

Mottingham Residents' Association

NEWSLETTER No. 13

OCTOBER 1977

Mottingham News is written by Mottingham people about local interests. In that sense you could call it parochial. But living where we do on the edge of a big city we meet problems which are national and even worldwide in their scope. So Mottingham News is about big subjects as they affect us - individual people in a small community.

In this issue we focus on two important matters - the problems and needs of lone parents and of young people. Both are subjects of national concern, but to individual people here in Mottingham they can mean personal frustration and heartbreak.

One of the best things about a small community like ours is that we can see and understand these problems among our own neighbours and can do something to help them. There are plenty of ways in which your help is needed, and you will find some suggestions in these pages.

There is much that we can be proud of in Mottingham, but also many things that should be changed. It is the task of the Residents' Association and of Mottingham News to campaign and work for a better Mottingham, and your ideas and help are important. Please share them with us by contacting the Secretary of the Association or the Editor. You will find our addresses and phone numbers listed at the back of this issue of Mottingham News.

A LONELY BATTLE

by a Mottingham Parent

I write as head of a one parent family, female type.

I am extremely grateful for the help I have received from all directions. I have a very understanding family who stood near enough for me to feel their support without actually carrying me. Since moving here, I have met so many people who have proved to be really good friends. The Social Security officers have been very understanding but slightly amused at my stubborn wish to be as independent as I can. Independence is the crux of the matter. A lone parent, especially a lone mother, feels maybe a stigma and loss of self-respect in having to depend wholly or partially on

maintenance and Social Security. Work at home is one answer, but the parent can become very insular and this can reflect on the already unsettled children. Another answer is full time work, but then the parent is hard pressed to meet all the demands made, the three main ones being keeping the home running smoothly, earning a living, and giving the children undivided attention for a period each day.

This leaves almost no time for ordinary social activity which others take for granted. There is a desperate need to feel that you are still part of the outside world. It is all too easy to begin to feel that you are an outcast and that your only reason for living is centred upon the concern you feel for your children. After your emotional life has taken a severe knocking it is hard also to re-establish a normal level of feeling.

It is tough taking the full force of the wind on your own; and I can remember those times when I went door-knocking through a whole community in search of accommodation but without success. At the time I was jobless and didn't know about Social Security. I am one of the lucky ones who have survived, but there are thousands of lone parents who need help, many in this community.

Finding a job, especially one with the required hours, is hellish, especially when the parent wants an interesting occupation which could be developed in later years when the children are older. Local would-be employers could surely consider, for example, two lone parents working part-time to fill one full-time job. I think, though, National Insurance contributions and so on will cause problems in this case.

Another idea is to compile a list of lone parents in the community with a note of their particular trade or attributes, with a view to the parents forming small self-help groups or working parties. In Greenwich a start has been made on this, and details can be obtained from the Mini Town Hall, 247 Eltham High Street. Maybe other members of the community would be willing to give advice in their particular field. In this way lone parents could choose their own working hours to fit in with school and so on, and have the benefit of meeting other people.

Now that I have had time to stand back and think about what has been happening to me in the last few years, I would have to say that after the initial struggle to survive it has been

a battle to retain my self-respect, and now that this has in some real measure been achieved, maybe what I have experienced, both good and bad, could be a help to others who are having to travel the same road.

A national problem

That is the story of one lone parent. It could be told again more than six hundred thousand times across the country. Even here in Nottingham, if it is a typical area, there must be something like seven hundred one-parent families.

Three years ago a Government committee - the Finer Committee - found that more than a million children are living in one-parent families. The biggest group of lone parents is separated wives, the smallest is unmarried mothers - fewer than the number of lone fathers.

How do they manage? Financially one-parent families are in general worse off than two-parent families. Widows and lone fathers are slightly better off than single women, but of the remainder over half are on supplementary benefit. Of those not on supplementary benefit, 15% were found to be living below supplementary benefit level.

Housing problems are common, both because of disputes over home ownership after marriage break-up and because of difficulties in finding a home within the means of single parents.

Employment. Lone parents are helped by part time work, but this often lacks paid holidays, sick leave and pension schemes, and also is most liable to redundancy.

