

# *The Edendale Welfare Society*

*by Joy Roberts*

edited by Jean Hey

## **Introduction**

*My mother, Joy Roberts, was chairman of the Edendale Welfare Society (EWS) for 40 years until it dissolved in 1994. During the years following its dissolution she would often remark that she ought to write a history of the society. All early records and minutes of meetings up to 1960 had been lost. Those involved in EWS were reaching the end of their lives and she feared that with them, the society's history would disappear. When my mother was diagnosed with cancer in 2007, she felt an added pressure to complete her research and writings. She died on Christmas Day 2011, having written most of the history, including a personal essay of her involvement. However the sections on the child welfare activities and the old people's home were incomplete. A couple of weeks before her death she said that she thought Sheila Mason, a longtime and dedicated EWS colleague, would be able to help finish the project. I contacted Sheila and she agreed, despite her own ill-health, and kindly filled in the missing pieces.*

*In an interview with the Alan Paton Oral History Project in 2010, my mother said, "When I was involved in the Edendale Welfare Society I used to have arguments with some people who thought it was wrong to do the government's business for them. 'You shouldn't be involved in welfare. Just let them sink,' they said. 'It's the state's responsibility. You are doing their job for them.'*

*"Well," my mother said in her usual matter-of-fact way, "that was hard, because you couldn't turn your back on the children. I couldn't, anyway."*

*What follows is an account of how, through remarkable doggedness and an unerring desire to help, a group of Pietermaritzburg residents improved conditions in Edendale, particularly for children, over a period of more than 50 years. I am grateful to The Natal Society Foundation for publishing this document and thus ensuring that a record of Edendale Welfare Society and its accomplishments is not lost.*

JEAN HEY

### **Personal involvement**

**A**FTER five years of travel and study in England and America, my husband Peter and I returned to Pietermaritzburg in 1953. Soon after our return I contacted the Pietermaritzburg Child Welfare to see if, as a social worker, I could help in any way. There didn't seem a place for me there. Bunty Biggs encouraged me to join her in the child welfare section of the Edendale Welfare Society. Cathy Orchard was then chairman and there were four areas of service where the EWS was active: the child welfare section, the Plessislaer Crèche (later transformed into Mthuthuzeli Crèche), the Ashdown Play Centre and the Emuseni Old Age Home.

I joined Bunty working with child welfare. There were two social workers, Mrs Nale and Don Madlinkosi, and a secretary. The office was in a small enclosed section of the Vulindlela Community Hall. There was no society transport. The social workers used their own transportation and often walked long distances over land where only footpaths led to their clients' houses. Social workers applied on behalf of their clients for maintenance and foster grants, visited families, and advised on social problems. Monthly case committee meetings were held at the child welfare office, reviewing cases, discussing problems. General monthly



*Joy Roberts*

management committee meetings were held where all members and representatives of each of the four sections of the society were present.

One of my early roles was helping with a sewing group when several child welfare mothers gathered weekly to learn to sew and make garments for their children. The society provided material (mostly rolls of khaki bought at discounted prices from a wholesaler, usually W.G. Brown & Co.) and we helped mothers sew school uniforms – shirts and shorts or dresses. One garment had to be left at the office for distribution to other families, the next could be taken home. I became the

main organiser of the sewing group, with a helper. I learnt to cut out, pin together and help sew pants and shirts, which made later sewing of shirts for my second husband, Simon Roberts, fairly easy.

Staff in the child welfare section increased. Soon there were three social workers, a social work assistant (Miss Mavis Mayila who served for more than 14 years), and a competent secretary. My service to the EWS was interrupted by the birth of my son in March 1955 and my daughter in December 1956, and for 18 months in 1958/59 when Peter had a Nuffield Fellowship and we lived in London, returning in May 1959, and again in 1962 when he had a lectureship at Wellington University, New Zealand. Peter died in 1963 after a long illness. After each return I took up my role in the child welfare section of the society – fundraising, distributing clothing, discussing cases, and contributing wherever I could.

In 1967, soon after my marriage to Simon Roberts, Cathy Orchard retired to the Cape after 15 years as chairman of Edendale Welfare Society and I took over the position. I was assured it would require no more than one or two mornings a week. It became a full-time job, involving contact with government departments and the National Council for Child Welfare, applying for subsidised social work posts, drawing up twice-yearly appeal pamphlets (photographs produced by photographer and committee member, Joan Rosenberg), keeping contact with staff and members, preparing and delivering annual reports, and involvement with each section of the society.

The society's name was now, and had been for some years, The Edendale Society for Family and Child Welfare.

In 1954 the society applied for affiliation to the National Council for Child Welfare. A condition of acceptance was that the name of the society should incorporate the words "Family and Child Welfare". Thus we became The Edendale Society for Family and Child Welfare, although, in addition to child welfare we administered two pre-primary centres and a home for aged and indigent Africans.

