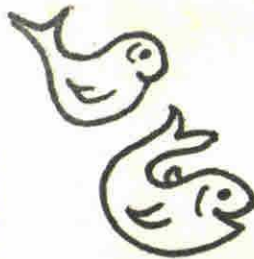
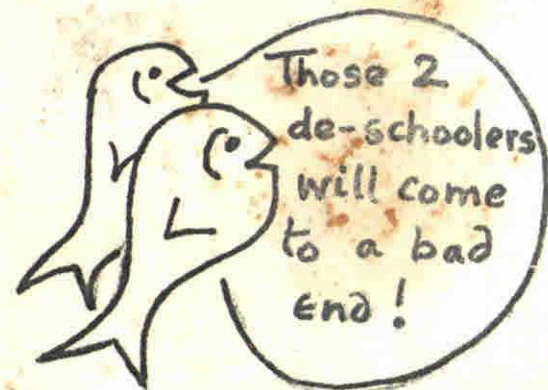
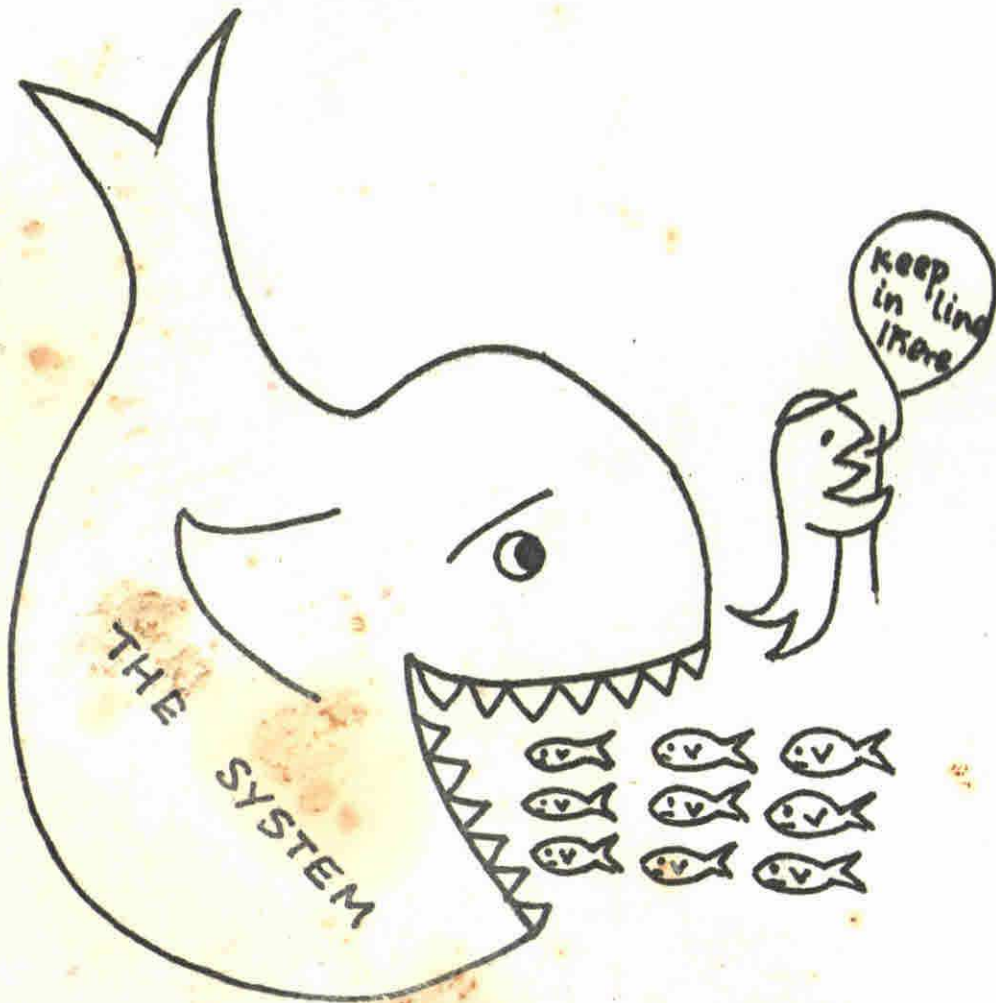


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NEWSLETTER NUMBER FOUR, NOVEMBER 1977

This Newsletter is overdue and we apologise for this. Now it has arrived we hope that you will be able to find time to read it carefully because it contains one or two important news items.

- Our need for members who are able to give active help. - Please read the first report in "The Core Groups and the Advisory Group". Think whether you wish to become an active member and how much commitment you can give, and then write to me.

- The London Meeting. - Please, if you live within a reasonable distance try to come to this, especially if you are practising EO. There is a great need for those who are showing an interest to have an opportunity to meet those who are actually doing it.

- Events. - Please read this and let me know your views on the form at the end of the newsletter so that we can decide what events people would like next summer.

- The Newsletter. - How valuable is it? How much of it do you read? What other items, articles, information would you like to see in it?

I think most people feel that the articles written by parents are really heartening and valuable and I hope you will continue to send them, together with any bits of information, etc, that you think people would find valuable. We would also like more items from EO children, and more ideas for the front cover, please.

Note especially our requests for information on ACE and WHERE, on Montessori methods, on 3,4,5 and don't forget to let me know if you wish to subscribe to Growing Without Schooling.

Dick Kitto

This Newsletter was put together by Sarah Guthrie and Dick Kitto. The next Newsletter will be published in the middle of February and items for it should be sent to Lower Shaw Farmhouse by the end of January.

The Education Otherwise Newsletter is published four times a year from

Education Otherwise
Lower Shaw Farmhouse
Shaw, Swindon, Wilts

THE CORE GROUP AND THE ADVISORY GROUP

There are now nearly a hundred of you and the numbers are increasing slowly but steadily. Many of you are content to receive the Newsletter, and other information; perhaps you are waiting for your children to reach school age, perhaps you wish to show support for EO without actually practising it yourselves. That is fine, we do very much want 'passive' support of this kind, and are very grateful to all of you who give it. On the other hand perhaps some of you would, if encouraged, like to take a more active role but are not quite sure what is involved or confident that you can do anything useful. We feel that Education Otherwise has reached a stage where it would very much benefit from a big input of active support and the purpose of this article is to explain ways in which everyone could contribute.

