

# 1994



Top: New Horizons gives financial support to pay for a horticultural designer who plans the walled garden with the volunteers who now maintain it. Our many visitors enjoy having tea there in the warmer months.

Middle: We design an exhibition in the Centre around gardening memories entitled **Back in your own Backyard** to coincide with the garden opening.

Below: Computer classes for over 60s start in our newly excavated basement. They are taught by volunteer tutors who work with four students at a time.



## New Productions

The Good Companions make a new show, **Friends and Neighbours**, about the streets where they grew up, with direction by visiting theatre directors, Sarah Worthington from USA and Silke Klug from Germany.

A new joint show between the Good Companions and the Youth Theatre is **Grandmothers' Footsteps** to mark the UN International Year of the Family. The older people play their grandparents and the children play the old people when they were young, and this idea is extremely popular with audiences in London, Brussels, Salzburg, Cologne and Lille.



A Reminiscence session in progress. **The 50+ Project**, supported by BT, is a year-long project to train 14 new reminiscence project workers, aged 50 or over, to work on reminiscence projects with older people across London. Bernie Arigho raises the money for this project and steers it through the training and practice stages. Bernie and Pam also begin negotiations with Greenwich University towards gaining accreditation for our training courses and this is achieved in 1995.

# The Bakehouse- an international arts and training centre

## The Bakehouse is ours at last

At the start of 1995, our tenants leave the Bakehouse and we can at last start work on its conversion. Alex Schweitzer has already conducted an architectural feasibility study, supported by the RIBA Community Fund and the building and refurbishment plans agreed can now be implemented. With backing from the Department of Health and the Baring Foundation, we set about achieving the almost impossible target of opening in May, when we have arranged to host a European Symposium on Reminiscence in Dementia Care and on Inter-generational Reminiscence.

## Cutting it fine, as usual

As delegates from across Europe call us to book their places, it is difficult to stay cool, knowing that, as yet, there is no staircase connecting the floors, nor any plumbing to speak of. An extraordinary surge of adrenaline is required to get the building ready and we call on long-term supporters from home and abroad to work round the clock. The moment when our Indian show opens the Symposium in the Bakehouse in the presence of two of our patrons, Dr. Richard Stone and Sir Sigmund Sternberg and friends from all over Europe is one to treasure. They are all delighted with the building, which is flexible, welcoming and a unique combination of old and new features.

## Catering and improvisation

Our caterer, Maureen Knott, who has provided good quality traditional food for trainees on all our training days, excels herself on this occasion. She drafts in her enormous wonderful family to help out and is supported by about 30 of our most committed older volunteers. Together, they provide meals for a whole week for 50 people a day. Bearing in mind that this is done with a single 4-ringed cooker and a Baby Belling, and with no hot running water, it is little short of miraculous.

## Further works to the Bakehouse

The May Symposium is to be followed by an even more ambitious event in the autumn and it is clear that we must take the Bakehouse building to a further stage (including a working kitchen, central heating and improved sound insulation) to cope with even larger numbers, including many elderly people from across Europe who have never been abroad before.

## Celebrating the peace

1995 is the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II and we have been busy marking the event in the UK with new productions and publications. 'A Time To Remember' is the name of our international festival of older people's theatre, co-ordinated by Age Exchange for the now flourishing European Reminiscence Network. The European Commission cover the travel and accommodation cost and some of the preparation costs of older people's theatre groups from ten countries.

## Coping with painful memories

Each group has worked hard to create a new theatre piece based on their own experience of the end of the war in their countries. For all the groups this has been a difficult undertaking, and part of Age Exchange's international training and support programme over the previous year has been devoted to helping the other directors to cope with the task. Everyone is nervous about performing such personal and difficult material to an international audience, especially when it includes their past wartime enemies. However, every group succeeds in making a play which expresses something important and true about their end of the war experience.

## Celebrations across the language barrier

It is hard to convey the thrill for all Age Exchange staff and volunteers when groups of older people fly in from Greece, France, Italy, Germany, Denmark, USA and Taiwan to celebrate with us.

In order to help people integrate and work together across language barriers, the Festival incorporates practical non-verbal workshops in mime, dance, music and improvisation. This proves to be an ideal way of relaxing the delegates and getting them working together without embarrassment. Summaries of the plays have been prepared in all languages, so that people can follow the action. Some groups have prepared well for the event by focusing on music, mime, dance and visual images, but every group gets a good hearing and the older people learn an enormous amount from watching one another's work.