Day care for children. For the under-fives this means the choice between a day nursery (private or local authority) or a child minder. Playgroups and nursery schools are not open in the school holidays so are of limited use to the working lone parent. Over-fives also need care during the holidays and after school hours.

Greenwich Borough is well aware of the problems of lone parents. The Eltham Area Social Services office has had a working party investigating possible ways of helping lone parents; and a public meeting was held in July in co-operation with the Greenwich Welfare Rights Group with the aim of finding out what improvements in local services would be possible. If you need, or can offer, help, please contact the Eltham Area Officer, David Schneerson, at 247 Eltham High Street (859 0031).

4) LIFE ON A STREET CORNER

by Terry Goldsmith

Detached Youth Worker, London Borough of Bromley

The scene is a dimly lit street corner. The time is ten o'clock. The place could be anywhere but it will usually have been much frequented before. A group of eight young people, all boys, is gathered. Some lean against the wall, two sit on the pavement, others roam restlessly around, rarely still for a moment.

Conversation is minimal, the odd word tossed from one to another, but nothing more. Every now and again a particular word or expression or perhaps the gesture of an arm produces a burst of laughter from the group, but in between, the desolate silence suggests anything but hilarity.

Time passes. People come and go from a nearby pub, across the road a courting couple stroll by, subject to the inevitable jeers from the group. Two elderly ladies pass hurriedly, throwing furtive glances towards the group, but they are ignored - the boys are hardly aware of their passage.

The attention of the group is focused for a while as one of their number tells them about a girl he was with earlier that evening - his story is improbable but most of the group believe him and none challenge it. Another boy takes over the story and tells about how he got fed up with his girl friend and how upset she was when he left her, and soon the group has found a subject for conversation. But after a few minutes it peters out and the moody silence reigns once more. One by one the members of the group make an excuse - "going down to me bird's house" - and slink off home to bed.

This scene is typical. Go around Mottingham, estate or "village", any evening and the above will be observed over and over again. Of course many young people stay at home and watch T.V., some go to a youth club or perhaps to Eltham or Bromley or Catford for the cinema or a disco, but these are not obvious to the passer by, and it is the "boy on the street corner" who characterises local adolescent behaviour to the casual observer.

Life on the street corner is not all boredom of course. There are evenings when a particular happening during the day leads the group into a noisy but absorbing argument. Other

times they make off "down the fields" or to a disco at the local youth club, or round to someone's house because his parents are out for the evening.

However, the proverbial "drugs, sex and violence" play almost no part in the life of the average "bored teenager" - certainly cigarettes are smoked to help pass the time, the conversation is often dominated by "sex" and many aggressive gestures are made both towards one another and towards any passing group of boys their age or younger, but all is talk and little or nothing is action. The group live often in a fantasy world, but one which is only too often reinforced by the attitudes of other people. Few adults are interested in what life is really like for them - most prefer to accept the mythology.

The roots of street corner life are many, most common to council housing estates and local town and village centres all over the country. Many young people brought up in a working class environment find life as a whole lacking in interest. School is boring and irrelevant, job prospects are far from good, there are few leisure-time facilities locally, Mum and Dad are rowing again, the landlord throws you out of the pub as soon as you go in and you've got no money left anyway.

Petty delinquency interspersed with long periods of "hanging around" gradually becomes a way of life for such young people. "Nicking" not only provides a source of income but also gives a sense of excitement to a life otherwise singularly lacking in it. Daubing one's name on the pavement in red ink or paint makes people aware of one's existence.

Sometimes a "leader" may emerge, the group becomes a "gang" and the delinquent behaviour becomes more purposeful for a while; but most times kids simply drift into occasional delinquency, often without apparent motive and little organised or deliberate crime is committed. Every now and then violence flares up between two rival "gangs", but usually far more aggressive language than actual deeds is involved, and few, if any, people get hurt.

My job as a Detached Youth Worker, employed by the London Borough of Bromley, is to work with young people in the Mottingham and Chislehurst area of the Borough. In theory my work can be with any individual or group of young people not making regular use of Youth Service facilities; but in practice it tends to be very much with the sort of young people/

described above. My work includes counselling, advice and information giving, appearance in court on behalf of young people, helping to find jobs, providing alternative leisure time interests - fishing, community service, trips and outings, and so on - and most significantly "social education".

