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those people attending for their wonderful contribution and help. I continue to admire people with disabilities for the efforts they make to overcome their disability, the beautiful work they produce in the workshop, the wonderful achievements of the children in the pre-school and the school and in particular, their involvement and achievements in the sporting field, especially in Special Olympics.

Another special development involved the spiritual and religious needs of the service users. In the early years it was the policy of the Catholic Church that people with learning disabilities could receive Confirmation but they couldn't receive First Holy Communion unless they were seen to understand the meaning of it. This was felt by those of us involved in the services as unfair, because, it was, and still is, very difficult to know exactly how much a person understands and it was felt that people with disabilities had a very deep spiritual life. Gradually, and particularly, through the work of the late Bishop Birch of Kilkenny, a decision was made to allow people, regardless of their disability, to receive the sacraments, including First Holy Communion. Since that time people have been prepared for the Sacraments, particularly in the Holy Family School, in line with other primary schools.

The aim of the Foundation, from the beginning, was to give people with disabilities a quality of life that would eventually allow them to take their place in their own communities, to be included in the everyday things of life. This culminated in the development of the Forge Restaurant in Broad Street. The services in the commercial centre enabled the service users to do a large amount of the work and deal with the public. This has proved to be a great experience for everybody. The TESS Training and the Job Placement Team have been very successful in sourcing open employment for adults. There is still a mountain to climb, in that a lot of buildings, both public and private, are still very inaccessible to people with disabilities. Some improvement has come about in

recent years but we are still a long way from giving a decent standard in this respect.

In this article it is impossible to mention people by name, because many people have been involved over the years. I hope in the coming year with help to produce a proper history of the Foundation that will recognise the role played by various people in the development. I would like, nevertheless, to pay tribute to Mrs Maureen McCarthy, who played a huge role in the decision to provide services in Charleville and in her role for many years as a Board member.

Everybody involved in St. Joseph's Foundation, both now and in the past, have enjoyed being involved. In the words of Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, *"It is in identifying with other people's needs and involving ourselves in their struggle against adversity, that we achieve our own fulfilment"*.



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The Early Years . . .



St. Joseph's Foundation was founded in 1968. The first recorded meeting was on the 19th December 1968. There have been two name changes. It was originally known as "Charleville and District Mentally Handicapped Children's Association" and later became "Charleville and District Association for the Handicapped". The present name St. Joseph's Foundation came into being in April 2004. For the purposes of this article I will only use the name "St. Joseph's Foundation".

The original purpose of the committee was to raise funds for the building of HELP Industries in Cork for Cork Polio and General Aftercare. Substantial funds were collected, mainly through a house to house collection in Charleville and were handed on to Cork Polio and General Aftercare. It was decided at the first meeting that once the initial collection was done the Committee would stay together and organise something for people with disabilities in Charleville and District. On the 22nd December 1968 a Christmas Party was held in Cronin's Hotel at which 30 people with disabilities and their families attended. This was a tremendous success and following this the group set about investigating the possibility of setting up a service in Charleville with special emphasis on children, and particularly, school going and pre-school children. Contact was made with the schools in the area and Public Health Nurses in order to survey the numbers of children with learning disabilities and, indeed, other disabilities as well. Members went out into the parishes and showed a film "Signpost to Love" dealing with the subject. This was facilitated by the late Charlie Sheehan who had a projector and showed the films in each area. In the Spring of 1969 the then parish priest, the late Canon Dan Murphy, offered rooms in the Parochial Hall. These

rooms were painted by voluntary labour and the school started on the 21st April 1969, two days a week. It was intended, initially, to target children from 3 to 7 years old and voluntary transport was set up. Margo Olden was the first teacher to take charge of the school ably assisted by Constance Mortell. On May 6th, 1969 there was an official opening of the school by Mr. Finbarr Hill of Cork Polio and General Aftercare and it was blessed by Fr. Tom Glavin, C.C. Charleville. Everything was voluntary; helpers in the school were voluntary, and the drivers in the school were volunteers from Charleville and the outlying parishes. Drivers were mostly women who used their own cars and travelled around the district collecting children. The school was faced with accepting much older children than the upper limit of 7 years and so a decision was made to have all the children assessed, psychologically, to determine their level of learning disability. Following this an application was made to the Departments of Education and Health for help, especially to pay a teacher. From the very early stages, Mr. Sean Glinnane, School Inspector, advised the Committee on how to proceed, particularly, with the Department of Education, and we owe him a great debt of gratitude.

The original committee was composed of Dr. M. B. O'Donnell, Mrs Maureen McCarthy, Mrs Rosario Sheehan, Mrs Eileen Lyons, Mrs Elizabeth Micheletti-O'Brien, and Mr. Maurice Dillon R.I.P. In 1971 the school moved to the Community Centre at Main Street, Charleville because of more adequate accommodation. This gave 3 large rooms and a kitchen to be shared with other Associations. Again, an awful lot of voluntary work was involved in preparing the rooms, painting, carpentry, electrical etc. and this was overseen by Mr.



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Jim Fenn, County Engineer, R.I.P. In October 1971 a full assessment was ready and sent to the Department of Education, including psychological assessments, outline of the accommodation in the Community Centre, staffing needs etc. The Department of Education's reply was that when there were 30 children attending they would consider help. The Department of Education gave three quarters recognition after this. That meant that they paid three quarters of the salary of the teacher and transport so the Foundation met the other twenty five per cent from fund raising. Finally, the Department of Education gave full recognition to the Holy Family School in 1973. This was a huge step forward as it meant that teachers and transport would be paid in full. Some of the children attending were deemed ineligible for the school and a pre-school cum day care centre was set up in the Community Centre to cater for these children.