Until now Education Otherwise has been launched and run by a core group which was more or less self-selected. They were a group of people who came together over a period at Lower Shaw Farm and decided that an organisation was needed, that it was worth setting it up, and that they were prepared to put the commitment and energy into doing this. From about this time last year until last summer the group met regularly once every five or six weeks and between them undertook the considerable amount of work that was needed. There are two reasons why several of that group are now withdrawing: the first is the sheer volume of work, plus the time and expense of frequent long journeys to our meeting places. The second is that Education Otherwise has now reached a period when local groups, local advice and local networks are becoming increasingly important, and it seems better for the more distant core group members to devote their time to fostering these. There are I think two needs here - one is the small local group where families within an area get together to practise Education Otherwise and perhaps to involve and influence other families in their immediate vicinity. The other need is to have spread throughout the country a network of people with experience and some expertise who can help people or groups within their area with their problems, especially with situations when families are being pressurised or harassed by the authorities.

The following have so far agreed to act in this capacity as local advisors covering quite a large area:

		Tel: 0357 21623
Scotland	Ken & Catherine Byron, Avonbank, Strathaven	
S Yorkshire	Mike & Anne Lydiat, 537 Crooksmoor Rd, Sheffield	
		Tel: 0742 668780
Birmingham	Roland & Shirley Meighan, 7 Green Lane, Great Barr	
		Birmingham 021 357 6603
N London	Sarah Guthrie, 4 Westover Road, London SW18	
	(temporary address)	Tel: 01 870 3861
W London	Peter & Nancy Scott, 48 Half Acre Rd, London W7	
		Tel: 01 579 9184
Cornwall	Sandra Holmes, Briars End, Perranporth	
		Tel: P 3423
Northants	Nigel and Paula Theobald, 34 Church View Rd,	
	Desborough	0536 761076
Midlands	Stan Windass, The Rookery, Adderbury, Banbury	
		Tel 0295 810993
Suffolk	James & Jackie Fearnley, The Homestead, Metfield,	
	Harleston	037 986

These people will give personal support and whenever possible advice to others in their neighbourhood. In order to limit their work load as far as possible we suggest that they restrict their commitments in two ways:

(i) Apart from brief initial contacts, which will emphasise the advice to "join Education Otherwise", they will only give individual advice to members of Education Otherwise.

(ii) They will try to concentrate their advice on matters relevant to EO, and not to other problems connected with schooling or childhood.

Obviously these are guidelines only - they won't and shouldn't be adhered to strictly, and how each advisor operates will be left to his or her own discretion; these suggested limits are an attempt to give people some self-protection. For example I find myself spending large chunks of time trying to give help to people who assure me that they are all in favour of EO and are going to join any day now, but in the meantime they have this problem at school etc etc. Days later and much phone money having been expended, they say thank you so much, and I never hear of or from them again.

You'll see that the list of advisors does cover quite a wide area, but really we need an advisor in every town of the UK, so this is the first way in which you might be able to help - Are there any of you who are willing to have people referred to you? No high-powered expertise is required, but personal experience of EO is a great help and so is some experience and confidence in dealing with Education Authorities and other official bodies. The sort of role that advisors can play is spelled out in Ken Byron's article later on in this Newsletter.

Advisors may cover an area of 30 miles or more (Ken covers the whole of Scotland!) but there is also a role for the local group covering an area small enough to enable people to meet regularly. The article later on by James and Jackie Fearnley gives an idea of some of the opportunities and problems that arise. We feel strongly that the small local group is the best way ahead for EO and that we shall soon see a time when many parents deliberately move to areas where such groups exist, just as now parents deliberately move to areas that are reputed to have good schools.

At present there are not many local groups, though several people are in the throes of trying to start them up. (For example Peter Jones in Stroud is trying very hard and would welcome contact with families who might consider moving to that area - Peter Jones, Pathways, London Road, Thrupp, Stroud)

Of course some people who start local groups may also be on the advisory panel, but it is not necessary to do both; and if you have limited time and resources, it is probably better to put your heart and soul into one job than try to spread your energies too wide.

And now the CORE GROUP - What does it do? Well it is a sort of Steering Group, perhaps of a temporary nature, until we are large enough to feel the need for a formal constitution and democratic structure with Councils, etc. It meets, it discusses what needs to be done next and it does it, or sees that it's done somehow. It has been responsible for the Newsletter and for our two other publications. It contacts and meets other organisations. It arranges meetings. It acts as a sounding board for future policy. It does not require any special expertise but it does need people who are able to meet regularly (probably in London or Swindon) and who are willing to put in a bit of energy - not a lot, so please don't be put off by the fear that you are going to be overwhelmed with more work than you can ever manage. Say about one meeting every six weeks or so (definitely not more, on the average) and perhaps one or two days' other work spread over that six week period.

The next meeting of the Core Group will follow the London meeting on 21 January and will take place from 2.00 onwards and we would like to make this a general meeting of as many as possible of those who are willing to undertake an active role (whether as members of the Core Group, advisors or local organisers) who are able to come.

FINANCE

All these jobs are voluntary ones, and so far we have no paid workers in EO and of course could not afford one. We are however supported by Alternative Society and Lower Shaw Farm in that they pay for a lot of the administrative costs. This however is likely to cease in May 1978, and it is very clear to me that if EO is to go forward as it should, it cannot be self-supporting but must have an injection of funds from a Trust or elsewhere. Has anyone any ideas about this?

What I feel about expenses is this: Local groups should be self-supporting, though in cases of special need they could apply to EO for a small amount of financial help. Local advisors should certainly have their reasonable expenses paid; if they are prepared to give their time, they should not be inhibited from necessary action by cost. (Though they should keep in mind that EO's total income is in the region of £350 pa).

Costs for the Core Group - that is a problem. We certainly ought to pay them - but if this involves regular payment of fares from a distance, we may just not be able to.

I think this is perhaps one of the first decisions the new Core Group may have to make. But anyway, if anyone feels they would like to join any of these active groups, they should not hesitate to come to the next meeting (on 21 January) on account of cost - we will definitely meet it on this occasion.

LEGAL PROBLEMS

This follows closely on 'finance' because unless we are lucky enough to find some fairy godmother lawyer who will advise us for a minimal or no cost, we have to face the likelihood of paying for legal advice occasionally and perhaps also of paying quite substantial legal fees in one or more test cases.

