

MEETING ABOUT THE ORGANISATION OF THE CHILDREN'S COCHLEAR IMPLANT
PROJECT.

4TH SEPTEMBER, 1989

*Bill, Jim, Charles Pankaj, Chris Gorn,
Jean Lehar, Judy Wimbll, myself.*

I originally requested that we have a team meeting to discuss the Children's Project because of organisational problems that have been the causing a great deal of conflict. This conflict is seriously affecting the work of the habilitation program. I don't think it will be resolved in a meeting such as this because the problems are inherent both in the organisational structure of the project and in the working relationships of the team members. Both areas would need to be addressed by the whole group at a Search Conference in order for the problems to be resolved with any degree of satisfaction.

I want to outline some of the areas of conflict that are affecting work of the project, and will illustrate them with specific examples. These include:

1. Communication between Bill and myself.
2. Negotiations and relations with external agencies.
3. The number of children in the project.
4. Office management.
5. Financial management.

I request at this point that you let me present my case about the organisational problems in its entirety before we discuss specific issues within it. I believe that the overall organisation is the main issue and not any specific examples, and I would like you to get a complete picture of what I mean. Also, I want to emphasise that my purpose in requesting this meeting is to bring about organisational improvements in the project and to help build collaborative work relationships among the team members.

1. Communication between Bill and myself.

Over the last 4 years I have found that it's very difficult to get things through to Bill. In oral discussions, he doesn't seem to listen to what I am saying, so, it is hard to get answers to specific questions that I raise.

After some experience with this I decided to put my discussion points in writing so that he would have a hard copy to refer to, but this has not been satisfactory either. For example, I wrote on two occasions to Bill about our need to apply for government funds to cover salaries for the core team, administrative costs, implants and equipment for the centre.

1. "I have enclosed (an) article about the government funded Cochlear Implant Clinic at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital in Melbourne. The government has provided money for implants as well as salaries and administrative costs. Could we please approach Peter Collins for funding for an implant clinic.....Could we please try for this?"
(27th May, 1988).

2. "I am extremely concerned about the future of the Children's Project. We neither have salaries in place for the staff, nor a proper facility in which to work. My own salary is only guaranteed until the end of December and there are no alternative funds in place for its continuation after that date. Although I have worked without a salary for several periods in the past, I am extremely loath to be put in that position again..... We should prepare a detailed submission to the Health Department for funds to cover the implant centre's staffing, administrative and equipment needs. However.....We should also prepare a detailed submission to the Education Department....I think we should present our case in writing first through the appropriate channels. We should also plan for a delegation to see the Minister and leave our submission with him. AND, IF THAT FAILS, WE SHOULD GO TO THE MEDIA."
(28th October, 1988).

Bill still had not organised any submissions for government funding by December, 1988, and, as I said in my letter, my salary was going to run out at the end of the month. The prospect of my salary running out again put me in a very insecure position personally because my husband is doing his doctorate and my salary supports our family. Also, we had to be in a secure financial position for our trip to Korea to pick up our baby. Furthermore, as I said in the letter to Bill, the whole project and all the families involved were placed in a very insecure position because we couldn't guarantee that the project would continue. I therefore acted myself to see if we could obtain financial backing. I wrote to the Education Department, the Health Department, the National Acoustic Laboratory, and also contacted Paul Trainor.

All of these initiatives bore fruit. I have had 3 very effective meetings with Education Department personnel and I

have obtained their strong support. The Health Department has provided a large grant which can be used to employ a core team for the habilitation program, and to buy implants and equipment for the project. The National Acoustic Laboratory has appointed a paediatric audiologist part time to learn the mapping procedures and to help ascertain the resource allocations they will provide in the future. And, finally, Paul Trainor has provided a grant to cover my salary as well as additional funds for the project.

The lack of funds had been a constantly aggravating problem which limited the work of the project and caused a great deal of stress. My decision to apply for funds myself was the initiative that actually saved the project, yet I now find myself in the invidious position of being treated like a naughty girl for having done so.

To summarise, I have found it very difficult over a long period of time to communicate with Bill over many issues. Our need for government funds was only the most telling example to give.

