

# **CENTRE 70**

## **40<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY 1970-2010**

### **MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND TRUSTEES**

**Countless people have been helped with advice and counselling from the Centre since June 1970.**

**Though the services which have been given will have changed over time, the thrust of Centre 70's work has remained constant: "to promote the benefit of the inhabitants of Norwood and the neighbourhood and to relieve their need, hardship or distress caused by social or economic circumstances". The need is as pressing today as it was in 1970.**

**Many people have given time, skill and money to support the work of Centre 70 over the past 40 years. To them - whether our highly dedicated staff, volunteer counsellors, members of the Monday evening panel of volunteer lawyers, funding agencies or donors, and Trustees - the community of Norwood and south Lambeth owes a deep debt of thanks.**

**Sadly, it has not been possible to contact all those who have contributed to Centre 70 over this period, but to their representatives who are able to join the celebration this evening, we offer a warm welcome - and many happy returns.**

**Anthony Merifield (Chairman)**  
**Martin Beard (Company Secretary)**  
**Jacobo Borrero**  
**Charles Carne**  
**Jacob Ecclestone**  
**Alison Farrow**  
**Sue Fish**  
**Nigel Franks**  
**Jill Panni**  
**Amanda Parry**  
**Michael Perry (Treasurer)**  
**Leanne Targett-Parker**

**24 June 2010**

## 1970-2010

### BEGINNINGS

Centre '70 Community Association (now *Centre 70*) was formally instituted at a public meeting held on 24 June 1970, with the Rev Ralph Blow as chairman and Mr Denis Gildea as secretary of the meeting. The first constitution was drafted by Denis Gildea with help from Mr John Fraser, a local solicitor and MP for Norwood. Denis Gildea served as secretary to the management committee through the 1970's and was chairman in the mid-1980s

The idea for a community association grew out of two different problems. First, the Rev Norman Watts, of Roupell Park Methodist Church, needed to redevelop his seriously war-damaged building in a way that met the day-to-day needs of the community. An ecumenical advocate, he contacted neighbouring churches and plans were drawn up for the new building which could be used as a community centre during the week and for worship on Sundays. Mr Watts planned to open the building in 1970 (hence our name).

In parallel, All Saints Church, West Dulwich, found that their "good neighbour" work had identified considerable social needs in the Norwood and Tulse Hill area. These needs would be exacerbated by Lambeth Council's plans for a major "housing-gain" development. Among the local people drawn into the early discussions on the creation of Centre 70 Community Association were the ministers or representatives of All Saints West Dulwich; Emmanuel Church, Clive Road; SS Simon and Jude (RC); Roupell Park and Chancellor Grove Methodist Churches; St Cuthbert's United Reformed Church and the Salvation Army. Funds were raised to employ Mrs Sally Winter, a qualified social worker, so that Centre 70 could support, initiate and strengthen local groups in order to ensure that the social implications of change were heeded. Her work expanded when she was also appointed to supervise a student training unit funded by the Department of Health and Social Security. This project offered group and community fieldwork placements to students on social work courses (the Student Unit, latterly called the Practice Learning Centre, continued until 1997).

These students helped local people to set up playgroups, social clubs for the elderly, tenants' associations, and also residents' associations concerned with planning issues, housing, rents and repairs, safe play areas, traffic problems, inadequate community facilities and the needs of the elderly.

Of particular note was Sally Winter's work with the Rev John Wiltshire of Emmanuel Church, and his wife Pat, in setting up *Clive Comcare* to support old people in the Clive Road area where they were facing major housing redevelopment. A survey carried out by two students showed that 64% of the elderly had lived in the area all their lives and did not want to be re-housed away from their community. *Clive Comcare*, with Centre 70 as a partner, presented this evidence at a public enquiry in January 1974. The proposed scheme was rejected and the partial redevelopment which was allowed ensured that older people were re-housed within their existing networks.

Centre 70 was also involved, through the Rev Jonathan Winter, a management committee member and at that time a curate at All Saints, in raising funds for a scheme in Brockwell Park aimed at preventing black youths from involvement in street crime. A major fundraiser was Kenneth Prideaux-Brune of Centre 70. Herman (now Lord) Ousely was its project secretary. This concern for ethnic minorities was reflected later when Centre 70 promoted a Black Elderly Luncheon Club in Norwood.

In his introduction to the annual report for 1978-79, Frank Broome, the then chairman, pointed to the ethos of the Centre 70 Community Association. As central and local government regulations grew ever more complex, he wrote that ordinary citizens needed to know more about their rights and responsibilities, and be encouraged to use the information gained. *"Centre 70 believes that the best way to meet the citizen's need for information, advice and assistance is by small centres serving particular communities or localities"*.