Does anyone know of a lawyer who has a personal interest in the idea of EO and might take our affairs to his heart, and who would not be too expensive?

To sum up, members seem to have five options:

1. To pay their sub and lie low - fair enough, no-one is going to be pressganged or made to feel guilty for doing this.
2. To concentrate on practising EO and hopefully let us know from time to time how they are getting on. Again, fair enough, you are the grass roots families whom this movement is all about.
3. To join the Core Group - meet (initially in London) regularly and do a fair amount of work.
4. To become a Regional Advisor. To be on call for support and advice - very difficult to estimate how much work this will involve, it might be very variable.
5. To start a local group. This is perhaps the most exciting role and one which demands a full commitment, but is one of the most central and hopeful initiatives that EO families can take.

Will anyone who feels they would like to participate in any of these ways please write to me. Will they also try to come to the meeting in London on the afternoon of Saturday 21 January. (Please fill in form at end of Newsletter). They would also be very welcome to come to the 'London' meeting in the morning.

EVENTS

Last summer we held a get-together for EO families at Lower Shaw which everyone seemed to enjoy. On the strength of this we felt that one service EO could provide would be to arrange such get-togethers periodically and perhaps extend these to having some educational content for children and/or parents. So we arranged two further events here during the summer and autumn. Both these were seriously underbooked, and the autumn one had to be cancelled.

So do people want events or not? And if so, what sort of events? Residential, regional day events (like the one in London in January), educational?

We do not want to go to the trouble of arranging and advertising events and then have to disappoint people by cancelling them. Also, if they are to be at Lower Shaw, we cannot afford to book events during the season that subsequently have to be cancelled at a loss.

Please will everyone who is interested fill in the questionnaire about events at the end of this Newsletter and return it to me.

NOTES FROM PARENTS

From Jackie Fearnley, Harleston

Since my report on our group in East Anglia (now called Children First) quite a lot has happened. We had a successful first meeting in our village hall in July involving 8 families, 4 of whom were teaching, or going to teach, their children at home. The others considered home teaching a definite possibility but wanted to find out more before committing themselves. This was followed by various informal get-togethers of different people during the summer and a more publicized meeting at the house Brian and Sarah Guthrie were renting near here. Several new families came to this meeting including one woman who had taught her (now adult) son for a few years through the Parents' Educational Union and one family who were trying to decide whether to keep their child at home who was at an assessment centre and possibly autistic.

One of the new people - a teacher not keeping her children at home - offered to arrange the next meeting at her house and send out notices and agendas. There was some opposition to this degree of formality but it was agreed that she should go ahead. The agenda for this meeting was concerned mainly with aspects of organisation but James and I felt we had first to decide whether it was worth forming a group at all where many of the people were not in fact educating their children at home. We were concerned that the energy coming from people actually 'doing it' could be dampened or diverted (with the best intentions) by people who wanted to be involved yet not committed in the same way. We were also slightly worried that in a group where the majority of children were in school the values and tensions we wanted to avoid would nevertheless be passed on to those being taught at home. In the end we decided it was worth carrying on for a variety of reasons. Several people in the group genuinely wanted to help and wanted some time to work out what they themselves would do about the question of school. There would be the benefit of social contact for our children and another boy who was out of school and it would form a focal point for others to contact us.

It was obvious at this meeting that 3 original families had dropped out and I think for two of them the reason was the (probably healthy) suspicion of 'too much paper' and scepticism about the motives of people who want to help without being committed through keeping their own children at home. On the other hand it is difficult to see how other

families who might feel the same, have children of similar ages, live near, etc can be contacted without some amount of organisation in the form of a newsletter, regular meetings and advertisements. It would be interesting to know how other groups have tackled the problem. Several of the people have children at present under school age and have not yet decided what to do about school - for some the decision is dependent on how things work out with the group. There are one or two single parents who feel more conscious of their children's need for social contact.

On the positive side - we had a very successful meeting last Sunday at our house which took the form of a 'craft afternoon'. At previous meetings the children have had plenty of 'play' materials and equipment and one or two older girls helping to organize things, which has given the adults a chance of an hour or so of relatively peaceful talking. This time we decided we'd done enough talking and we'd see how we got on in a teaching/learning situation. The main activities were weaving - including the setting up a simple loom, and working with clay. Everyone brought food and there was a very nice atmosphere of caring and co-operation as we worked together - the adults learning as much as the children. Conditions were rather overcrowded (with 17 adults and 18 children present) but everyone seemed to get on well together and to be able to have a chance of being absorbed in something. Several people suggested we should repeat this type of event with only one activity, more opportunity for demonstration and questions, or with smaller groups.

The next meeting is planned as a musical event. In the group we have a music therapist who runs a youth centre at Framlingham which we can use, so there should be space for dancing as well. At this meeting too we shall probably get someone to bring a selection of children's paperbacks.

We are rather widely scattered but do manage to meet individually between times. Other functions developing are book-exchange (eg on educational theory, psychology and related areas), a newsletter which we hope will bring some more publicity, passing on of children's clothes, and a register of facilities and skills able to be provided by people in the group. We produce a regular piece for a local Arts newspaper and have had various articles in other newspapers. We are also in touch with the Cambridge Free School and some people who functioned as a tutorial group in the Norwich/Aylsham area.

From Ken Byron, Strathaven

EO Advisors

The idea of 'EO Advisors' came to me recently after I had helped a family wanting to begin EO in presenting their case to an obstructive LEA. When this family contacted me they were feeling that perhaps they had already lost the battle,

having received what seemed like a 'blockbuster' of a letter from the LEA. When I saw this letter it was fairly clear to me that in fact it had more bark than bite and that with patience and a polite but firm approach on their part there was no reason why this family couldn't win acceptance for their EO project without having to fight any major battles. It proved to be so. Now, several months later, they are just getting on with EO without any real worries or harrassment from the authorities.

This experience led me to think that EO ought if at all possible to expand the help it offers about presenting a case to an LEA. The "First Steps to Education Otherwise" give clear, general guidelines, but some people at best may need more specific help with particular problems or challenges by the LEA, eg what to say on this "inspection", or in reply to this letter. I was able to help this family because I had

- i) experience in presenting a case to an LEA, and close knowledge of the way several other people had done it
- ii) an educational background - ie experience as a teacher
- iii) some understanding of the way LEA administrators think, and what makes them do/say things, and consequently what are appropriate reactions to them

I think that access to "expert advice" can make all the difference in the world when negotiating with an LEA and so I was led to the idea of a number of Advisors - people willing to help in this way. Obviously there is sense in having a reasonable geographical coverage of Advisors - personal contact is probably the best method of support. But it can be through the post - in the case I have referred to, my contact with the EO family consisted of an exchange of several letters and one phone call.