We record the whole extraordinary event on film, but nothing can quite capture the warmth and spontaneity generated by so many older people from around the world having a ball together and stretching their own sense of the possible.

# 1995

## Capital Projects

From January to April, Alex Schweitzer and friends, Helena and Toby Platt and Sebastian Fleiter, convert and refurbish the run-down offices in the Old Bakehouse into a reminiscence training and arts development centre, with funding from St. James's Trust, Help The Aged, the Baring Foundation and Department of Health.

In May we open the Bakehouse with a European Reminiscence Symposium attended by 85 people from 10 countries. All the catering is managed by our regular cook, Maureen Knott, and an army of volunteers. The building still needs central heating and sound-proofing so a great deal more work is done before the next big international event in the autumn.



## The Bakehouse houses photo exhibitions from Europe

Two Photographic exhibitions are held in the Bakehouse, one from Il Melo project in Italy on inter-generational projects across Europe and one from Daily Lives project in Lille on Centenarians across Europe.

## A new commission from the Department of Health and Help The Aged

*Winter Warmers* is a new professional touring show scripted by Rib Davis and Clare Summerskill. It is also a three-dimensional exhibition in the Reminiscence Centre and an illustrated book. All three parts of the project are produced with subsidy from Help The Aged and the Department of Health as part of their Winter Warmth campaign.



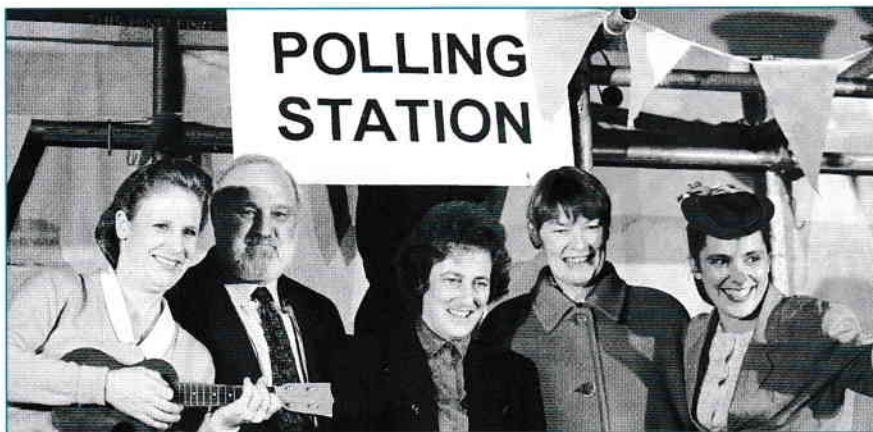
*'A Time To Remember'*, our international older people's theatre festival with European Commission funding held at Age Exchange, the Blackheath Concert Halls and the Albany in Deptford to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II with performances by older people's groups from 10 countries. Delegates receive summaries in their own languages and group leaders help with translation.

# 1995



Above: The Good Companions and the Youth Theatre develop a new play with Pam Schweitzer called **Cheers**, supported by London Arts Board and the European Commission. This is performed at the Centre in the exhibition space full of wartime memorabilia with a complete street party painted on the walls. The exhibition is by Lisa and Steve Wilson and Dora Schweitzer. This play opens at our International Festival, **A Time To Remember**.

Below: **When the Lights Go On Again** is a professional touring show scripted by Rib Davis and Clare Summerskill for Age Exchange and widely toured in the UK. We perform for Glenda Jackson and Frank Dobson's rally in Camden Town Hall. These two productions then play in Cologne at a sister festival to mark the end of the war. These end of the war anniversary projects attract funding from Readers Digest and the European Commission as well as support from the German state and provincial governments.



## Organisational Developments

In this special anniversary of VE Day year, Pam Schweitzer and Rib Davis undertake reminiscence/oral history work for the London Boroughs of Greenwich, Lewisham and Southwark. We interview people around wartime memories, create an archive of taped reminiscences and transcripts and produce edited reminiscence books for Southwark and Lewisham libraries.



## Special events

John Major, the Prime Minister, visits Age Exchange to mark the 1st anniversary of the National Lottery. We have just been granted £50,000 for essential improvements to the Bakehouse and the installation of theatre lighting, sound, raked seating, etc. We perform **Cheers** for him and the press go to town on us.

