

## The development of girls work in Mid Glamorgan

There have been attempts to respond to the needs of girls in the Youth Service in the county for some time.

The writer was appointed to the former county of Glamorgan in 1971, one of two Assistant County Further Education Officers. The terms of the appointment are no longer extant, but the conditions of service provided at the time use the feminine pronoun throughout. This confirms that the appointment of a woman was intentional, and the terms of reference included specifically, work with girls, and with female youth workers.

At that time the county insisted that the Warden and Deputy of the youth centres should be of opposite sex. As all but two or three Wardens were male, this meant that the majority of the deputies were female. There was an established pattern of Deputy Wardens' meetings held in each of the districts of the county. The few male deputies usually arranged for a female colleague to take their place, although the agendas of the meetings were not such as to exclude them. However, the females appreciated the mutual support and appeared to value the meetings. No agendas or minutes remain, so the content of meetings cannot be confirmed, but they were seen as a response to the needs of the female staff, and, by extension, of the girls.

There was specialised provision for the girls. As noted before, programmes of county events at the time, to which centre work was geared, reveal such items as hostess competitions; gymnastics displays; needlework and dressmaking items in Art and Craft exhibitions; and netball, rounders, and gymnastics. Girls were unlikely to play 'boy's sports', and their level of participation in mixed activities cannot be ascertained.

Local Government re-organisation brought or coincided with changes in programme and emphasis. The regulation about the sex of Wardens and Deputies was relaxed, with the result that males soon predominated in these posts in both full and part-time capacities. Deputy Wardens' meetings became inappropriate and were replaced by more general training exercises. With hindsight, it seems probable that girls lost out, although the attention they had previously would now be considered as rather stereotyped.

At first there was little awareness that girls needed any special consideration, and it was probably the coming of the Working with Girls Newsletter which drew attention to this, together with the active work of the Girls Work Unit of the National Association of Youth Clubs and articles in youth service publications. Regional meetings held by the Girls Work Unit were certainly attended by a few representatives from the county.

The first active response to this new thrust in Mid Glamorgan was a girls day held on 7 November 1982. At that time one full-time warden was female, there were six female full-time deputies, and one female leader of a voluntary organisation. With the support of the female officer, who convened the first meeting, they planned and led the day. The report lists the objective as being:

- to give girls a chance to try out activities not normally available to them in the youth club.*
- to give girls intensive coaching in activities they would like to undertake, but where boys tend to dominate.*
- to offer girls opportunities to relate to women who have achieved expertise.*
- to start girls thinking about themselves in a less stereotyped way.*

Participants were able to choose three activities to try out from a list which included archery, basketball, car maintenance, campcraft, electrics, first aid, judo, soccer skills, stage lightening and sound, table tennis, rock climbing, swimming, a 'mystery idea' and video filming. It was felt to be important that all staff for the event should be female.

It was difficult to assess the probably level of support, and the planning group worked round a minimum of 24 participants, and a maximum of 100. In the event booking had to be stopped at 150, 200 could have been reached, and 105 actually arrived. (This was a low rate of non attendance compared with other functions for young people). Another 12 girls were in a minibus which broke down, so never made it. The girls all said they enjoyed themselves, participated wholeheartedly and asked for more. What cannot be assessed is whether the day had any effect on the girls later.

It was felt that the cost and difficulty of travelling to a county venue might make difficulties for some girls, so the next event was aimed at one district only, and held in Cynffig for the Ogwr district on 19 June 1983. The programme was less extensive, as the target group was smaller, but it included motor cycling and tennis in addition to many of the other activities. It was attended by about sixty girls, and was again popular. The pattern was not followed in other districts, perhaps because they lacked the concentration of female full-time workers there happened to be in Ogwr, and these days require a considerable amount of time to plan and execute.

Concurrently with these events the county youth service underwent the restructuring mentioned above, which resulted in the loss of full-time deputy warden posts and the promotion of the female deputies to wardenships.

