwood group was better off financially and some members thought the Blenheim–Elgin group had no right to take advantage of the outings subsidized by Nottingwood funds. There was also, or at least there was felt to be, a difference of social class. According to one Nottingwood mother:

Blenheim mums all thought they were a bit better than us. I like the Blenheim mums really, but there was always that across-the-border feeling.

And from the other side:

The way it was spoken to me was that we were too ‘ah-la’ and that they were all cor blimey and swearing, and that they thought we wouldn’t get on.

The relationship between the two groups, which was thus predisposed to be poor, was made worse by individuals who spread gossip and rumour. The result of all this was some tension at joint meetings and on joint outings:

There was a lot of back-biting. It didn’t work very well. We found we couldn’t get on with the Nottingwood group and the Nottingwood group would find fault with us.

We found that the Blenheim group kept themselves well apart from us no matter how much we tried to get involved with them and draw them in. When it came to the coach, the Blenheim had to have that end of the coach to themselves and Nottingwood had to be this end, and this was the atmosphere that was created.

The summer activities, then, were not as happy as the previous year’s, and this tension had effects beyond the actual combined

A Community Project in Notting Dale

functions. When, towards the end of the summer holidays, Pat had to have time off because her mother was ill, one of the mothers' committee, Mrs Jenkins, ran the playgroup for a few weeks as the paid worker, and although Mrs Jenkins was agreed to be a competent playgroup worker and it was with general consent that she took the job, there were difficulties :

I think a lot of the mothers a little bit resented Ann Jenkins taking over. Although she was doing it officially, to the mums she was only a mum.

It went through a real bad patch. The kids weren't coming and what mothers were coming wouldn't do a thing. They didn't want to help. Half of them didn't want to pay. You had all this aggravation, people saying, 'It's all right for her. If her kid cries she picks it up and loves it. Doesn't matter about my kid crying.' They were doing the rota but then it got to, 'Why should she be paid and me not be paid?' Slowly the group began to fold up, out of jealousy really, the fact that one was being paid and one wasn't.

The workers too were anxious about this friction within the group, as is shown by the following story recounted by Mrs Travers :

It was the only time when I have ever seen Ilys in a temper. We had no playgroup worker at the time and Ann Jenkins took over the playgroup for a time. The mums had all been moaning and groaning that we should have a playgroup worker and that this isn't going right and that isn't going right, and yet none of them was willing to come forward to help. They were all saying, 'Might as well shut down the ruddy group,' - actually they used words a bit stronger than that, but still. And Ilys came up one day and we were sitting there talking and she said to my husband, 'And what do you think, Frank?' 'Well, I'll tell you what, Ilys,' he says, 'I'll tell you what they're saying,' he says, 'They are saying the group is useless, and it's just as well to close down.' Now this at the time hit Ilys on the raw. She was probably as much worried about the group as what we were, knowing there was so much bother in the group. 'Course,' she said, 'We will have it closing down if we have people like you saying it's no good and it's got to close down.' Well, they were cat and dog and I was really petrified. I thought, 'One of them is definitely going to blow their top in a minute.' And he said to her, 'I'm telling you what people are saying. It's not my opinion, it's what people are saying.' 'Well, of course,' she said, 'I understand that, but if there's people like you we will close down, we won't have no group.' And Ilys storms out. So he goes up the passage after Ilys. 'And what's more she's not coming down to help you clear away. You can clear away your bloody self,' and crash went the street door. Well, I sat here and I cried because I was

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

torn. I thought a lot of Ilys, I worshipped the old man. I didn't know what to do. I knew that if I went down to Ilys's place he'd start again. So I thought, 'What can I do, what can I do?' An hour goes by and then there's a knock on the door. So I open the door, and it's Ilys. Then I thought, 'Do I ask her in?' It was really a terrible feeling. I wouldn't want it again. So Frank says, 'Who's that?' So Ilys says, 'It's me Frank, can I come in?' So nice. I'll never forget it. So he says, 'Course you can come in.' Anyway she came in and she walked over to him – he was sitting in the armchair – and they shook hands and literally roared with laughter. And then she said, 'Frank,' she says, 'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I realize what you were telling me was only what people were saying,' and she admitted that she was worried herself then. 'Well,' he said, 'I apologize, Ilys,' he said. From that time on they got on like a house on fire.

Perhaps underlying all these troubles was anxiety and sadness about the departure of Pat Foster, for she was to leave at the end of September to get married. Ilys had had several discussions with the mothers to find out what it was about Pat that made her such a good playgroup worker (for everyone agreed that she was), so as to help the mothers to see from this what qualities they should look for in her successor. She was certainly good with the children :

I've seen that girl sit out there and hold the attention of as many as twenty to thirty children with a story, and I've never seen another leader do that. She would do 'We're a tree' with her arms out and the kids would follow her. They absolutely idolized her.

She used to keep them happy, cuddle them. She was the loving type. She had lots of patience.

Pat didn't mind if a child came in, which it did often, got sick or had wet pants. How many times did the children come in dirty clothes and soaking wet, and she would have to change them.

What emerged as being even more important than this, however, was Pat's relationship with the mothers :

We were talking one day about painting and I remember saying, 'What are they supposed to be?' She set up three or four of Ronnie's old paintings and in the first one you'd see nothing but a complete mess and then after a couple more you'd see a stroke. She said, 'You'll find first of all that children start off by making a line, and then suddenly you'll find a round ring will appear and then there'll be another stroke. They're beginning to take note. They're drawing what they're feeling. And then this comes out as mum, or that would be their house.' And Pat could understand literally what these kids were trying to paint and she could point this out to us.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

The mothers felt that Pat was a person they would like to help. They wouldn't like to let her down.

There are some people you can tell your troubles to, and they will never repeat it. Well, with regard to Pat, I do not think they were ever repeated, and that is the root of it all.

The work with the children, though it required skill, was thought to be not too difficult for the mothers to do. The work with the mothers themselves, however, required a worker from outside. A worker, it was thought, is able to help resolve personal differences between mothers, which they themselves cannot so easily do without taking sides. A worker can give a sympathetic ear to family troubles whereas mothers could not be trusted because of the temptation to gossip. Finally, a worker has the time to visit the mothers regularly, which was considered very important. The age of the worker, it was agreed, did not matter. (Pat, in fact, being in her early twenties, was younger than most of the mothers.)

The key to Pat's success at this work seems to have been her attitude of accepting people as they are, which mattered so much to the mothers as well as the children. Her experience of residential work with autistic children probably contributed to this, but it was largely in her nature. She herself has described her work thus:

It's very difficult for me to say what approach I had because I was just me. I never had 'an approach'. I let the mothers take the lead and fell in with them. I never used to teach them. I just used to do things in the playgroup and let them see what I was doing and they would probably start doing it themselves. I never tried to tell anyone what to do. With the people round here I don't think they would take it very kindly if someone came and said, 'We must do so-and-so.'

I used to try and keep in contact with all the mothers. I used to go and visit all of them in the playgroup and their friends. The main aspect of the work was to keep the playgroup going, to keep the mothers interested in it and to let them know what was going on. If, for instance, one came saying her little girl was ill, then I would go and see them. I just used to go around and knock on the door and say, 'I've come for a cup of tea,' so I'd sit down and have a cup of tea and have a chat with them. I enjoyed those visits and it was never any trouble.

Ilys wanted two of the mothers to be on the interviewing committee for Pat's successor, for two reasons. The mothers' judgement would be of great value since it was with the mothers that the

The Growth of the Nottingwood Group

worker would have to deal. Secondly, the mothers would probably be employing their own workers eventually and this was an excellent opportunity for them to begin acquiring some of the necessary skills such as interviewing applicants. The Family Study Committee decided against this, however:

On the one hand this was obviously part of the democratic process and so forth. But then there were practical problems. Could you be quite certain that local people on the selection committee would preserve confidentiality, for instance, about the references of the person they selected? The references might give weak points as well as strong points. There might be various things you had got to be sure wouldn't be repeated. Suppose the person appointed began to get up against any individual person in the neighbourhood. We discussed these pros and cons. As far as I can remember, Ilys was single-mindedly in favour of one or two mums being on the selection committee.

The problem here, which was to crop up again later on, was one of responsibility. The Committee argued that, since it was the Family Study who employed the playgroup worker, it was the Family Study's responsibility to make the appointment. Ilys argued that since it was the project's intention eventually to leave the playgroup in the hands of the mothers, the appointment should be regarded as at least partly their responsibility. The compromise decided on was that the mothers' committee should interview the applicants (without seeing the references) and that members of the Family Study subcommittee delegated to make the appointment should consult the mothers before making their decision. Since the problem of responsibility hinged on who actually employed the playgroup worker, it might have been better, in retrospect, to have tackled the question of employment. The Family Study, for example, might have made a grant to the mothers' committee to pay the playgroup worker so that the appointment would then genuinely have been the mothers' responsibility, but this idea does not seem to have been mooted. Eventually, Miss Tricia Maher was appointed, a young woman with experience of playgroup work.

In spite of Pat's imminent departure, however, and of the troubles of the summer, it ended cheerfully with a coach outing to Southend. The mothers in Allom House and Barlow House had organized a coach party (just for themselves, not for husbands or children) once a year for some years before, and this year the playgroup mothers were invited to form a second coachload. Ilys described the occasion in her notes:

A Community Project in Notting Dale

Pat went with 'the nursery mothers' coach'. I went with 'the flats' coach'. We did not look forward to it as, for weeks, there had been a lot of talk about 'the booze-up' and lurid tales of people flat out with drink, male parties on coaches teaming up with the ladies and so on. In the event it was a very quiet affair. There was lots of merry-making at the 'half-way house' – dancing, singing, and strangers dancing with strangers. All they wanted really was a 'knees-up' and they complained that the pubs at Southend had no music and there was no singing and dancing, but we had a very happy and sociable evening.

As the project approached the end of its second year, then, the work put into the Nottingwood group was bearing fruit. The group had formed its own committee, had planned and partly organized its own summer activities and was negotiating for its own premises (a story to be told in the next chapter). The ripples had moved out some distance by now, for over 100 families were in touch with the summer activities and an attendance of ten or twelve mothers at a group meeting was not uncommon. Most encouraging of all was a growing confidence among the people involved in their own ability to change the state of things. It was a source of some satisfaction for the workers to note what one mother said at this time – 'We won't be a stepped on community any longer. We're on the way up.'

Chapter 4

Treadgold Street

The story of the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground is told from start to finish in this chapter, to the exclusion of other things that were happening at the same time. It is a complicated story, partly because conflicting interpretations and sometimes conflicting memories have been included. It is not intended as a complete history of this adventure playground, nor as a list of all the lessons that were learnt for setting up adventure playgrounds. Several characters and events have been completely omitted. Its significance for this book is that it was the first time that the Nottingwood group attempted to cooperate with established organizations in setting up a project in Notting Dale. It is therefore part of the story. It was also, to some extent, an attempt at what has been called 'community involvement', 'local participation', 'cooperation at the grass roots level'. What have been included are those events and comments which throw light on this.

In July 1966, as a result of discussion on the problem of space for play in North Kensington, Mrs Bancroft, a Kensington resident who had been a borough councillor and who was on the committee of the London Adventure Playground Association, arranged an informal meeting in her home between representatives from play organizations and borough councillors. The Borough Chief Housing Officer attended, and he told the meeting that a group of prefabs was soon to be demolished as part of the Lancaster Road West development scheme, and that it might be possible to use the resulting site as a temporary playground. The site, bounded by Lancaster Road, Grenfell Road and Treadgold Street, was in Notting Dale and about one acre large. A meeting of the L.A.P.A.* committee was held, also in Mrs Bancroft's house, immediately afterwards, and this committee decided that the site should be used as an adventure playground.

Mrs Bancroft takes up the story :

* London Adventure Playground Association

A Community Project in Notting Dale

I got this temporary site in Treadgold Street through my own contacts with the Housing Department. They took quite a lot of persuading but they said, 'Well, you can have it. You might have it for eighteen months or you may have it for as long as three or four years.' We plunged in and hoped to get it open in six months.

We thought we had better start it as an offshoot of the Notting Hill Adventure Playground* Committee, so we set up a committee. I was chairman because I had made the initial contact and I was also on the L.A.P.A. committee and we were hoping to get some money through our contact there. Mrs Reynolds and Mrs Greig were secretary and treasurer because they were secretary and treasurer on the Notting Hill Adventure Playground Committee.

LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

Mrs Isaacs, the chairman of the Family Study, had been invited to the meeting in her capacity as chairman of the Playgroups Committee. She had stressed the importance of involving the local residents in such projects, and had also mentioned that the Nottingwood mothers' group was looking for premises in which to run their playgroup, the accommodation in the Rugby Club not being entirely satisfactory owing to the shortage of storage space. Consequently Ilys was invited to the meeting which took place in Mrs Reynolds's house a few days later and she was asked to bring representatives of the Nottingwood mothers' group. Ilys said in her notes: †

Mrs Reynolds had asked our cooperation because they wanted 'local involvement', which had never been achieved on the other adventure playgrounds in London. I took Amy Travers and Beryl Dawson (chairman and secretary of the Nottingwood group) to see Mrs Reynolds. All that was discussed was the interest of the parents in our neighbourhood in an adventure playground, their willingness to serve on a committee for the playground and their desire to have the opportunity to develop some community facilities of their own. There was the possibility that some of the existing prefabs on the site would be left.

Although Ilys gained the impression that it was out of a desire

* This is a highly successful adventure playground that has been running for several years at the northern end of North Kensington.

† Ilys kept detailed records of many of the events concerning the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground.

Treadgold Street

for 'local involvement' that she and some of the mothers had been invited onto the Adventure Playground Committee, it is not clear how involved the officers* intended them to be. On the one hand, the officers have said that community involvement is in general a desirable thing:

Adventure playgrounds can be rather nuisances, in a way, to people living immediately next to them. There is the noise and they are inevitably messy and the permissive atmosphere often seems to constitute a threat to people new to them, so you must do your best to involve residents who are living round an adventure playground to feel responsible, not only as a means of preventing vandalism but to help them to realize the point of this sort of play. In general, if you are going to do anything, you don't want to do it *de haut en bas*, if you can possibly avoid it.

You can't just have a middle-class lot imposing on the working-class lot a service that they don't want. That's silly and can't succeed.

On the other hand, as it turned out, most of the important decisions were taken without consulting the local people,† and it is not clear whether, even at the outset, the officers, in desiring community involvement, intended that members of the community would be involved in making those decisions. Mrs Bancroft, for instance, has said:

Mrs Isaacs said 'Could we have a corner of your adventure playground?' and that was the way it always seemed to me. *We* were running the adventure playground, and the mothers' group were sort

* In the story of the adventure playground and in the discussion which follows it, the term 'the officers' will be used to refer to the officers of the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground Committee.

† There is an ambiguity in the expressions 'members of the community' and 'local people'. The officers of the Adventure Playground Committee live just to the north of Holland Park Avenue, i.e. very close to Notting Dale, and for this reason call themselves 'local people' in the same way that the Nottingwood mothers are 'local people'. Taking the history of the area and the social class of the residents into account, however, there are differences between the officers on the one hand, and the Nottingwood mothers on the other. Mrs Bancroft takes account of these differences by distinguishing between 'middle-class local people' like herself, and 'working-class local people' like the Nottingwood mothers. The Nottingwood mothers take account of them by saying that they are 'local people' whereas the officers of the Adventure Playground Committee are not. It is this latter usage which is adopted here.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

of tenants of part of it. We weren't trying to take them over. As we saw it, we were not helping them to run their mothers' group nor were they helping us to run the adventure playground.

The officers, therefore, considered that, although the Nottingwood mothers came to be tenants of a part of the site and to be represented on the Adventure Playground Committee, this did not entitle them to a say in decisions concerning the whole playground. Ilys thought the opposite, that if one wanted local involvement, then one had to give some local people a say in such decisions, and she certainly considered that the mothers' tenancy of a part of the site and representation on the Adventure Playground Committee automatically entitled them to a say in those decisions about the playground which affected the mothers' part of it. This basic difference of view only became apparent when it led to disagreement on specific issues and the result was the steady widening of a rift between the officers and their friends on the committee on the one hand and Family Study workers and the mothers on the other.

One reason why this difference of view was not obvious at the beginning was that the status of the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground Committee was not clear. For the first months, it consisted only of Mrs Bancroft, Mrs Reynolds and Mrs Greig, who had become the three officers. The first committee meeting involving other members was not held until October, largely due to Mrs Bancroft's absence during August and part of September. When the committee did meet, it was a formal committee in that it had officers and minutes were taken at its meetings, but it was not a proper adventure playground committee since it had no constitution. This was because it had been started, and in some respects it behaved, as a subcommittee of the Notting Hill Adventure Playground Committee. Mrs Bancroft was not on that committee, but Mrs Reynolds and Mrs Greig were secretary and treasurer of both. Grants for the Treadgold Street Playground were paid to the Notting Hill Playground Committee and administered as part of the Notting Hill Playground funds. It therefore happened that some decisions about the Treadgold Street Playground, and about the money given for it, were taken by the Notting Hill Adventure Playground Committee, or a group from that committee, and therefore it was not clear what were the rights of the other members of the Treadgold Street Committee in making decisions about

Treadgold Street

the Treadgold Street Playground. These informal arrangements allowed much room for misunderstanding.

A CORNER FOR THE NOTTINGWOOD GROUP

The committee could not immediately set about establishing an adventure playground on the site because some of the sixteen prefabs were still occupied, and the Ministry of Works could not demolish any of the prefabs until all the occupants had left. However, a meeting was held towards the end of July between the three officers of the new Adventure Playground Committee and representatives of the Nottingwood mothers' group. Ilys noted :

At this time the full site cannot be used, but there is a small corner with no prefab on it which could be fenced in and used by the Nottingwood playgroup. Amy Travers thought that we should try to do this and ask Mr Harris* for his advice as he is good with his hands. Mrs Reynolds, who knows him, was very surprised and doubtful. She said that L.A.P.A. had offered to pay for the fencing, but Mrs Travers explained the importance of involving Mr Harris, as this would benefit him and his family.

Mrs Travers approached Mr Harris about the fence and on the following day, Ilys noted :

I met Mr Harris with Amy Travers and he went to the site with us. He advised us not to spend so much on fencing as chain-link would cost, but to make use of good boards from a demolition site which we could get for £15 to £20, including transport and uprights for the fence. He agreed to help if others would 'muck in'.

Several mothers in the Nottingwood group persuaded their husbands to help with the fence and Ilys had discussions with them. Concerted action was difficult to arrange since most of them had little time off work and were possibly reluctant to spend it doing what they did for a living, but one meeting was held on the site and plans were made.

In the meantime, however, a child had had an accident on the site, so the Borough Council had undertaken to fence in the whole site in the hope that this would keep children out. By the middle of August, therefore, despite protests from the remaining tenants, the whole site was enclosed by a solid board fence eight feet high

* A resident in the Council flats whose children attended the Nottingwood playgroup.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

with a locked gate. Thus it was that when a few husbands turned up to the site for a second meeting, they could not get in. It was some time before Ilys succeeded in obtaining a key to the gate in the Council's fence, and by the time she did, as will be explained, it had been decided that the Nottingwood mothers' group should have a prefab which was on a different part of the site from the part the fathers were to fence. The fathers' fence, therefore, was no longer necessary, so it was never built.

The fathers' fence was a cause of some disagreement between Ilys and the officers of the Adventure Playground Committee. Ilys's notes of a meeting early in August record:

Amy Travers reported what Mr Harris had suggested about the fence. Mrs Reynolds expressed the view that the use of local men to fence a corner of the site and clear it was much too slow, and that it would be quicker and more effective to order fencing and have L.A.P.A. pay. I explained our desire to use 'local involvement' and that if this was wanted, although it was slower, it was in the end more effective.

And Mrs Reynolds recalls:

They said, 'Oh, the dads will easily build proper fences and they'll come on Saturdays and Sundays and work in the evenings.' Well, not a single dad ever turned up, so that one was disillusioned very quickly.

THE PREFAB

To the Nottingwood group, the adventure playground presented a chance to get some premises of its own, for which it had been looking for some time, and in August, a youth club at the northern end of the borough which was closing down because of the area's redevelopment, offered a large wooden hut to the group. Ilys took Mr Hutchins, the husband of one of the Nottingwood mothers, to see it and he said that dismantling it and re-erecting it on the site was too big a job for volunteers. The mothers' committee decided to get a builder's estimate. The plan at this time was that the Nottingwood group, perhaps with a loan from the Family Study, would erect the hut on their patch of the Treadgold Street site, to be used for the playgroup and possibly other community activities.

In September, however, the plan was changed. The officers of the Adventure Playground Committee had arranged that the Ministry would leave three prefabs on the site when the rest were

Treadgold Street

demolished. The Adventure Playground Committee would buy these and the officers suggested that the Nottingwood group might have one. The mothers held a meeting and agreed that they would prefer a prefab to the hut, so two representatives, Mrs Jenkins and Mrs Fellows, met the officers of the Adventure Playground Committee to discuss this. Ilys recorded :

Mrs Reynolds said that the Ministry will leave three prefabs standing when they demolish the rest, but the Adventure Playground Committee will have to buy them. I asked the cost. The cost is £20 each. Mrs Jenkins and Mrs Fellows agree that since we have enough in the bank we could buy a prefab from the Adventure Playground Committee for ourselves if this was allowed. We said one of the prefabs was better for us than the hut. The Adventure Playground Committee appeared glad to think of having the hut. We then repeated the offer, saying that we could afford the £20 and would be pleased to have the prefab. This was accepted.

The one that the Nottingwood group bought was No. 36 and they made a gift of their hut to the adventure playground. No. 36 was vacated at the beginning of October and the Nottingwood group moved in on the following day. Ilys described the occasion :

I collected the keys from Mrs Reynolds and went round to the house a little after 9 A.M. I met Mrs Fellows who was taking Jimmy to school. She and Amy Travers came with me. We had a good look round. There was a back window broken but otherwise the house is in excellent condition. Very little needs doing except to cut a hole in the wall between the bedrooms to make one large room for the playgroup. We had another look round later and discovered that the electricity and gas meters had been removed (by the Electricity Board and the Gas Board?), but a new telephone was sitting on the passage floor. As soon as Martin's stores opened after dinner I bought a lock and twelve yards of curtain wire and then went over to Treadgold Street. I changed the lock on the door and until 4 P.M. we put up curtains. Everyone was very pleased. I saw Mr Hutchins in the evening about the broken window. He will put it in on Friday.

Two of the mothers have said :

It was like moving into your first flat.

We went round and we looked in and we were thrilled to pieces, because the stove was there, the toilet, the sink, the bath. All we had to do was to have the water and the electricity put on again. We started to move in bits of furniture and clean it up. We took chairs

A Community Project in Notting Dale

round and it was really nice. It was like home from home.

THE ONE O'CLOCK CLUB

Shortly after this move into the prefab, a disagreement which had been developing for some time between the Nottingwood group and the officers of the Adventure Playground Committee was brought into the open. It concerned the establishment of a G.L.C. One o'clock Club* on the site. Mrs Bancroft explains :

From the beginning we thought it would be a good idea if we could get the G.L.C. interested in running a One o'clock Club because they would supply us with lots of materials. The man who is in charge of G.L.C. play parks came down and looked at the site with me and Ilys and Jane Reynolds right at the start and he said it would be super. Then we had meetings with the G.L.C. Parks Department and all that was tied up. They would come in as soon as the prefab was vacated which they were going to use.

Most adventure playgrounds have some provision for under-fives on the site. At the Notting Hill Adventure Playground, for instance, a playgroup is run by the Save the Children Fund. The One o'clock Club was to perform this function for the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground. It is not clear how or when the decision was made but by October it had been decided that the prefab in which the G.L.C. was to run a One o'clock Club was No. 36, the one that had been sold to the Nottingwood group.† When the mothers heard about the plan to have a One o'clock Club in No. 36, many of them were not happy about it. There were some who were in favour :

We were going to come out better because any equipment that was provided for the One o'clock Club we were going to be able to use

* In some of its parks, the Greater London Council provides premises, equipment and a supervisor for small children's play. These places are called One o'clock Clubs. They are open in the afternoons. Mothers bring their children and it is one of the rules that they remain there while their children play.

† It is Mrs Bancroft's recollection that the G.L.C. was to run a temporary One o'clock Club in No. 36 during the summer holidays, though this turned out to be impossible as No. 36 was not vacated in time, but was to establish a more permanent one in one of the other prefabs if and when the Adventure Playground got under way. She does not think that it was ever intended that the Nottingwood group and the One o'clock Club should share No. 36, and she therefore thinks that the events here described were the result of a misunderstanding.

Treadgold Street

in the playgroup, and we didn't have so much equipment then as we had later on.

I thought it would be a good idea because it wasn't run on the basis of a playgroup, with just a rota mother. All the mothers stayed. I thought it was a good thing because not only were the children getting new friends out of it, but so were the mothers. The biggest proportion of those mothers hardly met anyone else unless they went out shopping.

But the majority were against it:

What I could see was our equipment being used and I could visualize it getting smashed quicker than it need be.

There were so many strings attached. You had to do their hours and you had to do their way of running a playgroup. It was entirely different to the way that ours was run. The mothers had to be there with the children all the time. You couldn't have a rota system. The mother had to be there with the child.

Other reasons why the mothers did not want it were that the One o'clock Club would prevent the Nottingwood group from having afternoon activities in the prefab, and that if the One o'clock Club was using the prefab for five hours a day, it might begin to dictate about the arrangements. This last point indicates the basic fear of the Nottingwood group which was that they would be taken over by the One o'clock Club and the adventure playground. This has been expressed in different ways:

I thought it would get too big and too organized and it would not be the same atmosphere as the group we had. I thought that we would become part of the adventure playground because they were so big anyway. We would still, quite probably, be running the playgroup but we would be running it under them.

We felt a bit swamped by bigger and better organized groups. We could still call ourselves the Nottingwood group, but when you came to look at things more thoroughly, it was more or less a take over by the One o'clock Club. We would completely lose our identity. We were a bit proud of our identity, we of the Nottingwood playgroup. It had its ups and downs. You'd get sick and tired of it one minute and pleased with yourself and pat yourself on the back the next minute. We thought we'd lose our identity and just be another One o'clock Club.

Added to this fear was, perhaps, a resentment at having this form of provision, as they felt, thrust upon them:

A Community Project in Notting Dale

They had no connection between themselves at the top and the people in charge of the playgroup. The gap there was absolutely ridiculous. They were sort of telling us, 'Well, I think it would be a good idea, because you've got no money. We're going to do this, that, and the other.' Ilys had a different way. Ilys didn't have anything to achieve for herself. She didn't set out to say, 'I'm the first person to start a playgroup or a playgroup in this district for the poor unfortunate children.' This wasn't her aim. She might have started out thinking, 'Kids in this district definitely need something,' but it wasn't at the back of her mind that at the end of it she was going to be put somewhere and said, 'That's the first woman who started playgroups'. Whereas the people on that committee, they thought they were doing somewhere and said, 'That's the first woman who started playgroups.' thing for the poor, so you'd got to be very grateful. We didn't want to be grateful.

Ilys got to know the mothers' feelings about the plan to have a One o'clock Club in No. 36. Mrs Meredith, who was supervisor of the G.L.C. One o'clock Clubs, and who became a member of the Adventure Playground Committee when it was convened, was anxious to explain to the mothers that the G.L.C. only wanted to support their group, not to take it over. Ilys therefore arranged a meeting between Mrs Meredith and the mothers, which took place in No. 36, two days after the Nottingwood group had moved in. Mrs Meredith recalls :

It was an ideal situation where the G.L.C. and the local council and an adventure playground committee were all trying to help a particular needy area. I spoke to the mothers myself in order to put them at ease about sharing with the One o'clock Club. They may not all have realized that we were on their side really and that we had access to equipment and all the things that they wanted but hadn't got the money for. They were a little bit anti the One o'clock Club. I tried to explain to them how well I knew their situation because I had worked in playgroups all these years. I felt that they didn't want the One o'clock Club there, but mainly from ignorance. The One o'clock Club was a new situation where the mothers sat around and were there. They understood playgroups where the mothers were responsible for doing something - rota helper or whatever. It looked to them as if we were doing it the easy way, with the G.L.C. paying two staff to be there every afternoon. To be quite truthful, remembering back, it was hard going. They didn't in fact want to listen with understanding. They listened because they were polite enough. They were very sweet to me. I didn't feel any resentment against myself as a person but only

Treadgold Street

against the G.L.C. daring to do this terrible thing when they had just got their own group.

Ilys continues the story :

At the end of the meeting, the mothers seemed unconvinced of the value of the One o'clock Club and were particularly concerned about the number of hours taken up (five hours daily), the wear and tear on the house, and the sharing of expenses over maintenance, repairs and electricity. Mrs Meredith explained that they could make use of the One o'clock Club's equipment and although no precise arrangement for sharing house expenses was made, the mothers and I were under the impression that some share of heating and maintenance could be arranged.

A few days later, on 10 October, there took place the first meeting of the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground Committee. It was held in Mrs Bancroft's home and present were the three officers, a local headmistress, a local health visitor, Mrs Meredith, Ilys and two representatives of the Nottingwood group, Mrs Hutchins and Mrs Wheeler, who had recently been elected the group's new chairman and secretary. The question of the One o'clock Club came up. Ilys recorded the occasion :

It was made clear that the G.L.C. Parks Department would not be sharing the cost of heating or repairs etc. The mothers showed horror at the prospect of being faced with a heating bill for five hours daily which, in their view, someone else had used. The committee's officers at first took the view that the mothers were 'backing down' on their agreement to take responsibility for the management of No. 36. I intervened at this point to explain that the resources of the community were limited, that they were willing and eager to use and manage the house, that they could arrange their activities and organize the use of the house around their resources, but that an additional heating bill for thirty hours a week would strain their resources. It certainly seemed that the committee's officers had failed to appreciate that the mothers, having agreed to buy No. 36 and to accept all responsibility for its management, were, *ipso facto*, entitled to be consulted about any sharing of the premises. Mrs Meredith pointed out that the One o'clock Club, having been invited to make the provision (but of course the invitation had not come from the mothers), could only supply the staff and equipment and that the morning playgroup could share freely the equipment supplied. It was finally agreed that the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground Committee could ask for an extra sum from the Campden Charities to cover the cost of this extra heating and that

A Community Project in Notting Dale

the mothers should bring any difficulties they found in meeting this expense to the committee. At this point, Mrs Wheeler made a contribution to the discussion to explain how the parents felt about their position in relation to No. 36 and to other members of the committee. She said, 'It isn't that we aren't appreciative. We are very grateful to have the playground and to have a place for our own activities. But we are a group. We've worked hard to be a group and we want to stay as a group and go on that way. We don't want to be broken up and for us to be taken over.'

