

2021

Tribute to our Chair Jean Willson OBE

I am sad like many others to see Jean stepping down as Chair this autumn after many years of dedicated service and we will certainly miss her indomitable energy. Incredibly her contribution to Centre 404 goes back just over 50 years when she first came to the charity seeking support as a young parent carer of her daughter Victoria.

Over the years Jean immersed herself in all aspects of the charity. She volunteered for many different roles and became well known both locally and nationally as a strong advocate and activist for family carers' rights. Throughout the decades of various campaigns, fundraising events and her day to day involvement, her dedication and passion for the work of Centre 404 remained consistent and steadfast.

All the books and theories on running effective charities tell you that the relationship between the Chair and CEO is vital to the success of an organisation. I now know this to be true. Jean and I have been a great team so I believe this relationship played an important part in the way Centre 404 has thrived over the past 10 years. More than that Jean has been a mentor and inspiration to me and many others in the learning disability community.

Her expert by experience as a family carer as well as her vast professional knowledge of learning disabilities issues especially around the support of families has been invaluable. Much harder to quantify, but no less important is the heart and soul Jean brought to Centre 404. She always guided us back to the core of our mission and ensured services users and family carers were central and first to every decision and action. Due in no small part to her influence we continue to have strong representation of services users and family carers on the board of trustees. In addition we have service users and family carers involved in sub committees and other groups pertinent to the running of the organisation.

In recognition of her major and unique contribution made to the life of the Borough Jean was given The Freedom of the Borough in 2011 and was awarded an OBE in 2013 for her services to people with learning disabilities and their family carers. These were much deserved recognition and all of us at Centre 404 were immensely proud.

There is not enough room there to lay out all the achievements of Jean but I know she is writing her memoirs and it will be a great and colourful read.

Much more detail and stories about Jean's involvement and achievements over the years will be presented on our website. We also plan to record and interview her as part of a wider project with other family carers to commemorate the charity's 70th anniversary in the coming year. I also have it on good authority that Jean will shortly be completing her memoirs and I know it will be a fascinating and colourful read.

Now it just remains for me to pass on a huge heartfelt thanks to Jean on behalf of everyone at Centre 404 for her Chairing role. However, although her tenure as Chair is coming to an end we look forward to maintaining contact with Jean in the new ambassadorial role as President for Centre 404.

Linda McGowan

CEO