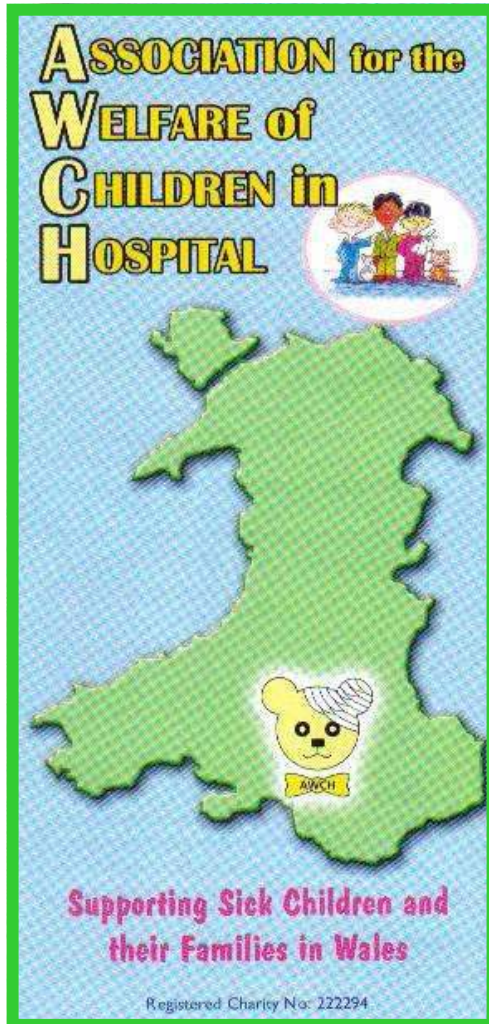


# Bear Tidings



Newsletter of the  
Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital

AUTUMN  
2008



## Welcome ....

... as usual to all our readers and, this time, to two new contributors.

It is good to hear from Elizabeth May, national co-ordinator for ASC Scotland, that our sister organisation is so active there.

Vivienne Jones recounts a childhood hospital experience from the 1960's. She says that writing it up has been a cathartic experience, and we thank her for her reminder of why setting up an organization like AWCH was so necessary.

While things have much improved since Vivienne's day, the expense borne by parents remains a major concern of AWCH. With the rising price of petrol and other transport costs, together with further distances to travel, the costs of hospital attendance and visiting are escalating. Read inside about our meetings with officers of the Children's Commissioner in Wales on this issue

... and finally, a very big thank-you to Margaret Fabb & Sarah Isherwood for, once again, holding events to raise much-needed funds for AWCH.

## AWCH aims

- To raise awareness of the needs of sick children and their families in the health service in Wales
- To provide information and support to children, young people and their parents/carers
- To work with professionals, other voluntary organisations, parents, and children and young people themselves to promote quality health care for sick children in hospital, the community and at home.

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# NEWS & VIEWS



## Action for Sick Children (Scotland)

*Helping sick children and young people meet their healthcare needs in partnership with parents, carers and professionals*



Action for Sick Children (Scotland) is delighted to report that in the year ended 31 March 2008 we worked with 7,714 children, young people, families, voluntary groups and health care providers. Our current projects include supporting *vulnerable families* in Tayside including teenage mothers and their children. We are also in the first year of a two year '*Special Smiles Dental Project*' which is piloting, in 'special needs' schools in Tayside, a dental play resource we have developed for use by children and young people with a range of complex and additional support needs. Our *Big Lottery* project has just finished and one outcome has been a *Children and Young People's Healthcare Rights Resource Pack*, which includes DVDS made by children and young people. This can be used by anyone working with children and young people on health issues. Earlier in the year we published our *Family Facilities Report (2005-07)* which surveyed Scottish hospitals admitting children in their wards. And last but not least we are also looking at the healthcare needs of '*looked after children and young people*' and exploring with health professionals working in this field how we can help. So all in all we continue to work hard North of the Border to secure best health care outcomes for sick children and young people.

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## NAHPS Study Day 2008

**T**he National Association of Hospital Play Staff, Welsh Branch held their fifth Anne Watkins Study Day on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> September. The speakers were Jane Hawkshaw talking about Play Wales and Joanne Jones who spoke about her job as Play Development Officer for the Vale of Glamorgan, her role is to develop inclusive play opportunities for all children 5-14, this includes play schemes and community based projects.