# 1996



Rado Klose is commissioned by Age Exchange to produce a photographic exhibition entitled **A Time To Remember**, based on the European Festival of Reminiscence Theatre held at Age Exchange in 1995. This is displayed in Hildesheim, Germany and in London.



**Work In Progress** is a new show by the Good Companions around memories of leaving school and starting work in the 1920s to 40s. This plays in London, Oslo, Copenhagen and Hildesheim at special conferences and events organised by our European Network Partners.



Individual **Memory Boxes** offer older people a chance to work with young artists to make their own life portraits from photos & memorabilia

## International Networking

The European Reminiscence Network holds four meetings:

**In Hildesheim**, **'A Time To Reflect'** calls together all the directors of the **'Time To Remember'** Festival to reflect on what has been achieved and where we should go next as a Network.

**In Copenhagen** we mount a conference in partnership with Brita Lovendahl and DaneAge on **'Combating Social Exclusion Through Reminiscence'**, which looks particularly at the theme of isolation and depression at the point of retirement from the world of work.

**In Brussels** we organise an international meeting on inter-generational reminiscence with Marie-Louise Carrette and Catherine Goor from Entr'Ages.

**In Crete**, European Reminiscence Project leaders meet to share working methods and increase understanding of reminiscence theatre methods.

## Memory Boxes Project: Travelling inspirations!

This is an idea we borrow from our German partners. Older people work with artists to make Life Portrait Boxes from photos, objects and memories of their lives. The Age Exchange boxes travels to many other countries, inspiring high quality reminiscence work and personalised portraits in Denmark, Finland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Taiwan. The Taiwan boxes inspire a new piece of older people's theatre in Taiwan which the group bring to London to play at our 1998 international festival.

# 1997



**The Journey Of A Lifetime: Reminiscence with Ethnic Minority Elders** is a new European Commission funded project co-ordinated by Age Exchange and involving 6 partner countries. We all work towards a festival of shared work in reminiscence arts. Our Indian show tours the UK in the autumn with financial support from the Linbury Trust, the London Boroughs Grants Unit (Arts) and the European Commission. It also plays in the Netherlands, Belgium & Germany, demonstrating how ethnic elders' experience can provide the basis for new theatre work.



## Financial difficulties to overcome

In summer the financial situation is looking bad, with uncertainty over funding and a very small staff trying to hold the operation together. We have no Reminiscence Co-ordinator and our Management Committee feels that we can no longer afford our Centre Workers. We decide to attempt to run the Centre with volunteer help from October onwards. Thanks to the volunteers' generosity with their time, we are able to stay open.

Delegates from Belgium, Japan, the UK, Spain and Greece at our conference in Blackheath. In May we hold our most international conference so far, **Widening Horizons in Dementia Care**. This is subsidised by the Health Promotion Unit of the European Commission in Luxembourg. It leads to a new publication, **Reminiscence in Dementia Care**. Speakers from 5 continents attend and a lot of important connections are forged, including a link with Alzheimers Disease International. At this Conference, we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Reminiscence Centre with a dinner to thank all our supporters. Alex Kalache, the World Health Organisation's Head of Ageing is there to congratulate us. Our patrons, Glenda Jackson and Sir Sigmund Sternberg salute our success.

# 1997

## New funding for arts work

The Linbury Trust grants us £15,000 per year for 3 years. This is the first time for several years that we receive significant funding specifically for arts projects. It enables us to secure other funds for our theatre and exhibition work and plan our professional shows further ahead than hitherto.

## A new Europe-wide dementia project is funded

With funding from the European Commission, we plan our new project on reminiscence with people with dementia and their family carers. The project will involve groups from ten European countries.

## New productions by the Good Companions and Youth Theatre

The Good Companions and the Youth Theatre work with Pam Schweitzer and Hilary Pearce to produce *Footprints in the Sand*, based on memories of going to the seaside in the 1920s to 40s. We receive £5,000 from the Arts For Everyone Lottery Fund and produce a new exhibition in the Reminiscence Centre, designed by Jess Curtiss, and a book of memories with this funding. The Good Companions work with Pam to produce *Nuts & Crackers*, a new Christmas show based on their own memories and a little book of stories to go with it.

## The charity wins an award

Pam Schweitzer wins the Jerwood Award (administered by the Jerwood Foundation and the Guardian Newspaper) for individual excellence in the small to middle-sized charity field. The award is presented by Martin Bell, M.P.



*Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today*, a new European Reminiscence Network project, receives funding from the European Commission Health Promotion Unit in Luxembourg. The new project involves 10 countries in a pilot scheme to introduce family carers and people with dementia to reminiscence as a means of improving communication in the present. It begins with a training and induction weekend for 35 workers from 12 countries in London in December 1997. The training course is followed by reminiscence work in pilot groups in 16 cities.



The Age Exchange *Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today* group meets in Blackheath in co-operation with the Woolwich Memorial Hospital and the Lewisham and Greenwich Alzheimers Society. We are supported by 14 Age Exchange and other volunteers, so we can work on a one-to-one basis with the people with dementia. This enables their family carers to have their own separate meetings to gain training in reminiscence and much mutual support. This project is still running five years later with different families and is funded for a further two years. Many of the original family carers from the 1997 project stay on as Age Exchange volunteers when their partners die or go into residential care.

# 1998



**The Journey of a Lifetime Festival** of the European Reminiscence Network. With European Commission funding we are able to invite ten groups from different countries to perform shows by ethnic minority elders from across the world. It is an exciting international event with workshops where delegates exchange ideas and best practice. Paul Boateng, Minister of State for Health, opens our new theatre space at the Bakehouse.



**Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today**, our European Reminiscence Network project is running in 10 countries (16 cities) culminates in an international Conference in November 1998 in Vienna co-ordinated by Age Exchange. A year later, the delegates meet again in Stockholm (above) to launch a handbook on our European dementia project.

## A busy year of professional touring shows

**Routes**, our professional touring Indian reminiscence show has a final tour in the UK and Germany. **Can We Afford The Doctor?**, our professional show about pre-National Health Service family health, is revived to mark the 50th anniversary of the NHS and tours nationally from May to August. It is financially supported by the Linbury Trust, the Department of Health and the London Boroughs (Arts).

## New community theatre projects with ethnic minorities

Pam Schweitzer and a visiting director from Canada, Lisa Dolittle, create an inter-generational theatre project with Caribbean elders and young black drama students from Lewisham. It is called **We Want to Speak of Old Times** and we continue to develop and perform it throughout 1998.

## Capital works

January to March we work hard finishing preparations in the Bakehouse for its use as a theatre space. Flexible and removable raked seating is installed, black drapes and a video unit for screenings, making it an attractive theatre space.

## New funding and a chance to plan ahead

In April, the Department of Health gives us 3-year funding. Help The Aged also gives a 3-year contribution. Now we can make appointments and plan ahead, having weathered a very harsh period of financial difficulty. We appoint an Arts and Education Officer, Reminiscence Co-ordinator, and Administrative Director and Age Exchange enters a new phase of development. We also recruit new members to our Management Committee and set up sub-committees on finance and human resources.

## More funding from Europe

We hear we have European Commission funding for **'Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today, Part II'**, a continuation of this project into 1999, enabling us to produce a handbook of the best ideas to emerge from across the projects in different countries.

## More awards

We win the IMPACT award of £25,000 for excellence in community health from Smith Kline Beecham distributed through the Kings Fund.

# Working with Ethnic Minority Elders

## 'We want to speak of old times'

Since the early 1980s, Age Exchange has sought to reflect the lives of London's ethnic minority elders in plays, books and exhibitions. Given that it is natural for people as they grow older to take stock of their lives and to revisit in memory the people and places of their earlier years, it is obviously important to create opportunities for reminiscence amongst Britain's ethnic elders. As Mabel Carter said to me in 1984, *"We want to speak of old times. We may even sing some of our old songs. We may remember the days that were spent at home, the moonshine nights we sat under a tree or in a big yard and sang together."*

## Confronting the bitterness

Our first professional show with migration as its theme was called "A Place to Stay" because of the ambivalent feelings of so many of the people we spoke to. One interviewee reflected the view of many when he said, *"This country isn't home to me; it's just a place to stay"*. In this first show, we confronted some of the bitterness felt by the older people we interviewed concerning the unexpected difficulties and hostility they had encountered on arrival in the 'mother country' and the endless adaptations they have had to make throughout their lives in England. We reflected the cultural divides between first and second generation immigrants and the particularly painful unforeseen problems of coping with loneliness and even abuse in old age.

