

GIRLS' 15+ CLUB IN RHONDDA

Over the past few years working with girls had had an increased importance at Treherbert Youth Centre. Groups of girls have been given the opportunity to take part in discussion groups and through the medium of activities such as hairdressing and "making the most of yourself" they have had opportunity to meet, discuss, challenge each other and air their views. Problems have been confided and shared and solved. This is not to say that girls were given more importance than boys in our club, nor were they encouraged to form groups in isolation, or segregation. Most of the activities on offer on the programme were for both girls and boys to enjoy together.

It becomes increasingly obvious however, that once the girls left school, within a short time they also stopped attending the Centre. The reasons for this have not been truly identified however, some form of explanation has been attempted and we supposed that these girls found new interests out-side the Centre, new boyfriends and started schemes of work (Y.T.S.) and the very lucky ones found employment. It was very sad to think that we could no longer answer all of their current needs. After much deliberation my deputy and I agreed it would be an idea to try to get the girls to form a club of their own where they could meet and get involved in the programming and identifying their needs.

We spoke to the girls whom we had now encouraged to take leading roles in activities, e.g. few of whom were pursuing hairdressing courses at the local College and others receiving work experience at local shops. They were indeed quite capable of organising the group activity and prepared to take the responsibility. This gave us the chance to talk to them and discuss this new venture. They were all in favour and enthusiastic and together we decided to hold the first girls club on a Wednesday, a night when we were normally closed, - March 11th. The girls wanted to call it the 15+ club and this meant that no one under 15 could attend.

We were pleased with the response and -also with the fact that we could develop an interest with the girls before the school leaving age of 16 years.

They also wanted to invite girls from other clubs and I contacted Ann Toomey - a part-time youth centre Warden at Trehafod whom I knew was also very interested in girls work. We, then set to plan the inaugural meeting hoping that from then on the girls would take initiatives and decide themselves what they wanted and when. We would then be present to offer support and advice.

Ann suggested some activity workshops in which they would all be interested - Beauty Techniques, Make Up, Manicure, etc, and she contacted the Pontypridd Technical College who were very pleased to co-operate. Eight girl students from the second year were prepared to run four workshops simultaneously and at this point in their training they needed an audience to demonstrate their skills.

The aims and objectives of the night were discussed and we thought these were achievable.

The aim of the 15+ Club is to "Encourage young women to make decisions on matters affecting their own lives and thus promote better life styles".

The Objectives

- Activities - to learn new skills and interests.
- Opportunity - to have social interaction and exchange
- Experience - to identify needs - deciding future programme planning and involvement.

50 girls along with staff attended on the first night from Treherbert, Maerdy, Cymmer, Trehafod, Blaenclydach, Llwynypia Boys' Club and out of district Rhydywaun in the Cynon Valley, and one of the only two males present a part-time centre Warden from Taff Ely. The other male being our own District Further Education Officer.

Four workshops were set up (Body Massage, Facial Massage, Make Up Techniques, Manicure) with two students at each, along with the latest gear and they carried out the demonstration with the girls acting as models. The groups moved freely from one to another of the workshops and were encouraged to ask questions and in turn received information.

At 9.00 p.m. we all moved into the Coffee Bar area for a light buffet and at this time the girls were encouraged to contribute to a Suggestion Box, which we had made, with ideas on what they wanted at their next meeting, when and where.

To help them with ideas we presented for topics displayed on a poster and amongst these were Look After Yourself, Diet and Healthy Eating, Self Defence, Know Your Rights, Family Planning, etc.

Eventually, one of the young girls from Trehafod Youth Club presented the students with gift tokens and thanked them for providing an interesting enjoyable evening.

The suggestion box was opened and a count began, Family Planning was the largest input with Self Defence and Know Your Rights as second and third choice. At present we are preparing and planning to hold this second meeting and hopefully we may invite a panel or forum to answer questions and provide workshops again on four topics which generate from Family Planning which are Relationships, Contraception, Well Woman Clinics and S.T.D.

We had hoped to meet earlier but with many other intrusions and breaks it has been difficult to make a firm date. We have however, made a start to encourage our older girl members to think that they can use our service by asking us to provide for their needs and make better lives for themselves through the Activities, Opportunities and Experience of the 15+ Club.

Val Evans.

Treherbert Youth Centre.