

# Behind the Scenes at Rose Hill Children's Centre

The Children's Centre is right next door to Rose Hill School. Behind a very modest entrance is a large suite of rooms radiating from the central area. At the recent opening of Rose Hill School's new play area (see p. 10), I met Sylvia Dolan, the Centre's Manager.

*'What does the Centre do?'* I asked her. As a 'one-stop' base for families with children aged under 5, the Centre provides much more than an invaluable meeting place with 'play and stay' sessions for parents and children.

Specialist help is available in the areas of

- midwifery
- ante- and post-natal care
- speech and language therapy
- health (health visitors attend the Centre, for those who drop in).

The Centre works with other agencies providing all this expert help, including advice on getting back to work.

It offers classes in parenting, healthy lifestyle, basic skills, English for those with another first language... In the December magazine we reported on the Centre's café, which provides tasty, excellent-value lunches from 12 to 1. From Monday to Wednesday, teams from Iffley Mead School are responsible for these; on Thursdays the dishes are halal; Fridays are volunteers' days.

*'Where does the money come from?'* I asked. The Rose Hill Centre is one of 45 in Oxfordshire, all government funded on an ongoing basis. They will soon become statutory—a part of the welfare state.

*'Can we do anything to help?'* Volunteers are always needed, and welcome, especially from those with specialist qualifications, but more generally too: to help with the crèche, drop-in, in the playroom, in the kitchen. Specially needed are people to help with 'tea and toast' for an hour each morning, starting at 9 a.m. There's currently a new opportunity for someone to coordinate garden work. All volunteers must of course have CRB checks—but the Centre will do this for you.

*'What are the challenges?'* There are 930 under-5s in Rose Hill, Littlemore, and Sandford—the area of Oxford served by our Centre. At present the help is reaching 310 (32 per cent). The challenge is to make the service accessible to all the others! Some task, but what a worthwhile one.

If you could support the Centre in a practical way, contact Sylvia Dolan, 716739.

*Pat Alexander*