I think Advisors would need to have to some degree the three things I mentioned above, and over and above that be prepared to offer help (advice and time) quickly in response to often urgent requests

From Sandra Holmes, Cornwall

There was an advertisement in the West Briton on 4 August which I placed there on behalf of the National Association for Gifted Children. As a result the press and radio rang up for interviews. I gave the same fully balanced interview to each and two wrote up a responsible, suitably factual piece while the third, Cornwall's answer to the Reveille, gave bent to his creative imagination. I was particularly amused by the following:

"Little James Holmes is too clever for his teachers. He is only six years old. But he has already produced his own newspaper, fallen in love with the music of Strauss and exchanged letters with Margaret Thatcher. His mother said 'He is not a genius, he is just bright'". !!!
- you could have fooled me!!

So let me warn anyone else in the same position that no matter how carefully balanced the interviews, a total of six hours in all, each will pick out the bits that appeal to him and present a totally different picture of the subject no matter how you stress that you want an impersonal, factual piece of writing. Luckily, in our case, two out of three responsible reports gave a fair balance.

Inevitably education at home was mentioned and I sat back awaiting the fanatics. None rang me. I had three direct enquiries and several indirect ones, all from extremely responsible people. Of these, one lady in particular stood out. She had expected that her child would go to a particular school in the area. Instead she was programmed for another which the mother considers to be of a lower standard. When she asked the head if she could look around the school and see the work he refused, a bad sign. Reading about me gave her a possible answer to a problem which, before, had been insurmountable. I told her to write to EO for literature, explained things to her and gave her a week to think things over. One week later she was still determined and she visited me. Again we discussed all aspects thoroughly, I made no bones about the work involved, showed her all my equipment, etc, and left her to discuss the situation, examine her motives and so on. She rang me again still determined.

It is fair to say that this lady is not qualified although she "ought" to have been and has taken an O level course after leaving school. In other words she is an intelligent young woman who was not able to stay on at school for various reasons and, from the ideas she discussed with me, I realised that she had the potential to provide a full and exciting curriculum for her daughter.

She has already taken three very responsible steps in asking EO for advice, beginning now so that she will know by the time her daughter is five, in a few months' time, whether she can cope successfully and finding, as I advised, someone within her area who might be willing to assist and advise her. She approached a retired teacher she knew. Unfortunately this lady appeared to go berserk, for want of a better word, laying down the law, telling her that her proposed course was irresponsible and illegal, only teachers could teach children, bright children would thrive under any conditions and so on. Frankly, I find such basic ignorance abysmal - thank God she never taught my children!

Anyway, the lady rang me up for reassurance. She was a little shaken but still determined and I would be grateful if any of you who have advice to offer her or who are in a similar position ie no formal qualifications but coping successfully would write to her. I have given her the names of one or two qualified people in her area but I am sure that the advice and encouragement of other EO members would restore her confidence. Please write to Mrs Godliman care of my address and I will pass the letters on when I visit her.

From Mr Hamsworth, Maidstone

Mr Hamsworth has given up his job to educate his two boys at home, and recently another boy from the area has joined his group. The improvement in the boys' work over quite a short period is remarkable, it has to be seen to be believed.

Mr Hamsworth is not a trained teacher, and he is being summonsed by his LEA under Section 39 of the Education Act because of his son's non-attendance at the school at which he is registered. The result of this summons and a report on the hearing will appear in our next newsletter.

"If you think you are right, do you fight for that belief against apparently impossible odds, when one can stay quiet and do nothing, or not? I decided to fight and this is my story to date.

Good school or not? Do you care? If you are reading this, then there must be a good chance you do.

How do you know your child is doing well? The teacher says so, the report was good.

I put it to you, that if you were told to throw your child over a cliff by a school (in his best interest of course) you would check the validity of that request.

If your answer was to the affirmative, why do you take their word on your child's education without checking? They must be right because they are teachers; he would not lie - he is the headmaster. If only you knew ...

If all parents gave their children a basic maths test, I believe 75% at least would begin to start asking questions. The same would apply with spelling. But parents do not realise what is going on and are being systematically conned.

One does not have to be an educational expert to realise a child of 12/13 years should be able to read, write, spell (a little) multiply and divide.

At sixteen what will the school say? (and you will believe them) "We tried everything but your child is not very bright, it is not our fault." Mind you he/she will still leave proudly clutching a failure certificate, CSE 3, 4 or 5 which the headmaster will gladly add to his impressive pass-rate tally - that's right, the one he used to convince you your child was in a good school. I have found kids with this certificate unable to cope with basics.

It still amazes me how parents who are good in all aspects allow their child to be systematically disabled by a poor education. I do not mean that every child should reach university or even obtain an 'O' level, what I do say is that every child should reach his or her maximum and be happy in the process. Any child given the correct atmosphere and stimulus will obtain the basics to live.

There is this other impressive, but ludicrous argument, that only trained and qualified people can, or are able to teach. We are the experts, they exclaim.

What is an expert or professional? My definition of an expert is someone who succeeds in doing the job he sets out to do, my definition of a professional is someone who gets paid for it.

An expert or professional fails to teach a child to read by the time that child obtains the age of 13 years. The unqualified (figuratively speaking) succeeds in getting that child to read inside a term, this is not allowed, as you are not a professional, the child must return to the experts who were unable to achieve anything, as they know best. Unbelievable, but true - and it goes on all the time, there are many more cases I could cite.

How does this situation arise? Well I believe that we have made too much of labels, we are all placed in pigeon holes, if we fly from our allocated hole arms are thrown up in alarm. The fact of that person being able to do a certain thing successfully, or as well as and on many occasions better than the so called expert is irrelevant.

Many people are shouting about discipline, well I agree with discipline and any sensible person does, but that discipline must be fair and relative to the person and the crime, I feel our problem has not arisen from lack of discipline but from the wrong discipline.

