

Marj Fogarty & Denise Iversen

Areas

In the 1970's it was decided to split the AKA into areas with a Council member responsible for each one's management. The five areas were North, South, East, West and Central. Meetings were held each term and hosted by a kindergarten in that area. The first meetings in the year were run with workshops to help new committee members come to terms with their positions on their committees. The Head Office staff member who looked after our finances was Mary Williams (ex Kotiri Kindergarten) and her Treasurers workshops were especially well attended. The meeting was convened by the Council member for that area (area rep) and a secretary from the host kindergarten looked after the minutes.

These areas worked brilliantly. In fact the kindergarten staff came up with their own version. In those days the membership of the Council was large (and on reflection most unwieldy) and we valued the close rapport with our committees. It was an opportunity for them to hear of fund-raising ventures, those who had surplus equipment were able to exchange with others, and quite a few held special fund-raising events to help the less fortunate kindergartens in their area. Joint fund raising was enthusiastically undertaken and we remember when the Western area under the leadership of Pat Cater hired the Avondale racecourse and held a huge Gala Day.

The inaugural Teddy Bears picnic was a result of a huge combined effort from all kindergartens, later combining with the Auckland City Council to make it an annual event. Our kindergarten staff entertained the crowd very professionally with music, clowns etc., Dame Cath Tizard read stories to the children under the trees in the Domain and Denise put on a Cookie Bear outfit (and absolutely **sweltered** on a hot February day) and handed out cookies etc. We had to keep giving her cold drinks behind the tent to keep her going!

Council members were heavily involved in the kindergartens, and perhaps it was just as well there were plenty of us. We had a policy of having a Council member present at every AGM. As these were all held within about a six week period it became a huge task. We were really concerned that the AGM was run reasonably well and we were there on occasions to take the chair in the event of an election of officers. We remember several occasions when there was an election for a Secretary, and normally you couldn't find anyone to do the job. As a result we probably visited every kindergarten in Auckland at least once. And although we lived on the North Shore it wasn't uncommon to attend AGM's in Otara or the Eastern Suburbs. Marj Fogarty **always** got lost going to Rathgar – heaven only knows why. It was easy to find in daylight, but not so easy at night. We both got lost going to Taupaki one evening and never made it at all!! Driving out on that country road – we eventually gave up. However, we are pleased to note that we made it to their opening which was attended by Maris O'Rourke who was CEO of the Education Dept. in Wellington. Maris also attended the Chelsea opening and this was our first experience of the new Government policy in using the Maori language for formal occasions. The completely pakeha gathering was bemused with a very blonde lady speaking fluent (relatively!) Maori.

Council

As we have said the Council was very big and rather unwieldy so people were put on to sub-committees in their particular area of interest. We relied heavily on our professional support people who were headed by Joy Ramsey (ex O'wairaka) as Supervising Head Teacher. Joy was a total professional in the handling of a difficult and often stressful job. She attended all Council meetings to report on staff matters and was also a foundation member of the National Appointments Committee. Staff really related to her and appreciated her wise counsel. Other valued staff members were Jo Greenhough, Cynthia Girling, Judy Gilbert and Jay Stewart. Joy's salary was paid for by the Dept of Education and we got an allowance for Jo and Cynthia. The balance of their salaries were met out of the interest from the Jessie Neill Estate, as we felt that Jessie with her rapport with staff members during her many years as General Secretary would have totally approved of this. Later, Judy and Jay were paid from this source. Jessie had left her entire estate to the AKA and whatever we did with the money needed to be in tune with her philosophy.

Apart from looking after the professional needs of our staff, Jo in particular set up a Kindergarten shop in the Myers Park building – something along the lines of the Play Centre Shop. Friday afternoons became a meeting place for staff members when they came to purchase equipment for their kindergartens. This was a much appreciated service and made money for the AKA too. Joy was much loved and respected by all our staff and when she retired, the function was held at the College Rifles Hall – and it was packed. Sadly she is no longer with us. On Joy's retirement Robin Sigley succeeded her as Supervising Head Teacher.

We made a major effort to re-write the Constitution as the document was out-dated and did not reflect our operating needs. This took us about a year, and then of course had to be ratified by a General Meeting.

After we both retired from the position of President, we were followed by Sue Woolley (now Crockett), then Pat Reid and Wendy Sharp. During this time there was a big change in the way the Council operated. Pat Reid and her councillors were ready to move away from the NZFKU and change was in the air. Council meetings were pretty torrid affairs and this was combined with a number of changes of Head Office Staff. A bitter dispute arose between the President and Vice President and Marj was asked to Chair two or three Council meetings to try and defuse the situation. At this stage meetings were finishing at about midnight, by which time everyone was quite frustrated. Things calmed down only to be put into further turmoil when our General Secretary (CEO) decided to pursue a Personal Grievance against the AKA to the tune of \$250,000. At this stage our Solicitor called Pat Reid, Sue Crockett and Marj Fogarty in to his office (Sue and Marj were both retired!!) to see if Sue and Marj would act as a go-between to avoid Court proceedings. This was achieved reasonably amicably, but a couple of months later the CEO decided to resign.