At a later meeting, the mothers decided that they definitely did not want to share No. 36 with the One o'clock Club. They suggested to the Adventure Playground Committee that the One o'clock Club might run in one of the other prefabs or in the wooden hut, and that is how the matter was left.

THE BREAK-INS

Only six days after Ilys, Mrs Travers and Mrs Fellows had put up the curtains in No. 36, Ilys wrote :

After dinner-time I went to see Mrs Fellows and then went on to No. 36. We were surprised to find that the front window was out and the front door open. The house was a mess inside. Someone had been in and had removed all the metal from the kitchen. The kitchen wall and the metal facing surrounding the water tank had been torn out. A piece of ceiling had been ripped out, probably to get at the tank. The floor and the kitchen surfaces were strewn with rubble from the ceiling and the wall. Some pipe had been removed from the sink. All the taps were gone and the telephone gone. A large pickaxe was in the kitchen. The chairs were still there. We felt wretched. It was a terrible mess and means a lot of work, and money, to replace the pipes. I went to see Amy Travers. She was not very well. She had had a word with one of the residents who was known to help himself to empty houses. She had asked him to respect the three remaining prefabs on the site as they were meant for the children, and she is sure he wouldn't have done it. Everyone is upset as they say, 'Everyone knew it was for the kids!'

This happened on the day of the first meeting of the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground Committee. Ilys noted :

The break-in was reported and there was a lot of anxiety about further break-ins and how these could be prevented. The committee's officers thought a watchman ought to be employed and wanted to know if there was anyone who might be prepared to stay in No. 36 to keep an eye on

Treadgold Street

things. Mrs Wheeler knew a Mr Riordan who might be willing, but as neither No. 36 nor No. 38 has water or electricity, it would be impossible. (The officers were all ready to pop him into No. 36 with a camp bed and a hurricane lamp, but I pointed out that he would have no water so he could not make tea, wash, shave or use the lavatory.) It was decided to get him into the other one (No. 225 Lancaster Road) as soon as it was empty.

Mr Riordan agreed to live in No. 225 and, since he needed somewhere to live at the time, he agreed to live there without payment. He moved in when the prefab was vacated (this was the last to be vacated) a few weeks later, but not long after he moved in, that prefab was burgled and his clothes were stolen. No written record of what was done about this has been found. Mrs Wheeler has said:

He should have been insured. They hadn't even bothered to insure him - 'After all, he's only a watchman.' Ilys said they should have insured him and they said they were going to but they never got around to it as they didn't think it was important. He'd lost all his suits, everything, and they only gave him £5 and I said, 'Well, that wouldn't even pay for his underwear.' All he was asking was that they would give him a suit. They said that he was exaggerating how much his suits cost, that he was trying to pull the wool over their eyes - 'A painter and decorator, how can he have a suit worth £40?' And I said, 'I can tell you, he had three.'

The officers of the Adventure Playground Committee remember it differently:

We paid him something. He wasn't insured. He had no personal insurance. We didn't realize. We took out a personal insurance for him subsequently. He valued his clothes at something or other and we paid him about two-thirds, because someone said he was 'trying it on', that he was asking for more than he thought he could get. So we settled for some figure. It was about £35 I think we paid him. I was very sorry about it all. It was very unfortunate for Mr Riordan. He had a bit of a rough ride. On the other hand, he did know it was liable to be like that.

That the officers thought that Mr Riordan would have a personal insurance whereas the mothers thought that his employers would insure him is an interesting example of the difference in assumptions with which the two sides began and which made co-operation difficult.

When the last tenant left at the end of October, a start could be made on demolishing the unwanted prefabs and clearing the site. An adventure playground leader had been appointed at the

A Community Project in Notting Dale

beginning of August. His previous work was on a local play park and he had been recommended to the officers. Two of them, with Ilys, had been to see him, and since at that time they expected the site to be vacated in a matter of weeks, he had been appointed then. His name was Brian Stafford. He recalls the state of the site in October :

The demolition people had fulfilled their contract which was taking the prefabs away, but the rest of the site was left for us to clear. It was incredible. It was just half-finished prefabs, Anderson shelters, junk, fences, gardens. I felt the best thing you could do first was to get the site cleared before you ask people to get involved. This was very difficult with a wheelbarrow in the middle of I don't know how many acres it was. As playground leader, it was left to me.

The presence of Mr Riordan prevented break-ins at night, but he was at work during the day and there was often no one on the site, so the vandalism continued. Brian Stafford recalls :

It got to a stage at one time when I went to lunch and upon returning I would see men in the scrap metal game coming out of the roof of the prefab and over the wall. I've still got some of their tools that they left. Very nice of them. Some very nice crowbars and hammers and so on.

Ilys thought that since No. 36 was the property of the Nottingwood group, it should be left to the Nottingwood group to repair it. She explained to the Adventure Playground Committee at the meeting :

Concerning putting the prefab right, I took the trouble to explain that we had men who could and would do it. I said that it could be done and done well as the fathers represented a number of trades and occupations which were necessary. *But* our pace was different. We knew that the Adventure Playground Committee could get repairs done at once as they could pay for it. We had to use the fathers' labour on week-ends. What could be done by a contractor in one day might take three or four week-ends when done by us. But fathers wanted to do it and would.

Mrs Bancroft thought the work should not be left to the fathers :

Ilys told me about the break-ins and I said, 'Well, it's your house, but I should get it mended immediately. If necessary, pay someone. Don't wait for the fathers to do it in their spare time.' But she said that Mr Travers or somebody would do it. Well, it didn't get done and because it didn't get done there were more break-ins. Someone was going to mend the plumbing but the electricity still wasn't working and this must have dragged on for three or four weeks. To my recollection it never

Treadgold Street

got mended. It may have been mended and broken again. That I don't know.

In fact some of the fathers did make some repairs. Mr Hutchins recalls:

I can still remember putting the windows in and people coming round and saying, 'There's some more been broken now.' And I thought, 'This is how it's going to be. You put windows in one day and go round and renew them the following day.' Mike was going to do the plumbing and I was going to do the electrical work and get it done in first-class condition. It was possible at the beginning. It wasn't too bad. Just a couple of panels were broken but they could easily have been repaired. We did do a couple that were broken, and it was all intact. But people weren't going to keep devoting their time to repairing the place and making it nice for the kids when every time you had done something, you turned round the following day and you were back at square one.

So the few fathers who did help became discouraged by the relentless vandalism, and No. 36 was never put in good enough condition to be used by the playgroup.

THE OPENING

The Adventure Playground Committee meanwhile were pressing on with their efforts to get the site opened as soon as possible. It was in fact unofficially opened in the Christmas holidays, but many difficulties were encountered. One was that a water main was fractured and could not be located. Brian Stafford was still trying to clear the site:

There was an architect on the committee, a very good one, but I believe that architects are architects and it's not as if they know about the functioning of adventure playgrounds. She wanted to keep all the gardens that were left when the prefabs had been removed. She thought the site should be studded with these gardens that were left. Personally, I didn't think it was a very good idea. There was a mass of wire fences round these gardens partly sunk in the soil, which made clearing the site very difficult and they would have made it impossible to divide the site into separate areas as I intended. So I managed, through writing letters, to get Wimpey's to come to the site, free of charge, with a bulldozer and two men, to clear the site, which they did. It would have taken me months, without any doubt, to do what they did. Two men with a bulldozer in two days cleared this site.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

Mrs Bancroft has said :

What Brian did was to get Wimpey's to come and bulldoze the site. He did this while I was away around Christmas and he absolutely ruined the whole site. We'd taken an awful lot of trouble to keep the bushes and bits of grass and the little concrete paths and things, and when the Ministry of Works was clearing away the prefabs, all this had been carefully preserved. And dear old Brian, trying to clear the water on the site, gets Wimpey's to come and they flatten the whole place so it's just a sea of mud with one prefab sticking up in the middle of it and the remains of another and a wooden hut.

The children who played on the site got very dirty. Fifty pairs of Wellington boots were procured for their use, but there were still complaints. Another difficulty was that the wooden hut donated by the Nottingwood group to the adventure playground was found to have more serious defects than had been thought. The floor, for one thing, had to be replaced. It was still transported and re-erected, though at greater cost than had been anticipated. The children lit fires on the site almost every night, and the Fire Brigade had complained to the Town Hall about it. The vandalism continued. One of the officers recalls :

We got the play hut erected and we got some things for it. We got some heaters for it, but as fast as we got things, they were pinched. The prefabs' walls were damaged. The doors were taken off. I couldn't understand why they wanted to take the doors off. It seemed so extraordinary.

One of the more vocal opponents of the adventure playground was Father Armitage, the vicar of a church which stands next to the site. Mrs Bancroft recalls :

Father Armitage had had things thrown at him by the kids and they had shouted obscenities at him. I would have thought that, working in that area, it would have rolled off his back. Apparently it got under his skin rather. He practically reduced me to a nervous wreck. He used to ring me up nearly every night around midnight and say, 'They're in there again.' We were all getting absolutely wrought up.

Mrs Travers has said :

That vicar came onto the site two or three times ranting and raving and then he wondered why it was that the kids rebelled and turned against him and started to throw stones. I don't blame the kids for that.

Treadgold Street

I don't encourage vandalism, but I think that if you're going to go against kids and not give kids a fair chance, they're going to have their own back, which is what they did, and he asked for all he got and I haven't a bit of pity for him.

Father Armitage expressed his views in a church newsletter which he wrote immediately after the stoning incident. Unfortunately, all attempts to find a copy have failed, but a local newspaper reported :

The newsletter asked whether the playground was open at all hours so that the 'criminal apprentices can learn their trade', and it referred to the 'phoney psychology' of the authorities in their efforts to appease the 'young thugs' of the neighbourhood. The newsletter alleged that 'the children of the criminal classes are being allowed to use the playground as a base from which to attack members of the public'.

Mrs Travers has said of this :

The vicar even had the cheek to put a leaflet out and the names he called those kids round there was diabolical for any vicar.

After a correspondence between Mrs Bancroft and the Bishop, Father Armitage* made an apology for his over-hasty action, but it was partly as a result of Father Armitage's parish newsletter that an 'extraordinary meeting' of the Adventure Playground Committee was held in January 1967 in the hut on the site, to which anyone interested was invited. The Water Board was asked again to see to the fractured water main, and the Electricity Board to install electricity in the hut. A leaflet was produced and delivered to every house in the neighbourhood in the hope that this would reduce the vandalism. A rota of committee members was arranged to visit the site and help the leader. Finally a new caretaker was engaged, Mr Riordan having left by this time. Mrs Reynolds has said of the new caretaker :

He was the only person we could find who was prepared to sleep there. He had a dog and he had no job and he was glad of some money. He was a genuine anarchist, totally permissive. He didn't mind in the least if the children destroyed whatever there was. He was the sort of man who related very well to a small group, so in the end I think he had three or four children there all the time sleeping rough in the remaining hut.

None of these measures was effective and, a few weeks later, the

* The person here called Father Armitage has since left Notting Dale.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

hut which had been transported and re-erected on the site at great expense was burnt to the ground.

THE CLOSING

Also during January, the Nottingwood mothers' group was making arrangements about repairing No. 36. Not all their energy could be devoted to this task since the work for a Christmas bazaar had filled most of November and December and other serious problems faced them in January and February. The plumbing and the wiring had not been repaired. All the windows were broken and had been covered with corrugated iron by the Council. One wall was damaged and the place was dirty. Mrs Wheeler, the secretary of the Nottingwood group, was particularly active in attempting to get it put right, and she spoke to Mrs Bancroft about the possibility of a loan from the Adventure Playground Committee. Mrs Bancroft said that L.A.P.A. could loan the Nottingwood group £20 towards the electrical repairs, but stipulated that all other repairs must be done first, that the loan would be given after the electricity had been installed, and that the playgroup must move in as soon as this had been done to prevent further damage. Mrs Bancroft has said of this :

Ilys would say to me, 'Now look, you mustn't do things for the mothers all the time. You must leave them to do their own things.' So when I was a bit niggardly over the loan for the electricity, this was me trying to act in the role towards the mothers that Ilys seemed to want me to. She said, 'You must set them terms. You must set them realistic conditions because I want them to begin to understand about managing money.'

Mrs Wheeler set about getting estimates for the work and had discussions about applying to the Family Study or to Campden Charities for grants. One week after the offer of the loan, however, Mrs Bancroft telephoned the workers' flat. Ilys was away in February for what was to be the first of several periods in hospital, but Elizabeth Glover, who had begun as a second community worker in November, was carrying on the work in her absence. She recorded at the time :

Telephone call from Mrs Bancroft. She informed me that they found they had very little money and would have to withdraw the offered loan of £20. The organizer of the One o'clock Clubs had been to the site this morning and said that a One o'clock Club could not possibly be run

Treadgold Street

there. She said that No. 36 had had it, that it would need over £100 spent on it and that it's a pity the mothers didn't move in sooner. She said they are giving Brian Stafford and the new caretaker two weeks' notice today and if they can't get more money from Campden Charities they are pulling out. They now have money only until the end of March. I asked her if she was going to inform Mrs Wheeler, the Nottingwood group's secretary, and she said she had no time to spend another twenty minutes talking to her and she was asking me to do so. I was speechless.

This record of the conversation illustrates the relationship which by now existed between the officers and the Family Study workers. Their different views on how much the mothers should be involved in making decisions about the playground, which had brought them into opposition before over the One o'clock Club and over repairs to the prefab, now brought them into conflict. Mrs Bancroft thought the officers were entitled to dismiss the playground leader and was simply informing the rest of the committee. She was a busy person and was saving time by asking Elizabeth to pass on the message, and if she was a bit short-tempered it was because she had had a bad time with Treadgold Street. Elizabeth, on the other hand, felt that the officers had no right to take such a step without the mothers since dismissing the worker meant closing the site and this included No. 36, but if it had been taken, she felt that Mrs Bancroft could at least have told Mrs Wheeler herself. Community involvement was what the officers had wanted and this, she was trying to say, meant taking some trouble, like telephoning Mrs Wheeler. She felt, moreover, that Ilys had been trying to explain this for a long time, and the officers seemed to take no notice. Relations after this did not improve.

Mrs Bancroft explains the officers' decision to close the site :

The site was enormous and we had an extremely short lease, so it was very difficult to get any substantial sum of money to put it right. The estimates for dealing with the wet were in the region of £2,000 or £3,000. When the man from the One o'clock Clubs came and saw the site he nearly had a fit. He said, 'We can't put a One o'clock Club here.' So there was that, plus the fact that I didn't think Brian was the right leader, plus the fact that the break-ins were continuing. We still hadn't found the water main and the hut had been burnt down, so it was just chucking good money after bad. I thought it was better to get out. We just had a little bit left and we thought we'd end up with some credit if we handed back the balance. The mothers' prefab was a write-off long before this, far beyond any possibility of repair.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

Not everyone agreed with this point of view. Brian Stafford was one who did not :

I'll never forget the day Mrs Bancroft came down to shut the playground. The sun was shining and there were lots of children there. We had these crates and formed a sort of camp area and there were lots of kids having a good time and to see the playground shut on that day seemed rather strange to me. I thought it was sad because I thought we were getting over the hard times. We had already arranged for an army of people to come down to get the site finally cleared. We were just going through one of the anticipated difficult stages. Adventure playgrounds take time.

And Mrs Travers was another :

Somebody came round to me and said that there was news of the playground closing down. I turned round and I said, 'I think it's wrong to shut the whole site up.' A few of the local mothers who were only living across the road from the site were all agreed. Their kids could come home from school, come in, put their Wellingtons on and go out straight away onto the site. So we said, 'Why not let's fight now?' So this we did and we started to get leaflets out stating that they were going to close the site down and why not fight now to keep the site open? Well, one of the women on the Adventure Playground Committee heard apparently that we were going round the streets begging people's help to hold on to the site, so she came up one Saturday morning. I went round to get some more of these leaflets to put round and who should be there but this woman? She said, 'Well, look at the state of the site. This isn't happening. This is wrong. That's wrong.' She could find all the faults under the sun. I agreed that at the beginning we were having fires and we were having trouble with the kids. When you first start off with kids - I don't care whose kids they are, my own included - they try your patience to see how far they can go with you, and this is what the kids were doing. All she could see was that it was a complete waste of money and a complete waste of time to carry on, and of course her and I got into quite a heated argument over this. She said, 'I can see you've got a lot of interest in what you want round here, but at the same time,' she said, 'I'm not in a position to stand and argue with you today.' She lost her temper the same as I did. 'If you care to come to a meeting then you can come and voice these opinions out.' And I said, 'What's the good of going to a meeting and voicing my opinions and the opinion of the local people when we know full well that if you're not going to give us your backing, then we're lost?' I was choked. I was really filled. By this time we were getting the kids on. They had these ropes from the trees and they were sliding down the ropes. They had wood, they had

Treadgold Street

nails, they had hammers. They hadn't had enough stuff to start with and this was half the bloody trouble. So that was it. The site got closed down and that was the finish of it.

Mrs Bancroft recalls a different meeting which took place later that day:

I was very upset because I heard that the caretaker and Mrs Travers had sat up all night duplicating this petition. They had got the wrong end of the stick in that they were blaming the Council for the closing down of the site. In fact it wasn't the Council at all. It was mainly me, in fact, because I personally felt, and people agreed with me, that it was not a viable proposition as it stood. The Council had given us the site. We'd failed to make a go of it. That wasn't their fault. In fact we were hoping to use it as a lever to get a permanent site from them, which indeed we have now done, so it would have been most unfortunate to create this fuss. We had a long discussion about it, really quite amicable and I explained that stirring up feeling and making a petition to the Council would really be self-defeating. 'All right,' they said, 'We'll stop taking the petition round.'

The decision to dismiss the leader and to close the site was taken by the officers of the committee. Mrs Reynolds has said:

I suspect that the consultation was mainly me with friends and me with my Notting Hill Adventure Playground Committee. I think possibly the decision was made not at committee but by sort of general consent between friends because, other than the mothers and Ilys, we were a small group of friends. I think this facilitates decision-making, but it also does make it rather autocratic.

Mrs Wheeler has said of this:

A few people made the decisions and just called on us to tell us what decisions they had made.

A meeting of the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground Committee took place on 13 February 1967, which turned out to be the final official meeting. Ilys was still away, but Elizabeth went with the two mothers who were on the committee. Her description of how it felt for her and the mothers illustrates how wide the rift had now become between them and the officers:

We arrived at about eight o'clock. Previously, meetings had been held in Mrs Bancroft's sitting room, a large room, and we'd sit round on different sized chairs in a sort of circle. When we came to this final meeting we were immediately ushered in the opposite direction into the dining

A Community Project in Notting Dale

room which was practically full. People were sitting round a very large oval mahogany table, and on this highly polished table there were elegant tall wine glasses with iced, white wine. There was hardly anywhere to sit and there were an awful lot of faces that I didn't know. I was aware that a number of decisions had been taken beforehand. Brian Stafford had already been sacked and the site was closed. There had been no consultation with the mothers about whether they wanted to finish with No. 36. I felt very strongly that I would have to raise this, because no one else would, and the closing of the site did concern them since No. 36 belonged to them. This was a very difficult point to raise because I was well aware that No. 36 was now in ribbons and that the mothers' hopes of getting it going again were pretty remote. But there was a feeling still among the mothers that something could be done – they'd bothered to come to that meeting. Mrs Bancroft very much held this meeting and I had to try about three times to have my say, and this indicates both how nervous I was and how powerful this group was that it was very difficult for me to get in. I asked whether No. 36 was included in this decision to close the site and I think I was greeted with, 'Of course, what else could happen?' Then the discussion about the future was interesting. All the organization people were discussing the organization part of the future, whether Mrs Bancroft should go on being chairman, whether they should negotiate with the Council about the site and so on. And then the mothers, entirely on their own bat, came in very worried about the danger on the site and asked what was being done about informing people in the area, thinking that a notice should go in the newspaper or be sent round, informing parents that the site would be dangerous. They had closed the site and they assumed that by just shutting the gate, this would keep the kids out, but the fence hadn't kept them out in the past, so the mothers were a bit worried about this. We felt pretty excluded at that meeting. There was nothing to make us feel good about being at that meeting, though Mrs Wheeler had worked very hard indeed. They were fed up with us.

It is illustrative of how unsuccessfully the two sides were communicating that Mrs Bancroft was quite unaware, and upset to discover, that the meeting had had that effect on Elizabeth and the mothers. She has said of the description :

It all sounds like a grand pompous committee lady being a bit high-handed and packing the meeting with her friends, and although I quite see that it might have seemed like that, in fact the reality was completely different. I was anxious and tense over the meeting and when you are very worried about something and want to get something across, you do tend rather to hold the floor and I expect I did. The drinks and the dining-room table and the rest of it were by no means meant to be

Treadgold Street

something more formal than what we had done before. It was partly to give an impetus to the new committee, because a lot of people there were in a way the nucleus of a new committee, and it was partly because it was my last meeting – I was resigning as chairman whatever else happened – and I thought it would be a nice thing to do to give everybody a drink and would be something like a thank you and a farewell from me personally to everybody who had helped.

Elizabeth continues the story :

There was a meeting of the Nottingwood group the following morning in the Rugby Club. I think Doris Hutchins gave the report to say that it was all finished. She was asked if she'd said anything at the meeting about No. 36 and she replied, 'What was the good? They just cocked a deaf 'un.' There was no outrage. The mothers just sort of took it, which I would say was indicative that they were all very depressed that it was over and that was it.

Mrs Wheeler has said of the Adventure Playground meeting :

I was amazed because they'd got such a body of people there. Doris and I had been going from the playgroup and yet we had never met all those people. There were so many people there, I thought, 'Blimey, why do they need so many people to end something?'

Since the Ministry, in the end, had not charged for the three pre-fabs, the Adventure Playground Committee decided to pay back the Nottingwood group the money paid for No. 36.

A meeting of the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground Committee, which was to have taken place a week after the meeting on 13 February, was cancelled. After this, neither the workers nor the mothers heard anything more. Late in March, Ilys, who was back at work by then, recorded :

Yesterday I learnt that there is to be a meeting of the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground Committee today. We had not heard anything about it. I also learnt that it is hoped to collect insurance on the hut that was burnt down and to offer this money to Campden Charities. It appears, then, that there has been some meeting as some decisions have been taken, or that some decisions have been taken without a meeting. We have not received notice of any meeting since the cancellation of the meeting called for 20 February. I decided to phone Mrs Bancroft.

Mrs Bancroft said that there has not been a meeting, and that no decisions have been taken. I mentioned the matter of repaying Campden Charities and Mrs Bancroft said that the decision had been taken at the last meeting of the Treadgold Street Committee. When I said that

A Community Project in Notting Dale

I had not seen this in the minutes (13 February) Mrs Bancroft said it would be discussed at 'tonight's meeting'. I showed surprise that there was a meeting. Mrs Bancroft said, 'Oh, haven't you had a notice of it?' I said neither of us had, nor had the others [Mrs Wheeler and Mrs Hutchins]: Mrs Bancroft then said it was really a meeting of the Notting Hill Adventure Playground officers, then added that it had been intended to have a Treadgold Street Committee meeting afterwards. Then she said that perhaps the Treadgold Street Committee meeting was not taking place as no notices had been sent out.

After further conversation, I referred again to the Treadgold Street Committee, but Mrs Bancroft said it had been disbanded. I said that from reading the minutes I understood she was remaining as chairman during negotiations with the Borough and this was still going on. She replied that she had stayed on as she had written a lot of letters and these required attention, and said again that the Committee was disbanded. I said I hadn't seen a record of this in the minutes and, if it were so, it should surely have been agreed and recorded. She then said hastily that she would get it minuted tonight (at the non-happening Treadgold Street meeting?).

She explained further that, if the Treadgold Street site or any other were developed, it would be under the responsibility of the Notting Hill Adventure Playground Committee, but with a sub-committee, adding 'We should have to have an entirely new committee.'

Mrs Bancroft explains her view of the position after the meeting on 13 February:

The possibility of our asking for more money hinged on whether or not we could get the guarantee of a reasonable length of lease from the Council. I wasn't involved but some members of the committee met the Chairman of the Housing Department and he told them that it was not possible to guarantee them a lease for the two years which they considered a minimum for making it worthwhile, so they thought that that really was that. So we then turned our attention to pressing the Borough, saying, 'We can't run it on this temporary basis. Will you give us a permanent site in the Lancaster Road West development scheme?' And, in fact, out of that discussion came the promise of a permanent site which we have now got. So at that point the negotiations reached as good a conclusion as you could hope for. Now perhaps somebody should have convened another meeting of the Treadgold Street Committee, but at the end there were eighteen people on the committee and we thought there was no point in sending out eighteen notices of a meeting and getting everybody together just to tell them the Borough wouldn't give them a long enough lease. As far as I know, a little notice was sent out saying that a meeting had been held with the Borough, though I didn't

Treadgold Street

receive one myself. As far as I was concerned, the Treadgold Street Committee ceased to exist after 13 February. If you haven't got a playground, you don't have a playground committee.

WHAT WENT WRONG ?

Looking back over the story of the Treadgold Street Playground, most people are agreed that it was a failure. Even so, as the officers have stressed, several good things came out of it. Mrs Reynolds has said :

One of the reasons for the failure, we thought, apart from the badness of the site and the lack of cooperation, was that it was very hard to get a good adventure playground leader. There just weren't any available. So when we decided we could go on no longer, we had in fact about £700 either promised or in our hands from various charities, and we thought that either we must give this money back or think of something sensible to do with it, and this is how the trainee project started. The money financed the first year of having a trainee playground leader at Notting Hill Adventure Playground. Also, partly as a result of this *débâcle*, it seemed necessary to have someone whose sole responsibility is to start adventure playgrounds, and we now have one and the money for one. The money comes from the Department of Education and Science through I.L.E.A.,* and he is appointed through L.A.P.A.† His duties are to assess whether a playground is worth pursuing and to help people in setting them up. So a lot of good things came out of this.

Also, the Borough Council has given the site and money for an adventure playground in the Lancaster Road West development scheme. Of this Mrs Bancroft has said :

Treadgold Street did convince the Council that there was strong neighbourhood support for the idea. The Housing Officer came down a few times, and the welfare people and the health visitors were reporting back about it. It wasn't that *we* wanted an adventure playground that impressed the Council. If we hadn't had the mothers then, I don't know whether we'd have our site now.

Another valuable result is that lessons were learnt about how to set up an adventure playground. The playground leader has said :

I think it's practically impossible for one man to run an adventure playground on a site of that size, though I didn't think that at the time.

* Inner London Education Authority.

† London Adventure Playground Association.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

I think now that one would require a senior playground leader and a male and female assistant. Another thing which that experience taught me was that prefabs are just not on. On a new adventure playground in such an area, you'd be very lucky to keep a prefab in good condition. They are very vulnerable things and a good kick would finish them off.

Another lesson is that vandalism is to be expected, so for the first months there should be a person on the site almost continuously. A more general lesson is that there are bound to be problems and that therefore an adventure playground cannot be established in a few months, so one needs to have a site guaranteed for several years. Lessons specifically about adventure playgrounds, however, are not sufficiently relevant to this book to be discussed in detail.

Of more interest here is the attempt which was made at community involvement. It might be called a success on the ground that there were two representatives of the Nottingwood group on the Adventure Playground Committee who did attend all the committee meetings and who did make some contribution. But relations were not good, and afterwards neither side had happy memories of the cooperation or much respect for the other. The mothers felt that the officers did not care what the local people had to say, and the attitude of the officers towards the mothers is perhaps summed up by one who said, 'They just seemed a damn nuisance, actually, the whole mothers' group.'

The community in question consisted of those people who lived in the vicinity of the playground and whose children might have used it, and the only members of this community who had anything to do with the Adventure Playground Committee were the mothers in the Nottingwood group. Although the Nottingwood group was not the same thing as the community, and therefore its representatives were not representatives for the whole community, involving the Nottingwood mothers would have been at least a step in the direction of community involvement. It may be, however, that the officers did not intend to involve even the Nottingwood mothers in setting up the adventure playground. Mrs Bancroft, for instance, has explained:

We didn't see it that we were helping them to run their mothers' group and they were helping us to run the adventure playground. We expected to work more separately. They would have representation on our committee because they were running something on the site, but they didn't have a right therefore to say, for instance, whether or not the leader should be hired or fired. This to my mind was to do with the actual

Treadgold Street

people who were running the adventure playground and really not the mums. The mums' house and their playgroup were their affair and the leader and the water main and all the other things were our affair.

This view was shared by some of the mothers. One has said :

I took it that our part was going to be a part on its own. I was only interested in the small children really. I don't think I was really interested in adventure playgrounds, to be perfectly honest.

The officers, however, have expressed their approval of community involvement in general, and it was out of a desire for 'local involvement' that they invited Ilys and some representatives of the Nottingwood group onto the Adventure Playground Committee. To Ilys and the mothers, this invitation indicated that they were to be fully involved in setting up the adventure playground since setting up the playground was the function of that committee, and several of the mothers did regard themselves as involved in this way. When Mrs Wheeler, for instance, secured the help of Mr Riordan as caretaker, it was not just for the Nottingwood group's prefab, but for the whole site. Mrs Fellows attended the committee's 'extraordinary meeting' and was one of the people who agreed to pay regular visits to the site, and Mrs Travers's petition was about the whole playground, not just the part owned by the Nottingwood group.

Apart from whether the officers or the mothers themselves saw the Nottingwood group as involved in setting up the playground, some decisions about the playground did affect the Nottingwood group, which might have been a reason for involving the Nottingwood group in making them. The decision to dismiss the playground leader, for instance, though not immediately the concern of the Nottingwood group, meant that the site had to be closed and this meant that No. 36 was inaccessible to the Nottingwood group.

Whether or not the mothers or other local residents ought to have had some influence on more decisions, as it turned out they did not influence many. The following important decisions, for instance, were made without local residents being consulted, and the last ones in the face of opposition from some local residents: the decisions to make the site an adventure playground; to make Mrs Bancroft, Mrs Reynolds and Mrs Greig the three officers of the Adventure Playground Committee; to employ Brian Stafford as the playground leader; to invite the G.L.C. to establish a One o'clock Club in No. 36; to dismiss Brian Stafford; to close the

A Community Project in Notting Dale

site; to disband the committee, and to abandon the project.

