

INTRODUCTION

This project was first established in 1983, although the actual base was not established until 1985. The Centre serves Norley Hall and Worsley Hall, which are two large Council Housing Estates. At present there are two full-time workers and three part-time workers, and because of the nature of the work, we also use a lot of other women to run specific courses at different times.

Laurel Street has always tried to involve the young women in what happens at the Centre, what we do, how we do it etc., so the varied programme and content are, in part, a reflection of this. One of the full-time workers left halfway through the year, so the brief programme below gives some indication of the work done, which obviously changed in some ways with the new worker starting.

Briefly the days looked something like this:

MONDAY - Cooker Group/Discussion Issues/Squash etc.,
TUESDAYS - Young Mothers Group
WEDNESDAY- Discussion Group/Trips out
THURSDAY - Activity day, both in and out of the Centre, including a lot of outdoor pursuits
THURSDAY EVENING - Borough Wide Drama Group

YOUNG MOTHERS GROUP

This group was established in the later part of 1987, in recognition of the fact that young mothers have common experiences and problems to share - often coming to Laurel Street is one of the few times they get out of the house, and often just come for a break. A break including wanting to ignore the kids completely, never making a cup of tea or washing up! During the period that there weren't any play-workers employed by the Authority it became even more firmly established as a young mothers group, because, if you didn't have kids, I shouldn't think you would have wanted to be within five miles of Laurel Street! This really was a difficult time for everyone and it seems that almost against the odds, we managed to get things done. However a varied programme has taken place over the year. In the first six months, the sessions usually started with taking it in turns to cook a meal - swapping recipes and thinking of cheap nutritional meals to cook. This was then followed by a variety of discussions looking at different issues, including health, racism, disability

etc. A lot of time has been spent talking about the young womens own experiences as single parents, male violence, bringing up children and then actually writing this down. In between the various courses, we've had trips out to Waves, Horwich Leisure Centre, Southport, Haigh Hall etc.,

Fairly early on in the year, we began making plans for a residential. Many of the young women and children had never been away, and it was also hoped to be a way of enhancing relationships. Seven young women and six children came away to North Wales and a separate report is available about this residential.

As the group built up, it became impossible to carry on cooking and get anything else done! In response to requests, there has since been a sewing course and a self defence course. The play-workers have made an ENORMOUS difference (they're wonderful!) to what can constructively be done and what the young women actually get out of the Centre. However, that is only one day a week, it somehow seems absurd to have a young womens centre and not have play-workers.

Brieger Brannigan started work at Laurel Street during the last week in September, and it was decided that she should take part in all the groups, in order to get to know all the young women who came to the Centre.

WEDNESDAYS

At this point, Wednesdays were taken up with various activities, like trips out, but some young women expressed an interest in having several Wednesdays set aside for discussions about issues affecting their lives, and for receiving information about education opportunities.

As a result, a four weeks course started in November, with a session on self-image; the second session was on violence against women, and involved a speaker from Manchester Rape Crisis Line. During the third week, a speaker from Community Education came to talk about returning to education, what courses are available and what child-care facilities there are for women who want to return to education. The course ended with a writing workshop, where women could do their own writing or just talk about how they felt about writing, how some of them had been put off writing by teachers' attitudes and how this deterred them from going back into education etc.,

After Christmas, we decided to embark on a local Women's History project. This involved making contacts with older women in the area, visiting a 'drop-in' for old people at Pemberton Community School, talking to some of the women there,