In 'A Place To Stay', we brought together stories from different communities, with the actors, also from different ethnic backgrounds, taking responsibility for devising the scenes reflecting their own culture and language. In the late 1980s, we created touring shows around the recorded life experience of London's Irish and Jewish communities. In these instances, we derived the script directly from the words of the interviewees, and this gave a particular veracity to the dialogue, generating rich memories amongst our elderly Irish and Jewish audiences across the country.

## 'Routes': A bi-lingual production

In the early 1990s, we interviewed many members of the Indian community in south east London. Actors who spoke Punjabi and Hindi conducted the interviews and devised a new play through an improvisation process. The end result was a powerful



piece of musical theatre in two languages called 'Routes' which spoke to audiences of Indian origin, but also to white British audiences who knew nothing of the immigrant experience. This show played in many countries in Europe where other immigrant groups from Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and Malaysia responded strongly to its images and sounds, which cut through conventional language barriers and reminded them of their own past and present lives.

## The Journey of a Lifetime

The 'Routes' tour laid the foundations for our 1998 'Journey of a Lifetime' Festival of theatre by and about ethnic minority elders from cities across Europe and beyond. Pam Schweitzer worked with directors in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany to create new pieces of theatre and exhibitions to bring to London. It was fascinating for groups to find common threads in their productions, all of which dealt with the immigrant experience from the perspective of old age.

Age Exchange made a new show for this event, called 'We Want to Speak of Old Times'. We worked with Caribbean elders and young black theatre students. Following interviews with the older people, which were later published in book form, the two groups worked together on a play about leaving the Caribbean and coming to England. They performed this delightful show in local venues, until the students' end of term.

The older people went on to develop more Caribbean stories in 'Market Day', a new play produced by Leon Robinson, a young black choreographer, which they took to the International Festival of theatre in Cologne. In 'The Birds and the Bees', a new musical play, they shared their experience of discovering the facts of life with a group of older white people at Age Exchange, proving that daring experiments can be fun, whatever your age.

## Cultural transmission

There is a growing sense among ethnic minority elders, of the need to pass on a cultural heritage to younger people in schools. Age Exchange now works on a regular basis with older people of Caribbean, Indian and African origin in Life History Workshops on the 'Windrush' theme, which is now a component of the National Curriculum. We see what a difference it makes to children of all races to listen to first hand experience of migration told with warmth, honesty and humour.

# Inter-generational Projects

## Age Exchanges

As the name Age Exchange implies, the concept of linking young and old through creative exploration of memory and experience has under-pinned our work from the very beginning. Indeed it was the educational projects undertaken at Task Force in the early 80s, described at the start of this record, which led to the formation of the Age Exchange Theatre Company, and we have since developed many ways of involving old and young in joint working. For example in the late 1980s we were running a thriving Youth Theatre, Theatre in Education projects at the Reminiscence Centre and arranging for our older volunteers to work with children in the Centre and in classrooms.

In the years 1992-8 we were developing young and old theatre projects in which the two groups performed together plays based on memories of grandparents, of wartime evacuation and trips to the seaside in the 1930s. These productions were especially well received on the Continent, attracting great interest in Austria, Germany, France and Belgium where work of this kind was unknown. In 1993, Pam Schweitzer recorded all our inter-generational projects in a book called 'Age Exchanges' which is still used as a standard source today, and has been translated into French and German.

## Millennium celebrations

During the Millennium Year, David Savill, our first full-time Arts and Education Officer creates 'On The River', a community play with a cast of 40 people aged from 5 to 85 years old. Many of the older people have been associated with the river and the docks all their lives, but have never thought of stepping on to a stage to share their experience with a general audience. It takes courage and nerve all round to go ahead, amply rewarded by the tremendously enthusiastic audience response. It is a very positive outcome that both old and young contributors to this project have stayed on board with Age Exchange, helping with our schools workshops and performing in further Youth Theatre shows.

We are also commissioned to conduct inter-generational reminiscence projects outside London. Staff at Stevenage Museum ask us to lead 30 local schoolchildren and 16 tenants of Sheltered Housing Units in a series of reminiscence sessions on childhood games. This is swiftly followed up with an inter-generational project on wartime memories culminating in a play performed by young and old at the Edward Gordon Craig Theatre in Stevenage.

