

Chairs Report

The last twelve months have been probably the most challenging and difficult since the beginning of the PCC. We have seen our membership soar and towards the end of the summer during 2003 had to make the decision not to promote ourselves further in order to not "overstretch" our limited resources. We have supported a record number of parents around SEN tribunals, DLA, Appeal/tribunals and other difficult meetings at school or elsewhere. We continue to ensure that appropriate representation is ensured at planning and commissioning groups at every level, across every district.

Responding to demand in May, we started a twice monthly meeting in Syston where families could meet for information support and a chance to meet other carers. Due to having a trained play leader at every meeting, this has meant that a cup of tea has often been drunk in relative peacenot a common event for most carers. We were careful to choose our venue as we did not want to be pushed into a "grotty" hall - we are actually in bright, clean and modern surroundings and we hope this makes us feel more welcoming.

At a national level we have been just as busy, we had a parent's representative on a government's group looking at Play & Leisure with Frank Dobson. Due to our success in working and advising on the N.S.F (National Service Framework) guidelines, we have become much more in demand to advise nationally on our model of consultation and support. We also have a parent representative who has been advising the length and breadth of the country on Inclusive Playgrounds. Several of our volunteers have spoken at both national and regional conferences and are assisting in forthcoming national workshops.

One of our main achievements this year has been our links with the **Database and Information Service**. As many of you are aware, the PCC provided an enormous amount of consultation and advice around the formation of this service. All of our views were not only listened to, but were incorporated into the structure and workings of the service. As a committee we were so impressed that after consultation we decided to work as closely as possible to provide an even more efficient service for carers. We now actively promote joint membership of the two databases.

We have representatives who sit on the Database and Information Service multi-agency planning group around information sharing (through their newsletters etc), and I myself am Chair of the multi-agency management Board who provide the ultimate 'steer' for the service.

The employment of workers will ultimately serve to strengthen us and enable the PCC to grow. I have deliberately not intimated that we will become more 'professional' as I do not think any of our volunteers have ever been perceived as anything other/. I am immensely proud when I hear of the respect and esteem in which they are held. We work at all levels and I feel that we are treated as equal partners and our policy is such that 'tokenistic' representation is not

tolerated. The introduction of the £20 honorarium to cover expenses has not only simplified the accounting system, but has helped to make our volunteers feel valued and supported.

AS usual at this time of year I thank all of the parents and representatives who have given up some of their valuable time to help and support others. No two work the same way, we all have different skills yet each one is crucial to maintaining our work across the City, County and Rutland, and I thank them all on behalf of the committee. Any amount of time that can be spared is always gratefully accepted and the committee will do all it can to support regarding childcare, expenses etc.

This year I also wish to thank the many statutory agencies that we have worked with over the past 12 months. There have been many individuals who have supported us as parents and collectively as the PCC. We have forged excellent links with most agencies and have always managed to maintain a dialogue even at times under difficult circumstances. We have a few parents who now chair important multi-agency groups and are treated fairly, respected for their views and made to feel welcome. I personally feel that the PCC has been responsible to some degree in breaking down the barriers between agencies and parents, thus enabling a more useful dialogue -long may it continue

Kathy Pearson