Many young people I meet find it difficult to understand and to come to terms with both themselves as growing, maturing human beings and also with their place within society as they see it. There is a need to give them an opportunity to talk over their feelings; to share their experiences with a sympathetic, interested adult, to ask questions they can't or won't ask their parents. Often there is also a need to extend their range of experience and to help them to learn from experience as well as to just endure it. Once one has established a degree of trust and respect with young people, the areas in which help and support can be offered are numerous, often more than one has time to deal with effectively.

My job also involves working with adults. Young people are part of a wider community, a community that can offer them immense support and guidance, and indeed can benefit in return from the enthusiasm, initiative and energy of adolescents. Potentially the community can add these advantages of youthfulness to its established assets based on the experience and maturity of adults, but sadly this does not always happen in practice.

Only too often teenagers are seen as the "enemy", as being rebellious, misguided, inscient, arrogant and sinful; and hence to be tolerated only as a necessary evil and to be avoided if possible. Young people meet rejection with rejection - they scorn the offerings of the adult world and rely instead on their teenage fantasies, they look to establish a reputation amongst their peers and to take revenge on the older generation which is so clearly hostile towards them.

This situation is no good. Adults pass rapidly by on one side of the street, young people write slogans on the wall on the other side of the street. There is a clear need for the two sides to come together and share the same side of the street, for each to treat the other with some respect and courtesy, and to demonstrate genuine enthusiasm to hear what the other has to say. As a detached youth worker I feel that I have a role to play in encouraging this process to occur whenever and however possible.

So, what is to be done? Money is of course limited, suitable premises are not always available, transport is often a difficulty, but the main problem is a lack of adult helpers. The project I am responsible for is, among other things, involved with a fishing club, a community service project and an advice and information service for young people - "Help Yourself". All of these are currently in need of more adult involvement - driving and/or instruction in techniques for fishing club members, supervision and arrangement of work for the Mottingham Community Service Project, and morning, evening or weekend sessions for "Help Yourself".

There are other ways to work with young people too - I feel there is a need for a non-commercial occasional coffee-bar in the "village" or Chislehurst. A Job Creation Programme for unemployed young unemployed young people might be possible if enough adults were interested in setting up one. Any number of trips and outings to places of interest could be run if local adults were available to help organise and staff them.

Or if you just want to help, but aren't sure what you can offer, I am sure I can find you something to do. On the other hand, if you feel there is something I or the Youth Service as a whole should be doing but isn't, then let me know about that too. I am based at Castlecombe Youth Centre on the Mottingham estate - though I do not work there at all - and can be contacted there any morning, or phone 857 0046. Alternatively, I am in contact with both the Mottingham Residents Association and the Mottingham Community Association, so messages passed through either will reach me.

Hope to hear from you soon.

HELL AND HIGH WATER

by Councillor Wendy Mitchell

For nearly ten years now a battle royal has been raging between the Thames Water Authority and the Greenwich Borough Council about the Crossmead area and whose responsibility it is to provide a relief sewer which has proved to be very necessary on a number of occasions in that part of Mottingham.

The Thames Water Authority deny that it is their responsibility although in 1975 a letter was received from them saying that funds had provisionally been set aside for the purpose of dealing with

this problem. Greenwich Borough Council say that since the 1973 Water Act they "can only carry out works of this nature acting as agents for, or on the instructions of, the Thames Water Authority". Unfortunately the ratepayers of the area fall between two stools and we have even been told that it is possible "that there is no public authority with any responsibility for these works" - an appalling situation.

Denis Howell was approached by Peter Bottomley M.P. in May this year and Mr. Howell replied that "This is a matter of interpretation of the law and ultimately may have to be resolved by the courts".

The Thames Water Authority, a faceless and unknown body, should be compelled to honour the original decision in 1975 to do these works. If they, like some of us, had to face the electorate, they would not remain in office for very long.

Meanwhile we will continue our determined fight and I hope soon that we will be able to report a successful conclusion.

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LOCAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

Bromley Borough's proposal to close Kemnal Manor Lower School for boys and Mottingham Girls' School is to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Education & Science, Mrs. Shirley Williams.