## Expanding our schools programme

During the next three years our inter-generational work steadily expands as teachers recognise the positive impact it has on their children. Soon we have 50 schools a year from several inner and outer London boroughs participating in Living Memory workshops linked to National Curriculum study areas. The workshops are featured on BBC Radio 4 and on BBC 2 for 3 weeks as part of its 'Get Set for Citizenship' series.

## Special needs work

We also have an on-going programme of work with special needs children. In the past we have invited children with special needs to visit the Centre and work with our older volunteers on stories about the past. Now we take our ideas to them in their own schools where we can make a more lasting impact and work with the same pupils over a 6-month period. Taking 'water' as the theme, pupils from Bromley Hall Special School in Bow work with older volunteers and Age Exchange Project workers with an arts background to convert a science laboratory into a reminiscence riverscape. Workshops included the use of first hand reminiscence, participatory drama, drawing and painting and documentary film. Willow Dean Special School in Greenwich would like us to develop a similar project around our older people's stories.

## Longer term developmental projects

Reminiscence work has an important role to play in on-going community regeneration programmes. We are now being invited to participate in partnership projects involving inter-generational work around citizenship studies. Recently, we have been working closely with Downham Pride, a regeneration programme on a local inter-war council estate, through a series of performances and community history workshops.

## The Youth Theatre flourishes

The Age Exchange Youth Theatre has been running on and off since 1987, but it has gained much-needed new energy under David Savill's direction. 'The Wireless Years', a new devised play focusing on the heyday of wireless in the 30s and 40s is followed by 'Lodz Ghetto', in which six young people work with Helen Aronson, a Holocaust survivor, to write a new play based on her wartime experience of her childhood, youth, and her miraculous escape from Poland.

# 1999

## News of lottery funding

We hear we have £50,000 funding from the Lottery Arts For Everyone Fund for a major reminiscence project and community play about the River Thames. We are also able to reprint our popular book of memories and photos of the working River Thames as remembered by older Londoners, entitled **On The River**.



1999 is International Year of Older People. We celebrate with a specially commissioned professional touring production **Once Upon a Lifetime**. Clare Summerskill creates an original work based on the real life story of one woman, Elsie House, throughout the century.

## We launch the new UK Reminiscence Network

We host a Conference in London on October 1st (International Older People's Day) marking the launch of a new UK Reminiscence Network. 100 people from all over the UK attend, a steering group is established. Age Exchange co-ordinates and seeks Network funding.



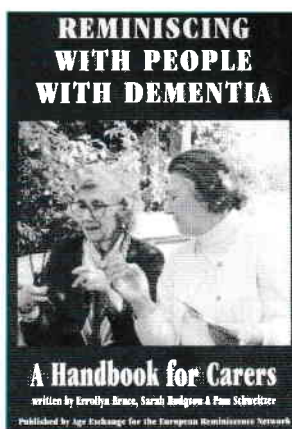
## We train 35 new Project Workers.

Many of them become regular Age Exchange freelancers on arts projects and outreach work.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the wartime evacuation of London's school children, Anny Evason and Alex Schweitzer create a new three-dimensional exhibition and we revive our popular participatory theatre show for today's school children, entitled **Goodnight Children Everywhere** with support from professional actors and older volunteers.

## International festivals

Age Exchange co-organises an International Festival of Older People's Theatre in Cologne, for which we create a new show by The Good Companions. **Our Century and Us** is to prove our most popular amateur show to date. We also form our own Caribbean Elders' Theatre Company called The Islanders with an original show called **Market Day** which was also performed in Cologne.



***"This manual will give a new impetus to carers looking for positive ways to engage with those whom they care for."***

**Dr. Nori Graham, Chair, Alzheimers Disease International on **Reminiscing with People with Dementia**, now translated into six languages.**

We publish a ground-breaking book, **Reminiscing with People with Dementia**, funded by the European Commission and launch it at our European Reminiscence Network Conference in Stockholm, Sweden.

# Working with Volunteers

## Volunteers play a vital role

Our volunteers are the life blood of our organisation. They participate in so many ways in the life of Age Exchange, giving us their time, their experience their generosity and their good will. Without their support we certainly could not operate our wide range of services. Their role in the organisation has changed and grown gradually over the years. Initially we asked for volunteers to tell us their stories so that our professional actors could use them as the basis for touring shows. We also requested their help in rehearsal periods to support the actors and to advise on matters of music, costume and dance.