The main reason why they were not involved in more decisions of importance was that the officers of the Adventure Playground Committee, or the officers with other committee members, often took such decisions themselves. It is partly, as they have said, that they never intended the mothers to have a say in the affairs of the whole playground, but it is also that they were keen to get things done. This, they have said, is partly a matter of temperament, but also they expected to have the site for only two or three years and felt they could not spend a whole year setting it up. Community involvement, though they recognized that it had virtues, was too slow. They have said:

Perhaps the bringing in of the One o'clock Club, like employing Brian Stafford, was rather autocratic decision-making on our part. I know I tend to act in rather an autocratic way because I like to get on with things.

I could see what Ilys meant about letting the mums do it, but their operations were terribly muddly, or so it seemed to me. It was always much quicker really to do things oneself.

This desire to get on with things also produced an impatience in their dealings with the workers and the Nottingwood group. They were unwilling to leave the Nottingwood group either to build its fence or to repair its prefab, and frequently urged Ilys to take more action herself. As a result they felt constantly let down by the workers and the Nottingwood group and came to see the involvement of the mothers as more trouble than it was worth.

There were other reasons why the mothers were not involved more. Communication was not easy. Mrs Fellows, who was not among the Nottingwood group's representatives on the Adventure Playground Committee, has remarked:

I think to work together you've got to be in much closer contact, not to be so far away from each other, to be able to contact one another more freely, such as us who haven't got the phone, for us to be able to go and pay a visit and for them to be able to come and pay a visit to us.

Of the officers, Mrs Bancroft had most contact with the mothers. This was because the Family Study workers and the mothers found her the easiest of the three officers to get on with. For this reason,

Treadgold Street

it was often Mrs Bancroft who was contacted about a problem although, being chairman, she was not always the appropriate officer to deal with it. (That is also why she has appeared more in the story.) She got to know five of the mothers, though only two of them at all well. She sometimes visited Mrs Wheeler in her home and sometimes telephoned her (Mrs Wheeler being at this time the only one with a telephone), but otherwise met the mothers only at formal meetings or on the site. Of the mothers, four visited the officers' homes, always for meetings, and one, Mrs Wheeler, used to telephone them.

It is significant that the meetings at which the mothers contributed most were meetings arranged by Ilys, the meetings with the officers about the fence and about buying the prefab, and the meeting with Mrs Meredith about having a One o'clock Club. The first two of these were held in the workers' flat (which is situated, perhaps significantly, exactly half-way between Mrs Bancroft's home and Nottingwood House). The third was in No. 36. The Adventure Playground Committee meetings were not arranged to facilitate the mothers' participation, so the mothers there made a much smaller contribution. An example of this is the final meeting. Mrs Bancroft has said:

They were just ordinary playground meetings. We used to have them at my house because there was room. I don't think they were unduly formal. I go to so many meetings and some of them are terribly formal, where I have to say things like 'Beg leave to speak, Mr Chairman'. There was nothing like that, but we did all sit round my dining-room table and we had minutes and we had agendas. Well, how else can you do it? I think they probably felt rather fish out of water, though it wasn't for want of trying on my part, but I think they perhaps felt outnumbered by the ladies with Oxford and Cambridge accents.

Mrs Travers has said:

I only ever went once. I went to one down in St James's Gardens and you were made to sit round in this big lounge which you felt uncomfortable in to start with because it was something you weren't used to. I don't think I said a word. It's probably because I was conscious of the way I speak. These people can use words as long as your arm. You can go to a meeting with them and they can use so many ruddy long words that the likes of me and the majority of the local mums don't understand what they're talking about. They can't speak in our way and if you go to pull them up they look on you as much as to say, 'My God, how ignorant can you be?' Now Ilys was the type who could go and

A Community Project in Notting Dale

speak with the nobs in their language but still come down and talk to us in our language, knowing full well that we could understand her and if she did happen to use a word that was long, we wouldn't be afraid to say, 'Ilys, what does that mean?' But if we were to ask them they would look at us and say, 'My God!' I think they understand what we're trying to say, but we can't understand them in return. For people like that to try and talk to me in my language, they can't because they would feel they were coming down a peg, and probably I'm asking a lot. Probably in a lot of respects I'm envious that they can use these big long words and understand them. You sort of feel as if they're above you. That's the only time I feel like this, when I go to these meetings and they use these words, and it makes me feel so small and I think, 'Crikey, it's not till you get to a meeting like this that you realize how ignorant you are,' and I think it's wrong that I should feel like this but I do definitely get these feelings.

A major obstacle to cooperation were the attitudes which each side held towards the social class to which the other side belonged. Each group attributes characteristics, usually unpleasant ones, to the majority of the other's class although their actual experience of members of the other class is limited and even conflicts with the generalizations. The evidence offered in support of the generalizations is very flimsy and sometimes fabricated. The generalizations, however, are still firmly believed.

These are some of the opinions that the officers have expressed about the mothers and working-class people in general: that they are incapable of long-term planning; that they leave everything for the authorities to do; that they are muddly in their operations; that they are not susceptible to rational argument; that they cannot understand the structure of national or local government and therefore cannot deal with official bodies; and that they cannot be relied on to carry out promises. And these are some of the examples offered: that a number of the mothers did their Christmas shopping in the last week before Christmas; that one mother thought the Council would clear the drains on the site; that the mothers' group mislaid a letter from the Gas Board, did not repay a loan of £20 and sent the cheque to pay for the prefab to the wrong address; and that they did not build their fence or repair their prefab. The cheque for the prefab was indeed sent to the wrong address. The fence was not built nor the prefab adequately repaired; but since these were both the property of the Nottingwood group, they cannot be regarded as promises unfulfilled. Of the other examples,

Treadgold Street

there is no record about a letter from the Gas Board, and the £20 was never loaned.

These are some of the opinions that the mothers have expressed about the officers and middle-class people in general: that they do not have the interests of children at heart but only work for such projects to gain the admiration of people high up the social scale; that they do not even care about their own children, employing nannies to bring them up and then sending them off to boarding schools; that they have such a low opinion of working-class people that they do not listen to anything they say; that they criticize a lot and do not balance this with praise; and that they are not prepared to dirty their hands. Only for the last two points have specific examples been given: that one of the officers in one particular conversation had more bad things than good things to say about the playground and the playground leader, and that they never came to the site. In fact, the officers visited the site quite frequently.

Whether or not there is substantial evidence for the opinions of either side, the product is mutual mistrust. This emerges when it actually comes to doing something together, and the cooperation is more likely to fail as a result. Each side takes this failure as confirmation of its opinions and mistrusts the other even more. A consequence, therefore, of the Treadgold Street project was that the officers came to have serious doubts whether the full involvement of the community, from the very beginning of the project, could work. Mrs Bancroft has said, for instance:

I personally learnt that, to retain the interest of working-class people on a committee, you must operate on a pretty small scale, and that their vision doesn't extend beyond the immediate future, so that anything that might happen next year or in six months' time is almost meaningless to them. I don't think they can be involved realistically in the planning stages because I don't think you could retain their interest for that length of time with nothing actually happening. So you've got to do the spade-work first, that is long-term, intensive work in the community with trained workers getting to know the local people and making them familiar with the idea of a playground, and voluntary people like myself relating the project to the authorities and making sure of the basic funds and the site. Then you would involve the local people about three months before the playground opens, so that something tangible is going to happen fairly soon, and they would help the leader to get the playground going and would be involved in the day-to-day running of the thing once it was off the ground.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

This contrasts with the views of the mothers :

For them to set up another committee, and run it the way they think, this is no way because this disheartens the local people and it disheartens the kids because I think if a kid feels that Mum and Dad are interested, then the kids show more interest. We don't want them to run it for us. I would get involved if it came up again because they're the right kind of people to give you a backing. They're the type that can get you the grants. They're the type that can get you the equipment. I would dearly like to get involved providing they can speak to me the way I understand and they are willing to listen to me.

They know the places to go. They know the people to speak to. They can get more than we can. If I ever got involved again, I would do the suggestions. I wouldn't accept things and just take them. I would have much more to say.

In a big thing like that you have all got to work together. It's not just one class of people. I used to wonder when the adventure playground started if it would be a kind of take-over bid as far as the group was concerned, the way they used to say, 'We've done this,' and 'We've done that,' over the site, doing all the negotiating and everything. I think it's best to know all that is going on and don't leave it to them to do.

Criticisms have been made of the actions and attitudes of the Family Study workers. One is that they identified themselves too strongly with the mothers' group. Some evidence that they were on the mothers' side is that other committee members have described Ilys as 'the representative of the mothers' group' or 'the mothers' champion'. Some of the workers' reports and recollections show a bias against the officers of the Adventure Playground Committee, and also, in some of their accounts of meetings, they refer to themselves and the mothers together as 'we'. Certainly the officers felt that the workers were partisan :

I always felt Ilys was much more on the mothers' side, that she felt it was 'us' and 'them', and so this idea, of course, was transmitted. That she was on their side against us was what I felt.

Whether or not the workers would have chosen to take up this position, there was much pressure put on them to do so. The mothers, on the one hand, have generally expected outsiders, Family Study workers included, to take the lead and have even pushed them to do so. The officers, on the other hand, preferred to communicate with the workers than to communicate directly with the mothers, and so pushed the workers into a position as the

Treadgold Street

Nottingwood group's spokesmen. An example of this is remarked on by Ilys in a note on the minutes of the first formal Adventure Playground Committee meeting: 'Interesting that where Mrs Wheeler or Mrs Hutchins agreed or said anything, it was attributed to me.' Another example was that, when a meeting was cancelled in February, a postcard was sent to the workers informing them and asking them to pass on the message, but no postcards were sent to the mothers.

The workers resisted these pressures to a great extent. They repeatedly suggested that the officers consult the mothers about things that affected them and kept refusing to make agreements or fight battles on their behalf. One of the officers has commented:

I regarded Ilys as our link with the mothers. I thought at the beginning we would be dealing primarily with her but she thought it was better not to stand between us.

And one of the mothers has said:

Ilys didn't say a lot. She put suggestions forward because she wanted us to be able to get ourselves sorted out. She wanted us to do it ourselves and thought that, if you're going to start, you've got to start from the beginning and learn how to deal with people, but she was always there.

The question of whether or not workers should be partisan, which is raised by the Treadgold Street story, is currently a controversial matter in community work. One argument begins with the premise that, when the activities of two groups have brought them into contact, it is the worker's job to facilitate cooperation between them. If a worker takes the side of one group, the argument runs, he loses the trust of the other, so that he cannot do his job. Community workers, therefore, should never be partisan. Over the Treadgold Street Playground, according to this view, the workers were wrong to be on the mothers' side since the officers came to feel that the workers were as much of a nuisance as the mothers, with the result that the workers could no longer influence the officers to be more cooperative.

A second argument begins with the premise that it is the worker's job to rouse people to fight for their rights. If a worker is strictly neutral, the argument runs, he loses the trust of the side he is trying to rouse and he deprives them of his support, with the result that both he and they are ineffective. Community workers, therefore,

A Community Project in Notting Dale

should always be partisan. Over the Treadgold Street Playground, according to this view, the workers should have done more to rally local support for the playground so as to bring pressure to bear on the officers, or perhaps the Council, to keep the site open.

Although these two arguments have opposite conclusions, they have certain similarities, and out of objections which apply equally to both arises a third point of view. The main objection is that beneficial social change, assuming that that is the worker's eventual goal, is not achieved *always* by facilitating cooperation, or *always* by rousing people to fight for their rights, but that different situations demand different approaches. Consequently, the worker should be both partisan and non-partisan at different times and to different extents. If, for example, two groups are trying to work together with a fair amount of goodwill on both sides but are liable to misunderstand or mistrust each other because of things like class attitudes, differences in ways of expression and so on, then it may be better for the worker to be non-partisan so that he can act as interpreter. If, however, one group is weaker than the other (less articulate, less assertive, less experienced in negotiating), or if the other is unresponsive or antagonistic to its wishes, then the worker may help to even the balance by putting his weight on the side of the weaker.

A second objection to the two arguments is that a worker is not *either* neutral and mediating *or* partisan and fighting, but that there are many positions in between for him to take. Being partisan can mean anything from putting forward a point on a group's behalf at a meeting to joining them in violent demonstrations against the authorities. Because of this range, a worker can show that his sympathies are more with one side without necessarily losing his role as interpreter, and can remain largely impartial without losing the confidence of the group he's working with. A similar point is that cooperating and fighting for one's rights are not static situations. One can turn into the other and it is the worker's job to adjust his role accordingly.

The view which emerges from these objections is that the worker can and should vary the extent to which he is partisan according to the situation. It puts great onus on the worker's judgement. Will the other side be alarmed by too aggressive an approach and dig their heels in, or will they be so unperturbed by too friendly an approach that they dismiss it? Will the worker's group feel let down if he fails to support them? Will a short-term victory make long-term improvement less likely because of worsened relationships, or will a

Treadgold Street

short term victory both encourage the worker's group and make the other side take notice in future? On this view, therefore, whether the workers should have been more or less partisan over the Treadgold Street Playground is an open question. If one sees the major problem as poor communication, one might think the workers wrong to have become as partisan as they did. If one sees it more as one group being overridden by a stronger, one might think the workers should have fought harder on the mothers' behalf.

The second criticism of the workers is also connected with the relationship between the groups. It is that Ilys should have been more plain-speaking, more 'directive' with the officers of the Adventure Playground Committee. Presumably she knew from her experience of community work that a genuine attempt to involve the community in setting up the playground would take a long time and would mean more work for the officers, in constantly consulting people about important decisions and so on. It would have been sensible, therefore, to warn them of this so that they would have been prepared for it, or could have made a decision at the outset not to attempt to involve the community at all. On particular issues, she could have made specific suggestions to the officers, for instance that some of the mothers should see Brian Stafford before the decision to employ him, or that Adventure Playground Committee meetings should be held at the Family Study's flat rather than at Mrs Bancroft's house, so as to put the mothers more at their ease. She had considerable standing in North Kensington, so the officers would probably have done what she said.

Ilys always kept fewer notes on her work with organizations than on her work with local people, so it is not recorded how many conversations she had with the officers, what she said or how she said it. There are recorded instances of her explaining, for example, why local people would take a long time to do a job but why, in her opinion, it was better to wait for them than to do the job another way, but it is unlikely, from her general approach to the work, that she would have been 'directive' in the way suggested here, that she would have said, for instance, 'The mothers are more at ease at the Family Study's flat than at your house, so if you want the mothers to participate more in meetings, you really ought to hold the meetings at the Family Study's flat.'

It is always a temptation, when things have gone wrong because of a misunderstanding present at the beginning, for the participants, or an observer, to say, 'This should have been clarified at the

A Community Project in Notting Dale

beginning,' but, of course, it is not so easy in practice. It is only because one knows after the event the way in which things went wrong that one can see what was wrong at the beginning. In this case, Ilys might have told the officers that community involvement would not be easy – in fact she probably did – but this would not have been an adequate warning of the problems that were to come. An adequate warning would require the gift of prophecy.

The criticism remains, however, that Ilys might have had some influence with the officers and should have used it to get them to do things, such as change the venue for meetings. There is an argument against this, however, which is, in fact, a general reason for doing community development. This is that getting people to change their ways has only a superficial and transitory effect if the people themselves do not see the point of changing. If people do something because someone has told them to, they are not doing it because they see the point of it. Exerting influence, then, might produce a temporary advantage, but if lasting change is what the worker is interested in, then the only method which can be used is questioning, suggesting, clarifying and so on, but essentially, in theory at least, not directing. Therefore, in this case, Ilys could have mentioned to the officers that the mothers might not feel at ease at Mrs Bancroft's house and that the Family Study's flat could be used if they wished, and there is some evidence that she did say this, but it would have been important to her that the actual initiative for change should come from the officers.

A third criticism that has been made is that it was not realistic to expect the fathers to spend their spare time doing the considerable amount of work necessary to build the fence and repair the prefab. Ilys did, of course, have reasons for expecting they would. She had met a few of them who said they would help, and in the first months there was great enthusiasm. But it was a lot to ask. They were all working men who did not have much time off. They had had nothing to do with initiating the playground or getting the prefab, so the scheme was not their scheme. It was only through their wives and children that they were brought into it. The work itself was not attractive, in the way that helping with the playgroup was for many of the mothers. They were only being asked to do, for nothing, something that they spent their days doing for pay. It was no social occasion for them and, apart from the feeling of doing a good turn, there was no special satisfaction to be gained. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that the fathers did not turn out in any great numbers.

Treadgold Street

Since it must have been obvious that there was a chance that the fathers would not do all the work themselves, the criticism has been made that Ilys should have asked more questions to make the group consider whether relying on the fathers' voluntary labour was the best way to get the jobs done, and should have suggested alternatives, for instance that the mothers might raise some money and pay for the jobs to be done. The basis of this criticism is that getting people to think realistically about such things is what the community development worker is there for.

It is recorded that she had several discussions both with the mothers and their husbands about these jobs, but what she actually said is not known and, in the absence of that information, one cannot be sure that she did not ask these questions or suggest these alternatives. However, since it is not recorded that she did these things, it is probable that she did not. This raises the question why.

It is possible to infer from some things which she said and did, though one cannot know if the inference is fair, that the idea of self-help held an appeal for her somehow for its own sake, that she felt the best thing that could happen was local people actually doing the work themselves for nothing more than the common good and that anything else, like local people paying someone to do a job, was vaguely second best. When she and Mr Hutchins went to inspect the hut which had been offered by the youth club, for instance, the assumption was that he and some other fathers would transport it if they could, and only if he considered the job too big would a contractor be employed.

Another reason was that this presented her with her first opportunity to involve local men in the work. Practically all the Family Study's work had been with women and one of the several reasons for this was that the Family Study workers had all been women and the customs of Notting Dale prevented them from making easy contact with local men except through their womenfolk. In supporting the mothers' suggestion of bringing their husbands in, therefore, she was making the most of this opportunity. She probably hoped that, if the fathers did quite a lot of work on the prefab, they would come to see it as their prefab as much as the mothers' and would want to use it and have a say in running it. The Nottingwood group might then expand to include the men and its activities would diversify. Actually this was unlikely because men and women in Notting Dale seem to lead fairly separate lives outside the home. The men who did help saw themselves as doing up a place for their wives' group,

A Community Project in Notting Dale

at their wives' request. At the time, however, since there had been little contact with local men, she was not fully aware that this was likely to be their attitude.

Both of these are reasons why Ilys favoured the work being done by the fathers, but neither is an answer to the criticism that, in not asking questions and suggesting alternatives, she was not properly performing her job as community development worker. The criticism, to some extent, holds, but there is a partial answer to it, and this is that the criticism oversimplifies the situation. It suggests that the only effect of her asking questions and suggesting alternatives would have been to bring certain relevant points to the notice of the mothers and to get them to think whether their husbands really would do the work. But this may not be true. If she had asked a lot of questions such as, 'How much free time does your husband actually have?', 'Does he have experience of this sort of work?', 'Does he have the tools for this job?', 'Are you sure he wants to do it?', she might have got the mothers to think realistically, but she would also have conveyed the impression that she did not think that the fathers could or would do the job. Why else would she be asking all these questions? Asking a lot of questions about a suggestion may, in itself, pour cold water on it. Since a large part of the workers' task was to give the mothers some confidence in their own ideas, pouring cold water on them might not have been a good thing to do.

The final criticism of the workers to be considered here is that Ilys should have taken more action herself. The officers of the Adventure Playground Committee, for instance, have said :

When the people moved out of No. 36, I would have liked her to have dealt with the matter of the meter and getting the electricity reconnected herself at once, and not have waited for the mothers.

I thought she wasn't pulling her weight, I fear. A highly intelligent, able woman, she should have seen more clearly that the mothers were not pulling their weight. It seemed apparent to us that the mothers were not going to be very effective when they were given responsibility for dealing with the Borough or dealing with the Electricity Board or dealing with anything that had to be dealt with. I felt that Ilys should have bullied them more.

This raises a general question for community work of how much initiative and responsibility the worker should take in the group's affairs. The advantages of taking it are obvious. In this case, Ilys could probably have arranged for repairs to the prefab to be done

Treadgold Street

quickly and efficiently and for the electricity to be reconnected so that the playgroup could have moved in and the mothers' dream of a place of their own could have been realized. This would have been a great boost to the group's morale and might even have affected the future of the whole playground. On the other hand, the whole point of community development is that people take their own action, for this ensures that the direction taken is the one they choose and that they develop their own capacity for action in the process. In this case, Ilys saw it as her job to enable the mothers to acquire their own premises and therefore she held back from taking action so as to leave them room to take it themselves. That people might not act quickly and effectively enough is an inevitable danger since leaving them room to act is necessarily leaving them room to make mistakes.

Chapter 5

The Move to Independence

The history of the Nottingwood group, from about the time at which this chapter takes up the story until the end of the project, was profoundly affected by a change in policy made by the Family Study. To understand what follows, therefore, it is necessary briefly to anticipate Chapter 7 which tells the Family Study Committee's story in more detail.

The policy which Helen Sheils had used in establishing the group had been to get something started, like a playgroup, in the hope that people would join in and eventually take it over themselves. The word 'springboard' was often used to describe this, the worker's help in the early stages being the springboard from which, it was hoped, the group would take off on its own. This policy had been continued in the period covered so far, for the springboard was still being provided, in the form of a playgroup worker, volunteers for the summer and materials for the activities, while Ilys was encouraging the group to take off (to form its own committee, to find its own premises and so on).

For reasons to be discussed in Chapter 7, relations between Ilys and the Family Study Committee had not been easy during this time and it was in the hope of improving them that Dr T. R. Batten, a well-known writer on community development, was invited onto the Committee in 1966. The effect of his arrival was to change the policy, for he suggested that the springboard approach was unsound. He said that the group was not likely to take off on its own because people are not inclined to do something so long as someone else is doing it for them. If the purpose of the project was to enable people to do things on their own, and to leave them at the end of the project capable of carrying on without the workers, then the group would have to learn to manage without the Family Study. Material help (the playgroup workers and so on) should gradually be withdrawn, therefore, while the workers were there to help the group make other arrangements. This was accepted.

This change of policy did not happen at a single meeting but was

The Move to Independence

more gradual, beginning roughly towards the end of 1966 and completed by the summer of 1967. It may not have been fully appreciated at the time what an important change it was, but in effect the hope of a springboard was abandoned and the rest of the project became an attempt to get the group to stand on its own feet.

In the last chapter, the Treadgold Street story was taken through to its conclusion in March, leaving out other things that were happening at the same time, so this chapter returns to the end of the summer, 1966, when Pat Foster had just departed.

THE COMBINED BAZAAR

Despite the friction between the Nottingwood group and the Blenheim-Elgin group during the summer, the two groups went ahead with the combined money-raising activities they had planned. A jumble sale was held in September and a bazaar in November. Relations, however, did not improve. It is a common feature of jumble sales that some of the sorters and sellers arrive unduly early for the sale and sell the best items to themselves cheaply. Despite the precautionary ruling that sellers were not to arrive more than half an hour early, this occurred at the September sale and aroused some resentment. At the bazaar there were some differences of opinion about the pricing of articles which people had made, some people thinking that the prices at which their articles were sold did not justify the effort they had put into making them. Afterwards, the Nottingwood group deducted what they had spent on materials from the total takings before splitting the remaining profits with the Blenheim-Elgin group. Since a high proportion of the Nottingwood mothers could not afford to contribute the materials themselves, they had always understood that this was the arrangement. The Blenheim-Elgin mothers had not understood this, however, and were annoyed. None of these things need have worsened relations much had the groups been keen to work together, but in fact neither group now wished to do so. In addition, those who had stirred the situation in the summer were doing so still – Ilys in a report mentions the trouble some people caused by 'making harsh judgements based on second-hand information and passing on conversations taken out of context'. The groups decided not to hold the combined Christmas party they had planned, and combined activities after this were few and small.

The Blenheim-Elgin group does not come into the story again, because it became independent of the Family Study at this time and

A Community Project in Notting Dale

had little more contact with the workers, so its subsequent history will be summarized here. The Family Study had been paying the salary of the group's playgroup worker, but in accordance with its new policy it decided to stop doing this from the end of 1966, giving a final grant of £150. A new committee for the playgroup was elected at this time and it began seeking financial support from elsewhere. The playgroup charges were increased and a Spring Fair was held in April, without the Nottingwood group, which raised over £70. Also at this time the lease ran out on the hut in the Gardens where the playgroup had been running. After searching in vain for accommodation in the Gardens, it moved to a nearby church hall. Though expenses were increased, the hall could accommodate more children and the playgroup expanded. Later it moved again to a mission hall near St James's Gardens where it now runs. It no longer takes children only from the Blenheim-Elgin Gardens, and its income is from the playgroup charges, the Campden Charities and the Borough Council through its affiliation to the Pre-school Playgroups Association. The local mother who began running the playgroup in 1965 still does so, and has taken the P.P.A. playgroup leaders' course. It is now called the Dale playgroup.

THE ROTA TROUBLE

Tricia, the Nottingwood group's new playgroup worker, had begun in September 1966. Her report on the first weeks describes her reception:

The mothers seemed to make a special effort to be friendly and helpful, though some were understandably reserved. I was very dubious about knocking on people's doors at first, as I felt I did not know the mothers well enough, but they were extremely welcoming and my fears were soon dispersed with many of them, though there are some whom I am still a little uneasy about visiting. Some of the children have still not accepted me and many still ask where Pat is. The fact that she is getting married seems to appease them, as they don't feel she has deserted them. I felt a little uneasy running the playgroup in the courtyard as I felt that all the mothers were watching from behind the curtains. Mrs Travers assured me that my fears were not unfounded and that I would feel better away from their gaze. I found this to be so on my first day running inside at the Rugby Club.

As winter approached, there were the first signs of what was to become a serious problem. Ilys reported:

The Move to Independence

As was to be expected, there was an unsettled period with the change of playgroup worker. Some mothers have not been as cooperative as previously. The rota, which slips during the summer when many school children help, has been slow to return to normal. There is now an agreement to have two mothers daily and to post the rota list. Mrs Fellows is to consult the mothers in order to make up the rota. If the rota fails to work, it is to be discussed and measures are to be taken to maintain it. One or two mothers have now gone to work and it is said by some that they are using the playgroup for their children in order to go to work.

Ever since the playgroup had started in 1964, a Family Study playgroup worker had run the group every day and the mothers whose children attended the playgroup had taken it in turns to help, each one doing it about once a week or once a fortnight (the numbers of children fluctuated). Some mothers whose children had left the playgroup to go to school also did a turn. There had been times when a mother had not turned up to do her turn, or when the number of mothers on the rota had been small, but it had worked reasonably well. There were several reasons why it did not work that winter. One was Pat Foster's departure. As one mother has said :

Pat had been put on a pedestal. Nobody would come up to Pat, and this was wrong. We had been rather spoilt with Pat because she was what we would call an ideal playgroup worker. Therefore we were looking in another person for all the things that Pat had. It was wrong because no person is alike. I think we were being rather selfish in a way. Although we had a good playgroup worker, quite a few of us didn't seem to have the interest that we did when Pat was there. I don't think we were being fair. When I look back on it now, I think we expected too much.

Shortly after Pat went, Mrs Jenkins, a prominent member of the mothers' group who had helped Pat a lot with the playgroup, also left the district, and her departure had a similar effect. Also, a number of mothers were short of money, especially after Christmas. One has said :

I think one reason it broke down was that, when they got their children to the group for a couple of hours, they thought they'd do a little job. You can't blame them. Some of them needed the money. But they weren't prepared to do anything else in its place.

For all these reasons, a number of the mothers were not doing their rota turn to help with the playgroup. Tricia recalls :

A Community Project in Notting Dale

It was difficult all the winter. Very few people helped. The majority of the time I was on my own, and I've been left alone to the extent that I couldn't cope because there were too many children. It was awful. It was my idea of hell, it really was. It just ended up with everybody fighting, because you couldn't play with anyone. It was a case of standing at the door and making sure that no one ran into the road and every other minute leaping up to the toilet with someone. Then Ronnie would lock himself in the toilet. The mothers had no idea how difficult it was. They probably thought that they could cope with their children, and why couldn't I cope with everyone because I was trained? They saw a trained person as some sort of magician.

Several mothers were worried about this. There was a group meeting in January 1967 which Elizabeth recorded :

Mrs Shaw was very emphatic that the rota was not working and that it was not fair to Tricia to be left to cope alone. There was a feeling that some mothers were using the playgroup 'to dump their kids', but it was also agreed that many mothers had a morning job and so could not help. It was agreed that a morning meeting at the Rugby Club would be a good idea and Mrs Shaw and Tricia should arrange this and tell as many people as possible. Mrs Shaw asked Ilys if she would come to the meeting 'as you might come down harder on the rota mothers'.

This last sentence illustrates the pressure that was frequently put on the workers to assume a position of authority.

The meeting was held one morning in January at the end of a playgroup session in the Rugby Club. Fourteen mothers came. Ilys participated in the meeting and Elizabeth recorded it. The full record is given, not because the meeting was particularly important, but because the record is an unusually detailed one and will provide the basis for a discussion later in the chapter :

The meeting was opened by Mrs Shaw. She said that unfortunately all the mothers present did their turn on the rota and it was hoped some others might have stayed. It was agreed to discuss the various difficulties.

Ilys raised the legal question about Tricia being in charge of so many children on her own. Officially there should be one adult to ten children. Several mothers agreed that it was wrong. They mentioned the danger of a child having an accident and Tricia having to leave the others unattended. They also mentioned that Tricia cannot play with the children properly if she is on her own with so many, 'and they like the singing and the games'.

Ilys reported that some members of the Family Study Committee had met the previous day. They had said that the Family Study pay three

The Move to Independence

workers and could not pay more and also that they felt that Tricia should not care for more than a certain number of children on her own.

Ilys suggested that perhaps the original idea of a playgroup with mothers' participation had changed. Now many mothers worked and several have small babies and therefore cannot help with the rota. Perhaps what is needed is a minders' group, but if it is to be a minders' group, Ilys pointed out, there are Ministry of Health regulations about the numbers of children per adult, the number of toilets etc.

Mrs Wheeler said the group could not possibly afford to pay additional workers. Mrs Waters suggested that, if more than ten children turned up for the playgroup and Tricia was alone she should say that she would not take any more unless a mother stayed. People expressed their appreciation of the value of play.