It is incredible to expect a child to sit for any length of time without uttering a word, when surrounded by his fellow pupils, but this is demanded by many schools. It is also inconceivable to me, to expect a child to accept discipline when he is in no way doing wrong, but this happens all the time with mass detention, because of the misdeeds of the few. Discipline has to be fair, be seen to be fair, then and only then will it get the necessary respect from our young fraternity.

I think many of our teachers have tried to demand respect where they would better have been endeavouring to earn it, it is my experience that there are very many who are incapable of this exercise.

A large factor in the lack of relationships in our schools, is I think, in the fact that very few teachers have any experience with life. Most have spent all their life in institutionalised environments, never having outside experiences. Many are not even married, so have no concept of bringing up children and how they would tackle the job.

Without any doubt, the worst situation of all is their incredible ability to tell half-truths, and even whole lies on occasion. This of course applies not just to the headmaster but to the LEA as well: in fact the LEA is possibly the worse, in stating parents have no right in educating their own children. Never will they admit to failure or having bad schools.

Any organisation, which endeavours to obtain the right of individual parents to choose and control their child's education, a right they have under law, but which in truth is denied them, is condemned by schools and teacher. Why? Because they will lose control. The two organisations which are leaders in this field are of course FEVER and Education Otherwise.

My own experiences are quite informative. I had, like many parents, never taken a really close interest in the education of my children, but I became annoyed at the lack of vocabulary of my son and started to correct him every chance I had. I agree this should have happened earlier, but I thought our schools were sound and would do well by him. It soon became very apparent that his whole grasp of English was, to say the least, appalling. I asked repeatedly, with comments in his book, for assistance to be given to him, to enhance his understanding of the English language. This did not produce any results and even his presentation, which was indistinguishable from writing with barbed-wire, did not improve at all.

I decided to ask the headmaster for assistance on this matter when he started doing French homework. I felt that he should have at least a basic understanding of English before moving into French, as in my opinion English is the stepping stone to all other subjects. I expected help and assistance, but in fact got hostility, total non-cooperation and his attitude was at all times superior. I was, to say the least, surprised and decided to withdraw my son from school.

On removal, it became quite clear that, not only English, but maths were at an equally appalling level. Fractions and decimals were out of the question for him, spelling was a joke; to say I became alarmed is an understatement. My son was at this time twelve years old.

I felt that once I explained the situation to the LEA, all would be settled and sanity would prevail. I did not realise it then, but I was just starting to find their total commitment to a system, right or wrong. The long battle had started, which was to surprise and horrify, frustrate and scare me. They were uninterested in facts, in the truth, or in the individual child.

I think I should make it quite clear that I am mainly concerned, at this moment in time, for the child who is failing to gain the necessary foundations of the 3 Rs. Build a house on sand and it will of course sink and no surprise is shown, yet our children who fail to get their basic foundations are expected to thrive and are persecuted when of course they sink into an academic wilderness.

The horror grows when the same failure obtains a high standard, or at the very least a sound basic, under so called unqualified teaching, and yet the LEA still tries to demand that he returns to where he failed. It can only mean that the system must not and can not be wrong.

To see these kids' faces and attitudes when they realise they can achieve is a great sight, and I must profess I gain tremendous satisfaction in helping them to gain back their self respect. It sometimes seems that teachers think our children do not possess any.

I was now on my own. To accept the headmaster's views, that could never be. The LEA did not want to know. What was I to do?

Teach him myself was the only answer and this is what I did. It was not long before I became excited at his advancement, and felt sure that the LEA would agree that my son was able to achieve a good standard if the school would help. How wrong: all I got was, "He is bound to improve, on a one to one basis, he must return to school". I could not return him to fail, so continued to teach him: improvement was maintained, his presentation was becoming noticeable for the care he was taking. He was showing interest in academic attainment, something he had never done before, there was a pride and arrogance in his ability to achieve, to him, a high standard. At this stage he was still way below his age.

Still I tried to gain some common ground for negotiation, but any ending of this dispute was only going to be on their terms, and these were unacceptable: I could not ruin the improvement both in presentation and attitude my son was now showing. I still had the doubt that I would not be able to give him an education which would meet all his needs, although I was growing in confidence, both with his advancement and with my apparent ability to communicate academic points. I of course was feeling as many parents must, unqualified (so called), and thus inadequate. This, as has already been said, just does not apply, it depends entirely on the individual whether one succeeds or not.

The whole term unfolded and summer was now approaching, and a respite however brief would be very welcome.

At last a move in the right direction, or so I thought: A letter from the school arrived, stating that they were prepared to drop French and substitute extra English. I was delighted and said so, although I was still concerned at the standards I had found, but thought perhaps now things would improve. Once again how wrong can one be.

My younger son started at the same school and almost immediately there was trouble. Paul, the elder, had always worn a uniform, but Mark did not like jackets, and so only wore part of the uniform. He said "Dad, I try hard and work hard, I also look smart, what more do they want?" One remark from the school was "We can not concentrate or teach unless all boys wear uniform". The mess my elder son was in (academic mess) made me wonder what he would have been like had he not had the uniform for them to concentrate on, the mind boggles. To cut this short the end result was that Mark was expelled, Paul also, as it was to turn out, for good. Regardless of your views on uniform, I think academic attainment should come first.

I asked for a letter explaining THEY were throwing Mark out and Paul with him. The letter read, 'It is with regret I hear YOU are withdrawing your son from school.' This was the start of a number of incredible statements, some of them down and out lies."

... to be concluded in the next Newsletter ...

From Jill Shaw, Buntingford

I am at present wholly engaged in an independent educational conservation project, and urgently seek premises from which to operate, preferably where children can visit, either residentially or on a day-trip basis. I have no capital, but am well-versed in self-sufficiency, organic food production, craftworks, animal husbandry, & am in a position to guarantee country-wide support for such a scheme.

My work as a peripatitic lecturer in zoology takes me into schools all over this country; I visit about 400 annually, ranging from pre-school nursery groups through Infant, Junior, and Secondary, and diverging from time to time into "special" schools as well as the independent sector. So I do know quite a bit about the educational standards prevalent today. In the State Schools these are reasonably high at Nursery level, but tend to deteriorate quite rapidly up the age scale until the Comprehensives, where they are nothing short of abysmal. "Special" schools are probably best left out of this - my views on them are too strong! - so we are left with only the independent schools if we wish to offer even a reasonable standard of education to our children.