The society was administered as follows: each of the four sections had a sub-committee of two or three, led by a chairman who visited and advised and conveyed any problems to the main committee. The society as a whole was administered by a committee comprising representatives of each section together with the chairman and treasurer, general members and an administrative secretary who was responsible for correspondence, pay sheets and banking details, purchasing any requirements authorised by the committee and generally being the chairman's assistant.

In the early days of my chairmanship, on payday, usually as near to the 25th of the month as possible, the pay sheet for staff would be drawn up with deductions for PAYE tax or previous loans. Then the total amount of cash, including each section's petty cash, would be withdrawn from the bank, the relevant amount of cash for each staff member would be placed in envelopes, and I would travel, with this cash, to each of the four centres and distribute the pay packets. It was only later that each staff member was required to have a bank or building society account and salaries were paid monthly into that account, thus making payday safer and more efficient.

As chairman, I felt equally committed to and concerned for each of

the four sections of the society. My chairmanship ended after 27 years with the dissolution of the Edendale Society for Family and Child Welfare, and the amalgamation in April 1994 of those sections of the society dealing with children with the Pietermaritzburg and Indian child welfare societies to form the Child and Family Welfare Society of Pietermaritzburg.

To mark the end of the long history of our society, an invitation was sent out to all staff members and friends “You are invited to a WAKE to mark the demise of Edendale Welfare Society, celebrate its achievements and those who made it work – and have a jolly party”. The date was 6 May 1994. The venue was our house, Runner’s Rest, in Oriel Road.

Emuseni fell outside this new society and was constituted separately as The Emuseni Centre for the Aged. My loyalty remained with Emuseni where I became the first chairman of the newly-constituted Centre for the Aged. Then, on standing down, I remained a member of the committee of management until August 2010 when I felt I had little further to contribute, although I retained an interest in its affairs.

### **The Edendale Welfare Society**

The Edendale Welfare Society, later known as the Edendale Society for Family and Child Welfare, had its beginnings in the Edendale of 1939 and early 1940s. A small group of concerned Pietermaritzburg women formed the early Edendale Welfare Society, which over the years established two crèches or pre-primary education centres, one old people’s home and a busy child welfare society. Each of these tried to meet the needs of the predominantly black area, financed by state and private donors and by its own fund-raising efforts.

It grew into an efficient, independent welfare organisation until 1992.

On a larger canvas we see in the history of this one, small society a picture of the state’s changing racial attitudes and how the development and administration of welfare organisations followed – were forced to follow if they were to survive – the political and economic shifts of South African society.

We see how welfare programmes for black workers and their families were non-existent before 1939. “White welfare” hardly fared better, being provided mainly by church and extended family. In 1937 the first state welfare department was established and with it the professional status of social workers. Voluntary welfare organisations were for the first time given state support. At first there were no statutory racial divides, but with the Nationalist government in 1948 came the all-pervading race classification policy. The population was divided into four racial categories and each had different access to welfare services and resources. Black organisations were at the bottom of the ladder and that is where the Edendale Welfare Society found itself and where it remained for most of its existence.

If you look at a map of Pietermaritzburg and its environs, Edendale lies to the left of the city, some 10 km to the south-west of the city centre. It is a big, untidy area, a tangled web of roads, tracks, houses, churches and schools, with a main provincial road running through it and a large hospital on its eastern edge. Today it houses about 100 000 people and stretches from Plessislaer in the east to Georgetown and Esigodeni in the west. There are many named districts in what we call Edendale today, but in the beginning the



*Edendale Nursery School*

first settlement was at Georgetown, on the hill rising out of the Edendale valley.

It was here in 1851 that the Revd James Allison, a Wesleyan missionary, came with a small band of converted Christians, mostly Zulu-speaking, to establish a new mission station. He bought a farm, *Wilverdient* (“well earned”), 6 123 acres in extent, from the Voortrekker leader Andries Pretorius, and he called it Edendale. This was surveyed and sub-divided into building lots, residential areas, agricultural land and commonage. The town area was named Georgetown, in honour of Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape Colony, who visited Edendale in 1855 and befriended and supported the young mission station.

