

**INTERVIEW WITH MRS GILL DICKINS OF 23 ELMFIELD GATE
WINSLOW ON TUESDAY, 22 JANUARY 2002**

Chloe Willetts and Crispian Graves

Mrs Dickins is Chairman of the Buckingham and District Mencap Committee.

There are 7 people on this Committee which raises about £3,000 per annum to provide activities for the 60 of Mencap's clients who live in the area. It is affiliated to National Mencap.

All local societies are self-funding and get nothing from National Mencap. In the light of this we felt that a lot of the questionnaire was not applicable. It would be better directed at Mencap's Headquarters in High Wycombe.

We did learn what it was like to be a carer of a mentally handicapped son and running a support group for similarly handicapped people in this rural area.

I use the words "mentally handicapped" because Mrs Dickins disliked the euphemism "learning disability", as it hid the real severity of the problems with which she and others had to contend to provide a lifetime care 24 hours a day.

Up to the time they are 19 years old there is a full-time education and respite care.

19 onwards though they go out daily to the excellent Options Centre, Winslow and Well Street Centre, Buckingham. There is no care at weekends and no respite.

Added to this as the children get older and bigger the parents get older, family support evaporates as grandparents are no longer around.

Mrs Dickins' is 34 now and lives in a Fremantle Trust Home, 32 Bourton Road, Buckingham with six other people for only the last 11 months. Nineteen live in Shaftesbury Court, Winslow. The others live with their parents and a few of those regarded as more capable live in their own one or two bedroomed flats. One is living in a three bedroomed flat!

This sounds fine. During the week a care worker comes in to give them their money daily so that they can buy food etc and they go into the Day Centre.

What happens at the weekend?

- eg
- (1) One young man spent £30 in taxis just getting in to Buckingham so he could see people, so he had no money for food.
 - (2) A young woman spends a lot of time standing in a shop in Buckingham simply to be with people.
 - (3) Another just lived on Marmite sandwiches.

Mrs Dickins' Committee, who are nearly all relatives and carers of the clients raise about £3,000 a year with which they

- (1) Run the Friday Club which meets once a month at the Wells Street Centre. Though it is rent free they have to hire a bus at £48 a month to bring people who are too far away to walk.
- (2) They organise summer outings.
- (3) A bonfire night
- (4) A trip to the pantomime cost approximately £1,000
- (5) They also provide additional funding to enable individuals to go on holiday.
- (6) They supplied a TV and videos for a young woman living in the Shaftesbury Home, whose strange tastes in viewing caused problems with the other residents
- (7) Act as a support group for carers.

Dealing with the County Council

Social Services fund and run Thrift Farm, The Well Street Centre Buckingham and Options in Winslow.

The centres are open every weekday.

The clients who are living with parents or on their own go five days a week.

Those who live in the homes go four days a week. Transport is provided. The bill is large.

On their side Buckingham and District Mencap have raised funds to refurbish the kitchen at Options in Winslow at a cost of just under £2,000. They also supplied tumble dryers to Thrift Farm.

The partnership of the local Mencap and Social Services does work well because they have a very good rapport with the local organiser Jenni Burton who is understanding and responsive to the needs of clients and carers. But Mrs Dickins felt that those taking strategic decisions only paid lip-service and did not listen to the people they should be consulting eg she was sent as a carer representative by the Aylesbury Locality Forum to a meeting in County Hall to speak on respite care. As she was sent no minutes of any previous meeting she assumed it was a new committee and all would be revealed.

She found herself amidst a group of Social Services officers who all had papers of previous meetings. When she heard the words "respite Care", she explained who she was and who she represented, to be informed that this was irrelevant and she was not allowed to continue. She had rearranged her work in order to come and had driven from Winslow.

It would help if all missives from County Hall could be written in clear English and necessary initials explained. In contrast the newsletter produced for the Aylesbury Vale Locality Forum was informative and readable.