An important factor at a higher level is, I think, that the LEA's, and probably the Ministry itself, have quite forgotten what education is for. Surely we must educate our children for LIFE? Take the vexed question of mathematics; I used to be good at "maths" at school, but I now remember no trig, virtually no algebra, and little more than Pythagoras of geometry - simply because I never have occasion to use them (Pythagoras I find handy for getting a right angle). The modern crop of mathematics is even worse, made up of "sets", "bases", and other irrelevancies without apparently even teaching the children to count! Much of the history, RE, science and so on taught in schools has no bearing on everyday life unless the particular child wants to specialise, but such really useful subjects as budgeting, map reading, telling the time or finding direction by the sun, handiman crafts (putting on a tap-washer, mending a fuse, wiring up a plug-head, unblocking a drain, etc) are omitted altogether. The three Rs are virtually ignored, and a great deal of rubbish is substituted; let us never forget that a child who can read, write, and do elementary arithmetic has the whole field of knowledge at his finger tips - without these skills he is lost.

Mainly through lack of time, I have been unable to educate my own children at home as I should have liked to, but contented myself with filling in the gaps as much as possible. I have, however, now taken my youngest daughter, Pheobe, away from school at the age of fourteen, and for the last year have been teaching her myself. (As I am presently wholly peripatetic, with no "fixed abode", this has really been essential, and the LEA under which she last came has been sympathetic). I fear, however, that this experiment is going to prove abortive, mainly because too much harm has already been done. I have, in fact, spent the last year trying to get her to catch up with elementary subjects which she should, by my standards, have mastered at Junior school. After three years spent in two Secondary schools she could not: do long division or multiplication (she can now); find the area of a rectangle (she can now, and also those of triangles, circles, etc); punctuate or spell correctly. At the age of seven or eight she used to write vivid and evocative compositions - Secondary school has changed all that; she had heard of a noun, verb, adjective, and adverb (though with only the sketchiest idea of what they actually were), but prepositions, conjunctions, articles, or terms such as tense, case, clause or phrase had no meaning for her; she thought Wiltshire was in Somerset and Cardiff in Scotland; she did not know that there were many religions in the world, had never heard of classical mythology, and confused King Solomon in the Bible with Solomon Grundy! Now Pheobe used to be a very bright child; since her father left us six years ago I have been unable to be in her company (until this last year) as much as I should have liked - and look what school has done to her! It is as though the very aura of school, which she hated, has drawn a thick curtain between her and her brain, and turned an intelligent individual into a herd-minded nitwit. I only hope that the damage is not quite irreparable, and that during the next year or so I can retrieve for her at least some of her early promise.

If anyone can help Jill Shaw, please write direct:
Jill Shaw, 1 Lower Farm Cottages, Throcking,
Buntingford, Hertfordshire.

From Maire Mullarney, Dublin

Now that I have read a collection of your "Newsletters", I am sure that Montessori has a great deal to offer to Education Otherwise, and that EO has much in the way of development to offer to Montessori. I have no doubt that Montessori made the greatest advance in education in this century (indeed, I am inclined to think that between them she and Pestalozzi have the field sewn up), but I am also inclined to think that her insights are shown to better advantage in the home setting than in "Montessori Schools". One of her conditions was that classrooms should open onto a garden, and that the children should be free to move out whenever they felt like it. I have asked in several well-run

"children's houses" whether this was found possible. The answer was, they can go out with work when the weather is fine - in other words, if the class moves out; otherwise, they go out for break. At home, of course, children are free to go anywhere - and when they are working they are free, too.

This attitude is obviously natural to Education Otherwise, but we can see that it becomes difficult to manage once more than, say, twenty children are in one space.

There is not space here to do justice to Montessori; I recommend the chapter on M in Revolution in Learning by Maya Pines (Allen Lane the Penguin Press).

A few points: M observed that children find WORK satisfying. She emphasised the importance of not interrupting, not correcting; if mistakes frequent, material must be at fault, or too advanced. A certain activity (say, building up pyramid rings) could be seen by one parent as play, and good, by a Montessori minded parent as work, good too, but demanding just that much more respect and non-intervention, with trust that child will correct mistakes, given time enough; it is acceptable to push a required ring back into field of vision; teaching would consist in building up pyramid correctly when putting back on shelf. Noting, too, that a pyramid or cone is something to learn from, while a teapot made of stacking rings is doubtful. Note that Susan Isaacs had full range of Montessori equipment and used it every day. Montessori herself seems to have expected no more than an hour of 'cognitive' work daily; ten minutes will be ample, if something clicks.

In our next Newsletter we shall have a description of how Maire used Montessori methods for her eleven children. Has anyone else experience with Montessori?

From Sarah Guthrie, now in S London, hopes to move back shortly to Islington

Recently the Guardian published an article about the miseries suffered by a 5 year old going to school for the first time. Their guest educational psychologist responded with breezy advice - "see the teacher" - "anything wrong at home?" - " .. necessary to learn to be independent ..." etc.

So I wrote suggesting that the parent take the child out of school, adding that this obvious solution was never put forward, mentioning the existence of Education Otherwise. The letter was published, and to my delight I've had over a dozen enquiries as a result, from all over the country, including one from an educational psychologist.

From Jean and David Head, W London
whose book "FREE WAY TO LEARNING" is accepted as one of the
key Education Otherwise documents

You may know that we as a family by-passed secondary school, though our Operation Otherwise scheme and dream never took off as we hoped. Martin was out of school for two years, when he was 14 and 15 years - Alison for 5 years - the whole of compulsory 'zany' time - 11-16 years.

We have now emerged at the other end - and I thought you might like to know this. We are always pleased to discuss our experiences if this helps anyone else - though we cannot offer help other than by encouragement! Still, over the years we have been rung up, or visited, by fairly large numbers of families.

I think the experience was right for us - and would encourage anyone else to have a go.

Martin, now 19, is in his first year at the Polytechnic of Central London, starting a degree course in Media Studies. He did his necessary O and A levels at Kingsway - Princeton College of Further Education (one of the best we think in London). During these three years he also crewed in the Tall Ships TransAtlantic Race, arriving in New York and Boston for the Bicentenary celebrations in July 1976. He has worked backstage with the National Yough Theatre for the last two summers. So he is not a product of a hothouse academic atmosphere!!