## The Reminiscence Centre needs regular volunteers

When the Reminiscence Centre first opened in 1987, we needed more regular and consistent help. Volunteers willing to make that sort of commitment were rather hard to come by at first, especially as the Centre was a new idea whose purpose was not clear to everyone. Luckily we had funding to pay Centre Workers at first, and that gave us time to build up a stable and reliable volunteer rota. People could choose whether they wanted to help on the catering side, or showing people round the collection and the exhibitions, or helping with groups of visiting school children. In 1997, when funding for our Centre Workers ceased, we contemplated closing the Centre down, but our volunteers were convinced they could run it themselves. And they were right. The Reminiscence Centre stayed open through their absolute commitment, and thousands of visitors every year continue to benefit from it. It is now run entirely on volunteer effort, including dealing with the daily takings and donations. Recently, with our staff reduced, our administrator called on volunteers to help us out with answering telephones and other office tasks. Once again they have not let us down.

## Volunteers work with school children

Our education projects too depend heavily on the participation of our volunteers. They share their experience with school children visiting the Reminiscence Centre for Living History Workshops. They go into classrooms and explore with the children our Reminiscence Boxes full of mysterious objects from the past. They go out to special needs schools to support David Savill and our Project Workers and talk with the children about their lives. They work with young people in our two Youth Theatre groups, developing new plays based on their own stories.

## Volunteers support our dementia project

In our dementia care projects, we are supported by committed Age Exchange volunteers. They help us to create a feeling of welcome and warmth, which enables the people with dementia to relax and enjoy the sessions. They often attach themselves to one person in the group and develop a special relationship over the 18-week period of the project. Ralph Gooding, a volunteer, commented recently: *"A most educating and moving experience was the series of meetings with the group of people suffering from dementia. Much was learned and we began to recognise the real people who were behind the struggling bodies and faltering voices. Some very loving relationships were formed which were a benefit to us all."* Some of the family carers who have benefitted from this project have offered their services as volunteers when the person they were caring for has died or gone into a nursing home.

## Theatre work involving volunteers

On the artistic side of our work there has been a definite shift towards developing performance by older people who have never acted before. Our professional shows continue to tour, but equal importance is now placed on the work of the Good Companions, our older people's theatre group. They have toured extensively in the UK and in other European countries and won many friends for Age Exchange in the process.

In our community play 'On The River', we involved older river workers in the performances, and some of these ex-dockers and lightermen now participate as volunteers in our schools workshops. The Caribbean elders with whom we have created theatre shows in the past, now play a vital part in our schools workshops.

## A two-way relationship

For the volunteers themselves, Age Exchange is a lifeline. Joan Dormer writes: *"The great thing about being a volunteer at Age Exchange is the feeling of being needed and valued. We can see in a very direct way how our individual contributions affect the success or otherwise of the various activities. I hope that Age Exchange will be part of my life for many years to come."*

Barbara McKenzie, another highly valued volunteer writes: *"I would like to thank Age Exchange for 'having me'. I find it a privilege to be involved with the project."*

# 2000

## Funding for Millennium Projects

The Department of Health supports Age Exchange in co-ordinating an international festival of older people's theatre in London. Entitled *The Time of our Lives*, this festival attracts 250 participants from four continents (Europe, USA, the Far East and Africa) including 14 productions and 14 participatory workshops.

The festival takes place in five venues across south-east London and is a major organisational achievement for Age Exchange. It is a significant recognition by the Department of Health of the benefit of creative involvement in the arts to older people's health and well-being.

We receive funding from the Millennium Commission to mount a new professional theatre production based on the memories we have collected of the working River Thames. Entitled *In Full Flow*, written and directed by guest artist Noel Greig, this plays in 60 venues in the south of England.

Age Exchange is funded to run the *Lewisham Millennium Project* celebrating older people's life experience through a range of artistic, inter-generational and health-based activities, including a 3-dimensional exhibition, schools workshops and a publication.

**Pam Schweitzer receives an MBE from the Queen in recognition for the work of Age Exchange and the Reminiscence Centre.** A big celebration is held at the Centre for all our volunteers and friends.



*On the River*, an inter-generational performance project. Dockers, Lightermen, Stevedores, and older women from the docklands community worked with young people from Age Exchange Youth Theatre to devise a play based on their memories of the working river and their family lives. The play was performed to great acclaim as part of the International Festival of Older People's Theatre held during March 2000 in London, and again at the Deptford Albany Theatre in August.