2. Negotiations and relations with external agencies.

A great deal of conflict has arisen between Bill and I about the negotiations that have been carried out with external agencies. Initially, I was not involved in these negotiations,

even though they concerned the habilitation program and my own position, and I had specifically requested that I attend. To illustrate, I wrote to Bill in October, 1988 that "I will look forward to working on the plans for the project and request that I am included in all meetings in which the habilitation program is being discussed." This request was unheeded, and I was often placed in the position of having to counteract commitments that Bill made to external agencies that were not in the best interests of the children. For example, Bill wrote in a letter to John Berryman in April, 1988 that:

"I agree to collaborate closely with The Institute on the cochlear implant programme and not to work with any other group regarding the habilitation. I will phase down the activities at Chatswood as requested and only undertake the early habilitation at The Yenibis Centre, I will make it clear that this is an Institute project. In other words, I will give The Institute the exclusive rights to the habilitation of the children and allow them to use this feature for any fund raising activities they wish."

I could not agree with this arrangement because Pia and Joseph attended school at Chatswood and they needed to be followed up. Furthermore, I don't think that any educational body should have 'exclusive' rights to the habilitation program. This aspect of Bill's negotiations would have seriously damaged the project.

Bill's negotiations with The Institute about my position also had serious repercussions for me personally. Bill gave me the impression that The Institute was funding the Children's Project as part of the University program. However, The

Institute believed that I was employed by them and that they had the right to supervise me. I was not aware of this and I would never have agreed to it had I initially been part of the negotiations. A letter dated 23rd April, 1988, that I wrote to Bill confirms this. I wrote:

"The people at The Institute clearly have the idea that the project is their now. I know how surprised I was last year when I had to negotiate my contract with John Race and found out that I was 'an Institute employee'. I thought they had agreed to fund my position, but that I was going to be seconded to the university. Hence the struggles with the lines of responsibility."

I should never again be put in a position where my career position is negotiated by someone else. Moreover, I should be in charge of all negotiations with other agencies when the habilitation program is being discussed because I am the expert on habilitation, not Bill. I think this also applies to the hiring of staff who work on the habilitation program. I should be given the responsibility of assembling a strong team of professionals to work on the project because I know the specific qualities, training and experience that are needed for the work.

3. The number of children in the project.

The third area of conflict that has arisen because of poor organisation concerns the number of children who are accepted into the program. We have had the very difficult problem this year of having too many children for the current resources of the centre. I tried to forewarn Bill about this in April, 1988, by writing to him about my need to spend less time at the centre once we had adopted our baby. I said:

"As I mentioned on Friday, I have urgent and important personal reasons for wanting to work part-time this year."

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I also realised that we would have to restrict the number of children we accepted into the program, and, in October, 1988, wrote that:

"We certainly can't accept any more children in the program until the problems are sorted out."

My assessment of the number of candidates that we could deal with in the program, however, was unheeded and 8 more children received implants after I wrote that letter. These children created an enormous workload right at the stage when I needed to spend far less time at the centre because I had a new baby. Since our baby's arrival in March, I have been in an impossible situation and have struggled to keep the program going. I have tried to keep working with the school-aged children, I have tried to do as much programming as I could, I have tried to keep negotiations going with external agencies to secure some relief, and I have tried to keep as much of the administration going as I could. But I will reiterate the obvious fact that the whole situation was unworkable. It lead me to point in June this year when I had to say to Bill, not only that I couldn't but I wouldn't continue with such an unmanageable workload. Instead of addressing my concerns, however, Bill responded by calling Jim Patrick on the weekend to complain.

The most aggravating thing about this whole area of conflict is that I had forwarned Bill in April, 1988, and it all could, and should have been properly organised. It has caused a great

deal of stress.

4. Office management.

The area of office management has also been a very difficult problem to deal with over a long time. In this area the Children's Project team are placed in the confusing position of having to get administrative matters through to Bill, yet Joan states that she doesn't do any work for anyone other than Bill. As it is impossible to get directly through to Bill himself most of the time we often have to leave messages with Joan. This means either that many things don't get done or that they are done with a great deal of resentment because Joan doesn't see them as her work. I can't see how we can get things attended to by the head of the department if his secretary doesn't think they are part of her work.