Around this time it became evident that some of the people attending the school were getting too old for the school and a decision was made to set up a sheltered workshop. A vacant shop was found in Main Street, Charleville, and work began. Golden Vale Foods provided sub-contract work mainly assembling cheese boxes. From the beginning, this was a great success and Golden Vale were very impressed with the standard of work. This laid the foundations for the adult services. Candle making was also a feature of this workshop together with arts and crafts. Mrs. Kathleen O'Sullivan was in charge of this unit.

Side by side with these developments there was extensive fund raising, church gate collections, a bazaar, 45 Drives and through an association with the Charleville Cheese Festival various funds were received as well.

1974 was a great year, there with the official opening of the Holy Family School by Mr. Tom O'Donnell, Minister for the Gaeltacht, and the official opening of the Sheltered Workshop by Mr. Dick Barry,

Junior Minister in Health. Also in that year the Foundation purchased two and a half acres of land in Baker's Road, with a view to developing our own premises.

In 1975 a small workshop was built in Baker's Road, and during the next few years a new school building and a large extension to the workshop were planned. Agreement was reached with the Department of Education to build a new school with the Foundation paying one tenth of the cost. This at the time amounted to £25,000. At the same time the Department of Health gave sanction to the building of a new pre-school and also an extension to the workshop and were agreeable to pay five sixths of the cost. The Foundation paid one sixth, this amounted to £30,000.

A campaign was launched around 1979 to raise the money needed for both of these buildings and the "Bricks and Blocks" campaign was started. The slogan was "Be a brick and buy a block" This involved selling a brick for £5 and a block for £1. in the new buildings and each person was given a certificate to show that they had donated. Their name was inscribed in a Golden Book. This campaign raised £68,000 which was a huge sum and it was organised through the parishes. A committee was set up in each parish and a door to door collection was made and this was hugely successful. The new school was officially opened by Mr. Donal Creed, Minister of State, Department of the Environment, representing the Minister for Education, and the new workshop and Padre Pio Pre-School were officially opened by Mrs Eileen Desmond, Minister for Health. This, finally, put the Foundation on a very firm footing.

The first Principal of the Holy Family School was Mrs Alice McAuliffe who was succeeded by Mrs Sheila O'Keeffe, the present Principal.

In September 1979 an Autumn Fair was held and this was the forerunner of the present Spring Fairs.

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1981 was designated the "The International Year of the Disabled". A large group from the Foundation made a Pilgrimage to Lourdes. This was a wonderful occasion and several hundred people travelled. It was a particular privilege on that occasion to meet Jean Vanier who was present at the ceremonies.

It gradually became apparent that some form of residential care would be needed and in 1983 the first residence was purchased, Ardfern, Charleville. This was funded with a grant from the Department of Health and also a special grant of £10,000 from the European Parliament as it was looked on as a pilot project. Up to then residential care was mostly in large institutions and "Ardfern" was the beginning of the community type house which was modelled on a family home and it accommodated five people. Some fund raising was needed as well to purchase the house.

These early years were very important because nationally there were other developments in progress. The Brothers of Charity and the Daughters of Charity in Limerick and COPE Foundation and the Brothers of Charity in Cork were already giving a service and it heralded the changeover from the large type institutional care to community services where the individuals could live at home with their family and attend a day service. When the time came to go into residential care it would be into family sized homes in their own locality. These changes were very welcome by everybody, especially families. It did, however, create other problems and needs and to meet those needs the Foundation gradually, over the years, have appointed social workers, community nurses and all the therapists, speech and language, psychology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, music therapy and Pastoral Care. As the need arose residences have been developed in various localities, Newtown, Dromina, Newmarket, Bruree, Kilmallock, Ballylanders, Ballyagran, and Granagh, culminating in the development of a retirement home in Dromcollogher and

the more recent building of a retirement home in Ballylanders. The Foundation has also developed respite care for both children and adults and also children's residential services which involves a house for respite care, a long term residence for children and another for adolescent people with learning disabilities.

As well as the Sheltered Workshop, the Foundation has developed day centres for adults, the first of which were Casa Maria and Assisi House in Charleville.

In the early years there was no administrative staff employed but as the work load increased a Secretary was appointed. The administrative staff that we have today gradually developed over the years, the final leg of which was the appointment of an Administrator in 1991 later to become Chief Executive Officer. For other departments a Financial Accountant and a Human Resource Manager were appointed.

A wonderful development was the founding of Special Olympics. This was founded by the Kennedy Foundation in America and headed up by members of the Kennedy family. St. Joseph's became involved in this from the very beginning. This has developed and been very satisfactory with our athletes appearing at all levels including World Games where they have acquitted themselves with distinction. The motto of the Special Olympics was particularly significant "*Please let me win, but if I can't win, let me be brave in the attempt*".

A great debt of gratitude is due to the original committee and all the various committee members over the years, too numerous to mention, most of whom are hale and hearty, but some have sadly died, May they Rest in Peace. Also a great debt of gratitude to all our fund raisers over the years and all the voluntary helpers who, in the early years, ran the services fully and since then have played a huge role in the various units and in fund raising. A special thank you is due to the various staff members over the years, the voluntary helpers and, in particular, the families of



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