The Borough's proposals have been discussed by the Executive of our Residents' Association, and a strong majority have been opposed to them. Representations have been made to the Borough without any effect, and the secretary has now sent the following letter to the Secretary of State on behalf of the Association:-

"My organisation representing many residents in the Mottingham Ward, which falls within the London Borough of Bromley, is disturbed at current secondary education re-organisation proposals affecting the schools serving this area. This plan, we understand is due to be submitted to the Department of Education & Science in a few weeks time in response to the 1976 Education Act.

"Our main concern is that the boys' secondary school is due to be sited wholly on the Crittalls Corner site (i.e. the position of the upper school). Mottingham boys will have 4 miles to travel to a secondary school. We wish this point to

be taken into consideration when you consider the Section 13 Notice concerning Kennal Manor School (dated August 11th 1977).

"The only secondary school actually in Mottingham is Mottingham Girls School. Bromley is proposing a quick closure and expecting girls to go to Bullers Wood School (Bickley) and Beaverwood (Chislehurst). This will involve bus journeys and the additional burden of fares as both these schools are just under the 3 mile limit from Mottingham.

"Enclosed is a copy of a letter sent by our Association to Bromley Chief Education Officer, which sets out our views. At a recent public meeting held at Mottingham Girls' School attended by some 200 parents and residents, the feeling of those present was 100% against the proposed closure of the school.

"We believe that a child's education is enhanced the more parents take a deep interest in the particular school. This is not easy when schools are a long distance from the family home. Many Mottingham parents, particularly mothers, do not have cars and rely entirely on buses. Bus services do not exist to enable parents to travel easily to such schools as Kennal Manor Upper and Bullers Wood.

"We trust that you will bear these points in mind when considering Bromley's latest proposals."

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YOUR LIBRARY

by Winifred Parkinson

Sales of the new Mottingham Local History now amount to well over 500 copies and I would like to thank the readers and residents for their magnificent support. Encouraged by this, a new printing has been put in hand to ensure that over the next two years stocks will be adequate to demand.

Christmas is coming - readers tell me that they have been sending copies abroad to friends and relatives and are finding that the history makes a useful gift. We hope also to have soon a stock of greetings cards based on pictures of old Mottingham from the History.

In its small way I hope the History - and the library events during Mottingham Week - have helped to link the different parts of our community together. A link was forged with Coldharbour Library where copies are still on sale, following an attractive local history

display arranged by Miss Fish, the librarian.

Perhaps as a result of all the activities Silver Jubilee Year in the library has seen a rise in book issues in spite of reduced hours of opening. This is encouraging news both for me and for my colleagues who have worked tremendously hard to reverse the downward trend. Our hope for the future lies in educating the children to use the library, and a programme of school visits is being maintained for this purpose. Parents will greatly help by fostering interest in the local library, and we hope to see an increase in young parent membership. Next year the library will be ten years old, and it would be pleasant indeed to find ourselves as busy as we were then.

IN BRIEF

Assessment Centre: Bromley Borough has given outline planning permission for the building of a Regional Assessment Centre on the Nottingham Hall site in Nottingham Lane. The Residents' Association lodged an objection to the proposal last year and a public meeting was held to discuss the outline plan. Alternative sites having proved unsuitable, the decision has now been taken to build in Nottingham Lane. However, the project may well be delayed for lack of funds.

Playgroup: Opening of the Geffery's Homes GLC Estate and the moving of a large number of young families into Nottingham Estate has brought about a marked influx of under-fives to Nottingham, some of whom could not be accommodated at existing playgroups. A new playgroup has therefore opened at the Nottingham Community Centre, St. Keverne Road, supervised by Mrs. Dot Tolhurst of 4 Smarden Grove, SE9. The playgroup is open 9.30 - 12.15 Monday to Friday during school term time.

"You take your life in your hands": That's what it is like for pedestrians trying to cross the A20 at the traffic lights by the "Royal" public house, writes Charlie Pryke, our representative on the Eltham Road Safety Committee. There have been 14 fatal accidents on this stretch of road in the past ten years, three this year - one of them right at the junction to a lady attempting to cross.

