

**Interview summary:** Laura McGillivray, Director of Manor Gardens from 1988 to 1991.

**Interviewer:** Emma Marshall

**Interviewee:** Laura McGillivray

**Interview summariser:** Ben Hadley

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**Recording length:** 01:14:50

**[00:00:00-00:02:20]** (Tags: introduction; first involvement with centre)

Laura was born in Aberdeen in 1953. She was working nearby when she saw an advertisement for the role of Director of the centre advertised in the Guardian. She began running Manor Gardens in 1988.

**[00:02:20-00:05:50]** (Tags: centre work and services; organisational structure)

When Laura began the centre was roughly divided into three areas: health services, directly run projects, and accommodating Islington-wide voluntary organisations. The centre was very influential within the local authority, Women's therapy groups, Mind, and Young People's Activity groups were all present.

A wide range of childcare services and healthcare classes were available including: speech therapy, chiropody, a Stroke Club, and London Gay Teenage club.

**[00:05:50-00:15:50]** (Tags: staff diversity; centre services)

60 percent of the population of North Islington were from ethnic minority groups, and it seems to Laura that the staff and activities of the centre did not necessarily reflect the community. However, a lot of work had been done to help improve facilities at the centre for people with disabilities, and the led the way in providing support for AIDS sufferers.

**[00:15:50-00:21:00]** (Tags: staff diversity)

The management committee didn't really reflect the community at the time, and Laura endeavoured to change this by meeting local organisations and chairing the Islington Council Voluntary Service. She also set about changing the staff profile by changing the recruitment process in order to reflect the wider community. At the same time she tried to update the facilities and incorporate computer systems so that the centre could run more efficiently.

**[00:21:00-00:27:00]** (Tags: centre services; organisational improvement)

Laura wanted to improve existing services in general, but particularly for people with special needs, by joining The British Association of Settlements. She speaks about improving the centre's approach to finances and administration, which she felt was old-fashioned. She wasn't very popular to begin with, but she was determined to make some important changes that would benefit the centre and the community as a whole.

**[00:27:00-00:30:00]** (Tags: Queen Mother; key events)

Laura enjoyed bringing her own children to the garden during the summer. As one of her charities, the centre celebrated the Queen Mother's 90th birthday with a parade, and a Red Arrows display. She tells an amusing anecdote about the ambulance they were driving which nearly stalled as it passed the QM.

**[00:30:00-00:36:37]** (Tags: staff and key figures)

She describes memories of Tim Davies who didn't have much contact with the centre but approved of her changes. Manor Gardens was one of the first organisations to participate in World Aids Day, Laura was very keen on promoting charities that tackled this issue, and helped the centre influence local policy. She talks about people who ran the centre: Ann Jennings, Gillian who ran the stroke club (who went to the royal garden party).

**[00:36:37-00:39:33]** (Tags: health services; community)

Manor Gardens was instrumental in helping voluntary organisations promote health issues throughout Islington. Ethnic minorities were catered for and there was a lot of support from the council.

**[00:39:33-00:47:00]** (Tags: funding; centre reputation; international relationships)

She discusses the effect of cuts to grant aid during the eighties. Manor Gardens wasn't too badly affected as they were very scrupulous with finances and offered an obvious input to the community. Laura doesn't remember any negative publicity about the centre! She talks about a Russian health organisation that made contact with the centre, and an exchange trip was organised between the two centres.

**[00:47:00-00:54:00]** (Tags: disability services and attitudes towards; centre leadership and policy)

She discusses the changing attitudes to disability and how the centre broke new ground by offering alternative therapies to a variety of ailments. She met with trustees every three months. The meetings were very formal, with concise reports presented. Discussion of potential changes to the centre would be put before the Management Committee. She also talks about how the role was a major challenge, and very different to anything she had done before, she came from a planning role, and wasn't used to dealing with such a large community of workers.

**[00:54:00-00:57:00]** (Tags: steering the centre forwards)

Laura talks about the paper she presented to the committee three months after she began the role and details her proposed changes to the centre: adapting to change, forming new alliances. She felt that the centre had the potential to reach many more people within the community.

**[00:57:00-01:02:00]** (Tags: achievements; centenary).

She is proud of her time at the centre, and felt she made a real difference which has endured. It helped her to develop her career, and develop skills. She talks about the centenary celebrations and reflects on the changes since her time, things that had stayed the same. She tells a story about borrowing furniture from a shop over the road.

**[01:02:00-01:10:00]** (Tags: history and future of the centre; centre values; personal achievements)

Laura talks a bit about the history of the centre and it's beginnings in 1913. The women who ran the centre at that time were concerned for the health of mothers who were having too many children, as a result there was a high infant mortality rate. From the beginning the centre instilled values that would not become widespread until the introduction of the Welfare State. The basic principle for helping working class families in the local community was already present in the early days of the centre.

Laura believes that her greatest legacy was to have improved the prospects of the centre at a point when funding was becoming sparse. If she had not done this the centre may have begun to flounder. Looking towards the future, she feels that it is important to take a wider view, and create a

synergy between the groups that operate there. She then goes on to explain the difficulties of working with charitable trusts, as they do not cater for long term funding.

**[01:10:00-01:14:50]**

She talks about her daily routine when she worked at the centre, and how she arranged childcare with her husband, she thinks conditions for working mothers have improved since she worked for the centre. Both of her children are now grown up and work in the public sector.

Laura becomes quite tearful at this stage and explains that it is difficult for people in positions of power to understand what the needs are for those on the ground. It is important for those at the top of councils and organisations to talk to those who are on their way up, as they tend to have a closer connection to the issues that matter.

END OF RECORDING

(Edited by TZ May 2016)