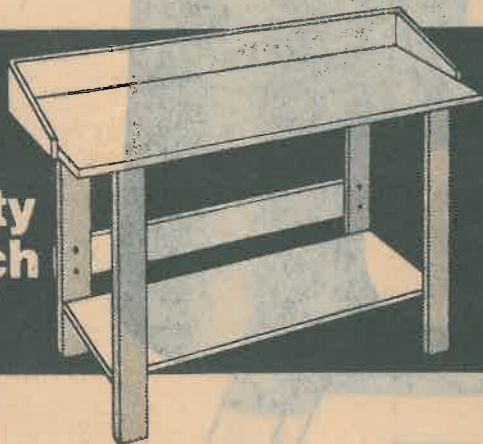


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midweek Happiness - an essential for beginning a new life

By VANYA HOGG

Plans for an alternative birth centre in Wellington were outlined to doctors at National Women's Hospital last week.



ROS CAPPER . . . "a woman has to be happy."

Ros Capper and Pam Skelton, members of a group keen to establish an out-of-hospital centre, told a large group of hospital staff the centre would be open to healthy, low-risk women who had participated in sound ante-natal screening and anticipating a normal birth.

Initially the centre would offer ante-natal education, post-natal education and support.

Supporters of the need for such a centre believe birth is a normal process requiring the minimum of intervention and that the conditions and place where a woman gives birth greatly affects the course of her labour, the normality of her birth, the health of the baby and the life-long relationship between parents and child.

Positive

A good birth experience, they feel, makes for a good parent-child relationship, gives the mother increased self-esteem and self-confidence and results in a positive attitude to parenting from mothers and fathers.

They also firmly believe consumers must have a say in the planning and administration of a birth and education service.

"A woman has to be happy in

herself to introduce a child to this society," said Ros. "For too many women it is an unsupported and lonely journey. Women are spending a fortune on toll calls to their families or books because in our society now families are often separated by great distances. A woman's pregnancy, birth and parenting make a major contribution to how the future goes for her and her family."

Power and choice are tied together, she said. Choice of place and method of birth gave parents power. Having to make decisions about the birth ritual for their child meant having to think positively about their child's whole future.

"Many choices are possible for the birthing ritual, but making choices in our society is not encouraged," she said.

According to Pam Skelton New Zealand is following the American trend of birth being mainly available in large teaching hospitals. Birth and Beyond, the name of the Wellington alternative group, is not convinced hospital is the safest place for mothers and babies. "Hospital is a place traditionally where sick people go. Its orientation is towards sickness," said Pam, who is a midwife.

Plans so far for an alternative birth centre state that the centre should have a home-like atmosphere and be reasonably close to a large hospital.

The committee administering the hospital would mostly consist of consumers who could seek advice from a board composed of medical people such as obstetricians, paediatricians, La Leche League and Plunket workers.

Several doctors questioned the women closely about the day-to-day logistics of running a birth centre. Some suggested the idea was emotional, idealistic and based purely on enthusiasm.

Elitist

Another feared the centre would be used by an elitist, articulate, middle-class group only.

Professor Denis Bonham, head of obstetrics, said he was delighted to find women questioning the birth service offered. "We want to change things," he said.

Senior social worker at the hospital, Kate Harbutt, said the idea of a birth centre was far from radical. Three of her four children were born at home. "What this means is that a choice that was once offered to women will be available again," she said.

And the Rev Nora Calvert, chaplain at the hospital, compared the

rising interest in out-of-hospital birth to the hospice movement for dying. "It's a move by the community to return life and death to the family."



PAM SKELTON . . . "hospitals, orientation is towards sickness."

Difference between solo and single

by **valerie davis**

What is a solo mother and what is a single mother?

The precise definition of these terms becomes a matter of urgency after the findings on single mothers

emotional, mental and spiritual qualities.

The Norman Kirk Administration changed the structure of social benefits, and probably of society,

girl should be required to report regularly to ante-natal centres, which should provide not just medical care, but counselling, parenting technique classes and the opportunities to meet other young mothers so isolation does not also become a problem.

After birth these services should provide after-care and constant back-up until the child starts school and after, if need be.

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