Alison, 16½, is in her first term at Kingsway - doing English and Music A levels and more O levels. She took 3 O levels as a private candidate last June. She got a Grade B for Music and 2 As for English Language and Literature. She prepared for the English O levels through the NEC E9 English correspondence course - excellent and enjoyable - thoroughly recommended (NEC, Hills Road, Cambridge). Her future will be somewhere in the Drama/Music field.

All the best to you and to other families "having a go".

Growing Without Schooling From Sarah Guthrie

John Holt will be known to many de-schooling families as the author of that inspiring and realistic series on education including HOW CHILDREN LEARN/FAIL etc.

Holt is an American, and has formed an association there called GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING (GWS). Its first newsletter came out in August 1977, and EO got a copy. The newsletter aims to exchange information, experiences, ideas and to be a source of ways and means of educating children at home.

It's a good piece of work: including book reviews, thoughts about social change, legal points, facts about US education (did you know that children judged "hyper-active" are sedated in US schools?) - all written in a clear, amicable, straightforward style. Holt himself has an illuminating piece on the way we're taught to see numbers - as progressions (unhelpfully, he says) rather than as descriptive shapes; as isolated nouns (3; 9; 41) rather than adjectives (3 spoons; 9 forks; 41 schoolteachers).

This sort of insight into fundamental learning styles - the ability to change from the orthodox approach in order to bring about a clearer understanding of basic concepts - is vital to anyone doing home education.

There is a need for deschooled teachers! Meanwhile, some of them are writing for GWS. If any EO member would like to subscribe, the newsletter costs £10 per 6 issues for a single subscription but for two it costs 6 dollars each, for four 4 dollars each, so that the more people there are to share a subscription, the cheaper it becomes. Let Dick Kitto know if you'd like to share in ordering them, so that we can bring the cost down as low as possible.

Incidentally, Holt highly recommends a book published in England. Called THE SELF RESPECTING CHILD, it's by Alison Stalibrass, (publishers Thames & Hudson) and is a rich account of the ways young children explore their world.

Here is an extract from the GWS Newsletter which gives some idea of its flavour and quality and demonstrates that its relevance is not limited to the American Scene. He is quoting from a letter from a deschooler:

" ... In regard to Topher, though, I should add that though we were glad he was happy and enjoying himself (in school), we were also sad as we watched him deteriorate from a person into a kid under peer influence in school. It was much like what we saw happening when he was in kindergartin. There are certain kinds of childishness which it seems most people accept as being natural, something children have to go through, something which it is, indeed, a shame to deny them. Silliness, self-indulgence, random rebelliousness, secretiveness, cruelty to other children, clubbishness, addiction to toys, possessions, junk, spending money, purchased entertainment, exploitation of adults to pay attention, take them places, amuse them, do things with them - all these things seem to be quite unnecessary, not "normal" at all (note: except in the sense of being common), and just as disgusting in children as they are in adults. And while they develop as a result of peer influence, I believe this is only and specifically because children are thrown together in schools and develop these means, as prisoners develop means of passing dull time and tormenting authorities to cope with an oppressive situation."

I have snatched this paragraph out of the middle of Jud's letter because it seems to me to answer so perfectly a question many ask me when they first think of taking their kids out of school: "But won't they miss the social life?" To this I say that if I had no other reason for wanting to keep kids out of school (and I have many), the social life would be reason enough. In all the schools I have taught in, visited, or know anything about, the social-life of the children is mean-spirited, competitive, exclusive, status-seeking, full of talk about who went to who's birthday party and who got what Christmas presents and who got how many Valentine cards and who is talking to so-and-so and who is not. Even in the first grade, classes soon divide up into leaders, energetic, and (often deservedly) popular kids, their bands of followers, and otheroutsiders who are pointedly excluded from these groups.

And I remember my sister saying of one of her children, then five, that she never knew her to do anything really mean or silly until she went away to school - a nice school, by the way, in a nice small town.

OTHER NEWS

The Corner Bookshop, 14 Endell Street, London W1
(on the edge of Covent G rden)

When you are visiting Central London, call in at this bookshop. It has the best stock of books and journals on Education that we know.

It is run by "Schools Without Walls" an organisation which is very sympathetic to our own outlook, and you will find them helpful and informative.

Open Door

We have been invited by the BBC Television "Open Door" series to put on a programme in the New Year. It will probably go on the air on Monday 20 February or Monday 27 February. It will require a lot of involvement for a few people for about a month before the programme. If anyone of our members living close to London has experience of the media, and has a bit of time to spare in January/February please let me know as soon as possible.

3, 4, 5

In the next Newsletter we will carry an article by Lorna Trevelyan-Bicici about the 3, 4, 5 Ready to Read scheme. Has anyone else had any experience of the 3, 4, 5 or Humpty-Dumpty learning schemes?

ACE and WHERE

The Advisory Centre for Education which publishes the magazine "Where" has moved from Cambridge to London. It's new address is: 18 Victoria Park Square, London E2 4PB. It has also appointed as its new Director, Peter Newell, who set up the White Lion Free School in Islington.

In our next newsletter we would like to write about ACE, and if any of you have subscribed to Where over a period we would be glad to have some comments on how useful you have found it. Also has anyone used the ACE advisory service and how helpful have you found that?

All comments fairly soon please if they are to appear in the February newsletter.

POEMS

Sun Down

Deepening, darkening,
Changing constantly.
Deepening light,
Turns to darkening night.

Changing colours,
Finally fading.
Leaving nothing,
But black and white.

by Vincent Theobald

The Snake

It slithers,
It rattles,
A zig-zagging monster,
The creepy sneaky snake.
A cold shivery creature.
He's as fast as a jet plane,
Curling, twirling, whirling,
Ssssssss, silent.
A violent viper,
With poisonous fangs.

Written by
James Holmes at 6yrs9mths

THE LONDON MEETINGS

THE MORNING MEETING

The purpose of the morning meeting is roughly:

1. To publicize the ideas behind EO, and the fact that a support organisation exists.
2. To explain what we are aiming to do.
3. To encourage those who would like to practice EO to identify people who might form local groups in different areas.
4. To enable us all to meet each other.
5. To gain new members.

