

JDA Diamond Jubilee Nostalgia 1970 – 1999



The official opening of the Resource Centre in Cazenove Road with (from left to right): Heather Grant, Pat Goldring, Desmond Wilcox, Lord Mayor of Hackney, Evelyn Gee, the late George Gee and Judith Morgan

Pat Goldring's story

To write about my twenty nine years of working at the JDA would take a couple of volumes and I don't think our Editor, Kay, would be too happy about that! So I will recall just some of the memorable events of the past.

The early days

My first contact with deaf people came in September 1970 when I went for the interview as a "very very" part-time Administrative Assistant to Dora Margulies, who was the Organising Secretary / Warden of the JDA at 90 Cazenove Road.

I was married with two young children and had not been out to work for some years, so I was rather nervous at the interview. When Mrs Margulies asked me questions about charity work, I told her that apart from putting money into charity boxes, I really did not know anything. Being a very wise lady, she could see that I was a "pretty intelligent young woman" and would quickly learn – so I got the job.

I started sending out the Rosh Hashanah Appeal. Being a housewife for some eight years, it would normally be a boring job to some people but to me it was exciting. And even more excitement was to come when the appeal money started coming in.

The JDA was about twenty years old when I started. The only staff, apart from Mrs Margulies and me, were two part-time cleaners, one being Marie Madden who later became the Housekeeper. Times were changing and so were voluntary organisations, and my volume of work grew.

After three years, I was needed for 20 hours a week and gradually, I came more and more into contact with our members by attending the various parties, the Seder service and taking on some of the welfare work as well as the office work.

I enjoyed the personal contact with the members and I made any excuse to go down to the canteen to have a cup of tea and a chat. The members and I soon became friends, exchanging stories about our lives. Communication wasn't really a problem between us, but when I heard that there were going to be sign language classes starting at the City Lit, I signed up and started to learn sign language properly in 1982 /3.

Mrs Marquies then decided to retire and I was asked to take over. Sadly, she passed away before she could enjoy her retirement and I was on my own. During those years, we shared ideas and tried to progress the work of the JDA together.

Pat as the Executive Director

In 1983 I was appointed Executive Director. Welfare work was taking on a new image and we changed the Friendship Club into a Day Centre, where our members could enjoy lunch and an afternoon activity.

I was always looking for schemes to improve the services and I managed to get the use of the Hackney Community Transport minibuses. We employed a cook so that the Wednesday Day Centre members could have a nice hot lunch.

A lot had happened during the eighties – we started sponsoring our members to take part in sporting events, educational projects, etc. We started a sign language class and Stoke Newington Police sent some of the officers to learn – all the time we were building up the image of the JDA.

I started to go out and give talks to various groups and discovered that profoundly deaf and hard of hearing people had different issues. Our work focused on the profoundly deaf, but what about the hard of hearing? This worried me. I did lots of research and came up with the idea that we needed an advisory service where hard of hearing people could come for information.

Special features

A new Resource Centre

This idea was sponsored by other deaf organisations and the Sensory Impairment Team at Hackney Social Services. My plans went into action and, after ten months, in March 1992, we opened our first Resource Centre in my old office on the ground floor at 90 Cazenove Road.

We had a Grand Opening with Desmond Wilcox (the late husband of Esther Rantzen) as the Guest of Honour. He confessed that he had a very severe hearing loss. The same evening I was asked to go along to Greater London Radio to speak about the new project and guess who interviewed me? None other than Vanessa Feltz, who was not so famous then!

I was pleased that some of our members wanted to take advantage of the new equipment in the Resource Centre and it proved to me that this should be available to deaf and hard of hearing people of all faiths, as there were not many Resource Centres around.

Many hard of hearing people and professional Social Workers visited the Resource Centre and we were invited to go out with our bag of portable equipment to give talks and demonstrations. We asked the Council if we could open another Resource Centre in North West London. The late Mr George Gee lost no time in finding me a room in Golders Green, and I was delighted that Helen Rabin joined the staff to run the Golders Green Centre, along with a band of dedicated volunteers.

On the move

It became the members' wish to move away from Cazenove Road. I mentioned this to my Committee and they listened carefully and made the decision to sell and buy another property. Easier said than done! We had an idea of where we wanted to go and when the Woodside Park site was suggested, the Executive Council, some of the members and I approved the location. It was a bare piece of land and it was just waiting for us.

90 Cazenove Road was put up for sale and, due to the tremendous efforts of our late Norman Prozzer, it was sold to our neighbours. The next two years was a time of worry, laughter, joy and tears. The plans were approved and altered and approved and altered again! Barnet Council had to be notified of every little change, which delayed the progress of building and this frustrated us.

Horrors of horrors, the date came when we had to move, and the new building was not yet ready. My conscience would not let me run away although I wanted to! Instead, the late Mr Gee found us a place in Alymer Parade, East Finchley, and there we remained for seven months.

I arranged for our Day Centre to use the Muswell Hill Synagogue Hall on Wednesdays. After more delays, we were delighted to join Jewish Care's Stamford Hill Centre where we were made most welcome.

Moving into Julius Newman House

In February 1998, bit by bit, we moved into the new Julius Newman House, Woodside Park Road. The official opening in June was an exciting occasion and I was glad I hadn't run away! My secretary Kathy moved with us, after a lengthy period making up her mind. Helen Rabin moved with us to run the new Resource Centre, together with Judith Morgan who had previously worked at Cazenove Road.

We soon became complete with Katy Solomon and Kay Kaufman joining the staff and Mira Goldberg moving in with Koleinu. The late Ivan Clements very ably drove the Community Transport minibus from Stamford Hill, so that our members living there could get to the new Centre easily.

The planned projects were soon put into action. Sign language classes, under the direction of Kay Kaufman and Irene Spielsinger, resulted in wonderful pass rates for BSL Level 1 (then Stage 1). Our computer classes, under Martin Bogard, were well attended and still are today. The Central Committee was very active and we did well.

My own work touched many people's lives. I made many friends. I celebrated Simchas with the members, Barmitzvahs, marriages, anniversaries and birthdays, and I shed tears with them when we suffered a bereavement. My title was "Executive Director" but I preferred to be called "friend".

Pat's retirement in 1999

All good things come to an end and I decided to retire in 1999, knowing that the JDA was a successful, respected organisation and I could sit back and reflect on having done a very satisfactory job. Anybody who is a part of JDA, whether they be a member, staff, volunteer or Trustee, should be very proud. As former Executive Director, I certainly am indeed.

Pat Goldring