

SOS!SEN News – January 2017

Charity co-founder recognised with a national honour



The co-founder of a charity which offers support and advice to families regarding Special Educational Needs (SEN) has been recognised with a national honour.

Marion Strudwick, of Hampton, has been given a British Citizen Award for her services to education.

The British Citizen Awards (BCAs) were launched in January 2015, to recognise exceptional individuals who work tirelessly and selflessly to make a positive impact on society. BCAs are awarded twice annually, and recognise ‘everyday’ people whose achievements may otherwise be overlooked.

Marion, aged 80, set up the charity **SOS!SEN** in 2001 with her husband, Bob Parslow, and school governor, Martin Dean, as a result of the closure of a local SEN school. They were extremely concerned for the lack of consultation available to parents, and wanted to support and empower parents to achieve the best education for their children.

The charity offers free, friendly and independent advice to families, helping to ensure they have access to the right support and information.

Marion, who was a coordinator at the charity for 13 years, set up a free term-time helpline run by volunteers, which is available to all parents/carers in the UK. In addition to the helpline, Marion helped set up eight advice centres across the country, giving parents the opportunity to talk to an experienced volunteer face to face, at no cost. The charity also runs workshops for parents to help them manage the SEN process, as well as running two charity shops.

Despite not having any formal legal training, with the guidance of the legal profession, Marion has represented parents, who can’t afford to hire legal professionals, at tribunals.

The charity, which originally started in Marion’s front room, has gone from strength to strength, and is now in its fifteenth year. SOS!SEN had been set up with a view to support parents in the Borough of Richmond, but quickly began helping parents nationwide, having supported more than 50,000 families.

Marion, who stepped down last year to become a trustee, is still heavily involved with the charity, and is dedicated to supporting parents and children. Parents will often turn to the charity when they are stressed, and may feel they have nowhere to turn, but Marion is always on hand to help.

Before setting up the charity, Marion worked in France for more than 16 years, and founded the International School of Bordeaux.

Marion is one of 29 medallists who will be honoured at a prestigious ceremony on January 26, at the Palace of Westminster. All BCA recipients have positively impacted society undertaking various activities in support of a number of causes. Each will receive a Medal of Honour, inscribed with the words ‘For the Good of the Country’. Medallists are also invited to use the initials BCA after their name.