The small community worked hard and prospered. They acquired land and obtained freehold title deeds, paid for by the sale of cattle and produce and wages earned in Pietermaritzburg,

itself in 1851 barely 10 years old. But in time land changed hands, population increased. Original settlers moved away to more fertile fields, original land came onto the open market, often to be bought by Indian and “European” buyers. And so the racial composition of the community changed. It had never been tribal or exclusively Zulu. The original settlers included some coloured labourers who had moved with Revd Allison from the eastern Cape, and Swazis and members of other tribes. But Christianity had brought them together and they became welded into a cohesive community by shared experiences and a common religious bond. Allison was their protector, administrator and friend and he remained at Georgetown for 10 years. After his departure, the community spirit and feeling for hard work and prosperity continued until the end of the century in spite of depression, cattle sickness and hardship. Slowly,

however, absentee ownership, unauthorised squatting, closer settlements and lack of any administrative control saw the spread of dwellings across the valley. It also saw standards of public health and sanitation decline to hazardous levels as more and more houses, mostly of wattle-and-daub, were built on smaller and smaller pieces of land. Edendale attracted those looking for work in Pietermaritzburg and cheap accommodation, illicit liquor sellers and traders. It was a place ripe for the social ills that take root in such a climate.

In 1939, Edendale was a sprawling settlement of about 12 000 people unserved by municipal water, sewerage or electricity. It was here that a small band of Pietermaritzburg women, members of the National Council of Women, came and saw, were appalled, and were moved to try to do something. Frances May Allsop, an energetic former teacher with a bright eye and persuasive manner, was very active in the Pietermaritzburg branch of NCW. She saw the sprawling slum on Pietermaritzburg's south-western boundary and it troubled her. Clearly it was a health hazard to the citizens of Pietermaritzburg, whose drinking water was carried in the Msunduzi River that ran through Edendale. But more than that, the plight of the people and their children touched her and her fellow NCW members. They formed a small committee, later to be called the Edendale Welfare Society, and organised a clinic to operate from a small building in Plessislaer, a village on the Pietermaritzburg side of Edendale. It was a simple, unpretentious, poorly-equipped operation, carried on with the assistance of the King Edward VII Order of Nurses, staffed by first one, then two African nurses under

the supervision of a European nursing sister and with weekly clinics held by the District Surgeon.

They were not alone in their concern. For some years Edendale had been the subject of correspondence among the three levels of government – state, provincial and municipal. Who was responsible for this area? In 1934 the state Secretary for Health wrote to the Provincial Secretary in Natal: “Sanitary conditions of the area in question are extremely bad and in dire need of improvement if outbreaks of enteric and other infectious diseases are to be avoided.” In 1938 the medical officer of health referred to Edendale as an “unsanitary death trap” for its inhabitants and a menace to Maritzburg. “We have a holocaust of insanitation at Edendale,” he said.

Of course, Edendale was not an isolated problem. Natal was full of incipient or potential Edendales and the system of local government of that time could not cope with the position.

It was against this background that the Minister of Public Health established a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Edward Thornton, former Secretary for Public Health, to “consider and report on the steps necessary in the different provinces to secure a better administration and control of areas (other than native reserves) not under local government, which are becoming urbanised and a menace to the health and good order of existing local government areas”.

The Thornton report, published in 1938, found what had long been known, that the “sanitary conditions at Edendale were deplorable in the extreme” and that “most of the houses at Edendale were of a wattle-and-daub type; that

there was no satisfactory sanitation system; that pit privies were generally used, and that the water supply from furrows and the Umzinduzi river was contaminated". Also that "a considerable sub-division and fragmentation of lands had taken place, and that houses had been erected and roads built according to no definite plan".

The Administration's response was to establish the Local Health Commission, which began operating in April 1942. This was a form of local government operating in peri-urban and rural areas that were not part of a local authority. Edendale was one of these. The Local Health Commission was primarily established to control health matters, but also had jurisdiction over roads and other public works and, indirectly, was responsible for the general welfare of the inhabitants of Edendale. Thus the paths of the Local Health Commission and the Edendale Society met and for many years followed similar contours through Edendale.

It was from the early beginning of a simple health centre established by those concerned Pietermaritzburg citizens that the Local Health Commission's work developed. On the appointment of a Medical Officer of Health in September 1943, the Commission took over the work of the clinic and the house in which it had operated became the Local Health Commission's Health Centre. In his first annual report the Commission's Health Officer refers to "the excellent work that had been carried out prior to the Commission taking over" the health centre.

Mr Wadley, the Commission's first Chairman, details the simple beginning of the Edendale Welfare Society thus: "Some years before the proclamation

of Edendale as a Public Health Area, conditions in the settlement had attracted the sympathy of a handful of Pietermaritzburg citizens, by whose active efforts a small health centre had been established in the area under the auspices of the King Edward VII Order of Nurses. The health centre premises consisted of a small wood and iron building, once used as a dwelling. It was meagerly equipped (a list of clinic stock when we eventually took over reflected six benches, three tables, a stretcher, four sheets, a pillow, sundry enamel jugs and dishes . . . . All, or almost all, the other items appeared in ones – including one breast pump, not working and one bath, old . . .)".