The meeting is aimed specifically at London people, but others are very welcome to attend. In particular people who are practising EO and are willing to talk to others who are interested. Also we do need help from members, both on the day and beforehand:-

On the Day preparing hall
 looking after children
 manning information stall
 collecting money
 taking notes

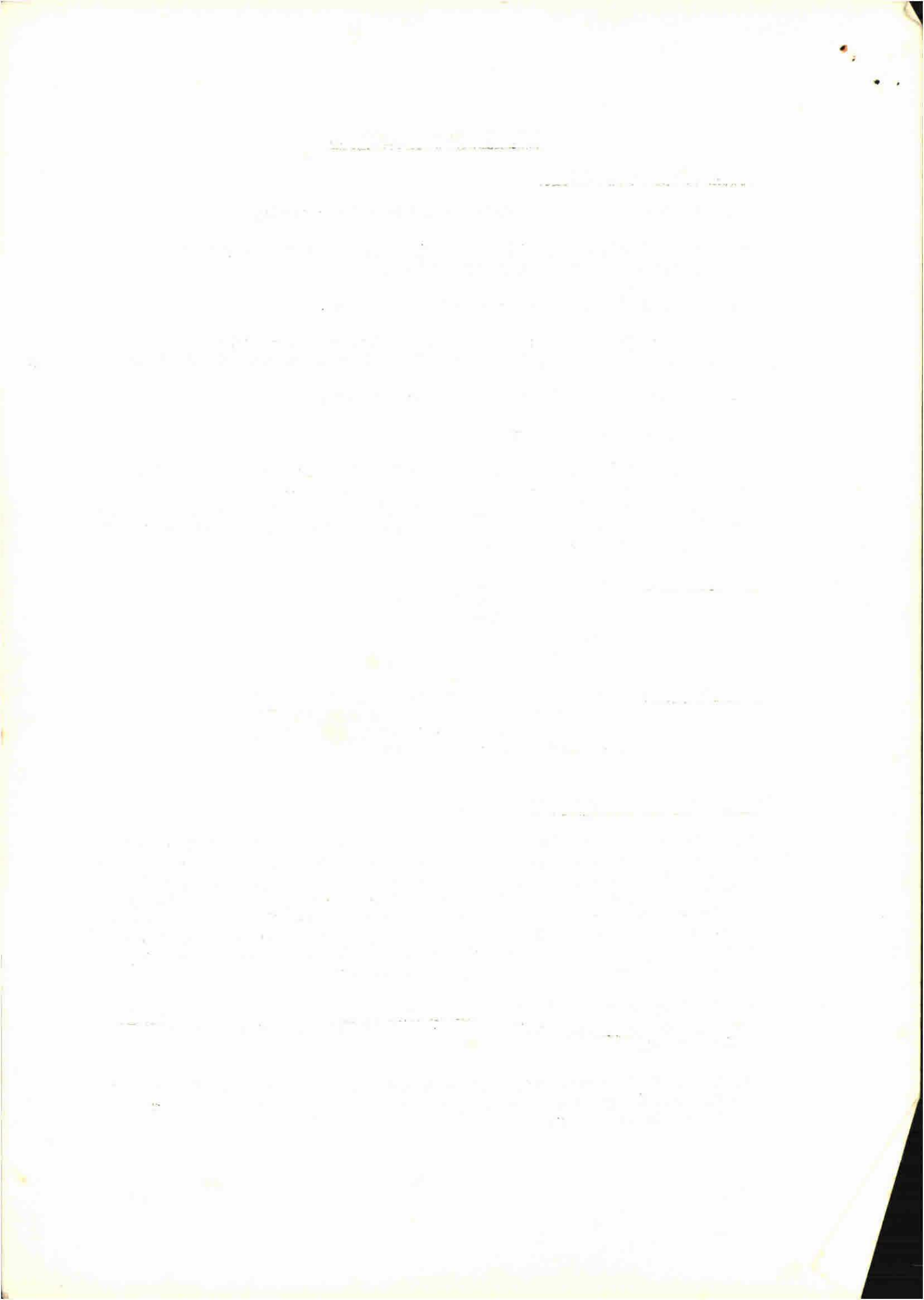
Beforehand distributing posters and handouts
 encouraging people to come and if possible transporting them
 preparing refreshments

THE AFTERNOON MEETING

The afternoon meeting aims to get together members who are prepared to contribute with help or work and to clarify what needs doing and who is going to do what. Everyone who is willing to act as a member of a Core Group, as a Regional Advisor, to form a Local Group, or to help in any other way, is welcome to attend. We hope as many of you as possible will come, though we realise that those who are operating EO have already taken on a heavy commitment.

Don't forget that if you very much want to become an active member and really can't afford the fare we will pay it on this occasion.

Please let us know whether you propose to attend either of these meetings and whether you can help - form at the end of this Newsletter.



QUESTIONNAIRE ON EVENTS

Please return as soon as possible so that we can use it to plan events in time for the next Newsletter.

Would you like further residential events to be held YES / NO

If so, what kind?

Unstructured get-togethers YES / NO

Events mainly to enable adults to get together for discussions YES / NO

Events mainly to enable children to get together for play, etc YES / NO

Education/instructional events for adults YES / NO

Education/instructional events for children YES / NO

What sort of education:

Music YES / NO

Drama YES / NO

Arts/Crafts YES / NO

Other YES / NO

The normal cost for events at Lower Shaw is £4.00 per day for adults, and £2.00 per day for children, that is £8.00 and £4.00 per weekend. At these rates would the cost put you off coming?

Alternatively, from next summer onwards, the centre will be available for hire on a self-catering basis at a much cheaper rate.

Would you be prepared to cater for yourselves?

If we put on a 4-day event at Easter do you expect you could come to it? If so how many

Adults ...

Children ...

Can you suggest other more convenient places where we might hold residential events?

What about day regional events, do you think they are worth holding?

YES / NO

If so, what form do you think they would take?

Would you be able to do some work helping to organise them?

YES / NO

What sort of work?

Organisational

Posters

Food

General

PLEASE TURN OVER

LONDON MEETINGS

Saturday 21 January 1978

BOOKING FORM

This is to enable us to know how many members are coming and can help. You can come without booking and there is no entrance fee. (There will be a collection to defray costs).

NAME

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE NO:

tick

I SHALL BE COMING TO THE MEETING AT 10.30 ()

I can help

at the meeting: preparing hall (9.30-10.30) ()

setting up information stall (9.30-10.30) ()

looking after children ()

collecting money ()

manning information stall ()

general ()

beforehand: distributing posters and handouts ()

arranging catering and refreshments ()

I SHALL BE COMING TO THE MEETING AT 2.00 ()

PLEASE TURN OVER
