

NEW ZEALAND HOME BIRTH ASSOCIATIONSecretary's Report 1984/85May 1985

1984/85 has been an interesting year ~~and~~ in which I learnt a lot. For me it has been overshadowed by constitutional dissatisfactions and partly as a result of this, and partly in fact the cause of the dissatisfaction has been a lot of duplication of effort and energy involving some unnecessary expenditure. My experience this year has confirmed for me the value, in fact, necessity, of a united national body representing all Home Birth groups but has also made clear how imperative radical rethinking and reform is. At present the channelling and distribution of information is operating at less than peak efficiency and a certain amount of inter-branch rivalry and disaffection makes us all the losers.

Some aspects of my year's work:Executive Contact

I received four communications from Marilyn ( some as part of branch-circulated material ) and two phone calls; I sent three letters to Marilyn specifically as well as forwarding to her all copies of material sent by me to branches or other organisations. In response to a direct request from Marilyn I wrote five letters. Lois and I exchanged six letters each on matters relating to finance and funding. In addition Henriette forwarded to me copies of her correspondence with M.P.'s.

Branch Contact

During the year I circulated three newsletters to branches and one specific request to branch secretaries re; membership lists. I received membership lists from: Waikato, Tauranga, Manawatu, Thames Valley, Nelson, Wellington and Timaru. I received newsletters regularly from Nelson and some from Dunedin and one (their 1st newsletter ?) from Timaru. A number of branches wrote to me during the year to let me know what was happening- a special thank you to Glenys Wood of Waikato for her support during the year.

Aspects of year's work cont...

Meeting Liason

Some contact with Wellington over half yearly meeting - including very good minutes.

Much contact with Nelson over this year's Conference and A.G.M. including two phone calls from Nigel. I felt I was kept very much in the picture and appreciated this.

'Outside' inquiries or contact i.e. (non-branch or exec. matters)

A letter of general inquiry from Rotorua.

A letter regarding setting up of new Home Birth group in Rawene (Hokianga).

A letter from Wellington Women's Summit (forwarded by Marilyn)

A letter from the Community Workers Network.

(All replied to ).

On my own initiative as Secretary

A letter to the 'Listner' re Caesarean births.

A submission to the National Newsletter for inclusion in the last copy of the financial year.

Things Incomplete

Information Kit

As a result of a couple of letters received from 'outsiders' I felt it would be good to have a selection of up to date information immediately at hand which could be sent to inquirers, new branches etc. and provide them with basic information and contacts. I undertook, in a letter to Marilyn dated 21 November 1984 to produce such a kit and suggested it include Home Birth Branch list, midwives' addresses and phone numbers, a general information leaflet on Home Birth, information on the N.Z.H.B.A., a reading list. I asked branches to co-operate in this by sending contributions but apart from a couple of notable exceptions had little response- when I came to compile a list of midwives, for example, I found I had names from three branches only. I also felt the intent to disincorporate preempted more efforts in this direction but the project is nevertheless dear to my heart and I am still willing to attempt it ex officio if required.

Community Workers Network

A letter from them 24 January 1985 indicates possible formation of a Community Workers Union and asking if we would be interested in joining one. This obviously requires discussion- it perhaps needs to be included on the agenda.

Beter Bevallen

A letter forwarded to me from Waikato and which I forwarded to the National newsletter in time for its final copy contains details of this movement hoping to organise an international platform for all those fighting for active birth. A meeting is being organised for August 1987 (immediately followed by midwives conference) in Amsterdam. I would like to see the New Zealand Home Birth Association send a delegate or two to this conference- feel it would be a fine inspiration and motivation.

Angela Sellwood.

Angela Sellwood.

A NATIONAL ORGANISATION- some ideas.

- \* Feel Communication from outside is hampered by lack of permanent postal address. Would like to see a New Zealand Home Birth Association P.O. Box number permanently sited, (letters forwarded to relevant person/committee).
- \* Greatly simplified constitution - bare bones only, designed to allow greatest possible freedom and autonomy for groups and latitude in meeting structure.
- \* Prefer retention of name as it has identification value.
- \* Functions of exec. and newsletter combined and discharged by duly selected and appointed committee in rotation.

Advantages- No more duplication of effort- all letters now circulated seperately would be combined and circulated to all together ( perhaps newsletters could be published more often, bimonthly?).

- Costs could be covered by subscriptions directly related to cost of newsletter- no more 'money for no benefit'.
- A more co-operative effort from all and by all.
- N.Z.H.B.A. files and resources in one place and readily accessible to all members of 'exec'.
- All resources and relevant information / communication in one publication.

Disadvantages- A lot of effort and energy for one group for a whole year. Danger that smaller groups might feel unable to shoulder burden and therefore miss out. (This latter happens anyway, however. Could be looked on as a positive, energising project for a group to take on for a limited term in the same way as conference organisation is).

- Too much power concentrated in one place (again, only in the way you look at it. Any executive is only the servant of the membership).

- \* As before one group taking on responsibility for organising conference ( should we aim higher and seek to draw the crowds perhaps aim for National or International speaker?).

What are the aims of the Homebirth Movement in New Zealand and how can they best be achieved?

Most people would agree that they are:

1. To provide education, information and support to all those involved with or interested in Homebirth.
2. To ensure the continued existence of homebirth as a birth option and to work for increased political and medical recognition.
3. To seek support, and improved conditions, pay and status for professionals in the domiciliary service.

The first aim can be achieved at local level; each group is best able to gauge local needs and make use of local abilities - though there remains the question of where do they as a group get their information and support from? An informal communication and sharing network from group to group may solve this problem and as the majority of people choosing homebirth are purely concerned with the personal aspects of their decision their needs and desires could be met in this way.

There are however, many interested in the wider issues of homebirth who recognise that homebirth is under threat and can only be a viable alternative if strenuous and concerted efforts are made to achieve the aims outlined above. Can this be done by local groups working in isolation?

I believe not, mainly because the political clout of a national organisation pursuing aims arrived at by consensus is much greater than that of individuals or dis-united groups.

True, a very large group with an active and politically aware membership, such as the Auckland HBA, does already have considerable influence and power, so much so, in fact, that where groups work separately, the smaller groups are in great danger of being ignored and held of no account by outsiders.

We need as a group to uphold the rights and support the views of all our members, and to help each other achieve our objectives. To do this, we need a mechanism whereby all members have the chance to participate so that initiatives on the political scene have the support of everyone - this does not weaken the larger, stronger groups but does strengthen the smaller groups. And I believe, in a minority organisation such as ours, there is no national body, despite its name, unless it truly represents all homebirthers in New Zealand.

A National organisation serves as a focal point, a clearing and store-house of information and records (invaluable for later research), and starting point for interested parties. Also, in a properly constituted and incorporated body, there is protection against claims of membership by people who are not necessarily sympathetic to the aims of Homebirth in New Zealand. (Where no criteria for membership exists other than goodwill, there is nothing to stop a peripheral interest group, e.g. the waterbirth people, claiming to be part of the homebirth

movement.) I think these benefits alone justify the continued existence of a national body but I believe it is time that its structure, organisation and constitution were reconsidered and reordered in a way that suits the present membership (all of us and not just some.) This means flexibility of structure but should not necessarily mean no structure - that would be like trying to build a house out of jelly,

I do not intend here to go into the specifics of organisation and structure: that is a matter for discussion, but I do most strongly feel that no progress can be achieved unless there is unanimity over the need for some kind of national body through which we can work in our own preferred ways, to achieve the continued existence of homebirth in New Zealand.