Jack Jones helps us to launch our new *River 2000* exhibition. Age Exchange secures a grant from Greenwich Borough's 'A Time To Celebrate' fund enabling us to co-operate with The Common Sense, another innovative arts organisation, on a major exhibition and associated reminiscence workshops. This ambitious 3-dimensional exhibition in the Reminiscence Centre gallery incorporates a sound-scape of voices for the first time and computerised inter-active exhibits based on working memories. This novel mixture of old and new draws many visitors to the Reminiscence Centre throughout the year and our visitor numbers exceed 30,000.

# 2001

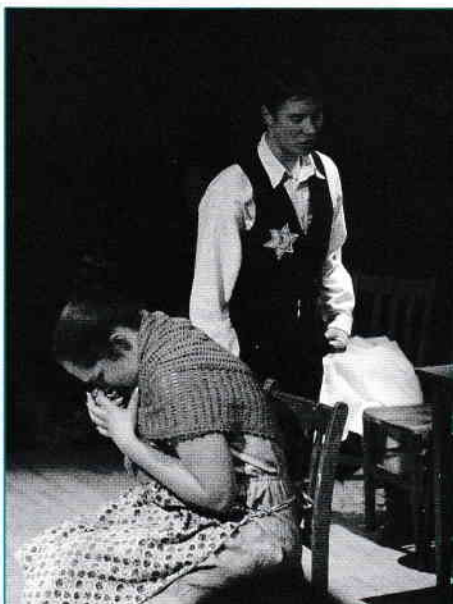
## A Year of financial struggle and squeeze

Following two very busy and well-funded years, Millennium grants terminate and Age Exchange enters a period of financial restraint. We retrench by letting office spaces and reluctantly reducing staffing.

We appoint a new Chair of the Council of Management, Paddy Ross, who actively engages in fund-raising on our behalf. Other Council of Management members also support the staff's efforts. Together we undertake an energetic fund-raising campaign and win support from (among others) Charities Aid Foundation in the form of a long-term loan.

We launch a new **Friends of Age Exchange** organisation, with a view to consolidating financial and moral support in the local area. We arrange a large number of fund-raising events.

The **Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today** project receives 3-year funding from Bridge House Trust and the Tudor Trust. Our book of the project, **Reminiscing with People with Dementia**, is translated into six languages.



We open the exhibition **Lewisham Lives**, based on the stories and remarkable photographs we have collected as part of the Lewisham Millennium Project. We undertake work in many Lewisham schools and produce a book for teachers on how to use reminiscence and encourage older people's involvement in curriculum work in the classroom.



Above: **Across The Seven Seas** is an exhibition commissioned by the National Maritime Museum. It features the memories of ethnic minority elders who came by ship to Britain after the war years. These memories are conveyed through sound recordings, memory boxes of treasured artefacts and photos and individual illustrated life story books.

Left: **Lodz Ghetto**, our new Youth Theatre production. Helen Aronson, a long-serving volunteer, is over-whelmed when young people from Age Exchange Youth Theatre perform their play based on her memories of her wartime experience in the Lodz Ghetto in Poland, and her miraculous escape. This work is to be performed again to mark Holocaust Day in January, 2002.

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## The Story So Far

### To all those who made it possible continued

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Nell Phoenix  
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Seva Dhalival  
Vincent Ibrahim  
Robina Mir  
Pavan Virk  
Sohail Dhin  
Ashiq Hussein  
Rezz Kempton

Neil Gore  
Philip Curtis  
Lyn Gardner  
Dan Norris  
Neville Hutton  
Verity Watts  
Owaine Williamson  
Celia White  
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David Rowan  
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Mike Sherman

#### Friends of Age Exchange

##### Committee:

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Gillian Gadsby  
Joyce Milan  
Barbara McKenzie  
Iris Gooding  
Lil Murrell  
Margaret Drummond  
Ginnie Quiney  
Clodagh O'Reilly

##### Good Companions:

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Eileen O'Sullivan  
Harry Demarne  
Anne Finer  
Kathleen Ash  
Margaret Phair  
Dorothy Barton  
Laura Murphy  
Margaret Kippin  
Joyce Milan  
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Lil Murrell  
Olive Smith  
Kitty Finch  
Penny Cheesman  
Lilian Burnett  
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Hilda Kennedy  
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