Mr Wadley's report continues: "A small-scale institution of this kind could do little to check the rising toll exacted by poverty, disease and malnutrition. Its value was the value of a tiny first-aid post or clearing station: it could not alter the course of the battle, but it could be, and it was, a centre of simple help, and of advice and reassurance. Actually the unpretentious little clinic was serving another – and as things turned out perhaps even more valuable – function. It was initiating its management committee, the aforesaid handful of Europeans from Maritzburg, into the depths and the significance of non-European bewilderment and misery. And in so doing, it was binding them to one another, and to Edendale, with ties of fellowship and understanding which would stand the test of numerous vicissitudes when, as the nucleus of the powerful 'Edendale Welfare Society', these same public-spirited persons were the greatest single ally of the Commission in its efforts to uplift the people, and the greatest single source of bounty in the area."

**‘Mr Commissioner J.C. Boshoff’:  
dedicated to the people of Edendale**

We hear no more of the Edendale Welfare Society until 1945 when a crèche was established by EWS at Plessislaer.

The intervening years were years of war and the preoccupations of war. Although no fighting took place in South Africa, its young men went away to fight and many of those who stayed behind were involved in what became generally known as the “war effort” – organising food and clothing to be sent to those in North Africa and Italy, and looking after troops who came to South Africa.

May Allsopp was not one to stand quietly aside during this time. While her energies were diverted from Edendale to wartime relief work, after the war she again turned her attention to Edendale. Her daughter wrote: “With the war ending, May Allsopp’s anti-waste work and supervision of refugee children came to an end and her energies turned to local needs. The war effort slogan of ‘speed and planes’ sparked off her ‘speed the drains’ appeal. The caption did not meet with universal approval.”

A name that features frequently in those early years of the Edendale Welfare Society and the Local Health Commission is that of John Christopher Boshoff. As one of the first commissioners, he was dedicated to the task of improving the living conditions and welfare of the people of the Edendale area. He became May Allsopp’s friend and advisor in all things relating to Edendale.

When John Boshoff died in 1953 after serving for 12 years as a commissioner of the Local Health Commission, it was resolved at a meeting of the Edendale and District Advisory Board, held on January 25 1954 that “a memorial or

monument in honour of Mr Commissioner J. C. Boshoff should be erected in Edendale, to symbolise his whole attitude of mind and spirit towards the area he so loved and for which he laboured so unsparingly”.

Cathy Orchard, wife of Professor Orchard of Natal University’s Faculty of Agriculture, served as chairman of EWS from 1952 to 1967. She recalled meetings under May Allsopp’s chairmanship thus: “At our monthly meetings May Allsopp always had Mr Boshoff sitting on her left. The two of them were a good team, he always giving his opinion and advice when she needed it .... My impression is that they had worked together for some time in the interests of the Edendale Welfare Society and its various activities.”

In the tribute paid to Boshoff by the Edendale Advisory Board in 1954 the chairman said, “When the clinical services conducted by some of the present members of the EWS were taken over by the Local Health Officer, it was Mr Boshoff who asked that good band of European ladies not to disperse but to direct their activities towards other fields. As a result, the Edendale Welfare Society was formed; and, inspired by Mr Boshoff’s vision, it established a nursery school when the prospects for such a project were indeed not very encouraging. That beginning, undertaken in faith, proved an unqualified success.”

**Battling apartheid bureaucracy:  
a crèche, a nursery school, child  
welfare and an old age home**

The members of the EWS worked consistently and unobtrusively to meet the needs of the people of Edendale. Over the years it established first the Plessislaer crèche, then, in 1946, Emuseni Home for the Aged; in 1949 Ashdown



nursery school opened, and then later the child welfare section of the society. It was this last that caused the name of the society to be later changed to Edendale Society for Family and Child Welfare. When the society applied for affiliation to the National Council for Child Welfare, that council required the affiliated members to include the words “child welfare” in their title.

Let us look at the development of each of these projects.

***Plessislaer Crèche / Nursery School / Mthuthuzeli: The Transition***

The Plessislaer Nursery School was the first nursery school in Edendale. The Local Health Commission provided the building, an old farmhouse, and it was opened in February 1945. It was registered with the Natal Provincial Education Department and was subsidised at four pence per day per pupil based on annual average attendance. It also paid staff salaries. This government assistance was withdrawn in 1958. The nursery school was thereafter known as the Plessislaer Crèche.

Children from ages two to six attended and in 1949 there were 48 boys and 45 girls. At that stage the parents made no contribution. After the establishment in 1959 of the Plessislaer Crèche, babies from six months to two years were admitted.