The next venture on 24/25 March 1984, was a week-end at Ogmores by Sea, the county residential centre. This was limited to forty eight girls. There was a similar pattern of activities, the centre being able to offer climbing, dry skiing, beachcombing, campcraft and environmental study. For the final session a number of women in non stereotyped jobs were invited to meet the girls for coffee. The girls were prepared to be hostesses, and briefed about what they might discuss with the visitors. The guests included a bus driver, a coastguard, a businesswoman and the local mayor, whose (male) chauffeur seemed to feel a little out of place! The girls appeared to have 'a whale of a time', and produced an interesting video film of the week-end as part of the programme.

A further week-end for girls was planned, but in discussion it was felt that the time had come to embark on staff training, so the next week-end, 22/23 June 1985 was for staff accompanied by girls. The programme included joint activities and some discussion work which introduced issues of special relevance to girls. This was followed on 30 November/1 December by a staff training week-end which was attended by both male and female staff. The programme included talks by visitors on issues related to work with girls, for example one on child abuse by an officer of the NSPCC.

Concurrently with these latest developments, certain districts had embarked on their own initiatives. In the Rhondda, the female full-time centre head had organised a training event for staff from the district, plus some guests to which she invited a keynote speaker from outside the area, who offered expertise in the development and use of resources. The result of this was to develop awareness of the need for resources, and a resource base was started for the Rhondda. This was followed by a local training event, and the inauguration of the Rhondda 15 + club for girls.

Meanwhile, at county level, on 6 June 1987 and 2 November, two training days were held, planned again by the full-time female workers, initiated by the female officer. Three workers from each district were invited to participate, to:

*identify the special needs of girls in the Youth Service*  
*suggest practical strategies for coping with these needs*  
*demonstrate several training methods for use at local level*  
*plan a local training for girls work*  
*devise a system for evaluating the training.*

Not all districts were able to take up the invitation, but there were fifteen people present, plus the planning team.

Between the two days, the district teams worked in their own districts in different ways, and the morning of the second day was spent in sharing reports and activity.

On the afternoon of the second day, the course was opened up to other workers, and about forty people joined the group to hear a talk about the Ogwr Enterprise Project, which led to discussions about the need to work with girls and boys together, if progress is to be made in altering attitudes and perceptions.

Participants were asked to complete evaluation sheets at the beginning and end of the second day. Recurring comments were about the preparation of resources, the running of special events for girls, the involvement of more staff, (first sheet) and the need to promote self esteem, the need to work with boys too, the need for mutual support, the need to discuss issues with the girls (second sheet). This would seem to indicate the raising of an awareness, at least at the time, of the elements of girls work.

The pattern outlined above reflects development in thinking from work within stereotypes, through the promotion of activities like those for the boys, to discussions and issue based work, to working with boys alongside the girls, and perhaps to working with mixed groups on the issues of gender equality which has been mentioned already. Each district is currently at a different stage, and working in a way developed to meet its own needs. At present, it is the work in the Rhondda which has developed most rapidly, due largely to the efforts of a small group of women led by the former head of the full-time centre. This has led to the Rhondda being used as the focus of a training video film on girls work produced by the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services and the Wales Youth Work Partnership, supported by grant aid from the Welsh Office. This film appears to be attracting favourable attention both inside and outside the county and Wales.

The arrival of the Welsh Office funding for in service training, (LEATGS) has also had a positive effect on girls work. In Mid Glamorgan, responsibility for servicing the use of this funding in the Youth Service has been delegated to the Districts. District Training Panels representing the different interests in the service have been set up – not all equally advanced in development – and a number of training events in girls work have been organised. All of these show evidence of having been stimulated or influenced by the county training events discussed above. Each one has had elements specific to the needs of the district or to the interests of the planning teams. In general, the pattern has been to offer initially a programme which would attract the girls, and which would offer the scope to introduce serious work based on issues of relevance to the girls. Thus, in Merthyr, a group of girls from all over the district was speedily involved in discussions about sexual pressure and attitudes, under the guidance of experienced staff. In Ogwr, the girls in attendance

were younger than had been hoped, so little work was undertaken outside the presented programme based on make up, beauty care, diet and some activities. Follow up work in both cases is intended, but it will differ to cater for the development gained.

Although there has been staff training as a result of these initiatives, it has been directed at experienced youth workers, with a few students from the initial training course opting to attend as an extra.