

RENEWAL CENTRE - Swallowfield, Berkshire RG7 1TJ – Stage One

www.renewalcentre.co.uk

The seed of an idea began 25 years ago when I had a curious, startling experience in the middle of the night.

I felt it was God-Directed. It was so strong it stayed with me and gradually, through developing a B & B business in our family home as each child left to go to University... it began.

From my family trauma of living with the effects of alcoholism I recognized there is an unmet need for family therapy. I wrote to America to get books initially. A family psychiatrist directed me to a worldwide self-help group Al-Anon, which has been in existence for over 50 years and is available for relatives or friends of problem drinkers, or those suffering from alcoholism or drug addiction. This was my saving Grace. There I began to learn of the disease concept. It was classified as such by the World Health Organization in 1956 and more particularly in the European Charter of 1995. The wording includes:

- 'all children and adolescents have the right to grow up in an environment protected from the negative



consequences of alcohol consumption and to the extent possible from the promotion of alcoholic beverages' and

- 'all people with hazardous or harmful alcohol consumption and members of their families have the right to accessible treatment and care'.

Although epidemic since the 1980s alcoholism and the need for specialized family treatment is not widely recognized in the UK.

To me this has become 'my life's purpose'. I have known of so much suffering which can be alleviated with education, changed attitudes, constructive, effective treatment, care and support. Through this learning the chance of recovery for the addicted person becomes more likely but is not guaranteed. 65% of the children of people suffering

from alcoholism also become addicted and so the illness perpetuates with generation after generation, unless a change is created which may help. It is an extremely complicated illness and can be profoundly devastating

to a point of death. Hazelden in Minnesota has provided me with helpful detailed symptoms charts showing the various progressive stages, with which one can identify: although it is 'dogged with denial' on a worldwide scale.

I took the risk of obtaining planning permission in 1992 with the support of 3 rehabilitation centres, Social Services and the Local Health Authority. Over 18 months I cleaned over 18,000 bricks to re-use and just about kept apace of the bricklayer's needs. We had to rebuild 2 dilapidated barns with step-by-step repair. I bid at auction for scaffolding, searched out and collected matching tiles, sifted through piles of reclaimed oak to match, became planner and project manager, organized trade accounts,

negotiated for the best deals, instructed joiners, did all the decorating as well as a myriad of other jobs...and so a building 'of excellence' came about.

I was Blessed with good people. The links began 20 years ago through the Church, which found for me a competent bricklayer at the time of the building recession: through my self-help group connection a gifted carpenter, who, through the experience of working for me, became extremely skillful and was my most supportive ally in the trepidation of developing 'my vision'. To these two people and a good-hearted structural engineer, who told me to catalogue the work as it was pioneering, I owe an immense debt of gratitude and thanks.



We started in 1994 and the Renewal Centre was opened and Dedicated to the Divine by Rev. John Sumner on 11th July 1999. It was a magical day of brilliant sunshine. 65 people happily attended and I gave surprises which I love to do: a trip on Concorde to the bricklayer as it was a dream of his, a silver canteen of cutlery to the carpenter to remind him daily of his service to humanity and a holiday in the Isles of Scilly to the structural engineer who guided me every step of the way.

Sally

www.donlavender.com

**Self-help group:
Al-Anon Family Groups &
Alateen Confidential
helpline 0207 403 0888
61 Great Dover Street,
London SE1 4YF**

www.al-anonuk.org.uk
**NACOA: National
Association of Children of
Alcoholics Confidential
Helpline 0800 358 3456
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