The house was in poor repair, smoke-blackened, and riddled with white ants. By 1960 the need to find alternative accommodation became urgent. When approached for funds to build a new crèche, the secretary for “Bantu Administration” stated that “a white-controlled crèche for Bantu in a Bantu settlement cannot be approved”. But his department had no objection to the society forming a “Bantu branch” which, with advisory assistance from the society, could establish the proposed new crèche in a Bantu area.

In 1962 the society, under Mrs Orchard’s chairmanship, approached Natal University’s School of Architecture for assistance in drawing up a plan for such a crèche. They indicated that before any planning could be done the site had to be determined. This became the



*Plessislaer Nursery School, 1946*

primary objective. Various possibilities were pursued – fruitlessly. Acquiring land through the Department of Bantu Administration or the Local Health Commission seemed hopeless. In 1969 the Commission wrote to the society thus: “Re: Proposed Bantu Crèche in the Public Health area of Edendale and District. In view of the interest which your society has taken in the above proposal, I write to inform you that the Commission, having given the matter careful thought, has decided that it be further considered in 12 months time.”

The society couldn’t wait that long. With Joy Roberts as chairman (she was appointed in 1967), it requested an interview with the commissioners. In that interview it became clear that the Commission had no land available. The solution would have to be to acquire land from a private owner in Edendale.

That private owner emerged as the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa (hereafter the Church.) They owned one acre of land, adjacent to a main road, in the released area of Edendale. They were anxious to sell it. The asking price was R8 000. The problem was to persuade the Department of Bantu Administration and Development to pay that price. As a white-controlled body, the society was not able to buy or own land in a “Bantu” area. It had to work either through the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, or through a bone fide “Bantu” organisation.

Mrs Roberts sent a comprehensive memorandum to the secretary for Bantu Administration and Development in Pretoria asking the department to pay the Church the required money so that the land could be allocated to the society to build its crèche. No acknowledgment was received. On 6 June 1971 a letter

to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg, requested an urgent reminder be sent to Pretoria. Pretoria responded, apologised for the delay, but “the relevant file could not be traced”. Meanwhile the Church had other prospective buyers.

On 10 August 1971 Mrs Roberts wrote to Pretoria stressing the urgency. She also wrote to the Church requesting an option to purchase the land for R8 000. An option was granted for 30 days to expire on 15 September. On 13 August Mrs Roberts sent a telegram to Pretoria advising that the option time was limited and concluding “What can the society do to reach finality?” On the same day she wrote to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pretoria, and to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg, sending each copies of the letters addressed to the other officers. She received no reply to any of these letters.

An appointment was made for Joy and Simon Roberts to visit Pretoria on 24 September 1971 to meet with Mr Viljoen, the official in charge of planning Places of Safety and crèches. The finance committee of the society authorised them to offer Pretoria R4 000 towards the purchase of the property. Mrs Roberts said: “At the interview Mr Viljoen did not appear to be thoroughly *au fait* with our problem. He did have our memorandum and photographs in his file but made no reference to them. He waffled about volume of work, shortage of staff, lack of funds and the fact that the acquisition of land was handled by the Land Tenure Section, and finally said that anyway, the town planners had not completed their scheme for Edendale.”

On the positive side Mr Viljoen offered that:

- a) The department would acquire land for the crèche once the planners had completed their plan.
- b) If the department had funds it would build a standard crèche.
- c) Once built, the department would probably let the crèche to the society at an annual rental equivalent to two percent of the cost.
- d) Despite departmental policy that “Bantu” should control their own crèches, the minister had said that “white-controlled societies should not lose control of the funds they administered for the benefit of Bantu crèches until the Bantu were fully able to take over”.

Joy and Simon Roberts then saw Mr Pienaar of the Land Tenure Section. He was a young official who gave the impression of having only a superficial interest in this matter. He reluctantly said that the Land Tenure Section had offered about one third of what the Church was asking. Mrs Roberts informed him that the society was prepared to subsidise the acquisition of the land up to 50% of the cost or R4 000, whichever was the greater. Apparently this made no impression on Mr Pienaar.

The Church confirmed later that they had had an offer of R2 200 for the land from “your department,” which they had rejected. At this point the society realised that it was on its own.

It turned to the Edendale Benevolent Society (EBS), a registered, black-controlled, well-respected welfare organisation. Excel Msimang, welfare officer of the Local Health Commission, the local authority, and treasurer of the EBS, was a good friend of the society. The two societies agreed to a partnership. EWS passed a resolution to make available to the EBS, the sum of R8 000

to enable the land to be purchased in the name of the EBS, subject to the execution of a joint trust deed embodying the following safeguards:

- a) that the property must at all times be developed and used for the purpose of a crèche, jointly by both societies.
- b) that a joint committee of both societies be established for the execution of all duties and responsibilities related to establishing and maintaining a crèche.