Mrs Shaw asked how the problem could be solved. It was suggested that some mothers had taken a little job since the playgroup started and some were in fact using the playgroup as a minding group. Several mothers disagreed strongly that it was a minding service and thought it should be 'an opportunity for the kids to play'. Mrs Dreyer thought it was also for the mothers to meet socially. She would welcome an afternoon meeting as she can't get out in the evening.

There was some discussion on the difficulty of getting enough helpers for the rota. Ilys mentioned Mrs Fellows's help. Mrs Fellows continued to help with the playgroup, although her children had left it to go to school. Might there be other mothers whose children were no longer of playgroup age who would be willing to help?

Mrs Shaw offered her ideas, having asked if anyone else had ideas. She thought a list should be put up, and referred to a previous list which seemed to work satisfactorily. She then suggested that each person should have a 'stand-in' day, the idea being that two people do two days between them, one doing her rota turn and the other being her stand-in on the first day and vice-versa on the second day. Ilys asked for clarification of this idea.

Mrs Shaw said that at the moment she could only bring her children four times a week because of having to stay in for the rent man on the fifth. She therefore suggested that they should run the playgroup sometimes in the afternoon, perhaps twice a week. She seemed to think that the working mothers (there were thought to be about eight, though no one was sure) would do their rota turns in the afternoon. Mrs Hutchins questioned whether this would solve the morning problem. Mrs Shaw thought that people would be more willing to do a morning rota turn if they had their children cared for sometimes in the afternoon group. Ilys said that Tricia liked to keep afternoons free for visiting and keeping in touch with people. Everyone agreed with this. It was thought unlikely

A Community Project in Notting Dale

that an afternoon group could be held in the Rugby Club, but it could be borne in mind for when the playgroup moved into No. 36.

It was reiterated that a list of mothers should be put up, to see when mothers could do a turn, though no one was specified to do this.

During this part of the discussion Ilys asked two or three times, 'How far have we got?' 'What have we decided?'

It was still realized that they were short of people to do the morning rota. Those with babies might be able to help more in No. 36 where there would be a spare room.

The question of having rules came up once or twice during the meeting and there seemed to be general agreement on the need for rules. For instance, if a new mother brings her child, she should be told she will have to help sometimes. Mrs Waters suggested that rules were necessary before moving into No. 36.

Ilys asked when there would be an afternoon mothers' meeting, as Mrs Dreyer had suggested. Nothing definite was arranged.

Of this meeting Ilys reported :

Some mothers take the initiative in trying to get the group to behave more cohesively and responsibly. Among the members generally there is a very clear appreciation of the purpose of the playgroup as a means of providing the children with a social and educational experience. Notwithstanding, there is a lack of decisiveness and an inability to follow up a proposed course of action. In this meeting, for example, the participating worker made more than a dozen interventions. Although most of these were received attentively, they did not result in any firm decisions being taken. As the group can only move forward in relation to the increasing appreciation by the members of the need for arriving at decisions, the workers cannot force the pace. In this meeting, for instance, to have made more or firmer interventions would have made the worker seem to 'take over' the group. Only in further discussions of this kind, initiated by some member of the group, can learning follow.

In February came the closing of the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground and the abandonment of hopes for No. 36. The Rugby Club agreed to the playgroup staying there, but increased the rent to 30s. a week. This meant that the playgroup charges had to be increased. The group decided that mothers who did a turn should pay less than those who did not, but the rota did not improve. Tricia recalls :

A rule was made that I couldn't take more than ten children. It was made at a mothers' meeting. The eleventh child must be turned away until such time as another mother came. It was very difficult. If number

The Move to Independence

eleven turned up and it was somebody who had a job to go to, and a lot of them did, they would go potty.

The Family Study Committee was concerned about the danger to the children and about the responsibility which this placed upon Tricia, who was the Family Study's employee. There was some disagreement, both within the Committee and between the Committee and the workers, about what the Committee should do, but it was decided that a letter should be written to the mothers. It was addressed to Ilys to pass on to the mothers and it read :

The above Committee met last Monday, 13 March 1967, and decided that the paid playgroup worker may not be in charge of a group of more than ten children between the ages of two and five, unless there is another adult present. For each additional ten children, or part thereof, an additional adult must be available throughout the time that the playgroup meets. This follows the recommendations of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Health Department.

When this letter arrived, in fact, the playgroup rota was working again. Ilys's notes relate what she did with it:

Went to see Doris Hutchins [the Nottingwood group's chairman]. Showed her the letter from the Committee. Mr Hutchins was out working. The children were ready for bed and watching the TV. I stayed until 10.30. We chatted about a number of things and I showed her the letter. I explained that Elizabeth, Tricia and I had discussed it and felt that as the rota is working at the moment it seemed a pity to present the mothers with a ruling which might cause some anxiety. I explained also that the Family Study Committee might be annoyed if we did not pass on the contents of the letter, but that we thought that if we informed the chairman of the mothers' group, this would mean we had passed on the information and that if the rota failed, Tricia was to come and inform Doris at once so something could be done about it. Doris's first comment was that ten children was quite enough for one person. She accepted our suggestion to leave the situation alone and not to post or circulate the letter. . . . Conversation in depth was not very easy as the TV was on and Doris obviously preferred to have a chatty evening while looking at the TV than to discuss the group's affairs in detail.

The mothers' group finally resolved the problem in April. The workers' progress report describes how this happened :

During the week of 10 April, Tricia was away. Elizabeth called into the playgroup and helped briefly on the Monday morning and

A Community Project in Notting Dale

continued to help with a mother for most of the mornings on the following days. She made a point of not taking over the playgroup in Tricia's absence. On Wednesday there was no mother to help as the mother whose turn it was was ill. Another mother was there but she had to return to a sick husband. She offered to take her children home but they were very loath to go. A discussion ensued as there were then eleven children and only one adult (Elizabeth). Eventually one mother took her child home. Elizabeth was made fully aware of the difficulties of turning away a child, of asking a busy mother to stay or to take her child away at the last minute. She discussed this with several mothers afterwards. On Thursday it was discovered that Friday's helper was inexperienced and unlikely to manage, and also that Elizabeth could not be there that day. Mrs Shaw offered to run the playgroup if the mothers' group paid her, and she left it to the treasurer and secretary to discuss it with Elizabeth. There was sudden emphasis on making a decision. 'What happened to that idea we had about employing a mother?' It had been suggested in the past (as long ago as September of the previous year and several times since) that the mothers' group should employ a mother to help Tricia every day. The mother whom people had in mind had not received a firm offer from the mothers' group and had not pushed herself as she wanted to be sure that the mothers wanted her and had weighed up, as a group, the value of taking on such a responsibility. The secretary and treasurer felt that this decision had been left in abeyance and now Mrs Shaw was interested in the job. 'Why shouldn't two mothers be employed for alternate days? After all, there is £70 in the bank, so why not spend it?' If the money was spent and down to about £20, they felt, people would be willing to raise more money.

On the Friday, Mrs Shaw ran the playgroup and was paid £1 by the mothers' group. Tricia returned on the Monday and again Mrs Shaw was there to help and received payment. At the meeting on that Monday night, which was well attended, the mothers decided to pay two playgroup assistants. During the discussion about this, satisfaction was expressed by the members that there would always be two adults in the playgroup (Tricia and a paid assistant), which was something they had been trying to achieve for a long time. They agreed that, if numbers rose above twenty, a volunteer rota mother would supply the necessary extra person. Ilys used this opportunity to support the mothers' group in this decision and reported the contents of the letter from the Family Study Committee, making it clear that the Family Study Committee wished the recommended practice of one adult to ten children to be observed in the playgroup, as they were responsible for the playgroup worker. This was accepted.

Mrs Shaw and Mrs Fellows were the mothers employed. They

The Move to Independence

worked on alternate days, so that each did three days one week and two the next. Tricia reported on the success of this system:

The playgroup moved outside to the courtyard in April, with only occasional mornings in the Rugby Club due to inclement weather. The children's whole attitudes are different outside. Inside, they need constant attention and want to be played with a great deal; whereas outside, they seem to resent interference, and therefore much more time can be given to individual children. Another factor which contributes to this happy atmosphere with the children is having regular help, and as one of the two paid mothers is there all the time the children are able to make relationships with these mothers.

The two mothers appear to enjoy working in the playgroup and have the most amazing understanding of the children who have problems. At the moment we have one particular child who is very backward and abnormal in her behaviour. Both mothers appreciate the child's and her mother's difficulties and are willing to make a great effort to help them both. They realize how important it is that the child, who is receiving psychiatric treatment, should attend the playgroup every day and be encouraged to leave her mother's side and make other relationships. I feel that these two mothers will be a great advantage to the mothers' group as well as to the playgroup, since the mothers now tend to stay longer and chat.

A NEW CHAIRMAN

In May 1967, the term of office of the group's second set of officers came to an end and an election was held. Mrs Waters was agreed to have been a competent and trustworthy treasurer, so she was elected again. Mrs Fellows and Mrs Shaw, the two mothers who were paid to help with the playgroup, were elected chairman and secretary. Mrs Fellows had been helping the playgroup since the days of Helen Sheils, though her own youngest child had now left it to go to school. She described to Elizabeth the effect that her position as chairman had on her:

Ilys achieved a great deal with me because, if I'd never come in contact with Ilys, I'd never sit here and talk to you like this now. I'd run a mile. In fact when I first came into the group, and I used to come to the meetings, I'd sit as far back as I possibly could and not say a word. It was when I was picked as chairman that things changed. I realized that I'd been given an official position and that I just couldn't sit back and not say anything, and it made me open my mind more and say what I felt. There were things I disagreed with before and I

A Community Project in Notting Dale

was afraid to say it. It felt as if a great big load had been lifted off me. What I mean is that I was able to express myself, whereas before I was afraid to. In fact my husband said to me, 'If your mother could see you now, she'd never believe it.'

There's one particular instance I can remember. I'd only just taken over the chairmanship. I was sitting at the table. We'd been talking about the playgroup and things and it went off the subject. There were quite a lot in the room and everyone was talking. It was just like a saloon bar, everyone talking at once. And I just picked up something and I banged on the table and said, 'Will everyone come to order please.' Everybody stopped and I thought, 'My God, have I done that?'

Soon after this election, a problem arose over the payments that people made for bringing their children to the playgroup. Ever since the playgroup had started, it had been the job of the playgroup worker, first Pat and then Tricia, to keep a register of children's attendance and to collect the payments. This was not entirely satisfactory for two reasons. The first was that neither of them was sufficiently firm with people to prevent them from missing some payments or running up large debts. This was partly a matter of temperament for both of them, but also it was part of their job to keep on good terms with everyone and this made it difficult to demand money from those reluctant to pay. Several people have remarked that the reluctant ones were not those with the lowest incomes – they were usually scrupulous about paying – but rather those who could afford it but would not pay except under pressure, and the playgroup workers found it impossible to exert this pressure. The second reason was that people paid at different times, some weekly, some daily, some at the start of the morning playgroup, others at the end, and often when the playgroup worker was trying to attend to the children. The accounts, in consequence, were difficult to keep straight. For these reasons the playgroup's system of payments had always been somewhat haphazard. In Pat's time, this had not been serious since the charge was only 4d. per day per child, but now the mothers were paying rent to the Rugby Club and paying the two mothers who helped to run the playgroup, so the charges were 5s. a week or 3s. for mothers who did a turn on the rota.

A misunderstanding about payment led to one mother withdrawing her child from the playgroup and discussion of this brought out the difficulties in the situation. In a conversation which Ilys had with the group's three new officers, they had the idea that one

The Move to Independence

of the mothers should take care of the payments. Ilys explained to Tricia the mothers' wish to handle the money and the desirability of their doing so, from a community development point of view, and soon after, the following conversation took place. Ilys noted:

At the end of the morning playgroup, the three officers were together in the courtyard and they approached Tricia about the payment system. Mrs Waters said, 'Can we see you about the money?' Tricia waited. They all stood and said nothing. Tricia saw they were uncertain so she took the initiative and said, 'Wasn't there some mention of you taking the money?' There was ready and quick agreement. Mrs Waters explained that it was a good idea if they did it as it would give Tricia more time with the children. Tricia said she was glad as she found it difficult to do both.

Mrs Fellows volunteered to take it on, and took it over immediately, instituting a new register and a system of receipts. This worked much better.

THE DECISION TO RUN THE PLAYGROUP ALONE

During the summer of 1967, it became known that Tricia would be leaving at the end of the year. This presented the Family Study with the problem of whether to appoint another playgroup worker, and they consulted the mothers. The mothers held a meeting in the courtyard and Mrs Fellows reported that they had decided to try and run the playgroup on their own. The workers were quite pleased with this in one way, especially in view of the new policy of the Family Study, since it was a big step towards the group's independence. Indeed, the workers' frequent reminders that the project would one day come to an end may have strongly influenced this decision. On the other hand, they had cause for apprehension since they thought it was not a properly considered decision.

They had two reasons for thinking this. One was that, because of other things, there was some bad feeling at the time which affected both relationships within the group and the group's relationship to the workers, and so the workers had not been invited to the meeting. Had the workers been present, they could have suggested that more people be consulted and could have raised alternative courses of action and pointed out some of the snags in running it alone, but this was not done. The second reason was that it was not entirely up to the mothers to make the

A Community Project in Notting Dale

decision. Tricia was the Family Study's employee, so it was a question for the Family Study Committee whether to appoint a successor. The decision, therefore, was not really final until the Family Study Committee had met, and it did not meet until December. This was because Ilys was in hospital again from September to late November. By the time the Committee did meet, it seemed to be taken for granted that no successor would be appointed since at least some mothers had said they wanted to run the playgroup alone, and this was in line with the policy of the project. The mothers in September, therefore, were prevented by circumstances from making a proper decision, and possibly did not think it was their decision to make. The Family Study Committee in December felt that it had already been made. In a sense, therefore, this important decision was never really made by anybody.

The prospect of taking on responsibility for the playgroup, coupled with some of the bad feeling of the summer still lingering, made the approach of winter even more depressing than usual. Few mothers attended group meetings and they were loth to discuss and make plans. The Christmas bazaar was now an annual event and there was occasional talk of preparations but little enthusiasm. Some mothers who had done a lot of work for it the year before felt that their work had not been justified by the amount of money it had gained and did not offer their help again; so the work was left to a few. Preparations were made eventually and in fact the bazaar raised £30, but it was not thought a great success.

This falling off of interest made it almost impossible for the workers to stimulate constructive discussion about the future of the playgroup. It was partly because of the unsatisfactory way in which the decision had been taken that the group could not realistically face the prospect; and partly because several mothers hoped that, since the Family Study had paid a playgroup worker in the past, the same money would now be made available to the mothers. Until the Family Study Committee made a decision on this in December, this faint hope prevented realistic planning. In fact, the Family Study gave a grant of £50, with the stipulation that it was certainly the last.

January was always a month when families were ill, husbands were out of work and debts had accumulated after Christmas. The playgroup worker was about to leave. The decision to go independent had been made without conviction and the member-

The Move to Independence

ship had dwindled. The group had little money and no firm plans. It was an inauspicious launching.

THE EFFECT OF THE POLICY CHANGE

In the period covered by this chapter, the mothers were faced by decisions more difficult than before and the workers consequently found that, whereas their job had earlier been to help the mothers make decisions they wanted to make, now it was rather to get the mothers to make decisions about which they were reluctant. The detailed record of the meeting about the playgroup rota which was given in full illustrates this. Ilys's recorded contributions add up to nine, and fall into three classes. Four times she supplied information: that the official ruling for playgroups was one adult to ten children, that the Family Study Committee was concerned about the situation and would not be employing another worker, that there are regulations about minders' groups, and that Tricia liked to keep her afternoons free for visiting. Twice she offered suggestions: that perhaps they would prefer to abandon the emphasis on mothers' participation and turn the playgroup into a child minders' group, and that other mothers, like Mrs Fellows, whose children had left the playgroup, might still be willing to help. And three times (or more) she asked for clarification: of Mrs Shaw's complicated suggestion about the stand-in, of what decision had been made about afternoon meetings, and in general about what other decisions had been reached. The mothers' recorded suggestions add up to six. There was, then, no lack of ideas. What was lacking was discussion. Only one suggestion – that there should be an afternoon playgroup – was discussed and decided on, the decision being to wait until the move into No. 36. None of the others brought forth any questions or objections, and an important assertion – that the group could not afford to pay a playgroup worker of its own – passed unchallenged, though in fact it was wrong.

Since it was the workers' task to promote discussion, the questions are raised why Ilys's contributions did not have the desired effect and what else she might have done. It is surprising that she did not challenge the assertion that the mothers could not afford their own worker, since it was by questioning this that the mothers found their own solution two months later, and the idea was one which had been mooted before. This was an omission on

A Community Project in Notting Dale

her part but, in the absence of her own comments on it, there is not much more to be said about it. More interesting is a suggestion she considered herself, that she could have made more and firmer interventions. She rejected this because she felt it would have been to 'force the pace', to push the mothers in some way against their will. Now that one can look back over the whole project, one can see why she felt this.

As was said earlier, the Family Study, both Committee and workers together, had made a change in policy. The hope of a springboard effect had been abandoned. The aim now was to make the group independent by the end of the project and this was to be done by giving the group less help than before in terms of money and playgroup workers so that it could learn, with the workers' help, to manage on its own. Managing on its own would mean making its own decisions about the playgroup, finding some way of running it and obtaining money for it. In short, this change of policy amounted to the attempt to transfer responsibility for the playgroup from the Family Study to the mothers' group. Previously, the playgroup had been run mostly by the playgroup worker. The mothers had given a lot of help and had taken a large part in decisions, but the worker had always been there to take some responsibility. The mothers' obligation to turn up for their rota duties, for instance, had not been the same as the playgroup worker's obligation to turn up for work. Now, however, the mothers were being encouraged to take on all responsibility for the playgroup, and it was a lot to ask of them. They had been expected to play some part before and had enjoyed doing so, but helping a playgroup worker is a different thing from running a playgroup oneself. They had volunteered for one job, so to speak, and were being asked to do a bigger one.

It was not quite as simple as this, in fact, nor so obvious at the time. That local groups set up by the project would become independent had always been part of the springboard idea, so the workers had always made it plain that the project would come to an end one day and that the group was expected to manage on its own. And there were signs of it moving in that direction. For instance, it was one of the mothers who opened the meeting about the rota. A year earlier, it would probably have been Ilys. Secondly, all the mothers thought the playgroup was a good thing and wanted it to continue and a small number did want the group to take the responsibility. All the same, the part they were being asked to play

The Move to Independence

was much more demanding than before, so it is hardly surprising, in retrospect, that they were not all keen to take it on.

Since the project's new policy was to put responsibility for the playgroup onto the mothers, and since they did not want to take it, the workers found themselves trying to get the mothers to face issues and make decisions when the mothers did not want to, hence Ilys's feelings about forcing the pace. In fact, it became the pattern of group meetings that the workers, whose job it was to put the group into the best position for making a decision, tried to promote constructive discussion and clarification of issues, whereas the members, who were in general more interested in the social side of the group than in deciding matters about the playgroup, did not want to clarify issues. They preferred to chat. Leading the discussion round to business was a delicate and sometimes impossible task, especially when the decisions were not easy to make. For example, in the autumn of 1967, when the mothers were faced by two difficult problems, organizing a bazaar and deciding what they would do when Tricia left, they repeatedly put these off, in spite of the workers' reminders and questions. Organizing a children's Christmas party, by contrast, was easier and more enjoyable and they did this efficiently with almost no help from the workers. Because making the group independent became the object of the work, forcing the pace a little but not forcing it too much became the workers' uncomfortable task for the rest of the project.

Chapter 6

The Group on its Own

Some mothers who had been stalwarts of the group in its more flourishing days had left or lost interest, so it was a depressed and depleted group which set out on independence at the beginning of 1968. Because of this, the group was much influenced by a newcomer, Mrs Chapman. She had joined in the previous summer and had been a regular helper on the rota; she had turned up to most of the meetings and had done a lot of work for the bazaar. Although to some extent an outsider, for her attitudes were more middle class than those of the others, her keenness had quickly made her a prominent member and she had been elected secretary in November.

Tricia was to leave on 10 January and it was only two days before this that the group, at a meeting in the project's flat, could bring itself to discuss the future constructively. Mrs Fellows, the chairman, with the strong support of Mrs Chapman, suggested that they should try to run the playgroup with just a rota of mothers working voluntarily. This would put the least strain on the group's financial resources, and for this reason Mrs Fellows was prepared to work voluntarily for five days a week. This suggestion of a voluntary rota was not well received by the other mothers because, as they pointed out, the number of mothers in the group was currently low and the rota had not worked in the previous winter. A suggestion was made that, since Mrs Fellows was good with the children and was prepared to work for five days a week, she should become the full-time playgroup worker and be paid for her work. She was reluctant to do this, however, and it emerged later that one reason was that her husband, being unable to work because of illness, was receiving social security benefit and any money that Mrs Fellows earned above £2 a week would automatically be deducted from his benefit. Any suggestions that the group might pay one or two mothers, or might employ a professional playgroup worker, were strongly opposed by Mrs Chapman since they would both require more money than the group could raise by its own

The Group on its Own

efforts, and would therefore necessitate applying to charitable bodies for assistance; and this was something she objected to on principle.* Although this objection was not shared by the others, the decision made was to attempt to run the playgroup only with voluntary help.

The mothers began, then, by trying to run the playgroup themselves. Not many mothers were now bringing their children to the group, however, and two who had been helping for some time took their children away to other playgroups, so almost all the work was done by the group's officers. Mrs Chapman especially worked hard, doing a lot of the playgroup work herself and trying to get the other mothers to help, but her way of doing this made her unpopular. Two of the mothers have said:

She was quite a sticker at trying to get the mothers more involved. Some of them didn't like it at all. They thought she was too uppity. She was a very forceful person and, if you don't like that sort of person, you can take it that they are trying to put you into something that you don't want to do. And she wouldn't take no for an answer. I mean, if she asked you to do a thing and you said you couldn't do it, she'd said, 'Oh yes you can if you try,' and people didn't like it. She used to do two mornings a week at the playgroup and, if she knew for a fact that someone else should have done it one morning, she'd get quite annoyed about it and speak to that person and tell them off about it.

She meant well, but she was different from all us lot. She did upset a lot of people. She wanted to run us like she thought we should be run and I don't like people thinking like that. Really you might agree with her in one way, but you automatically fight her because of her attitude.

As a result, Mrs Chapman's attempts to make the mothers cooperate more made them cooperate less. The officers, in consequence, had to run the playgroup almost entirely on their own and the other mothers came to feel that the officers were a separate clique and that the group meetings were officers' meetings and therefore somehow private. The officers felt increasingly isolated from the rest and it is significant that Mrs Chapman called a group meeting in her home at this time. All previous group meetings had been held in the workers' flat or in the Rugby Club or in the courtyard. A further reason for the seeming privacy of these meetings was the group's system of communication. Minutes of group

* Mrs Chapman did not wish to be interviewed and it is therefore not possible to include her own statement of her views.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

meetings had been taken fairly regularly since Ilys had introduced the idea in 1966, but they were not always duplicated or distributed in any systematic fashion. Information was more usually passed on the grapevine. Since a number of the mothers were related or were close friends quite apart from the playgroup, and often met in the shops, the launderette or the pub, this system had worked reasonably well. Mrs Fellows's connections with the other mothers, however, were not as close as this, and the other two officers had no such ties at all, so reports of their meetings were not passed along the grapevine. Consequently, the officers were out of touch with people who had an interest in the playgroup but were not immediately involved in running it. For instance, no letter of thanks was sent at Christmas to the landlord of the pub where a weekly raffle had been held for the playgroup for over two years. Mrs Bailey, who had been organizing the raffle, was upset and decided to give the proceeds to old-age pensioners instead. She has said:

It was just before Christmas and they had never even sent out a word of thanks to the landlord. I was so mad. It only cost a couple of bob to type a couple of letters, one for the Public Bar and one for the Saloon. The people were so good over there at the pub. Well, Mrs Conway knocked at my door and said, 'Have I done anything wrong?' And I said, 'No, *you* haven't.' She said to me, 'Are you doing any more raffles?' and I said, 'No, I'm not.' Anyway I told her about no letter and that I thought somebody should write and thank the landlord. The Christmas before, me, Ilys, and my husband, and the landlord and his wife, we had all had a drink over there, when Ilys came over to thank him personal, from her own mouth. Well, Mrs Conway went over to Amy Travers and Amy came over here and said, 'I apologize.' Then Amy went to Mrs Fellows and Mrs Fellows wrote a letter to say they were sorry and to thank for the money. I showed him the letter at the pub and he muttered that it was a bit late. So I never asked him if I could do the raffles any more for the playgroup. It just stopped, like that. So then we started doing a raffle for the old-age pensioners.

Because of the lack of income and the lack of enthusiasm for voluntary work, Mrs Chapman had serious doubts whether the playgroup could continue. Therefore, when it became known that Mrs Fellows, who had been ill for some time, was to go into hospital, Mrs Chapman announced that, if people were not prepared to help, the playgroup would have to close and the Family Study's grant of £50 would be returned.

The newly independent group, then, was not faring well. There

The Group on its Own

were few mothers, few children and little income, and the rota was working badly. Not all the mothers, however, took Mrs Chapman's view that the playgroup would have to close and some of them went to Mrs Travers. Mrs Travers had been out of the group since the previous summer, and her return had a marked effect. She and the mothers who had approached her held a meeting of their own, without the officers and without the workers. They decided that two mothers should be paid by the group as full-time playgroup workers, and Mrs Travers went to see Elizabeth.

Elizabeth had been working on the project since November 1966. The mothers had been as suspicious of her as they had been of Ilys:

We didn't think she would fit in either, because she is different to us – she speaks differently.

When Elizabeth came into the area, I was dubious of her. I thought, 'Oh, my God, we've got a right posh one here.' I thought, 'How the devil do I talk to her?' And then, when I met her up at the flat a couple of times, speaking with her and knowing that she could converse with me, and though she spoke well and had a better education than me, I realized that she could understand what I was trying to say and what I was trying to explain, and then to get to know her as a person was a different thing altogether. As it worked out, I think she fitted in quite well. I realized after a bit that it wasn't aloofness, it was shyness.

She had begun to establish a relationship with the Nottingwood group in the previous autumn while Ilys was in hospital, and on Ilys's return at the beginning of 1968 she and Ilys had decided that she would do most of the work with the Nottingwood group while Ilys would work more with the social work agencies and the other organizations that were springing up in North Kensington. During the winter she had kept in touch with the group's officers and with Mrs Travers, but had not been able to find out what the others were thinking, and it turned out that this was because they felt she had not been performing her proper function as the worker. Mrs Travers was sent to tell her so. Mrs Travers recalls:

I can remember going up to the flat one day and saying to Liz, 'Well, Liz, I think you should have more say at these meetings.' The complaint was that the mothers felt that she was just a stand-by, that she wasn't coming forward. They'd been so used to having Ilys there and Ilys turning round and saying, 'Now look, hold up. What about

A Community Project in Notting Dale

trying something else? Try it this way. Try it that way.' Liz had never done this and the mothers could see she wasn't doing this, so in their eyes she wasn't pulling her weight enough. She wasn't dishing up enough advice to the mothers at these meetings. They would have trusted her enough to accept her advice. They must have felt that. Otherwise they wouldn't have come to me and said they felt she was sitting back. They had a feeling that she was supporting Sally Chapman because they said that she and Sally were two of a kind, because Sally – let's be fair – knew how to speak and had a good education the same as Liz.

Elizabeth also recalls this visit:

I had not been very active at the meeting in January when they decided to try and run the playgroup voluntarily. Amy Travers's visit was a real eye-opener to me then because I discovered that Mrs Shaw represented the views of six other people at that meeting, whereas I'd thought it was just two people, she and Mrs Chapman, who were fighting out the decision, and that was really my ignorance, not knowing about the neighbourhood network.

Elizabeth knew better what the mothers expected of her and took a greater part in group meetings. At a well attended meeting in the Rugby Club soon after, the decisions that Mrs Travers and the others had made at their own meeting were passed officially. The control of the group was now once more in the hands of the long-standing members, and this was made complete the following week when an election of new officers was held. Mrs Travers was elected chairman for a second time. Mrs Hutchins, who had also been chairman before, was elected treasurer, and Mrs Shaw secretary. Mrs Chapman took her child away to a different playgroup because her husband, she said, was unhappy about the habit of swearing that his son was picking up.

FINDING ITS FEET

The basic things a playgroup needs are premises, equipment and a playgroup worker, and of course money to pay for them. The playgroup was still using the Rugby Club and had the equipment it had accumulated over the years, so the problems that faced it were those of playgroup workers and money. The two mothers whom the group had had in mind in the decision to pay mothers as playgroup workers had been Mrs Shaw and Mrs Fellows, but both were unable to do it immediately because of illness. Two

The Group on its Own

others were chosen by picking names from a hat, but they had little experience of running a playgroup and found it difficult. The workers therefore suggested that the group use the help of a volunteer, an American whom Ilys knew, who had done playgroup work before. Her name was Caroline Schelle. Although she worked for only a short time, she established a very friendly relationship with the mothers, as the following story shows. It is recounted by Elizabeth:

There was an outing for Caroline when she left. This was an idea of the mothers. I was asked to come along as well, and there was Lynn Shaw, Jill, Gina and Doris. Anyway, we all dressed up and went out and we began in a pub not far from the Rugby Club. We started on beer and had two or three half pints and then rushed off to bingo at the Rugby Club. I was sitting next to Jill and she had, I think, five cards and I had one but she kept an eye on my card as well because I kept missing out my numbers. Then there was an interval and we rushed back to finish our drinks and have another couple of drinks, and then we went back and continued to play. We were sat in a circle, some of us with our backs to the caller, so we were really a group and there were other groups like this. It was much more pleasant than sitting in a row, which is what I imagine happens in most bingo halls, sitting in an old cinema one behind the other. Then afterwards we went to the pub next door to Doris's home and I think we had two or three whiskies. Caroline doesn't really drink and she got quite worried. There was obviously some question of us being tried out as to whether we would drink along with them, and I guess it was me who was really being tried on this score. Anyway, then we left the pub and we walked everybody home and as we walked back we bought fish and chips and walked down the road, and this was another test, again for me, to see whether I would eat fish and chips with them walking down the road, and they laughed about this.

