

Bulletin remembers those who have dedicated their careers to speech and language therapy

Obituaries

REMEMBERING

Gerda Wilson

1933 – 2013

At the memorial service for Gerda Wilson, two former clients spoke movingly and eloquently about the impact she had on their lives. Both stammerers, first seen for speech therapy help in 1967 and 1975, they remained in touch with her and both said, “she changed my life”. That really sums up this speech and language therapist: vibrant, funny, lively, curious, sometimes a little bit irreverent, with complete and utter dedication to her field of stammering therapy.

Gerda trained as a speech therapist at the Oldrey Fleming School in London and started work in Birmingham at the Child Guidance Clinic. Following her marriage to Bryan, and settling in Northamptonshire, life became busy as five children arrived. Northamptonshire did not employ married women at that time.

Gerda was appointed to a research post in Oxford in 1966 with funding for two years to look at the effects of therapy using syllable-timed speech with people who stammered.

When the original funding ran out, Oxfordshire Speech Therapy service (as it then was) created a permanent post working with adults who stammer, in which she remained until she retired in 1998.

In Oxford, Gerda developed a programme of intensive residential group courses for adults, with country-wide referral: two weeks of full-on speech and language therapy. She worked with hundreds of people and inspired many fellow speech and language therapy colleagues.

Gerda shared her wisdom honed over the many intensive courses, enriching the professional skills of many a wobbly SLT dealing with the huge challenges that people with communication impairment face. A therapist first and last, she also achieved an MSc, based on the research post.

I first met Gerda in 1983 and was simply bowled over by her energy and vitality along with her total commitment to the

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client. By then she had been working for 17 years in Oxford and had inspired a group of by now discharged clients to set up a charity, The Stammer Trust, to help support the NHS work. The original members of The Stammer Trust renovated The Apple House, a dilapidated building in the grounds of the Warneford Hospital in Oxford. This is where the intensive courses were held and continue to be held by specialist SLTs to the present day, helping both adults and now children. Anyone coming to the Apple House is charmed by its quirky non-clinical feel and it is a place where many people have discovered the treasure of fluency, and go off with confidence carrying it into their lives.

Gerda had tenacity and firmness on behalf of the specialist service making the Apple House a centre of excellence in the UK for helping people who stammer. Its continued development is a real tribute to her. She injected joy and fun into the serious business of stammering therapy. Her ability to convey empathy and understanding was profound and completely extraordinary. What a legacy.

Also busy outside of speech and language therapy, Gerda was a magistrate and a very devoted wife, mother and grandmother.

We extend deep sympathy to Bryan and the Wilson family and our thanks for her energy and inspiration for the profession. ■

Christine Charles, SLT Trustee, The Stammer Trust, Abingdon, Oxfordshire