Centre 70 worked with a network of some 20 local affiliated organizations, including a one-parent families association and parents' forum, centres for the elderly, a Norwood neighbourhood network and playgroups. These last included the Lily Davis Playgroup for Handicapped Children, which was later continued by Pam Secrett as a separately registered charity. From 1973 to 1984 Hazel Gildea ran a much used London Marriage Guidance service for some three half days at Centre 70, thus bedding the service in the local community.

In the early 1970s a small advice service was set up with Diana Thompson as the first organiser. Diana started a Monday evening lawyers' rota, with her (later) husband, Mike Petrou, as one of its first volunteer members. The Monday evening lawyers' rota continues after 40 years, and many solicitors and barristers have given their time to provide free legal advice to Centre 70 clients. Two specialist advice-workers dealt with enquiries through the week, with support from the community workers and some lay volunteers. In the mid-1970's, Ian James became the senior advice worker, and stayed until 1988.

An early debate at Centre 70 concerned the best way to strike a balance between the "advice" given to clients individually, and "empowerment" through work with community groups. If the emphasis now has swung to the advice side, this probably reflects the mounting weight of regulation and complex legislation that now governs welfare, debt and housing matters.

In its early days Centre 70 sought properties in Norwood Road to supplement its use of the hall at Roupell Park Methodist Church in Christchurch Road. A second hand shop selling household goods, and running a furniture service, was set up in Norwood Road in 1978, finally closing in January 1997.

For some years Centre 70 ran an advice and women's health project from a community flat made available rent free from the South London Family Housing Association.

As the demand for advice expanded, so we needed more space for offices and file storage. A move became necessary. In 1995 Centre 70 obtained the first of a series of short term leases from Lambeth Council on 46 Knights Hill. A landmark agreement for a long, 25-year, lease on the property was signed in 2007. This included an initial rent-free period, which enabled Centre 70 to service a £100,000 loan from the Charity Bank. Together with a generous grant from the City Parochial Foundation this has facilitated a major upgrading of the offices. Although not expected by the founder members, Centre 70's activities are needed now as much as in the days of its foundation.

## **TODAY**

A Counselling and Befriending Service had been developed during the 1980s and 1990s and continued to be a pillar of Centre 70 alongside the advice services and work with the community. But the counselling suffered severely when Lambeth rejected Centre 70's bid for a renewed contract in 2004. Now, after six difficult years, a grant from the Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust's Charitable Trustees has enabled us to re-launch a free daytime counselling service aimed at dealing with stress caused, among other things, by problems arising from the recent economic downturn.

The advice service offering specialist guidance on welfare benefits, housing matters and most recently on debt has continued and grown over 40 years. It has attracted funding from Lambeth Council and we have valued the strong support from local councillors (especially as, at one stage, a campaign was necessary to prevent the Council grant being withdrawn).

For many years Centre 70 had only two, voluntary, specialist advisers. We now employ a dozen trained workers covering several projects supported by a range of agencies and charitable donors. Around 14,000 enquiries are received annually. We value the help of central and local government agencies, and non-government donors, but it has to be said that the short term nature of some of our funding threatens the stability of our work as is so often the case in the voluntary sector.

Centre 70 can be justifiably proud of its advice services, led by Brian Foxley and Mark Batten, both of whom have been with us for more than 20 years. Mark Batten's contribution has been recognised by the award of an MBE. The work of our advisers is at the Legal Services Commission "Specialist Quality Mark", level. The counselling work is directed by a fully accredited counselling manager, Bilgi McDermott.

Finally, special thanks are owed to all those who fund and support our work. Over 40 years we have been indebted to many government, public and private institutions, including Lambeth Council and its Councillors. A list of the agencies who have funded our work over the past two and a quarter years is printed on the inside back cover.

## **THE FUTURE**

We detect few signs of a diminishing need for Centre 70's services. Indeed it is rather the reverse.

So it would be an encouragement to Centre 70 and its trustees and staff, and volunteer counsellors and lawyers, if you felt able to support us by some form of regular giving. A **Standing Order form** is enclosed and should you be able to help we hope you will consider making an annual, or quarterly or monthly payment.

Equally, Centre 70 is always looking to build up and refresh its board of trustees. If you wished to know more about **what a trustee does**, and to seek information about being considered for this role, please do send a short note to *Anthony Merifield (Chairman), Centre 70, 46 Knights Hill, London SE27 0JD*

## **Chairmen of Centre 70**

### **1970s**

The Rev Ralph Blow  
Dr Peter Wallis  
Bernard Secrett and Tom Garrud  
Aldwyn Holley  
Frank Broome. (to1984)

### **1980s**

Dennis Gildea  
Aileen Buckton  
David Gardiner  
Margaret Ecclestone

### **1990s**

Valerie Kyte  
Joan Nield  
Sonia Antoniou  
John Groves  
Marion Cavanagh

### **2000s**

Jacob Ecclestone  
Anthony Merifield