The happy experience of working with Caroline encouraged the mothers to contemplate employing a professional playgroup worker. This coincided with word coming to Mrs Travers on the grapevine that two mothers who had stopped bringing their children to the playgroup after Tricia's departure had done so because there was no longer a qualified playgroup worker. This came as a surprise to her and to the workers since the general opinion of the mothers in the past had been that any mother who had brought up a family could cope with a playgroup. But that idea was changing. Mrs Shaw, who had particularly enjoyed working with

A Community Project in Notting Dale

Caroline, went on a short training course for playgroup helpers and much enjoyed it. It was run by the Pre-School Playgroups Association and was the first of its kind to be run locally. Several of the other mothers were also becoming more aware of the skills involved in playgroup work and of the value of training:

When you watch playgroup workers, they know how to do games out of nothing. They can make things and they can show children how to do these things. It wouldn't enter my head to get hold of something that was no good in the home and use it for the child to play with.

If there's just anybody up there, the children run riot in all directions. They don't seem to concentrate for five minutes on anything they're doing. But these trained workers seem to have some sort of authority over them and the children are quite interested in something they're doing. Their minds don't wander.

If you start singing 'Ring-a-roses' with a group of kids you feel a bit of a fool, but if you had a bit of training it gives you that bit of added confidence.

You could get a kiddie like we had young Tom. Little Tom was one of them. He was a real little herbert. A nice kid, but apparently there was something wrong with the background. Now a trained worker could have understood more of this than what us mums could. Some of the mums couldn't put up with him at all but he didn't want this attitude. He wanted understanding. He wanted attention.

Consequently there was general agreement to the suggestion that a qualified playgroup worker should be employed by the group, a possibility the workers had been raising for some months. The mothers wanted to employ Caroline, but she was about to return to America so they had to look for someone else. Employing a professional worker was something new for the mothers, and it therefore demanded much activity from the workers. First, they suggested three ways of finding playgroup workers – looking in periodicals such as *Nursery World*, advertising, and enquiring from organizations such as the Pre-School Playgroups Association and the Save the Children Fund. The mothers opted for the last of these. The workers had several discussions with individual mothers, notably Mrs Fellows, about the qualities to be looked for in an applicant, and a useful way of thinking about this was to consider what had been the qualities of the group's previous playgroup

The Group on its Own

workers. The opinion had changed from two years before, for the mothers now wanted a playgroup worker just to run the morning playgroup; her skills, therefore, should be mainly with the children. It was felt that the work of visiting the mothers of children in the playgroup and getting new people interested in it was better done by the mothers themselves. No one was sure how much a playgroup worker ought to be paid, and the workers raised this problem, but the group did not make enquiries and in the end Elizabeth had to find out.

Playgroup workers were in short supply and in fact the mothers only met two. The first they rejected because they thought she was too old. The second was an acquaintance of Ilys and of Caroline called Susan Weller. She came to a meeting with the workers and two of the mothers and herself raised the difficulty that she had a child of her own under three whom she would have to bring to the playgroup and that this was contrary to the practice recommended by the Inner London Pre-School Playgroups Association to which the group had recently become affiliated. A meeting between her and more of the mothers was arranged and in the meantime the workers discussed with the mothers the point she had raised. In fact, it did not worry them. Susan had also offered two referees and the workers explained to the mothers the point of asking for references; but the mothers preferred to rely on their own judgement and did not take up the offer. Finally, the workers stressed that the mothers did not have to make a decision in Susan's presence, but might prefer to have a discussion after seeing her, and this suggestion was accepted.

During the interview, Mrs Hutchins, the treasurer, mentioned the question of pay, but in a very quiet voice. The workers, knowing what she wanted to say, asked her to say it again and she did. Susan had been receiving £5 a week in her previous job and this was the sum agreed on. She was appointed playgroup worker for a trial period of three months and she began work in May.

The problem of a playgroup worker thus solved, the group was left with the problem of money. The income from the weekly raffle had ceased and the Family Study had made it clear that no more grants would be forthcoming. The daily charges for children using the playgroup covered the rent to the Rugby Club and paid for small things such as orange juice. Money raised from jumble sales and bazaars provided new equipment but was not enough for the playgroup worker's salary. The mothers therefore applied

A Community Project in Notting Dale

to charitable organizations for financial support. This entailed three visits, two of which Elizabeth describes:

For the first one, I went with Amy Travers and Doris Hutchins. The lady there gave us her full attention and was very efficient. I was sitting in the middle and she was inclined to ask me the questions, but I felt that I was able to turn either to Amy or to Doris so that they answered some of the questions. The mothers came away saying it had been quite a good interview. They felt that someone who asks questions like that is fair because they say straight out what they are thinking, though we all agreed we felt a bit on our toes there. After we left, Doris said to me, 'What a good thing that you came with us. We never could have managed this on our own, but now you've come with us we get the feeling we could do it on our own another time.' And I was very encouraged by this, because it was one of the first comments which showed an awareness that Ilys and I would one day be leaving. It was literally, 'This time you do it with us. Next time we do it on our own.'

The other one was Admiral Bowland. Amy and I went. The building was a little awesome, but when we arrived he came down to meet us and took us up in the lift, opened doors for us and made us feel very much at home. Again, he was inclined to turn to me to ask questions but I found that it was quite possible to explain my role and the Family Study and then turn to Amy and let her answer most of the questions about the playgroup, and in fact she did. It was a very friendly meeting. He was terribly interested in the idea of the playgroup mothers doing things for themselves, and he talked about his own wife and how they live in a village in the country and how she makes cakes for the fêtes and various other activities that they run in the village; so, although he was describing something which was so different from Notting Dale, he was talking about himself, and this in a way made it feel more friendly. When we left he saw us out, and when we came into the street, Amy was walking on air, really very thrilled by the treatment, and I entirely understood what she felt.

And Mrs Travers has said:

He was the type of man who really made you feel comfortable and he was really interested. Although he was a well educated man, he seemed to understand what I was trying to say.

In order to apply for grants from these organizations, the group had to present a statement of accounts and this was the first time that such a statement had been needed. A Post Office account had been opened, in Pat Foster's name, in the summer of 1965 when the first raffles had raised a sum of money for playgroup equip-

The Group on its Own

ment. When the group's committee was formed in the spring of 1966, this account had been continued in the group's name and an accounts book begun, kept by the treasurer. Ilys, who was quite skilled at book-keeping, had given some help to the first two treasurers, Mrs Conway and Mrs Waters, but on the whole had left them to do it as they thought best. The third treasurer had taken over when Ilys was away, and Elizabeth, who had no experience of book-keeping, had not given her much help and none had been requested, so the books had been in some confusion when Mrs Hutchins took them over in March 1968, and when this statement of accounts was needed, only Ilys knew how to produce one. She took the books home, worked on them for a full week-end and produced the statement. She also drew up a new book-keeping system for the treasurer consisting of a book to be brought up to date weekly and a ledger to be brought up to date monthly.

The main reason why it was difficult to keep the books straight was that transactions were conducted by several different people and not on a regular basis. When the playgroup ran out of something, such as paint or orange juice, the playgroup worker or one of the mothers helping would buy some more and they did not always get receipts from the shopkeepers. The playgroup worker was not always paid directly by the treasurer but sometimes by one of the mothers, who would then get a receipt from the playgroup worker and bring it back to the treasurer. Thirdly, the mothers' payments for bringing their children to the playgroup were made either to the playgroup worker or to one of the mother helpers, not to the treasurer, because she was not always at the playgroup; and although receipts were usually given, the irregularity of the payments made it difficult for the treasurer to keep track of the transactions. It was therefore possible for money to go adrift in this system, and it sometimes did.

There was also the perennial difficulty caused by mothers who would not pay the charges. When the playgroup register was inspected in April, for instance, it was found that one mother was owing several pounds. Mrs Travers, as the group's new chairman, was given the task of demanding the money, but the result was that the mother still refused to pay and left the group. This problem was not solved by either Mrs Shaw or Susan Weller handling the register, and in June Mrs Fellows, now back from hospital, took it on once more. All debts were ignored and they started afresh.

Applications had resulted in grants from both the charities, so

A Community Project in Notting Dale

the group's immediate difficulties were resolved. It still faced a problem of a different kind, however, and this was that only a few mothers were taking an active part. Almost all responsibility was being taken by Mrs Travers, Mrs Fellows and Mrs Hutchins, all long-standing members, and the others did not number more than eight. The group's dependence on its elder statesmen and its lack of new members were sources of concern both to some members and to the workers. The following conversation between Mrs Travers, Ilys and Elizabeth took place at this time:

Amy Travers is worried about the lack of involvement of the new mothers. She has invited them to meetings, asked them for small items to make up a raffle prize, and asked for their help at the jumble sale. They have not responded and seem just to want to dump their children at the playgroup and go. When asked what she wants involvement for, she explained that it was to enliven and improve discussion with new ideas. Elizabeth asked her why she wants the playgroup to continue and she replied that it's because it is her playgroup. Elizabeth suggested that, if what the mothers want is somewhere to dump their kids, might it not be better to put pressure on the Council or a playgroup organization to have that sort of provision made? Is there particular value in it being run by the mothers? Amy thinks there is. If Save the Children Fund or someone like that were to take it over, she could not have the same part in it. She stressed her interest in the playgroup, her feeling that it's her playgroup, etc.

Ilys gave the example of the chairman of a housing association group whom she knew who had frequently declared in similar tones a wish for involvement, but who was in fact in such effective control that there was no place for the involvement of others. Are there families in the new flats who might be approached? The Neighbourhood Centre might have contacts there. Amy was silent and probably upset.

That this conversation had an effect is borne out by Mrs Travers's recollection:

I'm going to be quite honest here. If you have never held a position like that before, you're inclined to get big-headed, like I did. I was coming up and saying different things about what we could do, what we couldn't do, and people were just agreeing with me. Whether it was because they thought I'd got that bit more authority or I had a pushing way, I don't know, but it didn't do me any good. It didn't dawn on me straight away. It was quite a while afterwards when I began to realize what I was doing. I was talking one day to somebody – I can't think who it was – and I mentioned 'my group', and then after I mentioned

The Group on its Own

it, I noticed, 'Lately, I keep saying *my* group, and it's not *my* group,' and it was from then onwards I began to realize, 'Amy, you're wrong. You're taking the whole lot and you're not fair to the others.'

The group, then, in the spring of 1968 was wondering how to find new members, when an opportunity came for it to do so. It was an invitation to join in a large play scheme for the summer. This invitation came from the Leisure and Amenities Committee and the Playspace Group. The first had been created as the result of a proposal by Ilys to the Notting Hill Social Council the previous year that a subcommittee be set up to see what better use for leisure activities could be made of North Kensington's school buildings, youth clubs, church halls, small green squares and play streets. At that time, an organization called Community Workshop had recently arrived, which gathered several organizations together in the Notting Hill Summer Project 1967. Part of this had been a play scheme, and this year, 1968, the Leisure and Amenities Committee was running a similar one with the North Kensington Playspace Group. This group had formed in 1966 to campaign for the use of the land under the new Western Avenue Extension, a large concrete flyover which cuts across North Kensington. Its object was to get the land used in a variety of ways for the maximum benefit of the local residents and to have the residents' own ideas incorporated into the plans. (It is now called the Motorway Development Trust.) It obtained a section of the site for use as a temporary playground in the summer of 1968. That part of the motorway had been built by this time and the space was divided by concrete cross walls into six bays. The Nottingwood mothers were invited to run their playgroup for the summer in one of these bays.

This invitation is a good example of the bridge-building which Ilys had been trying to do. She was on the committees of both these organizations and so had been able to suggest that they invite the Nottingwood group. To the mothers, her involvement in those organizations was a high recommendation and an important reason for their accepting the invitation.

The details had not been worked out when the mothers accepted the invitation and, as the holidays approached, they became worried that there would not be enough equipment. Ilys had gone into hospital, for a third time, in July, so it was left to Elizabeth to mediate between the groups. She arranged a meeting between the

A Community Project in Notting Dale

organizers of the summer scheme and the mothers at which it was agreed that the Nottingwood group would take its own equipment to the motorway and that the Leisure and Amenities Committee would pay for all loss and damage over the summer.

The scheme did not begin well. A large amount of equipment was being given by an American firm, but it did not appear until the second week. At the beginning, therefore, children of all ages wanted to use the Nottingwood equipment, and this increased the risk of damage. The eventual arrival of some of the other equipment alleviated the problem. There was some further misunderstanding about an afternoon playgroup. Before the summer, it had been discussed, though not agreed, that Susan, the Nottingwood playgroup worker, would run an afternoon playgroup, in addition to the Nottingwood one in the morning, and would be paid for this by the Leisure and Amenities Committee. Decisions during the play scheme were taken at meetings of the organizers and anyone else interested which were held every morning at nine o'clock. Unfortunately this was not a time when the mothers could attend, so they were not present when the final decision was made to begin the afternoon playgroup. They were not happy about this for three reasons. One was the increased wear and tear on the Nottingwood equipment. Another was that the afternoon playgroup was to be free, whereas the Nottingwood group charged 1s. per child for the morning playgroup, so one could expect attendance at the morning playgroup to decline, especially since not a lot of children under five were turning up. The third was their fear, as with Treadgold Street, of being taken over by a larger organization.

Elizabeth explained to the organizers why the mothers were upset and managed to arrange an afternoon meeting on the site. One of the organizers chaired the meeting and there was lively discussion. The six mothers present were able to put their case and it was agreed that there should be an afternoon playgroup in addition to the morning one and that the Nottingwood equipment would be used, but that the same charge would be made for the afternoon as for the morning session. Advertisements would be put up to attract more children. That the mothers could take part in the meeting and reach this agreement contrasted with their experience over Treadgold Street. The advertisements produced a large influx of children and for the remainder of the summer holidays the playgroup flourished.

Although it had been partly from a desire for new members that

The Group on its Own

the group had moved under the motorway for the summer, there had been some unease about the possibility of being overrun by 'outsiders'. It may be a small indication of this that newcomers during the summer were listed on a different page of the playgroup register from those previously enrolled. By the end of the holidays, however, a few new mothers were attending the playgroup regularly and were becoming accepted by the others, so that the group printed a small handout to inform new mothers of its return to the Rugby Club and to request their continued support.

There had not been much vandalism during the summer, considering the large number of children on the site, so it was particularly unfortunate when, after the end of the scheme, most of the Nottingwood equipment, which was temporarily stored on the site, was ransacked and largely ruined, but the Leisure and Amenities Committee made good its promise to pay for it all.

On the whole, the mothers thought the summer had been a great success. The Playspace Group was eager to have local support for its plans, so the mothers wrote the following letter to the Town Clerk:

This last six weeks has been the most wonderful experience that has ever happened to the children of Notting Hill. The whole playsite under the motorway at St Mark's Road has been a tremendous success and many people feel it would be a good thing if the motorway could go on as a play area. If this were so, we would very much like to use a bay for our pre-school playgroup.

We have been running the Nottingwood playgroup under the motorway for the past six weeks. We found this to be a great success because we have been able to go under cover which we would not otherwise have been able to do during the summer holidays. We got a great response from local residents in the area and the children enjoyed the freedom of space. Our playgroup runs each morning for two-to-five-year-olds and, if we could have a bay, we know we could help more families by relieving the parents of their children for two hours daily and giving more children of all nationalities the chance to play and mix with other children.

We understand the Joint Working Party which is preparing detailed proposals for the space under the Western Avenue Extension meets on 12 September and we should be glad if you could give them our request.

That the group should write its own letter to the Borough Council was a source of some satisfaction to the workers, and they

A Community Project in Notting Dale

had other reasons to be pleased. It was true that Ilys had gone into hospital for another major operation in July, but she seemed to be recovering well. The group, whose future had looked doubtful at the beginning of the year, had now successfully applied to charities, had joined the Pre-School Playgroups Association, had employed a playgroup worker, had gained some new members and had co-operated well with a larger organization in making the summer motorway scheme a success. For the first time for a long time, things seemed to be going well.

A NEWCOMER

The playgroup returned to the Rugby Club when the cold weather came and a few of the mothers who had joined in the summer continued to bring their children. The problem still remained, however, that it was the same few members in charge of the group's affairs. Mrs Travers remembered her conversation with the workers in which they had hinted that new mothers could not assume the leadership so long as it was held by her, and since she had to go into hospital at this time, she thought she should hand over to someone new. There was no obvious successor and no competition for the chairmanship, so Mrs Travers simply chose someone. She thought that Mrs Binns, one of the mothers who had joined in the summer, and who was helping a lot in the playgroup, had good ideas and was not afraid to speak her mind. She asked one or two mothers if they had any objection to Mrs Binns becoming chairman. They had not, and neither had Mrs Binns. It was therefore assumed that Mrs Binns was now chairman.

This illustrates the little importance that the group attached to formal procedure, which was something that had troubled the workers for some time. It had been inherent in the group ever since the election of its first officers. At that time a committee of fourteen had been set up, but nothing more was heard of it. The expression 'the committee' came to be used to mean sometimes the three officers and sometimes the group in general. At the second election, for instance, Ilys had noted:

During a discussion about the size of the committee, it was agreed that there should be no limit on the numbers. It is said that 'Everyone should be on the committee'. This appears to stem from a feeling that no one should be excluded and that they do not want a 'prestige' group within the whole.

The Group on its Own

The committee, then, was supposed to include every member of the group, but not every member was consulted about everything, and certainly not every member attended meetings. This was how the few mothers had come to be in charge. The reason this troubled the workers was that the dominance of the group by these few members, which the informality permitted, prevented any real growth in the group since new members could play no strong part. It was also doubtful whether charitable organizations would be prepared to continue supporting such a vaguely structured body, especially after the departure of the Family Study. The workers had been able to encourage democratic decision-making by passing information among the members and encouraging attendance at meetings, but the project was now in its final year.

The workers had put these points to the officers and had suggested that one solution was to have a constitution, perhaps on the lines of that suggested by the Pre-School Playgroups Association. There had been almost no response. It may be that what the workers saw as the advantage of a constitution – that it would ensure that the gate be kept open to new members – was seen by the present members as a threat. It may simply be, however, that it was foreign to the mothers to use formal procedures. An example of this was the continuing use of the grapevine as the principal means of communication, although minutes were regularly written and duplicated. Whatever the reason, no constitutional reforms had been made and Mrs Binns simply took over.

The playgroup was running badly at the time and one reason was that the Rugby Club had forbidden the use of clay and water because the room had sometimes been left in a mess the previous June. Mrs Binns was keen to move the playgroup elsewhere, and St Mark's Church Hall was suggested, a large hall by Blenheim Crescent, about two minutes' walk from Nottingwood House. Several of the mothers seemed to favour moving to St Mark's, so a group meeting agreed that Mrs Binns should contact the vicar. This she promptly did, and the rent was fixed at 50s. a week.

The playgroup at this time was under some criticism from the Pre-School Playgroups Association because of the low standard at which it was running, and it was also rumoured that another playgroup had its eye on St Mark's Hall. For both these reasons, the playgroup moved in some haste. The haste was unfortunate. A number of the mothers had not in fact seen the inside of the hall

A Community Project in Notting Dale

when the decision was made to move the playgroup there, and they found it large, cold and a bit depressing:

I knew what St Mark's Hall was – a dirty, rotten hole. They said it had all been done up and there was heating in it. I hadn't seen it for a few years and I thought in that time quite a lot could have been done. Then the playgroup moved there and I thought it was still the same dirty, rotten hole.*

A second drawback was that, although it was only 200 yards from Nottingwood House, and not in the wealthy area, it was on the far side of Clarendon Road and therefore 'across the border', as the following remarks by two of the mothers show:

I never knew the people round there at all. I don't seem to go beyond Talbot Grove, Round here, Walmer Road and that, I'm all right, but I don't seem to move beyond Talbot Grove. It's stupid really, but there you are. I don't know why I don't, really, because it's no further.

St Mark's was in a bad situation really. It was cut off from this area, kind of thing. It's surprising how many people – if you say St Mark's Church, they don't know where it is. It's just a building that you see and don't put a name to. I didn't know where it was.

The principal figure in the move to St Mark's had been Mrs Binns. From the time she became chairman she had taken a firm hold on the group's affairs. One reason was that she was a forthright and competent woman, not afraid of taking responsibility and getting things done, and these qualities contrasted with the customary reticence of most members of the group. She was also new to the playgroup and eager to learn about playgroup work. The other reason was that she was largely left to get on with it, both by Elizabeth who, as will be explained, was deliberately leaving the group alone, and by her fellow-officers, who felt St Mark's to be too far away and whose interest in the group was waning. She recalls:

Amy Travers just asked me if I would like to be chairman. I think if your kids are going to a place and they're enjoying it, then you should put some effort into doing something, so I said I would. Then all of a sudden it seemed to involve such a lot of running about. There was all this running back and forth collecting the playgroup worker's wages, money and this sort of thing, and nobody actually told me. Doris Hutchins was treasurer and Lynn Shaw was the secretary, but as far as I can remember I was chairman for about three weeks before I knew that Lynn Shaw was secretary. I don't think it was awfully well organ-

* The hall has since been redecorated.

The Group on its Own

ized. The first week Amy Travers talked about fund-raising things, but nobody actually told me anything practical like who was supposed to be doing what and that sort of thing.

Although Mrs Binns had by no means pushed her way into the chairmanship, and although the inactivity of the other members was one of the reasons why she took so much upon herself, her activity aroused the old fear in the others that control of the group was being taken out of their hands. For instance, Mrs Binns drew £25 out of the group's Post Office account and handed it to the playgroup worker who went off on her own to purchase playgroup equipment. The other mothers knew nothing of this until it had been done. This particularly upset the mothers because Pat, Tricia and Caroline had always made a happy group occasion out of purchasing equipment, though Mrs Binns, of course, was not to know this. Mrs Binns, therefore, not unlike Mrs Chapman a year before, was being left to do things while being viewed with increasing anxiety because she did them.

These unhappy events – the disappointment with St Mark's Hall, the poor state of the playgroup and a division within the mothers' group – coincided with a serious deterioration of Ilys's health. She had been in hospital several times over the previous two years and had had a major operation in July. In the summer she had seemed to be recovering well, but her condition deteriorated in December. A few days before Christmas 1968 came the news of her death. Some of the mothers had kept in touch with her, visiting her at home and in hospital. For those with whom she had worked closest, the loss was very great:

Before, she was always there if you got into difficulties. She was the first person you'd think of – 'Oh, I'll go up and have a chat with Ilys.' Nine times out of ten you'd think of something to do. You'd think your own way out of it. You knew it was the right way but you needed her confirmation to tell you it was right. I don't know, that year it seemed you just couldn't find a way out of anything. You were frightened to take the step that you thought was right with nobody to tell you that it was right.

When Ilys died, it seemed that the whole bottom had fallen out of everything for quite a period. I more or less then seemed to lean on Elizabeth and wanted to talk about Ilys and what she'd done and how we were missing her. It was a great help really having someone to discuss Ilys with, someone who already knew her.

A few of the mothers who had been in the group for some years

A Community Project in Notting Dale

had been losing interest in the last months and left soon after Ilys's death. One has said :

At the time, it was a relief to get away from the playgroup. It was a long walk to St Mark's and we didn't feel wanted by Joan Binns. Sally Chapman was the same. I think they wanted to get a new lot in and get rid of the old lot. With Sally we had a lot more go in us and we wouldn't let her take it, but I think we really let Joan take it. Ilys going I think took the go out of a lot of us. I suppose we all sort of drifted a bit after that.

Among the mothers who left at this time were Mrs Shaw and Mrs Hutchins. They had been secretary and treasurer for several months. Mrs Hutchins had been struggling with the playgroup accounts since March and was keen to hand them over. Mrs Shaw rarely came to the playgroup. Both found the extra walk to St Mark's tiresome and they wished to resign. Mrs Fellows was elected treasurer and Mrs Dreyer the new secretary, while Mrs Binns remained chairman.

The anxiety among the other mothers that Mrs Binns was taking too much on herself continued and came to a crisis in March over a jumble sale. The group had planned to hold a bazaar before Christmas but had changed it to a jumble sale and then postponed it and eventually arranged it for the middle of March. Though Mrs Binns had never run a jumble sale before, she took on most of the organization herself. Relations by now were not easy. She felt the others did not want to help and she did not like to ask them. They were willing enough but felt they were not wanted. Though Mrs Binns worked hard herself, preparation was inadequate. There was insufficient advertising and no proper arrangements for clearing away the surplus at the end. The consequence was frayed tempers and a poor sale.

The jumble sale was on a Saturday and on the following Wednesday morning there was a mothers' meeting in St Mark's. Mrs Dreyer, the new secretary, said exactly what she thought about the sale. The following is her recollection :

It was a washout really. There was no advertising put up. I know Joan Binns worked hard but she had no idea how to go about it and she wouldn't ask anyone. If you asked her she'd say, 'Oh, it's all right, I've done it,' but nothing had been done. Then there was the business of collecting the rubbish afterwards. There was a mix up about who was going to clear it and eventually Mrs Fellows got in touch with somebody. That jumble sale as far as Joan and I were concerned went on till half past ten that night.

The Group on its Own ☺

Mrs Dreyer said further that she was not prepared to work with a chairman who did not consult her enough and that, if Mrs Binns did not resign, she would. Mrs Binns resigned and walked out. Mrs Binns recalls :

When I came in on the Wednesday, Amy Travers was there and Pat Dreyer was late, and I knew straight away that something was wrong, the atmosphere about the place. A lot of the jumble sale was my fault, and I knew they said to me that I should have asked for help, but I had made arrangements with a few people and I didn't know those people were going to let me down. I suppose it was my fault, but I thought people would volunteer. I thought in an association like that you wouldn't have to say, 'You do this and you do that.' Besides, I was much younger compared with the likes of Amy Travers and Mrs Fellows and I didn't like the thought of asking them to do something. Pat Dreyer said that either she left or I did, so I left. I was very disappointed that Amy and Mrs Fellows didn't say anything. I felt annoyed and hurt as well. With Pat Dreyer I more or less understood because she is one of those women who boils up inside and it all comes out, sort of thing. But I was very disappointed in Mrs Fellows and Amy when they said nothing.

Mrs Travers recalls her feelings :

The three of us, after she went, we sort of sat there dumb-struck, because I think really and truly we all felt a bit guilty. You can get in a flaming temper for a period – I know I can – and I can tell you what I think of you, and the next minute I'll talk to you normally, and probably, had Joan not walked out then, and just given us time to quieten down, we could have spoken out where she'd gone wrong and how wrong we were in not helping her enough, but we never had time to do this. I was a coward. Pat Dreyer blew her top at Joan and said, 'You never advertised, you didn't do this, you didn't do that.' Well, instead of me being fair to Joan and saying, 'Pat, let's be fair. This is the first time Joan has run a jumble sale,' I sat quiet, and that was wrong. I don't know why. The only thing I can say when I prick my mind was jealousy. I probably wanted to see her do wrong – I'll admit this – and after she walked out I realized what a dirty coward I was.

ALL ON ITS OWN

The project was approaching the end of its five years. In November, before Ily's death, the Family Study had decided that the workers should withdraw at the end of March, using the final six months to

A Community Project in Notting Dale

work on the report of the project. In a sense, the workers had been preparing for withdrawal for four years, making the Nottingwood group increasingly independent on the one hand, while attempting to make the established organizations more understanding, tolerant and helpful on the other, and to some extent the success of the summer play scheme under the motorway had been the result of Elizabeth's work at the former and Ilys's at the latter. The group, however, had not reached the stage where the workers could slip away hardly noticed. The withdrawal had been expected to be a difficult time, and it was made more so, of course, by the death of Ilys.

Withdrawal was bound to be difficult because the workers were essential to the group, as they always had been. If the group had been independent of the worker from the beginning, then, having acquired the necessary skills for doing what it wanted to do, it would probably have been able to carry on without the worker. For the first three years, however, the springboard approach had been used, in which the mothers were not running their own playgroup but were helping a playgroup worker to run one. The attempt had been made to transfer responsibility for the playgroup onto the mothers, in other words to act as though the mothers wanted to run their own playgroup, and since a few did, it had been partially successful. But it was still really around the worker, rather than around their common interest in the children, that the group existed, so withdrawal was in fact impossible.

Elizabeth had begun the withdrawal in November by telling the mothers when she would be leaving so that they could make their plans accordingly. She also drew upon her training and experience as a caseworker in discussing with people the death of Ilys and the prospect of her own departure and in encouraging them to express their grief, anger or fear. The idea here was that parting would not be so depressing if everyone was to some extent prepared for the feelings it would arouse. She thought, for instance, that the serious effect of Pat Foster's departure could have been reduced if this had been done. Her general policy in the last months had been gradually to reduce her involvement rather than to be fully active up to the moment of departure, in the hope that the mothers would find it easier to get used to coping without her. She had not been attending every group meeting, or had arrived late and left early, and had not been getting to know the new mothers.

The poor jumble sale and its unfortunate aftermath showed what effect her withdrawal was having. Her hope was that the group had

The Group on its Own

acquired sufficient experience to handle things like jumble sales alone, but of course the educational value of the earlier ones was lost since the organizer of this one was a new member of the group. Her other hope was that one of the mothers might take on the community worker's role, and Mrs Travers was a likely candidate, but, as Mrs Travers herself has explained, she was too involved emotionally to stand back:

When things were beginning to go wrong up at St Mark's – and I wasn't chairman then – I found I couldn't keep away. Probably if I'd kept away, Joan Binns would have had a fair crack of the whip. I don't know why, but I just couldn't keep away. All I was doing was just going up and talking to the mums and they'd be having a moan and groan and saying, 'Joan Binns is doing this, and she's doing that.' This began to give me the needle, and I began to get jealous. I don't know why, but I knew I was jealous of Joan.

If Elizabeth had been working fully with the group in these months, she would probably have been able to encourage more co-operation between Mrs Binns and the others or, if such a crisis had still arisen, she might have given more support to Mrs Binns and the few new mothers, even if this led to the ousting of the old guard, so that new people would run the playgroup and the old ones could go on to something else – Mrs Travers, for instance, had taken an active interest in the plans for the land under the motorway. But not getting to know the new mothers and continuing to be visited by the old ones, especially after Ilys's death, was passive encouragement for the old ways to continue. The group was missing her, as some of the members recognized:

We knew she was fading out, but she seemed to be fading out quicker than we wanted her to. At the time we really did need her around the area, not only to talk about Ilys and things like that, but also to get the new mothers more involved. It was all right for Mrs Fellows and me to go up the flat and say this is happening in the group or that is happening, but the new mums never knew her to be able to discuss what was happening in the group. After Ilys had died, I personally think her committee pulled her away too quick.