I will illustrate the severity of this problem by giving several recent examples:

a) My salary has been a continuing problem because it hasn't been properly organised. Bill has had to have my salary paid from his Senior Lecturer's salary on a month to month basis. This means that he has to write a letter each month to say that I am reinstated and which account to use for my salary. However, this has not occurred 4 times since February and I have had to follow-up the procedure myself. The last couple of times have

been particularly aggravating because I have met with an angry response from Joan when I asked what has happened. She says that my pay is my own responsibility, but this is clearly not the case since the letter authorising payment must come from Bill. Thus, I have been in the position of not receiving my pay because of the poor organisation in the office, and of having recriminations

directed against me by the office secretary when I enquire about it. *Gail Mendoga' was extremely sympathetic. She thought the situation was appalling.*

b) Cochlear refuses to supply any of the children's books or spare parts to our clinic unless I pay for them myself, because payment through Bill's office is unreliable and takes so long. This puts a difficult burden on me however, when I am not even sure that I will receive my own pay on a regular basis.

c) It took 8 months for Bill's office to order videotapes for us that we needed for pre- and postoperative assessments.

d) lost files. g) Amount of time B. II spends on uni. work & with patients & surgery.
e) Daphne's sabbatical.
f) Joan's rudeness/laziness
To summarise, we are in the very difficult position of

having to work through Bill's office but frequently there is opposition and obstacles to this. The most frustrating part is that I meet with angry denials when I have to follow up things that are not done.

HFEEO guidelines & overriding the system
i) Alex & Joan's intrusion.
j) FEO guidelines / Catherine, Judy.

5) Financial Management.

There is now a great deal of conflict between Bill and I

about the management of the Health Department Fund. I feel very hurt that Bill is now organising this fund without consulting with me at all. I played a large part in obtaining that fund and I should be involved in deciding how it will be managed. It is,

after all, to be used for the Children's Habilitation Project. To be excluded from its management is quite ironic when you consider how much the Children's Project struggled during the time in which we didn't have adequate funding, how difficult it was to get Bill to think about applying for funds himself, and how desperate I was when I wrote the letter that finally secured the funds.

My letter asking for support from the Health Department clearly defined the purposes for which the government funding would be used. The main needs were for salaries for the core team of professionals who work on the habilitation project, and for equipment. However, apparently the Minister has also specified that some of the money should be used to buy implants for children who don't have private health insurance.

I have been most alarmed to find out in recent weeks that Bill has been thinking of using the money for purposes other the ones that were specified in my letter. Indeed, at one point he was actually proposing to give a large proportion of the money back. To quote from a letter written by Bill to ~~John Yu~~ *Peter Procopis*:

"The equipment has been offered by various groups and I am very confident that I can provide all the equipment listed on the

proposal from the donations received by The E.A.R. Foundation. Indeed, I have already purchased the greater proportion of these items." (25th July, 1989)

I was extremely concerned to read this letter because it

meant essentially that we would be giving back \$275,000, and I managed to persuade Bill not to send it. I also found out a few weeks ago that Bill was intending to use some of the money to pay for an Engineer to occupy the 2UE Hearing Centre. And finally, I was alarmed to discover that Chris had drawn up a proposal on how the money should be spent because he didn't even know that I had applied for it for the Habilitation Project. I think the money should only be used for the purposes outlined in my original letter.

b) Technava account. (3)

CONCLUSION

I began by saying that there are a number of organisational problems in the Children's Project that are seriously affecting the work. These problems could not possibly be sorted out in a meeting such as this. Bill's response to my request for organisational changes thus far appear to be centralising control of the project under him, but such a response would only exacerbate the problems I have outlined above. Delegation of authority and greater autonomy for the habilitation project are required to improve the situation. Certainly, a Search

Conference along the lines that I originally proposed would be a first step to the possible resolution of these problems.

My contribution to the work with cochlear implants in

children to date has been enormous and my input is invaluable to the continued success of this project. I find, however, that the problems that I have outlined have become intolerable. I will not continue to work in this project unless there are major organisational improvements and the problems are rectified to my satisfaction.