**P**lay Wales, or Chwarae Cymru, is a national organisation funded by the Welsh Assembly to provide advice, support and guidance, and upholds the children's rights to play by providing quality play provision in their own communities. Jane explained how children use their environment to support their play, using a variety of materials, making choices and taking risks.

**I**n the afternoon session we had a chance to play ourselves, we used our senses and got down to basics. We were blindfolded or given thick gloves and had to hold and examine familiar objects using our remaining senses. We also had some 'smelly' jars containing everyday smells and we had to identify them. The session was very worthwhile as we all spend a great part of our days providing opportunities for play but have little chance to play ourselves.

Ann Jones  
Play Specialist, Singleton Hospital, Swansea

## A Childhood Memory

Vivienne Jones was 4 years old in 1959 when she was admitted into an isolation ward under observation, an experience which led to her father, Peter, becoming a founder member of AWCH. Vivienne, now living in Canada with her husband and 18 year-old son, feels gratified that experiences like hers motivated people like her father to come together to work towards changing an inflexible and insensitive system.



Some childhood memories are ingrained. Certainly the one of my experience of being hospitalized has stayed with me and it's one I'd like to share with the current members of AWCH.

I'd been diagnosed by our doctor as possibly having tonsillitis, or worse still an infectious disease; we aren't sure even today what, perhaps rheumatic fever or diphtheria (in fact I didn't have anything serious.) Anyway it all happened very suddenly, one minute I was in bed at home and the doctor visited, the next I was bundled off to hospital

On arrival, the hospital allowed nothing from my home to remain with me; no toys, no books, no sleeping garments, nothing of my own to comfort me. My parents left and I was put to bed in a large unfriendly wooden crib. I recall the shock of it still, I was in a large room occupied by mysterious patients with strange tents over their beds; oxygen tents, I was told later, as this was still the time of polio. It was stark and sterile and unfriendly, there were no other children remotely my age and to my innocent four year old sense of reality it felt like a prison. That first night I can still remember standing in that crib crying for some one to come, calling out for a nurse who never came. No one came. No one came until the next morning and I felt and was completely alone.

After that I retained no clear recollection of the days that passed except for a sensation I identify now as a deepening feeling of resignation and abandonment. I had been admitted to hospital on a Wednesday and due to the strict regulation of visiting times I was to wait until the weekend to see my parents again. Visiting apparently consisted rigidly of Wednesdays and weekends at fixed times of the day. When they finally were able to visit me I only remember that by then I was no longer in a cot but in a bed but I also recall a strange numbness that had taken hold of me, as if a gap had opened up between myself and my life with my family, and I had fallen into it.

My father recalls, on seeing me, a nurse saying, "Well she hasn't said a word but she's been a very good girl." In fact my parents recall I just lay there silent and totally withdrawn. After that first visit, I was allowed a few items I remember, a new cuddly toy that my parents had brought, probably a few other toys, but how awful it was every time when they left. The nurses, whom

I feared in their stiff, starched, uniforms seemed to just pass me by, absorbed with their tasks, and I have no recollection of them as people.

Though I suspect my expectations of people were diminished by these two unfortunate weeks of my life spent in hospital, one memory remains positive. One kind person befriended me; it was a woman who came sometimes to wash the floors in our ward. I remember to this day a warm friendly face, someone who took the time to talk to me and befriend me. I realise now, here was someone who was trying to make a little girl's lonely experience in hospital a bit more bearable. Though my overall recollection remains a painful, difficult memory, I still retain positive feeling towards her for her kindness and humanity.

Surely this is the role of organizations such as AWCH, helping us become a humanitarian society that realises that the emotional well being of a child is at risk in such situations. Being ill or injured is bad enough for a child; hospitals shouldn't and mustn't be something for them to fear. Thank you again to AWCH for the ongoing efforts of working to prevent experiences like mine from occurring still. May your efforts continue to help where help is needed.

Vivienne Jones August 2008

## Update

Discussion at two meetings held between representatives of AWCH and Contact a Family Wales and officers of the Children's Commissioner Wales centred on the problems faced by families of children and young people needing hospital treatment. This was presented as a children rights issue. Siblings as well as the child in hospital can be adversely affected by problems which their families encounter.

The officers were receptive, and the outcome very positive with several suggestions for bringing this issue, once again, to the attention of Assembly ministers, members and officers being taken forward.

# Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital

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## Executive Committee

Caroline Crimp MBE - Chairman  
Ennis Roberts - Hon Treasurer  
Judy Evans - Hon Secretary  
Clare Lamb - Minute Secretary  
Mary George - Ann Jones - Jan Williams

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