These events were all taking place as the Council of the day was leaving the NZFKU and it caused great distress to many of our kindergartens. It did not help that the AKA was going through a period of unrest with their Head Office Staff. Luton Dawes, who had capably managed the General Secretary position had left to pursue other interests, and we had a succession of CEO's who sometimes appeared to have difficulty grasping the complexities of the

office. Some were education based and would relate to kindergarten staff but had trouble in other administration, and we had one in particular who managed to get offside with most staff members and during her memorable tenure disposed of a lot of our archives – hence the reason for the Life Members trying to fill in some of the gaps with our collective memory.

Relationships

From our time in office we felt we had a good relationship with our staff. Our Supervising Head Teachers were great and highly respected. The Kindergarten Teachers Union was quite strong and we enjoyed working with them to bring our brand of pre-school education to Auckland. Some of their Presidents we recall were Caro Martin (Takapuna) Robyn Houliker (Meadowbank) Robin Sigley (Taupaki) and Claire Wells (Myers). It was a slightly difficult situation as although we were the employing authority we were bound - as they were – by Government rules and regulations. We recall one marvellous rally they organised with a march from Myers down Queen Street to the Town Hall. Mums with children in pushchairs waved banners and it was a huge turnout. Caro Martin was their President and she generously allowed us to also speak to the crowd supporting the issues they were vigorously pursuing.

It is true to say that not all Council members felt this way about our staff! We had the occasional few who were convinced that staff were skiving off early and not doing their job properly (mostly it was some of the men who thought this). However, with our trust in our Supervising Head Teachers most of these fears proved groundless, and we enjoyed trying to help staff improve their conditions of employment.

Head office staff

When we joined the AKA Jessie Neill was the General Secretary and it was amazing how she handled the job on her own. She knew every staff member and was always available to help and advise. We will never forget her red hair (dyed) and she was almost a chain smoker, and often accompanied by her Sydney Silkie dogs. A wonderful person, she was The AKA. After Jessie retired she was followed by Margaret Dean. We also had the odd time when we were without anyone, and those of us who could pitch in and help did. This included Dorothy Gascoigne (Lady Cobham) and Judy Dent (St Heliers) and Marj Fogarty (Takapuna). Judy's son Timothy was just a toddler, so things could occasionally get pretty hectic, with Tim playing under Judy's desk.

Judy eventually took on the position of General Secretary. We had Pam who was our only typist, but we also had a part time typist for our Supervising Head Teachers. Then Dorothy came on to the staff and looked after salaries and finally Mary Williams (Kotiri) managed our finances.

During this period we were building kindergartens at a great rate and Judy became quite an expert in this area. In fact, she was eventually head-hunted by the Education Dept. and remained in their Building section until she returned to her native Australia. Judy was a great character and we were all firm friends. She still visits every year, and we always get together for a dinner while she is here, and also some of us have enjoyed her hospitality in Melbourne.

Dorothy was employed by the Association for over 15 years and was well known by all our staff. Her background as Chairman of Lady Cobham meant that she had a great knowledge of the kindergarten movement. In the days before we came on to Council one of the great fund raisers was a Floral Carpet displayed in the Town Hall and Dorothy was involved in those. Marj remembers helping with the last one – a depiction of Noah's Ark, and she was responsible for an ostrich complete with toi toi wings. Mary Williams came to us through Kotiri Kindergarten. She was absolutely dedicated to kindergarten and always had time to coach new and nervous committee treasurers. The hours she put in were way above her remuneration and she remained one of our greatest assets until her retirement several years ago. We had a great farewell for her at the Pt. Chevalier kindergarten which was attended by a great number of committee people as well as her colleagues and teachers.

Mike Beausoleil followed Judy as CEO. Mike was a Canadian charmer, always cheerful and with a great store of funny stories and anecdotes. It was a great job for him working with all those women! Then Luton Dawes came on board. He was an ex-Vietnam career soldier and brought a number of new systems into the job. He was thoroughly professional and we appreciated his input into the job. He resigned with our regrets after a philosophical change in the direction of the AKA.

Friendships

We felt we could not let this opportunity slip by without mentioning the friendships that exist within the kindergarten movement. From the time when young parents meet others with children in the kindergarten, we have noticed time and time again the value of those introductions into the community. For ourselves, Eileen Bethell, Sue Crockett, Marj Fogarty, Dorothy Gascoigne, Denise Iversen and Edna Munro have met regularly several times a year for dinner. We have all shared our joys and sorrows as our families have grown, and mourned when Joy Ramsey (who was also one of our group) died a couple of years ago. As previously mentioned, Judy Dent joins us when she is in Auckland visiting her family. Caro Martin is a loving attentive Godmother to Marj's granddaughter Rebecca who, then aged 7, was the sole attendant at Caro's wedding in Sydney. More recently, Rebecca (now 18) stayed with Caro and Ron on a visit to Sydney, and our families are very close.