This quotation shows where the group's major weakness lay and where, therefore, it most needed a worker. It could manage to employ playgroup workers, to negotiate for premises and to obtain money from the charities, but it could not tolerate newcomers taking part in running the playgroup. Both with Mrs Chapman the year

A Community Project in Notting Dale

before and now with Mrs Binns, either everything had been left to them or they had been ousted. This weakness was to be a serious one.

Thus it seemed automatic that Mrs Travers should be chairman again and her return put some vitality into the group for a while, as it had the year before. It was time to reapply to the charities and this necessitated another statement of accounts. Elizabeth had worked closely with the group's treasurer, Mrs Hutchins, in keeping the accounts regularly up to date, but producing a statement for the whole year was a big task and Mr Hutchins was called in to help. He has said:

You adopted a serious attitude towards it because you knew it was money hard got from these charities and jumble sales. I'd seen the way that Doris had worked for these bazaars, and I'd seen the way the other women had worked, and I thought we'd got to look after it because they'd worked so hard to get it.

After many evenings' work a statement of accounts was finally produced and audited. The group could now reapply to the charities. Elizabeth recalls:

Amy Travers came into the flat one day while I was talking to someone and said, 'I've come to ring Admiral Bowland,' so I had no opportunity to say to her, 'What are you going to say to him? Would you like me to get the number?' But I was very aware that she might get straight through to him and he wouldn't have the foggiest idea who she was. So, before I knew what was happening, she had dialled the number and was asking for Admiral Bowland. She got straight through to him and said, 'It's Mrs Travers,' and I gathered there was laughter from the other end while I suppose he was thinking who it was, and then he said, 'Oh yes, from Notting Hill,' and then they had a conversation about applying and so on. And Amy came back into the room absolutely delighted that he had remembered her so quickly. The group in fact got grants again from both the trusts.

Several people in Notting Hill at this time were discussing the possibility of a memorial to Ilys, and what form it might take. The mothers, especially the older ones who had known her well, wanted to give her name to something. Ideally, they would have liked some premises for the playgroup inside what they saw as their own neighbourhood, and would have called it the Ilys Booker Hall. However, they did not yet have any, so they decided to change the name of the playgroup to the Ilys Booker Playgroup.

After the end of March, as had been decided, Elizabeth paid only

The Group on its Own

occasional visits to Notting Dale. She left her telephone number with the mothers, but the group was now almost entirely on its own. Elizabeth was in fact on holiday in June when the group encountered a crisis. It concerned the group's current playgroup worker, Janet Duncan.

The group's first playgroup worker, Susan Weller, who had been appointed in May of the previous year, had left for personal reasons after three months. The mothers felt they had failed in some way by not getting on well with her, though relations had not really been too bad, and therefore they had not looked immediately for another playgroup worker but had reverted once more to paying two members of the group. This did not work well, so in the autumn, when the Borough Council Health Department issued new regulations recommending qualified workers for playgroups, the group had employed another playgroup worker. She too had left after a short time, again for reasons not connected with the playgroup, and in February the group had appointed Janet Duncan.

In her few months as playgroup worker, the number of children had increased a little and the mothers' voluntary rota had worked better. Janet's way with helpers was to use a little more authority than her predecessors had, and though this annoyed some people, it was effective in getting more people to help. Every day in term-time for the last eighteen months, two girls from the local Ladbroke School had turned up at the playgroup as part of the school's social service course, and Janet was particularly successful in making use of their help. One mother has said :

I've been up to the playgroup many a time when the schoolgirls were just sitting around doing nothing. She really got them stuck into something. They weren't idle when she was there. I don't know how she managed to do it but she did. My daughter liked her. And she seemed to tackle the rota all right. There was one mother who would never do a turn on the rota. Janet got her to do it. She told them straight, 'The playgroup is there for your child, and if you'd like your child to come to the group we'd like you to do a turn on the rota.'

When the good weather came,* the older mothers told Janet that the playgroup would be moving into the courtyard between Allom House and Barlow House, as it always had in the summer. Janet, however, was against this move :

* Since the worker was absent, no records were kept of the succeeding events. The account has been constructed from four people's recollections.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

I said I didn't think the courtyard was suitable. We would have children up to fifteen years of age in the holidays and you couldn't keep the gates shut. Our equipment was too small for the space and would have been lost. The space was very unpleasant. It was like a prison courtyard. It was a very depressing environment. There was glass all over the place. There were little spaces of grass which might have been used, but these again were full of glass. And you couldn't take things like paper and books because they'd blow around.

The mothers who remembered the summers in the courtyard with Pat and Tricia did not see it like this :

She didn't see what sense there was in going there, and of course, us having started there, we were quite horrified.

I will agree that there's bits of glass about the place, but I said all we had to do was talk to the caretaker about it. He was quite good and in the past we had found he swept up before the playgroup started. But this still didn't suit her. Whether it was because I'm so close to the courtyard and can watch what's going on, I don't know. We thought it was wrong because we had started in there. We'd had four years in that courtyard and we got on ever so well.

Janet felt so strongly about the courtyard that instead, on nice mornings, she took the children to Kensington Memorial Park, some ten minutes' walk away, there being no space next to St Mark's hall. Sometimes she walked up with them and sometimes they went in a van driven by one of the new mothers. Mrs Fellows and Mrs Travers were worried about all this, that the children would get lost in the park, that there were busy roads to cross when they walked there and back, and that the van they sometimes went in was not insured. They regarded the children as their responsibility and told Janet not to take them to the park. Janet knew that some of the new mothers preferred the park, so she demanded a mothers' meeting. This took place in the courtyard and was attended by about ten mothers including the younger ones with children in the playgroup, the older ones with no children in the playgroup but still involved in the group, and a few older ones who had had little to do with the playgroup for some time. The two views were stated and the group was divided at a vote. (Memories differ as to which had the majority.) Janet left the meeting thinking that it was agreed to continue going to the park so long as individual mothers signed a declaration agreeing to it for their own children. Mrs Travers and Mrs Fellows, however, were still worried about it. Elizabeth being on holiday, they telephoned two members of the Family Study Com-

The Group on its Own

mittee whom they had met and were told that, if the children had an accident in the park or on their way there, the playgroup was not insured for this. They thought that this decided it, and on the following day Mrs Travers told Janet that either she must run the playgroup in the hall or the courtyard, or she must take a fortnight's notice. Janet resigned and left immediately.

These events illustrate three things. The first is the difficulties produced by the group's informality in procedure. Mrs Travers and Mrs Fellows thought that, as officers of the group, they were responsible for the children, and could therefore give orders to the playgroup worker in matters such as this. Janet thought that the decision at the meeting had been final. Neither could claim to be right because there was nothing like a constitution to refer to. When Janet asked Mrs Travers who had made decisions like the decision to give her an ultimatum, Mrs Travers replied 'the mothers' or 'the committee', but these terms were sufficiently ambiguous for Mrs Travers to use them, even though some mothers disagreed with the decisions, and even though the secretary, Mrs Dreyer, had not even been consulted. Also, Janet and some of the mothers with children currently in the playgroup had never before seen some of the older mothers who appeared at the meeting, and therefore questioned their right to vote, whereas to Mrs Travers and Mrs Fellows it was those mothers who had formed 'the group' in its heyday and who were therefore still members. Again, in the absence of some sort of constitution, there was no way to decide this.

The second thing this illustrates is the strength of the older mothers' feelings about their own neighbourhood. Neither St Mark's nor Kensington Memorial Park were within what they saw as their neighbourhood, so getting the playgroup back to the courtyard was part of their wish that the group might regain its former character.

The third thing it illustrates is the effect of trying to do community work from the end of a telephone. When the worker's withdrawal had begun, the group had been a small but coherent group of people with whom the Family Study had had contact for some time, people like Mrs Travers and Mrs Fellows. It was therefore these people who had been given the telephone numbers of Elizabeth and the Family Study committee members. In the last months, however, a rival faction had emerged of mothers who had seen little of Elizabeth and knew almost nothing about the Family Study. When this crisis arose, therefore, it was only the old guard who contacted the Family Study committee members. Consequently it was only their

A Community Project in Notting Dale

side which the Family Study committee members heard about and which they naturally tended to support, and this was not altogether fair to the others. What the group needed was a full-time worker for a few days to get to know both sides and to bring them more amicably together (which is what Elizabeth would probably have done had she been available). It would seem that groups like this need to be attached to a body from which they can obtain such help after their workers have withdrawn.

Janet had begun to build up the playgroup again, so her departure was a blow, but there was still some cause for optimism, for during the summer the Leisure and Amenities Committee was to run another play scheme. Elizabeth had hoped that the group might cooperate with this committee as it had in the year before, but it did not turn out so well. A site beneath the motorway was used again but this was farther from Notting Dale than the previous year's site, so the group did not go there. The Leisure and Amenities Committee also negotiated with the Council for temporary use of the Treadgold Street site (now partly occupied by a lorry park), and Mrs Travers had said that the playgroup would run there if premises were made available, but negotiations continued until just before the holidays, so no premises could be erected. The mothers therefore kept the playgroup in the courtyard. It was run during the summer by a student volunteer from the play scheme. Some of the younger mothers continued to bring their children after Janet's departure, but their number was small. The hopes of a summer like the one before were not fulfilled.

A representative from the Borough Health Department had inspected the playgroup in St Mark's Hall in the spring, and had insisted on a handbasin being installed. During the summer these alterations had been made and the hall decorated, but when the playgroup came to return there, the church had put the rent up. The playgroup was also expected to pay some rent for the weeks it had not been using the hall, which was not what the mothers had understood. They decided to leave St Mark's. They had begun negotiations in March for a mission hall nearby, but they eventually received the reply that it was only to be used for the mission's activities. There appeared to be no other available premises in the area.

Many of the mothers who had been bringing their children for some time had now left as their children had gone on to school. The few new mothers who had continued to bring their children after Janet's departure had no interest in running the playgroup, and Mrs

The Group on its Own

Dreyer was about to leave the area. So the group, at the end of the summer, was really only Mrs Fellows and Mrs Travers. Mrs Fellows had enrolled in the Pre-School Playgroups Association playgroup workers' course and felt she could not run the playgroup until she had completed it, so the departure of the student volunteer left them with no playgroup worker. Premises in the area seemed impossible to find.

The end of September 1969, the end of a disappointing summer, was the end of the five-year project. The group, now reduced to its two most faithful members, had no premises and no playgroup worker. They decided, for the time being, to close the playgroup down.

Chapter 7

The Family Study Committee

The policies of the Family Study Committee have been mentioned at various points in the story. This chapter is a more detailed account of the changes in policy and of the reasons behind them.

The formation of the Committee was described in Chapter 2. It was a group of eight people assembled to undertake some project to improve conditions in North Kensington and from early days it favoured the idea of involving local residents in the work. Community work of this kind was new in Britain at that time, so neither the workers nor the Committee could take their roles for granted. It was almost inevitable, therefore, that they should run into difficulties. The reasons, though partly to do with the particular personalities and circumstances of this project, throw light on more general difficulties of a community project.

At the beginning of the project, relations between Ilys Booker and the Family Study Committee were most friendly. The Committee, encouraged by the success of the previous work, was enthusiastic to be embarking on something more ambitious and was pleased to have gained a worker of Ilys's calibre and reputation. Ilys was on friendly terms with several of the committee members before the project and had a high regard for their abilities. This closeness between Ilys and the Committee continued for the first months of the project, but in June 1965, the question was raised whether or not the Family Study should be promoting playgroups and this produced some conflict of opinion. It was the first sign that all was not well.

Underlying the uneasy relationship which developed in the first year between the workers and the Committee was a difference in their expectations. As was outlined in Chapter 5, the Committee had favoured the 'springboard approach'. The main lines of this are that the worker or his agency, after some study of the area and discussion with local people, selects a problem to be tackled and thinks of a way to tackle it (lonely old people – Christmas parcels; rubbish disposal – paper sacks; lack of provision for under fives – playgroups). He makes some suggestion to the local residents and, if the response

The Family Study Committee

is favourable, he goes ahead with the project, involving the residents as far as they are prepared to be involved, but if necessary taking most of the decisions, securing most of the resources and doing most of the work himself. This gets something started and the hope then is that people will join in and eventually take it over themselves. Ilys, however, favoured the 'non-directive approach'. The main lines of this are that the worker, in conversation with local people, stimulates them to think about their problems and what they might do about them, and the hope is that they will be moved, with the worker's help, to take some action themselves.

An important difference between the two is that, with the springboard approach, since the worker takes a lot of the initiative to get something started, fairly quick results are guaranteed, whereas with the non-directive approach, since it is up to the local people whether they take action or not, no group activity may happen for a long time. In fact none may happen at all. Pearl Jephcott and Helen Sheils had used the springboard approach and so a notion had been established in the minds of committee members of how long it took for the appearance of visible results, such as a playgroup. Ilys, however, especially in the first year, was using the non-directive approach, in her conversations with people in the launderette and so on. No doubt this resulted in a number of people thinking about the area's problems more than they would have done otherwise, but no group activity came from it, and as the months went by members of the Committee became increasingly anxious at the lack of visible results. A committee member recalls:

There was continuous discussion about whether it ought or ought not to matter that things were going slowly. I can remember Ilys being very depressed. Sitting here with nothing happening is dreadfully difficult, and she realized that we found it difficult. We did try and support her in this, but it was hard for all of us, because I think we had expectations which were perhaps unreal, but we had them all right. That was a very depressing year for Ilys and for us. We did recognize that it was bound to be slow, but perhaps we didn't realize it would be that slow.

This difference between the two approaches explains the uneasiness which built up over the first year, but after that the story becomes more complex. After about nine months, Ilys began to concentrate on the Nottingwood group. She did not clearly set out what her hopes were in doing this, but a clue is provided by a question she asked in a report to the Committee in January 1967 (towards

A Community Project in Notting Dale

the end of the Treadgold Street episode) – ‘Is the playgroup a springboard to initiative?’ – for this implies that she had hoped that a springboard effect would occur. Perhaps she had in mind that the group would become independent, that it would expand and that its interests and activities would diversify so that she might leave it behind at the end of the project as a sizeable community group of all ages and both sexes, in its own premises, with its own organization and finances and with the playgroup only one among many activities. If fate had been kinder, of course (for example over the Treadgold Street Playground), all this might have happened.

To understand fully some changes which were made later, it is important to see how Ilys’s work with the Nottingwood group after she had come to concentrate on it was related to Helen Sheils’s work. Helen Sheils, in using the springboard approach, had combined two roles. She had acted both as a playgroup worker, for she actually ran the playgroup, and as a community development worker, for she encouraged and assisted the group to make decisions and to take its own action. Ilys was doing just community development with the group, but she was doing it in conjunction with a playgroup worker (Pat Foster) who was running the playgroup. Ilys herself, therefore, was doing something different from what Helen had done, but Ilys and Pat *as a team* were doing the same as Helen had done. Taken together, that is to say, they were continuing the springboard approach for quite a lot of help was being given to the group (Pat was running the playgroup every morning) and the hope was that the mothers, with encouragement and assistance of a community development kind from Ilys, would gradually take over the playgroup, become independent, begin doing other things and so on.

If, then, the workers were now continuing the springboard approach, which the Committee favoured, why did the relationship between Ilys and the Committee continue to be poor? Since there were eight people on the Committee, there was a variety of views to which a brief account cannot do justice. Broadly, however, the Committee was in two groups who were unhappy about the work for different reasons. Some members had disagreements with Ilys about the amount of help to be given to the group. For example, a large part of the materials for the summer activities of 1965 and the Christmas bazaar that followed it were given by committee members. Ilys was not against any help being given to the group – for instance she supported employing Roger Mitton for the summer holidays of 1966 – nor was she in principle against these committee

The Family Study Committee

members helping the group, for they got on well with the mothers, but she felt that too many gifts might dwarf what the mothers themselves could contribute and perhaps create unrealistic expectations for the future, since the same help would not always be forthcoming. Another example is that some committee members thought the Family Study should acquire premises for the group since lack of premises was one of its major handicaps. Ilys thought that in time the group itself would feel a sufficient need for premises to look for them and to ask for assistance in obtaining them and that then would be the time for help. Expecting the mothers to take responsibility for premises before then could be asking too much of them. It could lead to the Committee itself having to run the place.

Other members of the Committee were not in favour of giving the group more help and had no particular disagreement with Ilys about what was being done, but felt a need for more analysis of what was happening and more constructive discussion about what course should be taken. This has been expressed in different ways. Several felt a 'lack of direction' in the work. One has said they did not really know what was happening, for either they received general papers on community development, about which there was no dispute, or else, in discussion with Ilys, they received highly detailed verbal accounts of what had happened recently in the playgroup or of a conversation with Mrs So-and-so. What they wanted, and what they never received, was something in between. Another has said:

We did find ourselves, to be perfectly honest, mistrusting Ilys and thinking, 'What is she doing? If only she could be a bit more scientific!'

Something which increased this anxiety was that the Committee was an *ad hoc* group of individuals which met five or six times a year. In the early days when the first members had been trying to get support for the idea of an action research project, they had tried to interest several organizations, including universities, in supervising the project, but without success. The consequence of being an *ad hoc* group was that there was no person or body in touch with the work between committee meetings and this had two bad effects of leaving the workers without support and making the Committee anxious.

What this feeling of a lack of direction possibly boils down to is that, when Ilys came to concentrate on the Nottingwood group, committee members did not for some time appreciate that this was happening and then did not understand why. It was certainly a

A Community Project in Notting Dale

major policy step and in fact it was never analysed. Though it was not obvious at the time that it was such a major step, it is still not clear why Ilys never explained or justified it. Perhaps it happened so naturally and seemed at least for a while so promising that it never occurred to her that it required explanation, and committee members did not specifically ask her, 'Why are you concentrating on the Nottingwood group?' Perhaps she felt defensive about her work because she was under pressure from those committee members who wanted more help to be given to the group. Acknowledging that she *was* concentrating on the Nottingwood group would, of course, have meant acknowledging that her work in her first year had not given rise to other local groups, and though she could justify it as time well spent in finding out what people thought, she might have been a bit disappointed at the lack of response and slightly loth to admit it. At the same time, it must be said that she did sometimes raise hard questions about the work – for instance whether the playgroup was in fact acting as a springboard or not – and that when she did, the questions were not usefully discussed since committee meetings, though long and tiring, were not constructive. The chairman felt she had had little experience at handling such a group, and other things made it difficult for her to keep a tight rein on the company. Committee members have said:

It was very queer being on this committee. It was not so much that it was difficult as that one experienced constant role confusion. We used to meet in each other's houses, and refreshments were provided, and many of us were friends and knew each other outside the Committee. The result of this was that the whole thing was skewed into a social occasion and I think this was one of the reasons why it was so frightfully difficult to get orderly discussion, to bring things to a head and make decisions.

Ilys was fascinating when she talked and so there used to be immensely interesting discussion, but I think increasingly we didn't know what was immensely interesting discussion and what was North Kensington.

One fault of the Committee was that it was too high powered. The members were too experienced and used to operating in different kinds of situations, so that they perhaps thought they knew the answers and might have been less susceptible to learning. They were more concerned to put forward their view than to grapple with the problem at hand. People would free associate, irrespective of the actual issue. Immediately something was raised, a member of the Committee knew somebody,

The Family Study Committee

or knew some project that was doing something about it, or had some bright idea that something should be done, or had read an article, or a book had just come out, so in a way the trouble with the Committee was that it had too many bloody ideas.

Everyone felt that all was not well but no one knew what had gone wrong. Ilys got the impression that the Committee as a whole was disappointed and unsympathetic, and she did not know what sort of reports to produce. At first she tried to use the Committee as a panel of advisers with whom to discuss problems of the area and what might be done about them, for she did not have such a panel at this time, and so her early reports tended to contain a large number of ideas on which she wanted discussion. But committee members did not have the time for this and some thought it was their role to make decisions rather than discuss ideas, so they became impatient. She concluded that the Committee did not want to discuss the work in any detail so her later reports tended to be descriptions of the Nottingwood group's progress rather than accounts of what she herself had been doing or of problems she was encountering, though she often concluded her reports with questions for the Committee's attention. Her assessment of the position was that she had been appointed to do community development and was trying to do it and that the Committee seemed unhappy with this. She concluded that the Committee did not understand what community development was, so she wrote some general explanatory papers on the subject, from which the following are quotations. They are included partly because they give her views and also because, being slightly defensive in tone, they indicate her feelings :

The community development process is not as unformulated as it often appears to be. Based as it is on human relationships and on the dynamics of individual and group interaction, the results of the workers' influence are not visible in a concrete way for a very long time, and are certainly not measurable in terms of groups, activities or other such returns, although this may be the consequence of the workers' involvement in the area. The community development worker has no more power than the gardener to create results. He sows, tends, waters, feeds and prunes his plants. He is anxious about the hazards and longs for the results. But the flower will bloom in its own way in its own time.

Certainly there are critics who complain that methods such as these are unnecessarily laborious and unproductive. This point of view comes principally (in the general field of social work) from administrators and from the body of community centre and settlement workers, most of

A Community Project in Notting Dale

whose experience is in using organizational techniques. In this context the bulk of experience is in organizing programmes, forming committees and making decisions related to the provision of services or activities. Such work can create change on an organizational front through coordination, for example, or by providing services which are lacking. It does not, however, reach down into the street.

In an area like North Kensington, it might be possible in two or three years using these organizational techniques, to get some provisions made which are not there now, for example playgroups, recreational facilities for all age groups, an improvement in the appearance of the streets and so forth. Such improvements as can be made in this way are not likely to make a general impact on the prevailing social attitudes in the area. The neglect and vandalism that such provided amenities tend to suffer are an expression of the non-involvement of the community. It is not easy to achieve involvement, but when it is achieved, the community interests and the community sanctions go hand in hand.

This defensiveness by Ilys of course made her relationship worse with both halves of the Committee. Those who wanted to help the group and take an active part in the work felt excluded, without understanding why:

You slightly had the impression that it wouldn't do if you went down to the people in the neighbourhood. I would have adored to have gone down to the playgroup, but you always had some impression that this would be wrong and that you wouldn't understand what was involved.

I remember we got to a stage, Ilys and I, where I felt I couldn't come here. I just had to keep away.

Those who thought they had a responsibility to look at what was going on felt that they were prevented from doing so and that Ilys did not want them to:

One of the difficulties was an awareness that Ilys felt that the Committee was unhelpful or unsuitable in some way, and there was a reluctance to say things or do things that might make life more difficult for her. I think the Committee tended to 'leave it to Ilys' with the idea that this would give her freedom to operate. The side-effect of this is to create a very difficult situation for the worker to operate in because issues and possibilities are not looked at sufficiently coldly and objectively. One is torn between the need to be supportive and helpful in a very difficult and complex situation on the one hand and on the other looking rigorously at what is going on.

The relationship between Ilys and the Committee was particularly unsatisfactory at about the end of the first year (the autumn

The Family Study Committee

of 1965), and some attempts were made at that time to improve it. One was that a working party was set up to take out of committee meetings the detailed discussion about day-to-day problems of the work. Apart from setting out a system of record-keeping for the workers, which is discussed in Appendix B, its meetings were not recorded so its contribution cannot be assessed in detail. Briefly, however, it failed to perform its function to the satisfaction of either the workers or the members, for reasons inherent in the way it was set up. Its nucleus was three members of the Committee who had kept in close touch with the work during the first year and who were particularly worried both about the progress of the work and about their relationship with Ilys. They had met frequently both on their own and with the workers and it was out of these meetings that the working party grew, so to an extent it was making formal a sub-group of the Committee which was already informally constituted. The result was that many of the factors which made constructive discussion almost impossible for the Committee also bedevilled the working party. Secondly, as well as its primary function of helping the workers, it had a secondary function of preparing the ground for the Committee's decisions, and this meant that topics which the workers raised at the working party were likely to end up in committee meetings. A worker most needs the help of an advisory group over problems where he is anxious or unclear or in some way not in control, and in order to raise such problems and be prepared to analyse them, the worker must feel safe. With this working party, for the reasons just given, the workers did not have that feeling. They therefore tended to conceal their work from the working party rather than lay it open for inspection, and this of course annoyed the members. Since it did not fulfil its primary function very well, its meetings became increasingly devoted to its secondary function of preparing agendas and making recommendations to the Committee.

Setting up the working party allowed the Committee to meet less frequently, which it did for the rest of the project. Also, an attempt was made to make meetings more businesslike by holding them in the project's flat. The Lady Norman resigned from the Committee at the end of the first year, feeling that she had made her best contribution in helping to launch the project and that she could not contribute greatly to the detailed discussion of the work. By coincidence, Dr Jahoda resigned at the same time to take up a professorship at Sussex University.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

It was in a further attempt to improve its relationship with the workers that the Committee took a step which was to be of major significance. At Ilys's suggestion, Dr T. R. Batten, author of several books on community development, was invited onto the Committee in 1966.* His analysis of the problem was as follows:

After the first two or three meetings, it seemed to me quite clear that the Committee had never clarified for themselves what it was they wanted to do. They had a general idea of community development being a useful way of working with people, but no very clear idea about what community development was. Most of them had what I would call a social welfare approach, that is, helping people in need and providing for people in need as well as they could, and they were using the project for this purpose. They had sought out Miss Booker and employed her specifically as a community development worker, but what community development meant, how it could be applied to this project, they just hadn't considered.

I said that what was being done at the moment either was not community development, or the community development which the worker was trying to do – and she was – was being made impossible by the actions taken by the Project Committee. They appointed playgroup workers who ran playgroups, and this left the mothers out. They put in funds directly, in terms of their own decisions, when they thought this was necessary. This made the mothers feel that the playgroups were being run basically *for them by* the Committee, which made them, I think, irresponsible. Whereas Ilys Booker was trying to help them think through their problems and take responsible action about them. These two elements were in complete conflict.

Dr Batten's presentation of this view caused the committee gradually to make a fundamental change of policy. What he said, in effect, was that if it was the purpose of the project to leave behind local groups who could carry on alone after the project had finished – and the Committee agreed that it was – then the groups would have to get used to independence and it was best that they should do so before the project ended, while the workers were there to help them. This meant, he said, that the Family Study should not go on providing playgroup workers and grants of money indefinitely. The mothers would then know clearly that, if they wanted the playgroup to continue, they would have to ensure its future themselves.

* After this the Committee remained the same till the end of the five years. Mrs Muriel Smith, Community Development Officer at the London Council of Social Service, was on the working party throughout and joined the Committee at the end of the project in October 1969.

The Family Study Committee

This would give them time before the end of the project to find, with the workers' help, other sources of advice and financial assistance, which would continue after the project had ended so that, when the workers departed, the mothers would have the necessary knowledge and experience to keep the playgroup going if they wanted to. This was accepted. In other words, the Family Study decided not to wait for the groups to take off from the springboard on their own, but to make them independent by ceasing to provide playgroup workers. For the Blenheim-Elgin group, this meant ceasing to pay the playgroup worker's salary after 1966. For the Nottingwood group, it meant not employing a successor to Tricia, in January 1968.

Ilys thought she had been trying to do community development for a committee which did not understand or did not want it and that Dr Batten was explaining to the Committee what it was and getting their agreement for her to practise it. Actually, as has been explained she had been doing the community development half of the springboard approach by concentrating, with a playgroup worker, on the Nottingwood group. Dr Batten said that the springboard approach belonged to social welfare, not community development, and the Committee, faced with this opinion, decided to abandon the springboard approach by ceasing to provide playgroup workers. Ilys was thus left doing the community development part, as she always had, but now that she was no longer coupled to a playgroup worker, it was no longer part of an overall springboard approach. It is possible that she did not appreciate the importance of this.

This change of policy was not a decision made at one meeting but rather a gradual shift over several months, and there was some confusion in between. An example was the disagreement about what the Committee should do when the Nottingwood mothers' rota was working badly and Tricia was having to cope with too many children. The workers raised it for discussion at a working party meeting. Some committee members felt that something should be done, so the problem was raised at a committee meeting. Two committee members give the reasons for their concern:

If you want to work with the community in a field such as work with small children, at what point do you demand of the community particular standards of care for their children? I am bound to say that as a doctor I would be very unhappy if the playgroup became one in which the mothers didn't learn about child development and about

A Community Project in Notting Dale

how children should play. I feel that it would be enormously helpful to insert, rather subtly, ideas of child play and ideas of child development. But it became clear that the mothers were using the playgroup more as a provision place where they parked the kids and went away, and that Tricia was having a far greater child load than I would have thought appropriate in a nursery situation. So the whole object of the exercise was being defeated – first of all there was not parent involvement and secondly Tricia was having to run something badly.

We were bothered that if some child had an accident of some kind, all the other children would have been left. If something had happened and the Committee had known that Tricia was running the group alone, I think we should have been responsible.

There was the possibility, then, of the Committee taking some action. The workers were also concerned about the children but did not want the Committee to take action since they were trying to get the mothers to solve the problem and felt that action by the Committee would interfere with this. This was basically a continuation of one of the disagreements already described, about how much action the Committee should take in the project.

Dr Batten's opinion was that, if the purpose of the work was to get the mothers to take responsibility for the playgroup, the Committee should not take action such as providing another playgroup worker since this would relieve the mothers of having to take responsibility. Rather, the Committee should help the mothers to take responsibility by making it clear that it was only prepared to continue providing a playgroup worker under certain conditions. He suggested writing the mothers a letter, to which the Committee agreed. He has said:

The Committee left the responsibility of deciding on the future of the playgroup with the mothers. All it did was to clarify the extent of the help the Committee was able to give so that the mothers would be able to reach a responsible decision for themselves in the light of this fact. It was the workers' job to present this fact *as a fact* which the group had to take into account, and then promote discussion of what decision the mothers' group would reach. There was no need for them to identify themselves with the Committee's decision if they disagreed with it.

Several committee members thought that since this was in line with a community development approach, the workers were happy with it. In fact, the workers were not because, though they agreed with the reasons for writing the letter – that the mothers should

The Family Study Committee

know the conditions on which the playgroup worker was provided – they thought that it was their job, as the workers, to inform the mothers in the way they thought best and that the Committee was trying to do their job. Hence the way in which Ilys handled the letter.

It was in the attempt to clear up such confusions that the shift in policy was made complete in May 1967, when Dr Batten suggested the following statement of purpose :

The purpose of the project is to help the community to become aware of and to recognize need, to think, discuss, decide, plan, organize and act. It is to do this rather than provide any social welfare provisions. The workers' function in relation to these purposes is to stimulate, encourage and promote through asking questions and to supply information where necessary. Therefore, resources should only be used for workers performing this function, not for technical aides in the form of specialized workers, premises, equipment, etc.

