



Branch Beginnings

Memories from Mary Dodds to Joyce Iles



Have you ever wondered how our Branch started and what support there was for people living with motor neurone disease 20 years ago? Two of our founder members, Mary Dodds (formerly Prior) and Joyce Iles, have recently been in touch about those early days.

MARY DODDS WRITES:

'My husband, Derek was diagnosed with motor neurone disease and, on a hospital visit to see Mr Hyman, the neurologist in September 1986, we were asked if we would be interested in setting up a self-help group for MND sufferers. Both Derek and I were very interested indeed.

Mr Hyman, along with other professionals, such as speech therapists, nurses, and OTs, got together to discuss the best way of helping a local branch get off the ground. I was invited to the second meeting in November. There was a lot of interest from the professionals present but they were concerned that my involvement might be a little too much to handle, along with caring for a husband suffering with MND and two children in school. I soon put their minds at rest! Mr Hyman's team contacted MND Northampton and they (bless them) sent a lovely gentleman called Ted Fawcett to help with getting a local branch off the ground.

In January 1987, it was announced in the local paper that a public meeting at Battle Hospital would launch a Reading branch for MND Association on Tuesday 10th March 1987; 93 people turned up for this special evening! According to Ted, this was the most people at that time who had ever come to a public meeting for MND. The formal Branch meeting took place a month later in Battle Hospital. The officers were Chairman, Maurice Lawrence; Secretary, Phyllis Lawrence and Treasurer Barbara Prior. Attending also on the night were yourself, Joyce, and others including Derek and myself, numbering 25 people.

Photographs of early fundraising provided by Mary and Joyce

EARLY FUNDRAISING

From 1988 Derek, in spite of his condition, put himself forward to help with publicity to raise awareness of MND and of the Branch itself. We did lots of fundraising during these times and raised thousands of pounds – with a lot of hard work!



From April 1989, with the help and support of Dave Wilcox, who was at that time the UK's offshore powerboat champion, we raised approximately £4,000, which, in September 1990, was presented to the Branch at a special function in Brock Barracks, Oxford Road. Reading Sea Cadets at Brock Barracks were a superb help, giving us use of their facility to hold fundraising discos free of charge, and they helped in fundraising too.



"The Dragon Club were also very supportive over the early years."

I am so pleased I was involved at the start of the Reading Branch, although they were also very sad times for my family. I take great pleasure in reading the Newsletter and all that is going on with MND Association in Berkshire. The Branch of today is much more professional than it was in 1987 and for the better. I wish it continued success.'

Contributed by Mary Dodds (Prior)

Long Service Awards

Both Mary Dodds and Joyce Iles have recently been awarded Long Service Awards by National Office, along with Phillip Adams, another early member.

Joyce very recently celebrated her 80th birthday and the committee sent her flowers in thanks for her continued active involvement with the branch, 20 years on.

Without the foresight of these dedicated people, we probably would not be in the fortunate position we are in today, continuing to provide practical, emotional and financial support to people living with MND and their families



Phillip Adams, Jennifer Hay and Joyce Iles with their Long Service Awards

And the fundraising continues.....



President Jonathan Hoare and Publicity Officer Charlotte Pusch hand over a cheque for £1,371 to Association president Lady Hallifax and Branch chair Margaret Moss.

The young action men and women from West Berkshire Rotaract Club have given us a huge slice of the profits from their fundraising exploits in the last year.

President Jonathan Hoare and Publicity Officer Charlotte Pusch told a recent management committee meeting how the cash was raised for their chosen charities.

A SLICE OF THE ACTION

Their enterprising efforts included a 10-mile night hike in the Chilterns and a crafty raft race dressed as Zorro along Newbury's waterways. The team also marshalled at the Royal Berkshire Show and manned a giant tombola stand there.

They chose the MND Association as one of the charities to benefit after being impressed by the website and information available from national office.

Rotaract is a global organisation for young people aged between 18 and 30 who enjoy meeting others for social and fund-raising events.

The club meets on the first and third Monday of the month at the Bacon Arms Hotel, Newbury, from 8.15pm.

For more details email the club at Clubwestberks@hotmail.com or go along to one of its meetings.

Contributed by Jane Gilbert

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