

**Interview summary:** Ann Jennings, pre-school staff from 1975 to 2008.

**Interviewer:** Jane Eimmermann

**Interviewee:** Ann Jennings

**Interview date:** 22 April 2013

**Interview code:** MG201310A

**Recording length:** 00:56:27

**[00:00:00 - 00:03:29]** (Tags: introduction; relationship with the centre; getting involved)

Ann Jennings introduces herself. She was born in London in 1945. She discusses how she first became involved with Manor Gardens.

Ann used to take her daughter to the clinic and was offered a part-time position in the downstairs pre-school. She started on a part time basis in January 1975. Eventually she became deputy and then organiser, working full time. Her daughters used to attend the playgroup whilst she worked at the centre. Ann worked at the centre until she retired in 2008. Today she is a Trustee at Manor Gardens.

Before joining the centre, Ann worked at a day nursery in North Islington and a private nursery in Muswell Hill.

**[00:03:30 - 00:08:20]** (Tags: first impressions; activities; wages; pre-school)

Ann discusses her first impressions of the centre, which as a big charity organisation was very different from where she'd worked previously. She recalls the wide range of activities that took place at the centre, including fundraising events, the clinics, and mothers groups, which held cookery, keep-fit and other classes.

She was paid around £2 a week. She remembers Mrs [Althea] Davis saying that people who worked with children did it for love, not money.

Ann was happy to work at the same place that her daughter attended. She says her daughter was very independent and didn't need lots of attention just because Ann was around.

Ann describes the playhall, which was a very big room, and the layout of the pre-school. She remembers that there was lots of equipment and mobile toys. If there was a mothers' group, they could have up to 40 children in the afternoons, with around 7-8 staff on hand. She remembers it being a very friendly place.

**[00:08:20 - 00:12:30]** (Tags: parents; events; Althea Davis; leadership)

Ann mentions that the parents used to help with bazaars and other fundraising events.

She shares her memories of Mrs [Althea] Davis, who was very ladylike if a little aloof.

Ann also discusses the centre's leadership over the years. She says Mrs Davis was in charge when she first joined, and then different directors were brought in. She mentions the health authorities moving out (including the dentist and optician), and how many things stopped running as a result. Activities started to build up again when the new directors came

in, who introduced womens' therapy and a youth club for disabled teenagers amongst other things.

**[00:12:31 - 00:16:16]** (Tags: groups and activities; Childrens Act 1989; staff qualifications)

Ann discusses her involvement and interaction with other groups. She recalls how the pre-school used to close in the holidays and the playhall would be used as a dormitory by the disabled group, which would host an exchange with a group in Holland. The pre-school staff were invited to some of the 'dos of the other groups.

Ann shares particular memories of the pre-school. She recalls outings, including library visits and playdays at Whittington Park. She mentions their early dependency on fundraising. She discusses the Childrens Act [1989] and how this affected work and activities at the centre, including an increase in paperwork. For Ann the emphasis shifted from providing a place to play, to providing education.

She discusses how many children were allowed to attend the centre under the Childrens Act and with Ofsted, and the qualifications required by the staff.

**[00:16:17 - 00:19:25]** (Tags: staff training and qualifications; children's experiences)

Ann discusses the training and qualifications she needed to work at the centre, and how these changed over the years.

Ann feels that this has changed the children's experiences to some extent. She feels that perhaps children have less time to enjoy being young, with the earlier emphasis on learning.

Ann mentions the ages of the children attending the pre-school (2 and a half - 5 years).

**[00:19:25 - 00:21:00]** (Tags: pre-school entrance; centre's reputation)

Ann discusses the role of the pre-school within the community, and how its changed over time. Ann says most children were recommended through the health visitor when she began, and there weren't as many local playgroups. Over time, parents began recommending the centre to other parents. Now, some of the children she looked after are bringing their own children! She says the pre-school has always had a waiting list.

She feels that Manor Gardens has always had a very good reputation (which brings word of mouth recommendations).

**[00:21:00 - 00:24:16]** (Tags: job details; workload)

Ann discusses how her role changed going from a sessional role to the organiser. It was a lot more clerical work, including financial paperwork. She often ended up doing paperwork on her weekends because there just wasn't enough time. On top of this, she was also taking her NVQ Level 3, and the workload was very hard.

However, Ann feels that they gained a lot from working hard, and by taking the required qualifications, in January 2000 the pre-school was able to start taking full-time children.

**[00:24:16 - 00:26:20]** (Tags: personal achievements; proudest moments)

Ann discusses her main achievements at the pre-school. She feels she ran a happy place with long-term staff.

She says she always felt proud seeing the children leave and then years later seeing their parents and hearing about their successes. She says some are actors, some are teachers, one is a grenadier guard at Buckingham Palace.

**[00:26:21 - 00:30:06]** (Tags: events; outings)

Ann shares memories of events, including staff Christmas lunches; the centre's cafe; trips to restaurants and the London Eye.

She also remembers Christmas parties for the children and seasonal outings to the seaside and a nearby farm. They would also arrange visits to Margate and later Southend. Ann mentions that parents had to accompany children on big outings, to ensure the children's safety.

**[00:30:07 - 00:36:34]** (Tags: Queen Mother; key events)

Ann recalls the Queen Mother visiting the centre [in 1988], which took a lot of organisation. The pre-school had a party and remembers the Queen Mother singing along with the children. Ann says it was a very good afternoon. The Queen Mother asked Ann how long she had been there and unveiled a plaque.

Ann also went to Buckingham Palace twice, once as a representative of Manor Gardens. She says it was nice to have the Queen Mother as a patron as it gave the centre some respect. It felt as though they were getting recognition for their work.

**[00:36:34 - 00:43:30]** (Tags: present relationship with Manor Gardens; diversity)

Ann talks about her current relationship with Manor Gardens. Today she is a trustee, representing the pre-school. She has attended some Council meetings and fundraising events. She feels that due to her long involvement with the pre-school she is able to make informed contributions.

Ann feels that the centre is doing its best to stay versatile. She feels that diversity is key to the centre's ethos.

Ann says that women have really driven the work of the centre over the years. She doesn't recall many male staff but feels that there are more men there today.

**[00:43:31 - 00:47:58]** (Tags: leadership)

Ann discusses director Brian Earl's contribution to the centre. She feels he brought positive changes and introduced a terrific amount of different groups. She recalls him as a strict person, but very good at his job. He also worked hard to improve the physical state of the centre. Ann feels that he left the centre in a very good position.

Ann agrees that having male directors was a departure from the original running of the centre - mostly volunteers and very female-orientated.

**[00:47:59 - 00:54:40]** (Tags: leadership; Geraldine Aves; present relationship with the centre)

Ann shares her memories of Geraldine Aves. She was a very genteel lady who worked hard for the centre and alongside others helped to turn it around.

Ann discusses the community's influence on the day-to-day running of the centre. She feels that the committee were very much in charge during her early years there, and the community and 'downstairs' staff didn't really mix with the committee or management then. This changed over the years.

Ann then talks a little more about her role as a trustee today, and the centre's centenary celebrations.

**[00:54:41 - 00:56:27]** (Tags: relationship with the centre)

Ann says that she has thoroughly enjoyed being involved with the centre. On a more personal note, it provided a safety net for her following her divorce. She always enjoyed working there and feels that the centre does a good job. She hopes it will be there for a long time to come, and hopes to help in any way she can.

**END OF INTERVIEW**