

Appendix 6



A Brief History of Somerset Court 1974 - 2006

*(kindly provided by Norman Green of the
National Autistic Society)*

A Brief History of Somerset Court

Early in 1962 a group of parents met to form a society to promote and improve the prospects for children with autism they called it "The Autistic Children's Aid Society of North London" Many parents at this time found it difficult to gain a diagnosis for their child and also prior to 1971 no child had the automatic right to education. If a child fell below the required test at the age of five they were not considered educable and would be cared for in training centres or Special Care Units that were not required to provide education.

The Society gained impetus and the number of members grew steadily as more parents with offspring affected by autism rallied together to improve information and awareness of autism. During this time in 1965 the society opened its first school in Ealing run by Sybil Elgar. This is now a National Autistic Society (NAS) school of that name. A second school was opened in Gravesend as a result of the success of the first and that is now known as the Helen Allison School also now owned and run by the NAS.

In the late sixties the society renamed it self as the "The Society for Autistic Children" and now had offices and a small staffing team to manage the increasing demand for information and help for children with autism. In the early seventies the school in Ealing that Sibil Elgar was running was reaching a stage where the pupils were approaching school leaving age and no provision existed for young adults with autism. The parents of these children formed themselves into the "Ealing Autistic Trust" and at personal expense purchased Somerset Court in 1974 as a provision for post school development. Sibil Elgar was to be the principal of the project and 18 boys and 3 girls supported by 23 staff moved in during August of that year.

The Ealing Autistic Trust ran Somerset Court and developed a new bungalow during the late seventies that is now known as Blackdown and Polden. During the early nineteen eighties the Main House required extensive renovation which would cost a great deal, it was decide that the "Ealing Autistic Trust" would hand over the property to the NAS (formally: The Society for Autistic Children). The NAS invested a substantial sum of money and completely rebuilt the Main House in 1985. Further work continued with investment from a housing association which enabled Mendip House to be built. In the late eighties the Horticulture and Woodwork units was completed and a private benefactor donated sufficient funds to enable Knoll and Lakeside House's to be built. In 1999 the cottage was renovated with its extension added in 2004 the two properties have since became Porlock House.

Howard Williams
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References:-
Perspectives on a puzzle piece by *Helen Green Allison*

First Year at Somerset Court by *Sibil Elgar* – from Special Education : *Forward Trends Vol 2 No. 2 June 1975*