What distinguishes community development from other kinds of community work, it was said in Chapter 3, is that its object is to assist local groups to decide on and take action of their own. What the Family Study resolved to practise by accepting Dr Batten's formulation was a strict version of this in which any action was to be initiated and carried through entirely by the group. The Family Study was to provide nothing but community development workers and the workers were to confine their help to supplying information and clarifying alternative courses of action in the light of which the mothers could make their own decisions. This was a big change from before when the Family Study had provided a playgroup worker, occasional volunteers, equipment for the playgroup, materials for the summer activities and the Christmas bazaar and so on. A committee member suggests why it was that Dr Batten had such a strong effect :

It was partly because of Dr Batten's forceful personality. There was also the reason – and this recurs again and again, of course – that a prophet is not without honour except in his own country. People very often listen to somebody coming from outside, particularly if they have some kind of aura of authority about them, much more than they do to the people close at hand. He may have been in a better position than Ilys to work on the Committee because he was a committee member and not a worker, and therefore he was in a stronger position.

Perhaps the major reason for Dr Batten's influence, however, is that he put to the Committee as a priority an aspect of the project

A Community Project in Notting Dale

which had hitherto occupied second place, namely its value as an experiment with this type of community development. He has explained his point of view on this :

I never saw this project as a project which was worthwhile in its own right, so to speak, that is in terms of the amount of stuff that was actually done on the ground. It wasn't quantity and making a big splash that I saw the project as going for. It was rather to do some really detailed work, using community development methods, being clear about these and applying these to see just how much response one could get, and to see where the difficulties came and how they were overcome, if they were overcome. So the key purpose for being here was not children's welfare, not even the development of the mothers and the adults. But rather it was a pilot project to experiment in a very difficult situation so that what came out would be useful for application elsewhere in terms of training and in terms of development of ideas and theory. In order to get the lessons in terms of community development, one needs to have a clear purpose and to work to this. Then you can make your decisions in terms of this purpose and you can evaluate how far your decisions were effective in promoting your purpose.

Such a big change in policy was bound to give rise to problems. One was described in Chapter 5. If a group has been established by this non-directive version of community development, then the members have come together of their own volition to do something which, from the beginning, is their own. This is a necessary condition for being non-directive because, if the worker is not to take action on behalf of a group but only assist it to take its own action, he must at least have a group which wants to take its own action. The playgroup mothers, however, had not been running their own playgroup, but had been helping a playgroup worker run one. It could not be assumed that they wanted to run their own playgroup and in fact in general they were not keen to. The workers therefore found themselves not so much helping the group to make decisions as getting it to do so since they were trying to be non-directive with a group where an essential condition for that was not fully present.

A second problem was one of responsibility. So long as the Family Study was employing the playgroup worker, then the Family Study was mostly responsible for the playgroup. When it ceased to do so, the mothers were mostly responsible. The new policy, therefore, was putting onto the mothers a responsibility they had not asked for, and some committee members were unhappy at this :

There was a clash over continuing to provide money for the

The Family Study Committee

Blenheim – Elgin playgroup worker. Dr Batten said we had been very wrong to do this at the beginning, that we oughtn't to have provided money. Some of us felt that, having done it, it was very hard to discontinue it unless the playgroup people had access to other sources. He said we should stimulate them to look for other sources. We said it was no good stimulating them to look if the other sources were not available and that we had a responsibility, since we had embarked on this, to be sure that they could find other sources. If we simply withdrew our help, then it looked as though the playgroup was bound to collapse, and we would simply have shifted gears leaving the mums to hold the babies, so to speak. I still think we never fully thought out in what ways the 'pure community development approach' is appropriate. I am putting this in an extreme form, but it can be cruel to say to people, 'This is what you need and want. O.K. Go and get it,' when they are not in a position to do so.

As is clear from this quotation, not all committee members were happy with the new policy. Some thought that refusing help to groups in the form of money or materials or specialist workers was unreasonable in an area like Notting Dale. Some thought that the method was reasonable in itself but that switching over to it after having used the springboard approach for three years was hard on the groups. Others were in favour of the general direction of the change but thought that the strict adherence to the method which the experimental aspect of the project required was not always reasonable. An example of the last is a disagreement about Elizabeth's withdrawal. The end of March had been agreed as the time for her to leave Notting Dale, and she had informed the mothers of this. If the project was an experiment with this type of community development, it was said, it should end at the stated time, so she should leave when she had said she would and the Family Study should give up its flat. To keep Elizabeth on because the mothers might need her would not be in line with the community development approach now being used. Other members, however, felt that, because of Ilys's death, withdrawing Elizabeth at that time was cruel to the mothers since they needed her for longer, and that keeping strictly to this particular method was not that important.

In spite of these doubts, however, the Committee did not go back on its resolution to tackle problems strictly in this way. Since this ruled out the possibility of tackling problems in other ways, the first effect was to leave committee members with less room for

A Community Project in Notting Dale

argument. The second effect was that whereas before many discussions had been about what action the Committee should take, in acquiring premises or employing playgroup workers and so on, the new policy did not require such action, so the Committee was left with less to do. Partly for these reasons, partly because the working party had taken some of its functions, the Committee played comparatively little part in the latter half of the project.

Chapter 8

Community Work in Notting Dale

To make a list of the effects of a community project is no easy task, for most are subtle, diverse, and intangible. Taking part in running the playgroup might have affected a mother's attitude to herself, her children, her neighbours, to the social services, the authorities and the world in general in ways which were not apparent to the workers or obviously attributable to the project and which may only give rise to tangible effects long after the project has ended. At best, one can list only the overt consequences.

Ignoring what was done with organizations, the work was with two groups, but comparatively little was done with the Blenheim-Elgin group and it was poorly documented, so this assessment is limited to the Nottingwood group. This began in the spring of 1964 and continued as a mothers' group running a playgroup until the autumn of 1969. Including all the mothers who brought their children to the playgroup and all the people who were kept informed about the group's summer outings, the total number of families touched by the work with the Nottingwood group was something over 100. The total number of children who attended the playgroup was over 200 and those who took part in the summer activities about 300. Most of the mothers came and went in the five years, though some of the more prominent members remained throughout. About fifty mothers did some work for the playgroup, helping on the rota or with fund-raising activities and so on, and about twelve took a leading part in making decisions. One father gave a lot of help to the group and about five others helped in small ways. About ten local teenagers helped sometimes, particularly on the summer outings or with jumble sales.

What the group did was to run a playgroup for small children, mostly at a good standard, and this was supplemented by summer activities for older children for three years. The following comments on the value to children of a playgroup are from the mothers:

Some of the children might not have any toys at home. The mother

A Community Project in Notting Dale

might have a big family and she cannot afford to go out and buy toys. But with the children going to a playgroup, they can let the children play there.

You get some children in the first few days who just sit or stand and look, or you would get one who would go round and hit everybody. Gradually they would learn to mix in with the children and play together and play as if they had been there for a year.

It helped my girl going to school, definitely, especially her being an only child. No tears or anything. Straight in. 'Tata, mum,' and that was it. She's very clever in making things as well, her teacher says, and things like painting, which are all things she was doing in the playgroup.

It was very good for him. With him being handicapped, he had been in and out of hospital since he was born and this made him very dependent on me. I couldn't walk out of the front room into the kitchen without he would follow me. After six weeks of staying with him at the playgroup, he became entirely independent. One hears of children being cruel to handicapped children, but they are not and none of them seemed to notice.

Being able to leave their children in the playgroup for a short time in the morning was a help to the mothers :

Two hours. You can imagine what you can do in two hours. Even if it's just going across to the launderette, it makes it twice the work dragging a push chair and a child along with you. Just a break from that child for two hours makes it more bearable when the child comes back. I know it sounds wicked, but when you have a child with you all the time, it does get on your nerves.

Many of the mothers who did a turn on the rota learnt a lot about the value of children's play and of having good equipment and messy materials like paint and pastry. Their handling of difficult children may also have been influenced by the Family Study playgroup workers. Among the children who attended the playgroup were one or two whose behaviour was strange and sometimes aggressive, but it was never said that these children should be excluded or sent elsewhere. Rather, there was agreement that the social experience of the playgroup was particularly valuable for these children and that therefore their behaviour had to be coped with. The mothers' ways of coping with these children varied, some favouring a clip on the ear, some encouraging the other children to fight back, some distracting the child when he started misbehaving, others looking for the source of the problem

Community Work in Notting Dale

and trying to do something about that. An example of the last approach is where the mothers saw that one child's odd behaviour was at least partly due to the difficulties of the mother. They made efforts to put the mother more at her ease when she helped at the playgroup, and the child's behaviour improved.

On the summer activities, it may be remembered that some mothers said, after the summer of 1965, that because the children had been kept occupied there had been fewer fights between them and consequently fewer quarrels between the mothers. The following observation by the Children's Officer is also about 1965:

In that summer, we were far less anxious about certain children, particularly the under-eights whose mothers couldn't afford to give up work. We were able to leave more children at home with confidence because we knew some mother was going to be responsible for them. In fact the court figures were lower and the applications for reception into care didn't rise that summer as in the previous one. As far as we were concerned, this appeared to continue and the trend - I don't mean the in-care figures but the number of applications - didn't have the dramatic rise from the project area in the summer that they had had previously. One can't prove it statistically because the figures haven't been comparative since the break-up of the former London County Council, but there was a period of fifteen or sixteen years where one had had July and August with very dramatic peaks and it has been less. And this isn't a general trend.

A feature of the group which the mothers themselves rated highly was the opportunity for social contact which it gave them. The first of the following quotations is from a Nigerian mother:

With me, when I started, I didn't know any of the mums who came along, and actually it was a change of circumstance because before, people looking at me going along, they just see me, but when the children started coming to the playgroup I knew many more people in the area and I could say 'Hello you!' It was a change for the better for me.

The rota was an idea for the mothers of young children to get to know one another. Mothers of young children are tied to the house and the only time they get to see anyone is when they go to the shops. I was tied down here with my four children and although I'd lived here for four or five years, apart from the immediate neighbours I didn't really know anybody. It made a big difference to me personally.

It's the outings more than anything that I can remember, and working for the bazaar. The mothers had an outing one evening to South-end. We set off at six o'clock and got back at four o'clock in the morning. It was the first outing that lots of the mums had had for years

A Community Project in Notting Dale

and I think they thoroughly enjoyed it. For the bazaar we used to go up to the flat in the evenings. We used to go up there about seven and have a cup of coffee and then get stuck into the work. We used to leave there about half ten. The mums used to look forward to those couple of nights out in the week. You would get away from the children and it didn't cost money.

In a district like this, everybody wants to keep themselves to themselves and is suspicious of everybody and if anybody is doing anything for anyone, there is a reason behind it. This I think was Ilys's main task, to get people to do things for other people. I don't think now that it's such a worthless task as I did then. I thought if you help people, they won't help themselves. But you change your views. I suppose I got involved personally and I saw people from a different angle. Before, I suppose I was a bit of a snob in a way and sort of looked down on them. When you get to know them, they're people after all.

Neighbourliness, of course, existed before, but the following observation, by a Senior Child Care Officer, suggests that the project perhaps had some effect on it:

There is more of being able to find a neighbour to help out. One of the things I have noticed as night duty officer is that often there is less urgency to get children cared for in a crisis. This is not so everywhere in North Kensington, because there are a great many parts of North Kensington where people don't know the person in the next bed-sit, and they ring the police station now and we must do something now. Whereas in the area of the Family Study project – I don't mean people can contain the problem – they can wait. Six years ago there wasn't the possibility of tolerating the problem even for a minute if there was a crisis. If it was during the day the children were in the waiting room in the office and at night they were in the police station.

One husband has described the effect of the project on his wife:

She never neglected her home for it, but she had her heart and soul in this. At night time she would trot off and be gone for an hour or two and the next day you'd be discussing what had been discussed the night before and she really did this thinking she was doing some good. She was a person who had been content to do the housework and sit about and go from one day to another, and this certainly made a different woman of her. She met new people, people who I had never met before. We have always been a family who has an open door to anyone who comes and wants to have a talk, and I have always had many friends. But the people who have come up concerning this

Community Work in Notting Dale

playgroup have been numerous, different people, and through this she has met various people who are interested in the welfare of Notting Hill. They all come round and have a chat with her and it really excites her to have these conversations.

It is probably true of all the project's results that they were particularly valuable in the context of Notting Dale. The opportunity for play provided by the playgroup, for instance, though a good thing anywhere, was particularly valuable in an area with few play facilities. This is especially true, however, of the effect on the mothers' ability to organize and take group action. This is because certain features of Notting Dale, and doubtless of other areas like it, make it difficult for the people there to take organized group action, and therefore the opportunity and encouragement provided by the project was all the more valuable. The following are some of the things which made action difficult for the Nottingwood group.

There was a lack of premises in the area. It was not the habit of the mothers to move out of a fairly small area, and within that area the only premises in which a playgroup might be run were unsuitable or too expensive or unavailable. Even a place for the mothers to meet did not exist after the Family Study gave up its flat. Their homes were small and fully occupied by families, and holding a slightly formal meeting in one's home, and behaving accordingly in a slightly formal way, would have been extremely unfamiliar. There just was nowhere else. Since almost any group activity for most of the year demands an indoor meeting place, this lack of premises was a serious drawback.

At several times in the group's life, its activity was interrupted and extra problems created by the absence of key members because of illness, either their own or their husbands' or their children's. No study has been done, but it is the worker's impression that members of the Nottingwood group and their families were often ill.

The group's members had few resources of their own, in money and goods, which they could contribute to group funds. In a more affluent neighbourhood, one might expect the members of a mothers' group to make quite substantial contributions of articles for bazaars or toys for a playgroup, but the members of the Nottingwood group did not have the surplus of possessions necessary for that. For some of them, the reason was simply that they had a small income. For others the reason was an irregular income – the

A Community Project in Notting Dale

result of their husbands' doing casual labour or being unemployed in winter or changing their jobs frequently – combined with a habit of spending their money as soon as it came.

The group's members were all mothers. This meant that they all had the full-time job of raising a family and several had part-time jobs as well to supplement the family income, especially in winter. (It is significant that the most consistently active members were older mothers whose children were at least of school age and who therefore had more free time.) In addition to this, several had serious problems of their own to contend with, particularly those living in privately rented accommodation of a low standard. Consequently they had only a little time and energy left over for group activity.

Taking action in groups to tackle problems was not something with which the mothers were familiar. It was partly that that is just not a customary part of life in Notting Dale, and it was partly the product of the obstacles to group activity already listed which make taking part in group action difficult even for people who want to. Consequently, the people there do not develop skills in organizing themselves collectively, making group decisions, handling group funds and so on. The traditional ways of doing things, such as keeping accounts in one's head or passing information on the grapevine, are suited to everyday tasks but were not always adequate for playgroup business. The grapevine, for instance, though it worked when all the members were friends and neighbours, was not sufficient when some members were 'outsiders', like Mrs Chapman or the mothers who joined in St Mark's, since that grapevine did not extend to them. Not having formal membership of the group or the committee, though it arose from the desire that no one should be excluded, led to confusion about whose right it was to make certain decisions. A budgeting system designed for housekeeping, since the money was group money handled by different people, made it difficult to keep group accounts. Partly for these reasons and partly because of requirements from elsewhere, such as the charities requiring a statement of accounts, new skills had to be acquired. Having to acquire these skills may have deterred people from taking a leading part, and acquiring them took a long time. Further, many were reluctant to adopt the roles which group action needed because of their other relationships with fellow-members. It is not easy, for instance, to bring to order a group of one's friends who are discussing something fascinating but irrele-

Community Work in Notting Dale

vant, or to demand the payment of debts to the group from one's neighbour.

Both cause and consequence of the lack of such skills are their attitudes to 'outsiders' and the attitudes of outsiders to them, commonly referred to as the 'we and they' attitudes. Outsiders (the 'they' in 'we and they') comprise the Government, the Council, 'the welfare', the police, the schools, the middle classes, voluntary bodies like the Pre-school Playgroups Association and the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground Committee, and many more. Both their attitudes and outsiders' attitudes are deep-seated, for they reinforce each other and have done so for many years. Because local people are not familiar with group action, and therefore not confident at it, outsiders gain the impression that the local people are incompetent, apathetic, inarticulate and anyway not to be trusted with matters of any importance. Since it is outsiders who make decisions, the local people are denied the opportunity to make decisions for themselves, and so denied the chance to gain in experience and confidence. They are also given the impression that outsiders are contemptuous and overbearing people with whom one would not wish to cooperate even if given the chance. Their consequent reluctance to have anything to do with outsiders confirms the outsiders' opinion of them.

Outsiders vary, of course, in their opinion of local people, but it is in many little ways that the local people's attitude is reinforced. One small example from the project is Ilys's note of a conversation with a worker at the youth club where the Nottingwood playgroup ran:

He is bothered about the storage of playgroup equipment and wanted a word with me about it, so I suggested he discuss it with Mrs Fellows and Mrs Waters, whom he knows, and Mrs Shaw. He took me along to the landing and explained that he had a cupboard or two which they could use. These were not large enough, but a special one could be built and he has wood which could be used. Once again I suggested he discuss it with the mothers as he wants the stuff moved for Monday evening, and I said the mothers could say whether any of the fathers might construct one. *Finally* got him to consult Mrs Fellows and left them discussing.

A second example is Mrs Travers's conversation with an official at the Borough Housing Office. She rang up to report that the gate into the courtyard needed repairing and that this was particularly urgent because the playgroup was meeting there in the mornings.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

Perhaps the official was unaccustomed to such an approach from a council tenant. At any rate, it clearly never crossed his mind that she was one, for he told her of his troubles with 'the people in those flats', and how gate-breaking was exactly what you would expect from them.

A third example is that health visitors who had contact with the Nottingwood playgroup tended to speak to the playgroup worker rather than to the mothers. There was a reason, as a health visitor explains in the following quotation, namely that the playgroup worker was a fellow-professional, but one can see that this would not make it easy for mothers in charge of the playgroup to consult the health visitors :

I think a mother running a playgroup who has been visited for her own children sometimes finds it rather difficult to treat you on equal terms, whereas if someone has had a high training professionally before they were married, then they always treat you on equal terms when you visit them anyway. But it does present a bit of a problem with the mothers because in most cases one is already known, as a worker, and I think they often felt rather shy about coming to see us, although it was quite unnecessary. I would go and see the playgroup worker about a child. I don't think one could discuss anything very confidential with a mother running a playgroup. It's something to do with professional etiquette or something. But it might not be necessary to go into great detail about anybody's background anyway.

Life in Notting Dale, then, is not conducive to organized group action. The mothers, therefore, were not experienced or confident at it and had, in addition, this long-standing (and not always unjustified) suspicion of 'outsiders'. Most groups in their first stages have some anxiety about their own identity. For the Nottingwood group, this was persistent. On the one hand this meant a desire, pleasing to a community development worker, to manage its own affairs and make its own mistakes, but on the other hand it meant a resistance to outsiders for fear of being taken over and a reluctance to assimilate newcomers.

It is not easy to say how typical the Nottingwood group was in having these obstacles to group action. The families were probably typical of Notting Dale. Obviously, not all areas where community work might be contemplated will be exactly like Notting Dale, for example in having a fairly settled population or in being part of a rich borough, but they would probably share many of the features described.

Community Work in Notting Dale

It is in this context – the lack of organizational experience and confidence, the ‘we and they’ attitudes, and so on – that the significance of some of the project’s effects can be appreciated. Those who took part in the administration of the group, particularly those who held office, acquired some experience at the necessary tasks such as keeping accounts, taking minutes, chairing meetings, interviewing applicants, handling employees, making group decisions and so on, and also some knowledge of how things get done in the world of social welfare provision, of the procedures with charities, for instance. Not all of these will be of lasting value. Producing a statement of accounts, for instance, was seen purely as a chore made necessary by the requirements of the charities. More valuable was learning which the mothers saw the point of. Most of the mothers, for instance, came to see the importance of making out receipts for all transactions of group money. In fact they were unhappy with one of their professional playgroup workers who was less strict about this than they had become.

If lack of experience at group action, lack of confidence and the ‘we and they’ attitudes are consequences of each other, a change in the first should produce changes in the other two. There were, towards the end of the project, some indications that the group was feeling more secure and therefore less afraid of outsiders. The best example was the summer motorway scheme of 1968 where the mothers felt their group had played a part in something larger without being swamped or taken over. This was partly because of the organizers, of course, who were more anxious to involve the mothers than most outsiders were, but it was also because of the mothers’ preparedness to put their views and to cooperate. These good relations have to some extent continued, for some of the organizers occasionally consult some of the mothers on local matters, and those mothers do not regard those outsiders as ‘outsiders’ any more. This does not mean that the group completely overcame its fears, as was shown later by the troubles with Mrs Binns and with the mothers who joined when the playgroup was in St Mark’s.

There are also some indications that one or two individuals gained some confidence from the project. One is that a few of the mothers have attended and spoken at some public meetings on local matters. A second example is that Mrs Fellows took the one-year Pre-School Playgroups Association course for playgroup workers. The workers had suggested this as early as 1967, and

A Community Project in Notting Dale

she had wanted to do it but had held back, for fear partly that the others might think she was getting above herself and partly that she might let the group down by failing some test or examination at the end. The group, after its unhappy relations with the professional playgroup workers it employed, was eager that Mrs Fellows should take the course, and the worker could assure her that there was no examination. She completed the course in July 1970.

Further indications are the observations of some other workers in the area. The following quotations are from a health visitor and a general practitioner:

Ilys seemed to be able to encourage people to take responsibilities, people who at times one would have thought would never be able to. I can think of several people I used to visit who suddenly took active parts in the playgroup and went on committees and helped to run them, people who before used to sit at home and feel quite depressed and never went out very much.

At the time of her work here, the number of families who always used to attend surgery began to drop. I've seen women become very independent, expressive people, able to organize, able to get information and feel that they were doing something constructive.

Finally, there is some evidence of this increase in confidence in events after the end of the project. Mrs Fellows and Mrs Travers persisted in their attempts to restart a playgroup. The problem of finding a playgroup worker was solved by Mrs Fellows completing the playgroup workers' course, but the problem of premises remained. There was a sudden increase in vacant premises in the area when people moved out of shops and houses in the redevelopment area immediately north of the flats, and the two mothers tried to rent one of these places from the Council, in co-operation with the Neighbourhood Centre.* The attempt did not succeed, but their negotiating with the Council and the Neighbourhood Centre shows what effect the project had had on them. Mrs Fellows has said, for instance:

I didn't feel the same way about this as I did about the Treadgold

* This was established in the Lancaster Road Methodist Church by the Notting Hill Summer Project of 1967 (p. 119). Its object was to assist people to claim their rights, partly by providing a service of information and advice (mostly on legal matters and especially about housing) and partly by helping to organize local campaigns.

Community Work in Notting Dale

Street thing because I was speaking for the group. It wasn't just the Neighbourhood Centre doing the negotiations. It was the playgroup as well. I think it's best to know all that is going on and not leave it to them to do. If it had been left to the Neighbourhood Centre, they would have fought to get Evans's shop, but I wasn't in favour of this because I knew the Council would never knock the rent down. I was a bit on my own, with Amy Travers being ill, and they thought this other place was too small, but I said, 'I'd sooner fight for that than Evans's.' I think when you come in with anyone like that you've got to stand your ground and not go their way every time.

THE WORKERS' CONTRIBUTION

All this did not happen spontaneously, of course. Not counting the work with organizations, the workers' contribution was roughly of two kinds. The first was that aspect of the work usually emphasized in general descriptions of community development – asking questions, supplying information, suggesting alternatives, clarifying issues and so on. It is hoped that this part of their work has been made clear enough in the story. The second part was giving help and encouragement to the group. This helped to keep the group going which was, of course, a necessary condition for the workers to do the other part of their work.

One example of the encouragement given by the workers is Elizabeth's going along with the mothers to visit the charities. Another is the following account by a mother who was the Nottingwood group's representative for a time on the North Kensington Playgroups Committee :

They discussed all the things that were carried on from the last meeting and at the end of it they asked each person representing a playgroup how that playgroup was going on. The first time I went there I was really terrified. Mrs Taylor spoke first and then someone else spoke and then I thought they would forget about me and wouldn't ask me. I had what I was going to say all written on a little book, but I didn't fetch it with me. And then I think it was Joy Isaacs asked me about our group. When I first started speaking I couldn't get anything out. And then I looked up at Ilys and just looking at Ilys made me feel better and I started talking then. It went all right. After that I used to look forward to those meetings.

The friendship of the workers was also important to the mothers. The workers made it clear that they were not employed

A Community Project in Notting Dale

to practise casework, and that most of them were not qualified to, but it was natural that the mothers should sometimes discuss their personal troubles with them. Sometimes the workers could encourage a mother to contact the appropriate social work agency and sometimes they arranged meetings in the project's flat between social workers and mothers who wanted some advice but who were reluctant to visit the agency. Sometimes, however, all that the mothers wanted was to talk to a sympathetic listener. The mothers drew a distinction between the workers and 'the welfare' (meaning health visitors and social workers from both statutory and voluntary agencies), for, although some individual welfare workers are trusted and liked, the profession is viewed with reserve. One reason that the workers were thought to be different was that a caseworker, by reason of his job, has a number of clients whom he visits with a view to helping with their personal problems, whereas a community worker makes a more informal relationship with people, not particularly directed at helping with personal problems and not involving anything like regular visits – he would not begin visiting a person's home, for instance, until it seemed natural to do so, which might take just a few weeks or might take over a year. The relationship, in short, is more like friendship, and the mothers preferred this. At the same time, the workers, being workers, were not just like other friends, but could be relied upon not to gossip. Although the workers' personalities were important, therefore, it was to a large extent because of their role that they could combine the virtues of a friend with those of a social worker. The following conversation took place at a mothers' meeting:

If you said to Ilys you wanted to get a bit off your chest, you get it off your chest. It hasn't gone, but you've relieved yourself. If you spoke to someone like Ilys, she's not going to speak to Mrs So-and-so. If you talk to a mum you know it's going to go next door in about five minutes. You felt that Ilys – you could tell her bits. Though she couldn't do anything to help you, you've relieved your feelings a little bit.

She was better than a welfare worker. Welfare workers have a job. You don't get, in a sense, close to a welfare officer. You don't see her enough to have it that way.

Then again if you tell a welfare worker, she is doing her duty. She is sorting out problems and all this. But if you're telling the same

Community Work in Notting Dale

thing to Ilys, she always used to come in with something – ‘Oh, that reminds me of when I was so-and-so, or when I was in a certain place.’ And you felt, ‘Well, she knows, she’s been hurt,’ or ‘She’s been through something herself, and she’s still a straight, upright person just the same.’ I would have thought anybody would have preferred to talk to Ilys rather than a welfare worker.

To me, if ever I talked to Ilys, I talked to her as a married woman, funnily enough. Most mothers have something about welfare officers – they’re a bit nose-y about the children or something like that, and if there is something bothering you they might go deeper. With Ilys you always knew that unless you wanted to go deeper, you wouldn’t go deeper. She understood family life – you’ve got to make do and mend with your pennies, or your arguments with your husband, or perhaps your worries over your children. Really they’re stupid things to worry about, but not to the ones it’s happening to at the time.

In addition to friendship and encouragement, the workers also provided some practical help. The project’s playgroup workers, of course, were in charge of the playgroup for the first three and a half years. The project’s flat was used for group meetings and for storing materials for summer activities, bazaars and jumble sales. Volunteers, both Family Study committee members and friends of the workers, were brought in occasionally. The workers’ cars were used sometimes for group activities. More specific examples are Ilys’s producing the group’s first statement of accounts in 1968 and Elizabeth’s helping in the playgroup for a week when Tricia was away.

In addition to the practical value of the workers’ help, it often had a marked effect on the group’s morale because people wanted to take part in something if the worker was joining in. The most enthusiasm for a bazaar was for the one when Ilys joined in, and for a jumble sale was for the one when Elizabeth joined in.* The two playgroup workers with whom the mothers got on best were Pat Foster and Caroline Schelle, and there were few problems with the mothers’ rota when they were running the playgroup because the mothers enjoyed helping them:

I don’t know what it was with Pat, but to me there was warmth. I’ve got an idea that, in Pat, mothers felt she was a person they would like to help. They wouldn’t like to let her down. I felt like that towards Pat.

* The jumble sale is described and discussed in Appendix A.

A Community Project in Notting Dale

Caroline was marvellous. She made the morning go by ever so quick. The kids seemed to be better. It was a shame we couldn't have her all the time, really.

Two quotations from the mothers illustrate the importance of the workers' effect on the social side of the group:

I will tell you how Pat got me interested in the Christmas bazaar. She invited me up for a coffee in the evening. She said, 'We are having a coffee evening for the mums to get together and have a chat.' That is really how I got interested. Frankly, if she had said, 'Would you like to come up and do some work for the bazaar?' I would have said, 'No, I don't think so.' I just hadn't got the time.

When Ilys started drifting away, I think the group started breaking up. When she was there the mothers were there. Do you know what I mean? When there was a meeting, the whole lot would turn up. There was plenty of biscuits, sandwiches, coffee. I mean to say, we would be up there till nearly twelve o'clock at night. You'd get that carried away listening to her that you forgot all about the time.

The workers, then, throughout the project, were doing much more than asking questions, supplying information and so on, though they were doing that too. It was largely their presence which made the group's activities rewarding, even enjoyable, for the mothers. It is probably not coincidence that the group began with the arrival of the first worker and ended (with the exception of the attempts by Mrs Fellows and Mrs Travers to restart a playgroup), soon after the departure of the last.

Some of the remarks just quoted invite the question of how far the effects of Ilys's work were attributable to her personality. To a large extent, as was said in comparing her to a caseworker, it was her role which enabled her to do what she did, but obviously a worker's personality has some effect on the work, and perhaps Ilys's had more than most. What is puzzling when looking at this is that people's descriptions of Ilys seem contradictory on this point, both contradictory to each other and sometimes apparently contradictory in themselves:

Ilys had a personality. She could get people thinking for themselves. There is no doubt about that. But it was mainly women. I don't think she could influence men in the same way. I think men were very wary of Ilys inasmuch as she seemed a very dominant personality. Maybe women like that from another woman, but men certainly don't like it from a woman. (A Notting Dale man.)