The society received an impressive document, dated 26 August 1974, signed by the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, stating that “IT IS HEREBY CERTIFIED that the State President has been pleased to approve the acquisition by purchase from the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa by the Edendale and District Benevolent Society, an association consisting of more than six Bantu, of certain Sub 2 of Lot B ... in extent 4 047 square metres, for the sum of R8 000.”

But other obstacles emerged. There were eight trustees of the Church. Legal advisors attending to the transfer of the land wrote to the Church: “In terms of the constitution of your church it is necessary for the president and all connexional trustees to sign all the documents necessary to pass transfer of the property to the purchaser.” Each trustee was sent a power of attorney for his signature appointing their president as agent to sign the actual power of attorney to transfer.

All went smoothly until Mr Ditira of Cape Sands, Bloemfontein, declined to sign. He seemed to doubt his authority to do so. This was finally resolved when Mrs Roberts accompanied her husband, a lawyer, to a conference of the South African Law Society in Bloemfontein and, assisted by a local law society

member's wife, visited Mr Ditira in Cape Sands and persuaded him to sign.

So at last the scene was set. The land was acquired, funds were sought, and plans for the building were requested from architect Michael Dyer. The joint trust was called the Mthuthuzeli Trust and the new crèche was to be the Mthuthuzeli Crèche, Mthuthuzeli meaning "to comfort a child".

Almost 40 years later, the Mthuthuzeli Crèche is still going strong.

### *Ashdown Nursery School*

Ashdown is an area across the Msunduzi River from Edendale. It is not part of the "released area" of Edendale. However, in 1946 a substantial bridge was built over the river, thus linking Ashdown to the main road running through Edendale.

With money borrowed from the National Housing Commission, the Local

Health Commission bought land to establish a sub-economic housing scheme. The land was to re-house families living in slum conditions. The plan was to erect 800 houses in this area together with schools, shops and recreation. A four-acre site was transferred to the Natal Education Department for the establishment of a new school.

With the growth of the Ashdown housing scheme, Edendale Welfare Society turned its attention to establishing a nursery school in the area. The Local Health Commission made available an existing old house. The Natal Department of Native Education made a grant of £140 towards the purchase of equipment, chairs, tables, kitchenware, etc. EWS met the additional expenditures necessary before the school could function. And so, in February 1949, the Edendale Welfare Society opened its second nursery school. Sixty-five



*Ashdown Nursery School drawing lesson*

children were enrolled. The original staff consisted of an African supervisor, an assistant, a cook and a gardener. The Local Health Commission paid the salaries of the first three. The gardener was paid by Edendale Welfare Society.

The nursery school ran along much the same lines as the Plessislaer Crèche at that time. It was the only centre for pre-school children in the Ashdown area. The building, the original farmhouse of the area, was very old and dark, and not really suitable for a children's centre, but it functioned adequately over the years and had the advantage of spacious grounds. The number of children enrolled soon increased to a maximum of 110. They attended each weekday until 2 pm and were fed and cared for.

However, in 1969 this changed. Due to problems in funding, the nursery school was converted to a "Play Centre". Staff cuts were made and a midday meal was no longer provided. It was an inevitable but regrettable step. The Local Health Commission was unable to provide a subsidy because Ashdown was a sub-economic housing scheme and therefore ran at a substantial loss. Subsidy money from the Local Health Commission at that time came from beer hall profits and could only be allocated in the area from which the profits derived. The beer hall was in Edendale, so Ashdown couldn't benefit.

The population of Ashdown grew and the local authority for the area changed. In 1975 the Drakensberg Bantu Affairs Administration Board replaced the Local Health Commission. The Drakensberg Administration Board was very helpful in maintaining the grounds and fixing structural problems in the building, such as installing new floors when a snake reportedly stuck its head out of a broken floorboard. In 1976 the board

gave a grant of R800 in aid towards running the centre. The society minutes of that time read, "We hope that during this year the board will provide waterborne sewerage for the centre as three ancient pit privies for 110 children is totally inadequate."

It became obvious that a new crèche or pre-primary centre was needed, and the society set about trying to accomplish that. But it had limited capital funds, so money for a new crèche had to be raised through fundraising and donations. In August 1976, architects' drawings were completed and tenders called for. The lowest tender was R54 000 and the contract was signed in the faith that sufficient funds would be raised. Building started in November 1976. The Bantu Administration contributed R30 000. The society's building fund contributed R5 000. R19 000 had to be raised. The Anglo American Chairman's Fund agreed to meet each donation on a rand for rand basis up to a maximum of R5 000.

