



HIGHAMS
RESIDENTS'
ASSOCIATION

The Lodges and The Montalt Neighbourhood Care Scheme

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The development of Montalt Road began in 1897. The plan was to build 44 of these large red brick houses facing the park, but demand was slow, and only 30 were built.

These villas were very substantial semi-detached properties with six bedrooms, bathrooms, and three reception rooms. The kitchen, scullery, pantry, servants w.c. and internal fittings were described as “of superior quality and most recent design.”

By 1955 most had multiple occupancies, and Walthamstow Council announced its intention to demolish 28 properties and build 166 flats to replace them. The Highams Residents' Association protested strongly. The Council still acquired the properties but decided against demolition and reconstructed the internal accommodation providing a range of one-bed flats, maisonettes etc., naming them Lodges. Those early residents were often retired nurses, teachers, midwives and other professionals.

In 1985 Waltham Forest Social Services were concerned that over 100 people lived alone on one road in the borough, in the Lodges on Montalt Road. They enlisted the help of 6th formers from Highams Park Senior High School and surveyed resources in the locality. This identified Evelyn Handley's vision as a lifelong Salvation Army officer of a caring neighbourhood. Evelyn was also a long-time resident of Montalt Road. With her energy, compassion and enthusiasm, the Montalt Neighbourhood Care Scheme was born with Evelyn as the Co-ordinator and a £200 grant from the Council.

She designed the Scheme, organised a Committee with a secretary and a treasurer and enrolled a group of willing supporters. She continued to be the inspiration and driving force behind its activities well into the next century until the last of the Supporters was no longer able to continue, and the residents of The Lodges had changed beyond recognition.

Without undertaking tasks within the remit of Social Services, of which Evelyn Handley had personal, professional experience, her Scheme aimed to provide support and care for residents in need, focussing on the quality of life of neighbours in the area of Wood Lane, Keynsham and Lichfield Avenues, Mason Road and Montalt Road who might otherwise be isolated.

Active members of the scheme, Montalt Road residents, responded to the need for:

- emergency shopping and provision of meals
- replacing light bulbs, hanging curtains, replacing locks
- gardening, moving furniture
- prescription collection
- point of contact for next of kin
- transport to surgeries, clinics
- transport to and assistance at supermarkets
- hospital visits.

Evelyn was also keen to find ways for elderly housebound residents to get out of their homes and enjoy the company of other people. Every year there was a Christmas Party held at the United Free Church and a summer barbecue in a Montalt garden. Visits to places of interest, lunches in the Mallinson Rooms, trips to the seaside and even boat trips on the River Lea with cream tea were organised. Originally Waltham Forest generously provided transport by school buses in between their normal school-based duties. Later, supporters' or committee cars were used. House parties to watch holiday videos or listen to a special speaker were also enjoyed.

I was not part of this scheme in the early days, but when I retired from twenty years of headship in 2001, I was immediately approached by Evelyn to join the committee of six, which met regularly to discuss and plan together.

Evelyn's people skills and sense of purpose were such that new committee members were readily and actively enlisted into the Scheme. Things had to be done properly, with minutes read out and a treasurer's report at each meeting.

The annual Christmas Party was held in the front hall of the United Free Church. The committee members provided the catering, sandwiches, homemade bread pudding and cake with tea. My job was to compere and keep the guests happy and amused with jokes, riddles and amusing stories while the tea was prepared. After tea, the entertainment was provided by another committee member and her enthusiastic group of singers, often music hall style. The party always finished with carols led by Ron Handley and accompanied on the piano.

The summer BBQ was held in the treasurer's garden with burgers, onions and rolls and tea. No entertainment this time but a "free" raffle and much friendly chat. A Christmas lunch was booked at Mulberry House, with committee drivers providing the transport. Celebrating the anniversary of the

scheme, a competition to find the most attractive front garden, planted pots or window box in Montalt Road was set up, and attractive certificates were awarded to all who joined in.

The quality of life for the elderly, isolated or disabled, together with the overall community spirit in the Montalt Road area, did greatly benefit from Evelyn Handley's efforts and compassion with lasting contacts and friendships made. Time and age took their toll on us all. Several years later, the committee ended the scheme as no longer relevant to the much-changed Montalt Road demographic. Informal contacts did continue, with help given when required.

As a brilliant community hero, Evelyn Handley was given a Waltham Forest "Love Your Borough Award" in 2010.

Highams Residents' Association love to hear stories about The Estate from residents. Get in touch if you'd like to tell us yours.

www.highamra.org