Community Work in Notting Dale

I don't know what she did. It was the way she did it more than what she did. She had that way that she didn't do much and she didn't say much, but it was the sort of command she had over people to make them do the right things. (A Notting Dale man.)

I don't know why she didn't admit that she was taking a stronger role. She always said, 'I'm as near passive as I can be,' but on the Notting Hill Social Council she spoke with great authority when she spoke. (A fellow-member of a North Kensington committee.)

Ilys did manipulate people. Brilliantly. Her work, as I see it, was a brilliant exercise in leadership. It was not the absence of leadership. She was not non-present in the area. That is very important because if you just take the philosophy of her work, and sometimes just listen to her talking, you could almost imagine that there was not any leadership and that she was not there or something. But this was exactly not true. Ilys's was the kind of manipulation that created space in which people could discover themselves and their own capabilities. (A local clergyman.)

I got no direction from Ilys because her method of working with a colleague was very similar to her method of working with the neighbourhood. Although she might make suggestions, she waited for one to take the initiative. It was very much a matter of my finding my own feet, discovering what I was best at doing and how I fitted in. It seemed to me at the time to be exceedingly undirective and I found this rather trying. (A colleague on the Family Study.)

I think she was an absolute genius regarding her ability of work. She had an uncanny ability to sit on her own intellect, to sit on the sideline and then just put in the right phrase or the right sort of prodding remark. (A local doctor.)

There are instances where at meetings one could have spoken up and said, 'This is the way to handle things,' but talking to Ilys I learnt just to sit back and let them take three meetings to come to the conclusion. Allowing people time to make up their own minds is more efficient really and more lasting than if you map it out for them. It's all very subtle and difficult but I certainly learnt a lot from Ilys. (A local social worker.)

Working with Ilys was very pleasant because I found her an extremely pleasant person with a delightful sense of humour. It was exciting because of her obvious ability and shrewdness, and for the same reason it was always very uncomfortable because one always had the feeling that she was somehow much more sensitive about people, and I sometimes tended to feel, if not put on my guard, at

A Community Project in Notting Dale

least put on my mettle. If she had seen herself as God, I would have felt perfectly at ease. I should have felt superior then. It is precisely the fact that she did not that was my problem. (A local clergyman.)

So Ilys had 'a dominant personality' and 'a command over people', 'spoke with authority' and 'manipulated people', but also she 'created space for people', was 'exceedingly undirective' and had 'an ability to sit on her own intellect'. These contradictions stem from a contradiction in Ilys herself. Her views were original and exciting and she put them forward with great feeling. She was by nature a forceful person. At the same time she felt she must not infringe people's right to think and act for themselves, so she chose a profession where not infringing this right was part of the method.

To return to the question of how far the effects of Ilys's work were attributable to her personality, it is useful to compare her with other workers, say Helen Sheils, Pat Foster and Elizabeth Glover. (Though the roles taken by Helen and Pat, as was explained in Chapter 7, were different from Ilys's, all four had substantially the same approach to the mothers.) Their personalities were quite different but all had the relationship to the mothers which enabled them to play the part that the group required – of someone to raise questions, resolve conflicts, give encouragement and generally keep things going. To take an analogy, one does not have exactly the same relationship with each of one's friends because they are different people, but the relationships have enough in common for them all to be called friendship. Similarly, Pat's relationship with the mothers differed from Elizabeth's and both differed from Ilys's, but important features were common to all three. It is difficult to say what these important features are – and if the story has not made them clear, a summary is not likely to – but they are part of that balance already described between being a worker and being a friend. Too much of either means too little of the other and both are essential.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ELSEWHERE

Five workers were employed in the project, some for several years, and the total cost, including the preparation of this report, was £25,000. This raises a question for future work in areas like

Community Work in Notting Dale

Notting Dale – whether such amounts of money and effort should be put into community projects of this kind or whether they would be better spent some other way. This is really the question whether something different might produce better or worse results.

Community development and the provision of services can be regarded as opposite ends of a continuum. A worker might confine himself to asking questions and so on and not give any other sorts of help. Or he might combine asking questions with giving help and encouragement to the group, as the community workers in this project did. Or he might provide a service while involving people in making decisions about it, as the Family Study play-group workers did. Or he might provide a service of which people may take advantage if they wish but in which they do not take part. If the ends of this continuum are red and blue, so to speak, there are many shades of purple. The question can now be asked in terms of this continuum whether better or worse results than those of this project might be produced by other methods.

The general idea of work at the community development end is that when, as a result of the worker's asking questions, people have become aware of a problem they have and of something they can do about it, they will then proceed on a course of action, drawing on the necessary resources, organizing themselves in an appropriate way and so on. Its primary virtue is that, by doing things themselves, people gain in experience and confidence. They emerge as more able people. However, this can happen only if people have the time and energy, such necessary resources as a place to meet, some organizational experience and a certain amount of confidence; if they do not have all these things, then the onus which is put on people means that only a few people, if any, will be able to take part in the group action and little will get done. In an area like Notting Dale, therefore, an extreme community development approach would be unlikely to produce better results than those of this project.

A method incorporating much more provision makes fewer demands on the local people's own resources of time, money, administrative skills and so on, and therefore, in terms of the amount of things established, such as playgrounds or youth clubs, it is more assured of results. However, since its success, in those terms, arises from its not depending on local people, it inevitably fails to produce the sort of results for which local involvement is essential, the development of people's own capacity for

A Community Project in Notting Dale

leadership and action. As methods got closer to the provision end, they would have less effect on that circle of lack of practice and lack of confidence which was picked out as one of Notting Dale's most serious handicaps. Worse than having no good effect on this, in fact, they might have a bad one, encouraging the view that the world is divided into 'them', the people who do things, and 'us', who are either exploited or provided for but not thought capable of action.

The experience of this project suggests that it is possible to combine the virtues of both. The method nearest to the provision end in the project was the springboard approach used for the first three years. This combined substantial provision (of equipment, materials, a worker to run the playgroup) with a way of running the playgroup and making decisions which allowed – in fact encouraged – the mothers to play a real part in it. The community workers also, it has been argued, combined the two by putting enough into the group to keep it going in order that they could do the community development part of their work.

Since gaining in the virtues of provision, however, automatically means losing in the virtues of community development, and vice versa, one cannot combine the virtues of both and leave out all the vices. If it is true that people in an area like Notting Dale cannot come together to take action just because they have been made aware of a need and that therefore the worker must take most of the initiative to get something started, the decisions about what problem to tackle and how to tackle it are largely the worker's. Obviously the worker will choose a problem which seems likely to arouse local interest, and the choice may follow a period of exploration to discover which problems do concern people. This was the case with the Family Study's choice of playgroups. Nonetheless, if an extreme version of community development were practised, there would be the safeguard that if the local people made the first move to tackle a problem then one would be sure it was a problem which they cared about, whereas with a method closer to the provision end, one does not have that safeguard. Then, when the activity has been established, if the worker is putting a lot of effort and enthusiasm into it, this makes it more difficult for the group to change the activity than it would be if the activity were all its own. When, for instance, the playgroup had been established and a playgroup worker was running it, the group had the options of either helping with the playgroup or

Community Work in Notting Dale

not helping with it, but did not feel it could do something completely different. The local people, therefore, may be saddled with the agency's aspirations. If the agency favours 'respectability', then the activity will be a 'respectable' one, such as play schemes or old people's clubs. Or if the agency is more interested in local politics, the activity will be more 'political', such as rent strikes or protests to the Town Hall.

A second drawback also results from having moved towards provision. It is the weakness which the Family Study discovered in the springboard approach. If the worker takes some initiative in getting something started and gives the group a lot of help, then the group is likely to remain dependent on the worker. A springboard effect is not impossible, and if it should occur, then the worker would have achieved his own redundancy and there would be no problem. If it does not, however – and this project suggests it cannot be relied on – then either the project has to be one which can continue indefinitely or it leaves people in the lurch.

A third drawback results from moving the opposite way, away from provision towards community development. This is that, since the local people take some part in the work, the work may not be done as well as it would be by professionals. A playgroup run, or partly run, by mothers with little experience of playgroups, for instance, is not likely to be of the standard of one run entirely by qualified playgroup workers. Community work is commonly done in areas which are most in need of good services, such as playgroups, and too great an emphasis on self-help could lead to the residents of such areas always having to provide their own and so ending up with inferior ones.

Because the worker has to be constantly weighing up how much to take upon himself and how much to leave to the group, the work is not easy to do. On the one hand, the worker must do whatever is necessary to get the group started and to keep it going, but on the other, he must allow the people room to do things of their own so that they can learn from it. Perhaps paradoxically, it is not difficult for workers to do things themselves. What they find difficult is allowing others to do things. If the worker is putting his own effort and enthusiasm into the group's activity and taking some responsibility for it, he will want things to be done quickly and properly. Since he will almost always be able to do things better himself, leaving them to the group will be harder than

A Community Project in Notting Dale

actually doing them. This is particularly so for workers with a specialist training who are usually reluctant to allow others a say in their work since they regard this as compromising on their professional standards. If the community development side of the work is not to disappear, however, they have to be more flexible about this. For example, Janet Duncan refused to take the play-group into the courtyard, because it was her professional opinion that the courtyard was unsuitable, and her refusal distressed some of the mothers, whereas previous playgroup workers had gone along with the mothers' decision to move the playgroup there and made the best of it. As community development, their course had been better, and in fact the playgroup standard had not suffered much.

To sum up, it seems from this project that an extremely non-directive version of community development is unlikely to produce group activity in an area with the disadvantages of Notting Dale. For the same reasons, it is probably unrealistic to expect a local group which a worker has got going to start running the activity on its own, to branch out into other activities and to form other local groups. It does not follow, however, that one should go to the opposite extreme for the project also shows that local people get a great deal out of participating in an activity like the play-group.

When one looks back over the five years, it seems that the group flourished best at those times when the members were taking a large part in deciding on and running the activities but were also being given quite a lot of help and resources (in equipment, materials, premises and, most importantly, in the form of workers) – the first summer activities and Christmas bazaar, the combined summer activities of 1966 and the summer under the motorway. Since that amount of help was not given all the time, one can only speculate what difference it would have made to the results if it had been, but it is possible that in terms of numbers the results would have been quite a lot better. It could be that if the same amount of money (£25,000) over five years was spent on two or three workers using such an approach all the time and providing the other resources mentioned, the results in terms of numbers might be doubled or even trebled. It would be possible in areas like Notting Dale to employ a number of such workers. This project suggests that one worker should not be expected to work with more than one group, that the number of adults actively

Community Work in Notting Dale

involved in a group at any one time would probably not be above thirty and that each group might need a worker indefinitely. Would it be worth it?

It is common practice to evaluate a community project not so much on what it does as on what comes out of it – whether the activity goes on without the worker, whether other groups are formed, what knowledge is derived for application elsewhere and so on. On those criteria, such workers might not be worth it. But it can be argued that the immediate results in their own right justify the expenditure. If each worker could sustain a group of about the size of the Nottingwood group in its heyday (twenty to thirty mothers actively involved, eight to twelve regularly attending group meetings), one might expect, and in larger measure, such benefits as the mothers gained from the playgroup – learning new skills with children and with organizing a playgroup, the enjoyment of the social occasion and the neighbourliness, a better understanding of how decisions are made and a little more confidence to take part in them – and one could add to these the value of what the group actually does (running a playgroup or whatever). One must add also those effects which probably occur but which are not seen. There is some evidence of pathways being opened to the social services. If, for example, a mother has herself contacted an agency via the worker, then she is able to tell a neighbour where to get help. There is some evidence also of people taking more interest in the work of other local organizations or of the Council. One does not know how much effect it may have on a mother's relationship to her family if she has a rewarding though not too demanding interest outside the home. (The local doctor's observation of a fall in surgery attendance suggests that it may have quite a marked effect.) It is difficult to add up such disparate items into a final judgement of whether they are worth the money. It would be useful to have for comparison, if one could, the same sort of value-for-money analysis of the effects of, say, a school or a church or a youth club. Looked at like that, it might be thought that the results of the sort of work proposed would be really quite cheap. People's participation is generally agreed to be desirable, but it does not just happen. It has to be worked for and therefore paid for. This project, one might say, has discovered the price.

Appendix A

An Example of the Workers' Help

A general description was given in Chapter 8 of the help and encouragement given by the workers, and it was suggested that this should be seen as an important part of the worker's role, especially in an area with the disadvantages of Notting Dale. A detailed example of what this amounts to in practice is a jumble sale held in May 1968.

Several members of the group, especially those who had visited the charities, were anxious that the group should not cease its own money-raising activities because it had received grants, and so a jumble sale was planned for May. The collecting was done by five of the mothers, a number of teenagers and Elizabeth. Some was collected in prams and quite a lot in Elizabeth's car, and it was mostly done in the wealthy districts next to Notting Dale with occasional forays into South Kensington. Elizabeth recalls of these outings:

Lynn Shaw and I used to go quite often to South Kensington, and quite often when we were doing a block of flats, instead of us each taking one side, she would want us to stay together, and she would say, 'No, you talk Liz, because you talk better.' Nobody put this into words but I very much got the feeling that they used me as a sort of protection when they went out of their 'territory'.

Some of the jumble was stored in Mrs Hutchins's basement, but most of it in the workers' flat, where all the sorting was done. The sale was held in a church hall. Caroline Schelle's husband ran a large van and he took a lot of the jumble to the hall. Mr Travers, a taxi driver, took a few loads in his taxi, and Elizabeth took some in her car. Mr Travers also produced some posters (*'Don't be humble, come to our jumble,'* is the best remembered) and these went up in the nearby Portobello Road. Ilys was stationed on the door to collect the entrance fees while the mothers, the teenagers and Elizabeth did the selling. Unsold stuff was sold to a local rag-and-bone man and the total profit was £25.

Appendix A

The most obvious parts of the workers' contribution were Elizabeth's car for carting and the flat for storing and sorting. Elizabeth helped a lot with the collecting, sorting, selling and clearing away afterwards, and Ilys took the money on the door. A resource for which the workers were indirectly responsible was the help of the teenagers, since Elizabeth was working with a small group of teenagers at this time and it was for her as much as for the playgroup that they gave their help.

Three less obvious aspects of the workers' role were also important. One was the 'protection in foreign territory' already described. A second was the energy and enthusiasm which Elizabeth could put into the work. For the mothers, collecting jumble was extra to their everyday work whereas to Elizabeth, of course, it was part of her work, so she could put more into it. It is pleasant to do something in good company whatever it is you are doing. Collecting jumble was dull work for the mothers on their own, but doing it with Elizabeth could be fun. The worker's presence made all the difference. Thirdly, though they resisted this, the workers were often made to fill a place which none of the mothers could, that of leaders in the sense of superiors or authority figures. For example, one mother refused to help with the jumble sale because, she complained, there was no gratitude, whereas she helped at the jumble sale for a local school because she felt her efforts there were recognized. The person who recognized her efforts for the school was, of course, the headmistress and the reason she did not receive such thanks for her efforts for the Nottingwood group was that there was no one in the position of the headmistress. This need for that sort of thanks was shared by most of the mothers, and since none of the mothers could play that role, much pressure was put on the workers to do so. The workers tried not to since it was not for the workers or for the workers' playgroup that the mothers were raising money, and the workers wanted to make this clear, but even so the mothers may have looked upon the workers' interest in their activities in this way so that the workers, willy-nilly, filled their need for that sort of figure.

This is the sort of help which, it is suggested, a worker might give in areas like Notting Dale. The workers did not supplant the mothers as organizers of the sale, nor did they do everything for them, yet their involvement encouraged and enabled the mothers to carry it out.

Appendix B

Records in a Community Project

Different records are produced for different purposes in a community project, but one set forms the basis for the others. These are the records which the worker writes primarily for his own use. The general purpose of writing them is to help him to do his work as well as possible, and the way it helps is that writing them, and later reading them, forces him to analyse what is going on and reminds him of what happened some time ago so that he can gain a clearer view of his problems and act appropriately. The main problem of these records is that writing and reading them is an effort. Since their purpose is to help the worker in his work, they should be seen as part of the work and not supplementary to it, and therefore time should be devoted to them as a matter of course, but the problem remains that, if lengthy records are asked of the worker, he is likely not to write them, and even if he does write some, he is likely not to read them. Some compromise is needed, therefore, between too short records, which would be convenient but useless, and too long records, which would be interesting and valuable but which would not get written.

Two sorts of workers' records were written in this project, records with headings and narrative records. To take records with headings first, a list of headings was worked out in 1967, when the experimental aspect of the project, and therefore systematic recording, had assumed more importance. The purpose of the headings was to help the worker to pick out what had been important from recent events. They were written about once a month. It was a fairly complex list of headings and sub-headings. For example, for each 'client group' (such as the Nottingwood group), there was the following list:

- (1) Purpose(s) of the members for their group
- (2) Membership: Active? Passive? Total
- (3) Group organization and procedure:
 - (a) Group meetings: attendance, purpose, quality of procedure, decisions

Records in a Community Project

The problem here is that life does not happen under headings, so to speak. The natural way to tell someone about what has happened is in the form of a narrative account, a form flexible enough to cope with the variation in what one might want to say. Narrative accounts are the second sort of records which the workers produced in this project. Many examples have been quoted in the story.

The main advantage of narrative records is that they are readable, even entertaining, so they are easier to understand, to remember and to refer to. One might expect that records with headings would be easier to refer to because the material has already been categorized, but in fact one remembers and refers to the example just given as 'the roulette wheel story' and not as 'November 1967, 3(a)'. But they have disadvantages, stemming from the total lack of guidelines as to what the worker is to include in the narrative and what to leave out. One obvious danger is that he will include a lot of useless detail. One of Ilys's records (not in fact a typical one) is an example of this:

Tricia started today. Had a talk with her about the mothers' share in the playgroup and the proposed voting for a mother to help. Went to the playgroup. Met Ann, Mrs Thompson, Amy, Mary, Sandra Morris, Jane Downes, Lynn Shaw. Visited Nora Fellows, Vera Conway, Gina Wheeler. Ran into Florrie Parks, Joan Stanley, Beryl Dawson, Susan Benson. Asked Nora Fellows to talk to Mrs Sewell about a mother being paid to help in the playgroup as she appears to think that mothers on the rota will get paid. After lunch, took paper for the children to paint on to Ann, and paper for posters to George Conway. Saw Pat Conway and Mrs Dawkins. Met Kathy Fellows and Jimmy. Found Amy, joined by Joan Stanley and Pat Brown. Went to Amy's for a cup of tea. Gran Fields, Susan and Jimmy Fields there, Jimmy helping Frank to strip the bedroom paper. Mothers' meeting this evening.

It is perhaps interesting that Ilys saw so many people in one day, but without more information on what she spoke to them about, the record is not of much value for analysing her work.

A second, more subtle, danger is to replace a specific description of what happened with a more generalized one. For instance, a complicated difference of opinion at a meeting may be recorded by the worker as, 'There was disagreement over this,' whereas it may be important for the worker to analyse what the disagreement actually was. Similarly, both workers in this project tended to describe their own activity in generalized terms such as, 'I tried to

Appendix B

clarify the issues,' or 'I attempted to modify Mrs So-and-so's attitude,' or 'I supported this idea,' whereas a more specific description of what they said and did would be more useful for analysis. The main reason for substituting these generalized descriptions is probably that they are easier, but there may also be a feeling that an expression such as 'clarify issues' is somehow more 'professional' than a description like, 'I asked her what she meant,' or 'I asked them if they'd thought about such-and-such.'

In general, then, the danger with narrative records is that the worker, having to think out anew each time what to put in and what to leave out, may put in what is useless and leave out what is important. One's immediate conclusion is that the best records would combine the virtues of headings with the virtues of narrative accounts. The worker would write narrative records, but would have a list of headings, or perhaps questions, to indicate important things which he ought to include. A problem arises, however, when one tries to frame this list of questions. If the questions are general enough to be applicable, they are not likely to be helpful. For instance the question 'What is the group's purpose?' received the same answer month after month - 'To run a playgroup'. If, on the other hand, they are specific enough to be helpful, they are not likely to be applicable. For instance, a good question for the workers at certain times would have been, 'Is your relationship with the group's leaders affecting the other members' attitude to taking leadership?', but it was not always a good question, and in other projects it might never apply at all. What the worker needs is the right questions, but there is no such thing as the body of right questions, which could be written down for him to consult while writing his narrative records. What questions are right depends on the situation about which they are asked.

The worker, then, needs some device flexible enough to ask the right questions about the situation he is in. In fact he has such a device in the form of his colleague and his consultant or his advisory group. A digression is needed to explain what the advisory group is.

One of the lessons learnt in the first year of the project was that the size of the Family Study Committee, its responsibility for the project and the infrequency of its meetings made it unsuitable as an advisory group for the workers. It is important, then, to have a separate body to perform the function of providing constructive discussion and advice on the problems of the work. Some workers

Records in a Community Project

may prefer to have just one consultant and others may prefer an advisory group of three or four. The advisers in the Family Study project performed the task voluntarily, but since it is a demanding task in terms of time and effort, and one which requires certain expertise, advisers might receive payment. Since the clarification of problems en route is a difficult and constantly changing task, the advisory group should be prepared for long and fairly frequent meetings (say two or three hours once a month). A single consultant, of course, could see the worker more often, perhaps once a week. Meetings can be held either regularly or at the worker's request. The advantage of the latter is that time is not wasted in routine meetings which are not needed, but there is the disadvantage that the worker is required both to know when he needs help with a problem and to be prepared to ask for it, and with the most difficult problems he may not be able to do this. For the same reason, the onus of raising problems should not be entirely on the worker. Obviously the advisory group can only work with the information given by the worker, and since its purpose is to help the worker, it must tackle problems which the worker raises. The worker cannot be expected, however, to see all his problems clearly enough to raise them, so the advisory group should be able to ask questions of its own.

An advisory group could be most helpful in discussing the most serious problems, and the experience of the Family Study working party shows that constructive discussion of these problems can only occur if the worker feels safe enough to raise them. If the advisory group is responsible for the work, then two possibilities are present which may make the worker feel unsafe. One is that the advisory group may take a problem into its own hands, or refer it to the committee to do so. Another is that it may give direction, rather than advice, to the worker. If the providing of helpful discussion is the advisory group's primary purpose, it follows that it should not be responsible for the work.

This affects the choice of members for this group since it means that committee members, being responsible for the project, are not the best advisers. Against this, however, are two arguments. One is that the committee has a right to know what the advisory group is doing, especially if it is paying the advisers, so it is reassuring for the committee to have one of its members on the advisory group. The second is that if a problem of the work should arise at a committee meeting, a committee member is in a better position to defend the worker's course of action than the worker is, so it is

Appendix B

helpful to the worker to have a member of his advisory group on the committee. A person acting as the committee's representative, but not as the worker's supporter, may make the worker uneasy with his advisory group. A person acting as the worker's supporter, but not as the committee's representative may be inadequate reassurance for the committee. It is best, then, if one person can perform both, though retaining the confidence of both sides may require considerable diplomatic skills. The same applies to a consultant.

To return to the worker's problem of what to include in his narrative accounts and what to leave out, it was said that the task of asking the right questions is best performed by his colleague and his consultant or advisory group. His first narration of an event, in practice, will probably be to his colleague, and the colleague will ask for the information he needs to understand what happened. They may also discuss it. This first description and discussion will help the worker to see what is important when he then writes down the account. It was records written after such a discussion between Ilys and Elizabeth, for instance, which provided the basis for the passage on the jumble sale in Appendix A. Similarly, since the advisory group will want to know all the relevant facts for discussing the worker's problems, their questions will show up deficiencies in his records which he can put right.

The records of this project, then, suggest that narrative records are the most useful, written in whatever detail is necessary, fairly soon after the events they describe. Several of these records would be produced per week. In addition to narrative description, they would include anything which the worker thought important, such as observations, questions, analyses and so on. Other material such as correspondence or the group's minutes might be attached to them.

Records of this kind are the most useful for someone writing a report on the project as well as for the worker himself, and for the same reasons. Also for the report writer, the more aspects of the work that are recorded, the better. It was lack of records, for instance, which made it impossible to write an account of the work done in this project with organizations.

A final word on the worker's own records is that they are more likely to be read as well as written if they are in reasonable prose, since the abandoning of syntax in the interests of brevity makes them difficult to read. For example, in the records about the beginning of the summer motorway scheme is the following line :

Records in a Community Project

Mrs Fellows and Amy to worker anxious re complete lack of equipment, though some reported to be locked away. They wished to see one of the organizers and were particularly worried re disappointment and eventual difficulties of older children.

This would be easier to follow if it read :

Mrs Fellows and Amy visited the worker. They were anxious that there is no equipment on the site, though they have heard that some is locked away. They were worried that the older children will be disappointed and will interfere with the playgroup, so they wanted to see one of the organizers.

This body of narrative records which the worker will accumulate forms the basis for the other types of records he produces. If the worker sees his advisers once a month, then he will look through the records before the meeting, perhaps prepare some notes on the problems to be discussed and collect the records relevant to them. It might be useful to summarize the advisers' discussions (again useful also to the writer of the report).

Both with writing narrative records soon after events and with looking at problems once a month, there is a danger of not seeing the wood for the trees. It may be useful, therefore, for the worker to make an overall assessment of whether the project is moving in generally the right direction, perhaps every six months. In the Family Study project, for example, most of the records and the working party's discussions were about the 'workers' problems with the Nottingwood group, and only rarely was the general question asked of whether the concentration on the Nottingwood group was the best policy. Once again the question arises of whether a set of headings or questions will help the worker in making these overall assessments and once again the problem is that general questions are likely to be unhelpful (for example, 'Have there been environmental improvements?') and specific questions are likely to be inappropriate (for example, 'Is the project too involved with a few people?'). Perhaps there is a similar answer here, namely that different activities have their own criteria of success and failure and the questions will depend on the activities undertaken, though some general criteria will be provided by the stated purpose of the project. For instance, if a main part of the work has been a public education campaign about the rights of unfurnished tenants, that sort of endeavour has its own criteria of success, though the purpose of the project will provide the general question of whether

Appendix B

that sort of endeavour is what the worker is supposed to be engaged in.

Some version of this overall assessment might form the worker's reports to his committee, the final sort of record which the worker produces. If the committee's primary responsibility is to see that the project's money is properly spent – that is that the work being done is broadly the sort of work for which money was obtained – the reports will need to contain a description, in some detail, of what the worker has been doing since the last committee meeting and a general assessment of how the project is going. One lesson to be drawn from the Family Study's experience is that the committee wants to know not merely what has happened but also what part the worker has had in it. If, for instance, the worker has spent most of his time with a group of squatters, the committee will want to know what part the worker has had in their activities and why the worker chose that focus for his work, or if the worker has tried it and then abandoned it, the committee will want to know why he did so. In addition to these reports, the Family Study workers also produced occasional papers about community development and about the area, its problems, the attitudes of the residents and so on.

There is a problem with the worker's reports to his committee, which is that if any committee members are likely to come into contact with the people with whom he is working, what the worker tells his committee may affect his work. If, for example, there are borough councillors or representatives from the statutory departments on the committee, they may be tempted, may even have an obligation, to make use of what the worker tells them in a way which might interfere with his work. This could happen if the group's activities were on the fringe of the law, or antagonistic to the authorities. Or if people from local organizations with whom the worker is working are in contact with members of his committee, as was the case with the Treadgold Street Adventure Playground, for instance, then what the worker tells his committee may affect his relationship to those organizations. There is no easy solution to this problem. The worker will have to find a compromise in each case between what the committee needs to know and what he wants to tell them.

There is not the same need for strict confidentiality for a community worker's records as for a caseworker's records since, from the nature of the work, the records will be about people's public actions rather than their personal problems. They should still be

Records in a Community Project

kept confidential, however, for a reason similar to the worker's reason for occasionally keeping information from his committee. This is that if anyone, including the people with whom he works, could read the worker's records, then the worker would have to write the records with this in mind. Thus, writing records would not be purely a second-order activity, observing and analysing what he has done, but a first-order activity as well, that is something he is doing which might influence the people he works with, just like talking to them or making points at meetings. But the whole point of writing records is lost if they are a first-order activity as well, since he would then have to write more records to observe and analyse the effect of his records, and so on, indefinitely. Writing records, therefore, must be kept as a purely second-order activity and this means that the records must be kept confidential.

Appendix C

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Appendix D

For Students and Teachers of Community Work

The following is a list of topics in community work which may form the subjects of essays and seminars, together with a list of passages in the book which are relevant to them:

The worker

- Making contacts pp. 14, 15-17, 19, 26-31, 36-8, 42, 57, 89
- Helping the group to make decisions pp. 20, 38, 43-4, 95-101, 105-7, 114-15
- Practical help, friendship and encouragement pp. 14, 19, 39, 43-4, 49-50, 51-2, 59, 90-91, 99-100, 113, 116, 125, 161-6, 173-4
- Mediating between the group and other bodies pp. 53-77, 84-8, 119-21
- Evaluation in the course of the project pp. 20, 39, 40-41, 46-7, 52, 98, 100-101, 121-2, 175-83
- Withdrawal pp. 50-51, 127-9, 133-4
- Records pp. 175-83
- Community work and social work pp. 161-3
- Community development and the provision of services pp. 166-71

The group

- Difficulties of self help pp. 155-8
- Indigenous leadership pp. 24, 42, 48, 101-2, 108-12, 118-19, 122-7, 156-7
- The group's organization pp. 20, 38-45, 102-3, 110-11, 116-18, 122-3, 132-3
- Relations between local groups pp. 45-8, 93
- The group's relations with established bodies pp. 53-91, 119-22
- 'We and they' attitudes pp. 42, 61-2, 65, 82-4, 120, 157-8

The agency

- The project committee pp. 18, 21-3, 34-5, 136-50, 178-80

Large cities, for all the speed with which the more prosperous parts are developing, have their 'deprived areas' that seem resistant to all attempts at social reform.

The reason for this resistance, many people think, is that the policies of reform have not been fashioned by the people who are intended to benefit from them. Certainly services are provided, but they are provided by councillors and officials, social workers and clergymen; the local people have no real voice in what happens. What is lacking is participation.

This community-development project in a small part of West London was an attempt to encourage and assist local people to run some service of their own. The outcome was a playgroup run by local mothers. The book is the story of this playgroup, much of it told in the words of the mothers and the community workers themselves. The authors discuss some of the questions the story raises about how this kind of work should be done, and conclude with an assessment of the value, and the limitations, of participation.

£3.00 net

Photograph: Terry Rand