The new crèche opened in July 1977. Shirley McKenzie was placed in charge of running it. The minutes of the society's AGM for 1977 state that Mrs McKenzie would "help introduce nursery school techniques which will provide a strong foundation for our children's later education". Staff attended a training course at Mthuthuzeli. There were now proper toilet facilities, a secure door to prevent abuse over weekends, six swings, and a large half-circle motorcar. The 110 children received mid-morning milk and bread, and a cup of soup before going home. Fees were 50 cents a month. By 1983 fees had increased to R3.50 a month and apples had been added to the children's food. In 1985 fees increased again to R5 a month. Those unable to meet the

fee could apply for assistance through a child welfare social worker.

Society minutes reflect that the number of those hoping to be enrolled in the crèche continued to exceed the number it could accommodate by far. Each year about 100 children were turned away. A social worker had to be in attendance on opening day to explain to unsuccessful parents why their children could not be admitted. Another frustration was the number of break-ins. Windows were damaged and food stolen. To prevent further burglaries, in 1983 the Drakensberg Administrative Board provided two night watchmen.

In 1985 the Ashdown crèche was registered by the Department of Education and Training. This entitled the society to claim R25 per term for every pre-school child five to six years old. A new classroom and new toilets were built. In 1986 electricity was installed, paid for by Rotary. Despite this progress, break-ins continued. In 1986, 10 blankets and two primus stoves were stolen. The school had become an obvious target for vandals, and security had to be increased.

In the early 1990s the Department of Development Aid took an interest in the school and made a substantial donation of furniture and equipment. It also helped with the maintenance of the school building and grounds.

The Ashdown Pre-primary School has continued to provide its children with an interesting and cheerful environment in which to develop. It remains a valuable asset to the community.

### *Child Welfare*

Once the crèches were established, it was time to focus attention on the many children being raised in poverty. Bunty Biggs, a tireless social worker, settled

in Pietermaritzburg with her family in the early 1950s and became deeply involved in EWS. To work on the family and child welfare in Edendale, the society hired two experienced social workers and a secretary, while also drawing on the help of Bunty Biggs, Joy Roberts and Cathy Orchard. They operated from a small, enclosed section of the Vulindlela Community Hall, which became the first office of the Edendale Welfare Society.

At this time the Department of Social Welfare was paying maintenance grants to white widows and orphans, but not yet to blacks. The small staff of EWS began the enormous task of processing applications for maintenance grants for black widows and orphans. They succeeded in obtaining what was known as a “widow’s pension”. They also managed to get state assistance for children who were in foster care.

The role of the EWS social workers was to visit and monitor the care of these children, help with the application for grants, and ensure that children of school-going age attended school regularly. They also trained and assisted many women to make school clothing, which was sold at a very reasonable price. They undertook fundraising projects and solicited many donations of food, material, clothing and shoes.

By 1954 two more social workers had been added to the staff and the State had begun providing a substantial salary subsidy. It was at this time that the Edendale Welfare Society became affiliated to the South African National Council for Child Welfare with the consequent name change already referred to. The National Council then maintained a monitoring and supervisory role over the society.

The name change did not affect the work being done in the Edendale community. The crèches continued to provide for pre-school children in the vicinity and all other welfare work went ahead as planned. The years passed and during the early 1990s preparation for another big change took place: all the child welfare societies in Pietermaritzburg were to be amalgamated to form the Pietermaritzburg Family & Child Welfare Society.

In 1991 Joy Roberts, in her chairman's report for the Edendale Society for Family & Child Welfare, gave the following statistics about the child welfare work in the area. (It was during this period that Edendale was in the grip of bitter unrest with violence and destruction, but the work of the society continued.)

"The emphasis during this year has again been on case work although all social workers have worked to establish groups and group discussions with teachers, school-going children and unmarried mothers.

"There are 371 families receiving assistance from the society. These can be broken down as follows:

- 147 foster children placed with 70 foster families;
- 92 families receiving state maintenance grants, their initial reason for approaching the society, but requiring additional advice and counselling;
- 90 families receiving state maintenance grants, applications and reviews being done by the staff;
- 2 pending adoptions;
- 40 destitute families not qualifying for state assistance but receiving advice and material aid from the society;

- A further 43 families who fled the area due to fear and unrest. Some are starting to return.

"Furthermore, for the entire year under review, refugees have occupied the community hall adjoining the child welfare offices. It is estimated that 137 families were afforded relief by the society – especially food, powdered milk for babies and transport to health facilities."

Due to the refugee situation in a very tense and insecure community, material aid was given to many families. The society collected hundreds of blankets, food hampers and clothing for needy families.

This was the situation in Edendale when the decision was made to proceed with amalgamation of all the child welfare societies in Pietermaritzburg. In the final paragraph of her report, Mrs Roberts says the following:

"As we have in the past, we look forward this year to practical achievements within those fields in which we already provide services. We also look forward to the changes that are imminent and far-reaching – a new director, new colleagues and associates. The problems presented by an area such as Edendale are immense and grow each year. The big issues of housing, unemployment and poverty are beyond our scope. But children are not – they are our insurance for the future. We need to reach more children and we need help – from parents, teachers, colleagues and the whole community."