Our Association has for years made persistent attempts to get a safer crossing, resulting in a recent extension of the "all-red" phase to help pedestrians. But the "all-red" is so short that it is almost impossible to get across if you obey (the rule

"Walk, don't run. With traffic trying to turn right, drivers jumping lights and high speed traffic down the A20, the pedestrian takes a monumental risk - though perhaps that is an unfortunate word to use.

Less Police Protection: The Metropolitan Police are proposing to make Eltham Police Station a counter station only and to close it in the evenings. The official view is that this will make no difference to policing in the area, but Councillor Ray Martin reports that local police are opposed to the change. They believe that a police officer making an arrest and needing assistance may have to seek much farther afield.

Greenwich Borough is also concerned at the proposal and has asked to be consulted before a decision is taken. The Metropolitan Police view, however, is that this is no concern of the Local Authority since, alone among police forces, it is answerable only to the Home Office.

WHO'S WHO

OFFICERS & EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 1977/78.

<u>PRESIDENT:</u>	Mr. D.L. Porter:	23, Grove Park Road, S.E.9	
<u>VICE-PRESIDENT:</u>	Mr. H. Lynn.	24, Ashdale Road, S.E.12.	357 4424
<u>CHAIRMAN:</u>	Mrs. T.G. Kirk:	10, Scotsdale Close, Orpington, Kent.	56 34034
<u>VICE-CHAIRMAN:</u>	Mr. G. Jenkins:	61, Court Farm Road, SE9.	357 8705
<u>HON. SECRETARY:</u>	Mrs. M.V. Gardner:	55, Leysdown Road, S.E.9.	357 6654
<u>HON. TREASURER:</u>	Mrs. M.E. Davies:	1, Cedar Mount, Motting- ham Lane, S.E. 9.	357 7855
<u>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:</u>			
Mr. L. Bannister:	68, Leysdown Road, S.E. 9.		357 2497
Rev. C.M. Byers:	233, Court Road, S.E. 9.		857 1691
Mr. R.C. Cambridge:	7, Lavidge Road, S.E. 9.		357 1291
Mr. J. Hollingum:	33, Devonshire Road, S.E. 9.		357 5856
Mr. J. Jeffery:	25, Westdean Avenue, S.E. 12.		
Mr. W.A. Lingham:	12, Cedar Mount, Mottingham Lane, S.E. 9.		357 2466

Mr. R. Porter: 23, Grove Park Road, S.E. 9. 857 4424
 Mr. C.R. Pryke: 76, West Hallows, S.E. 9. 857 3005
 Lt. Cdr. D. Richards: 10, West Hallows, S.E. 9. 857 5299
 Mr. H.F. South: Littleholme, Motttingham Lane,
 S.E. 9. 857 0336
 Mr. F. Winpenny: 12, Grove Park Road, S.E. 9. 857 1417

NEW ROADS SUB-COMMITTEE: Mr. L. Bannister, with
 power to co-opt.

BROMLEY RESIDENTS' FEDEFATION: Lt. Cdr. D. Richards.

ROAD SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Bromley: Mrs. T.G. Kirk.
 Greenwich: Mr. C.R. Pryke.

TOWN PLANNING: Bromley & Greenwich: Mr. G. Jenkins.

MEMBERSHIP SUB-COMMITTEE: Co-ordinator: Mr. R.C. Cambridge.

Section Leaders: Messrs. H.I. South, L. & R. Porter;
 Mesdames M.E. Davies & E. Horsman.

PUBLICITY SUB-COMMITTEE: Editor: Mr. J. Hollingum, with
 Messrs. Cambridge, Pryke, Richards and Winpenny.
 Mesdames Kirk and Gardner ex officio.

GREENWICH B.C. COMMITTEES (Planning, Environmental and Tree
 Groups): Mr. F. Winpenny.

ELTHAM SOCIAL SERVICES (Area 5) GROUP:

Mr. W.A. Lingham and Rev. C. Byers

CENTRAL ELTHAM RESIDENTS' COMMITTEE: Mr. F. Winpenny and
 Mr. W.A. Lingham.

GROVE PARK COMMUNITY GROUP: Mr. J. Jeffery.

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