Forgotten histories of childcare will now be told

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The work has been made possible thanks to a grant of £197,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The Planned Environment Therapy Trust will give former children, staff and families the chance to record their memories as well as getting involved in archive conservation, creating a website and DVD and performing theatrical pieces drawn from the material collected.

The project will help preserve rare and vulnerable documentation held by the Trust at its Archive and Study Centre while augmenting this with newly gathered information. More than 100 volunteers will be involved in a series of archive weekends where training will be given in research, interviewing, recording, editing, and designing and maintaining websites.

The material will be gathered mainly from five former therapeutic schools and communities, all of which will have their own pages on the new website. Information plaques will also be unveiled at or near the site of each of the therapeutic communities to celebrate their involvement.

Project Director Dr. Craig Fees, said: "To ensure a rich participation in this fascinating area of the heritage, we will be working closely with thriving therapeutic environments for children and young people such as the Mulberry Bush School in Oxfordshire. But the main body of the project will focus on several which have now closed, such as Bodenham Manor in Herefordshire, Wennington School in Yorkshire, Hengrove School in Hertfordshire, Shotton Hall in Shropshire, and Red Hill School in Kent. We will also be working closely with the Caldecott Association, which is for former children and staff of the Caldecott Community in Kent."

Using the material gathered through research and interviews, those taking part will work with theatre professionals and performing arts students to devise a dramatic presentation that will be shown at a range of venues, including therapeutic schools, training courses, conferences and special events.

Commenting for the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF South West England, Nerys Watts, said: “This project will perform a valuable task by enabling those with first-hand knowledge of the work undertaken in therapeutic communities to create a body of knowledge that, for the first time, will be made available to a wide audience. It also provides excellent training in a wide range of skills for the volunteers involved."

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms our heritage. Through their grant making, HLF aims to conserve the UK's diverse heritage for present and future generations to experience and enjoy; help more people, and a wider range of people, to take an active part in and make decisions about their heritage; and help people to learn about their own and other people's heritage. HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, including £404.7 million of grants to 3,015 projects in the South West.

The Planned Environment Therapy Trust (Registered Charity No. 248633) was founded in 1966 by therapeutic

community pioneers Dr. Marjorie Franklin, David Wills OBE and Arthur Barron. The aims and objects were “To investigate and study, publish results and expositions, and train workers and eventually carry out in practice methods of treatment of: emotionally disturbed, maladjusted, or delinquent children: young persons or adults, by means of planned environment therapy, especially in association with specialised psychotherapy". Since 1989 its main work has been the development of the Archive and Study Centre.

In 2002 the Trust opened the Barns Conference Centre in Toddington near Cheltenham, to support the work of the Archive and Study Centre with facilities for day and residential seminars, conferences, meetings, and events.

In 2007 the Trust joined with the History of Medicine Unit at the University of Birmingham to encourage and facilitate research, training, and publication by forming the Institute for the History and Work of Therapeutic Environments (IHWTE), based in the Archive and Study Centre.

In 2008 the Trust agreed to provide a base for the Child Care History Network, and to use the resources of the Archive and Study Centre to facilitate networking, communication and growth. The inaugural conference of the Child Care History Network was held at the Barns Conference Centre in October 2008. Childcare History Network website.

The Handicapped Pupils and School Health Service Regulations (1945) was the first official recognition of a group of children who required care rather than punishment. This coincided with the establishment of a handful of residential therapeutic schools, clinics, camps and hostels to treat rather than punish children. The therapeutic approach developed by early pioneers had a major influence on legislation and practice which contributed in helping change professional and public attitudes towards children and childcare in postwar Britain.

Further information

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Planned Environment Therapy Trust Archive and Study Centre website.

Find out more about the Other People's Children Project.