By April 1994, the amalgamation was complete and the social workers were transferred to the new society. Control was passed on to the Pietermaritzburg Family & Child Welfare Society and the work of all the sections of the old Edendale society ended.

*Emuseni Centre for the Aged*

During the early period of the Edendale Welfare Society, there was a growing awareness that many elderly Edendale residents were alone and destitute. The research conducted over this period (1945–1951) under the auspices of the University of Natal (with financial sup-

port from the business and industrial sector) highlighted the need for special provision to be made for aged, crippled and other indigent persons. The Edendale Welfare Society approached the Local Health Commission for their assistance in creating a place of care and they agreed to help.



*Emuseni before expansion in the 1950s*



*Emuseni today*



In 1946 Emuseni (meaning “place of kindness”) was built on land belonging to the Local Health Commission. The EWS raised most of the necessary funds by appealing to Pietermaritzburg residents for donations. The Local Health Commission provided the balance. The building was completed and formally opened by the Administrator of Natal in November 1946. The area secretary of the Local Health Commission at that time was Mr George Taylor who worked hard to bring Emuseni into being. He became the honorary secretary of Emuseni and remained a great supporter of the home until his death in 1997.

The first building could accommodate 27 old people – 12 men and 15 women. These people could come from anywhere in South Africa but had to be healthy and without any option of alternative accommodation. They were given food, clothing, shelter and companionship. Since the residents were not sick, for many years there was no need for nursing staff. In the early 1960s, the matron was Mrs Besslina Memela, a kind and motherly lady who cared for the elderly residents very well. Although she only had a basic primary school education, she remained the matron for more than 25 years.

In the early 1970s, a bequest from the Hesketh Estate allowed the building to expand to include a sick bay, a matron’s flat and a sitting room for the residents. In 1976 additional rooms were built for elderly married couples – rooms that were separate from the main building – two units each consisting of three rooms with toilet and washing facilities. Round Table No 12 financed these, although the care of the resident old people would remain the responsibility of Edendale Welfare Society. There

was never much interest from married couples to make use of this facility, so these rooms have always been used by residents who are able to walk up to the main building. Much later a hall, a storeroom, new bathrooms and ramps for wheelchairs were built.

As the buildings changed so did the health status of the residents. In the early days the residents could walk about and feed themselves, and were generally active. Today all the residents are frail, semi-frail or disabled, needing nursing staff to care for them.

In the beginning, as now, Emuseni was financed partly by the residents’ old age pensions and partly by a grant from the government department in charge of welfare projects. Any funds collected by EWS, including donations and bequests, were also used to meet running costs of the home. Over the years state assistance has grown from a small annual grant-in-aid to a substantial subsidy based on the number of residents. This large increase in financial support from the Department of Social Development has provided the much-needed assistance to ensure that Emuseni has been able to upgrade its facilities. It is also this government subsidy that has enabled the hiring of qualified staff.

In 1994 when the three child welfare societies in Pietermaritzburg amalgamated, the Department of Social Development ruled that provision for the care of the aged required a separate organisation. A new society called Emuseni Centre for the Aged was formed, with its own constitution, chairman and treasurer. Mrs Joy Roberts was the first chairman, Mrs Gladys Shandu followed and then Mrs Edna Molutsoane who remains the chairman to date. The objectives of this new society remained

the same – the management of Emuseni, the promotion of services for the elderly in Edendale and the co-operation with other organisations which have similar objectives.

In 1995, Emuseni incorporated the residents and staff of Ethembeni, a small home for the elderly run by the Edendale Benevolent Society. Both societies had been notified that the state was not prepared to subsidise two institutions with the same objectives situated close together. As Emuseni was the more substantial of the two, Ethembeni residents and staff joined Emuseni. This amalgamation was completed smoothly. Some of the committee responsible for running Ethembeni also joined the management committee of Emuseni.

In 2002 Emuseni started an outreach programme where individual carers go out from Emuseni into the community

to attend to elderly persons in their homes. This has expanded to eight trained care workers attending to more than 50 elderly persons. For the most part, the Pietermaritzburg Community Chest funds this project.

Emuseni remains the only old age home in the area and it is now registered with the Department of Social Development to accommodate 55 frail, semi-frail and disabled elderly persons. There is still considerable support from the community and churches in the area. The residents are well cared for, the buildings and grounds well-maintained and the staff is dedicated. One detail that bothered Mrs Roberts, however, was the dilapidated sign outside the building. To honour her commitment to Emuseni, the management committee has erected a new sign in her memory.