



Dilys Skinner

OCCUPATION: RETIRED SLT

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I retired 15 years ago and it’s a surprise to me that it has been so long since I was actively working as an SLT. I was fortunate in my career, of which the most interesting parts were in the first five years when I worked in Oxford under Catherine Renfrew, and the last five when I led the children’s team in Coventry. There, with the aid of an entrepreneurial finance director and the support of colleagues from Coventry Education Services, we were able to acquire funds for a variety of initiatives like Sure Start and Education Action Zones.

I never regretted becoming an SLT, though it was not a planned career path, but one I adopted after leaving my chemistry course at The University of Sheffield during the first year after the sudden death of my mother.

My partner and I were fortunate in that we both had promotions during our final years at work and we made a pact to retire at 60. Although I had made no detailed plans for retirement, plans were soon made for me. I had only finished work a few days previously when our daughter announced that she and her fiancé wanted to marry as soon as possible. So, 10 weeks later, we had a wedding for her at a local hotel, and five years after that, we had another wedding in Sweden for our elder daughter. There was a third wedding too, as my partner and I (previously my husband of 47 years who became a transgender woman in 2016) married in an equal marriage ceremony in 2018.



Looking back over the past 15 years, I realise how much my career has influenced my retired life in the volunteering activities I have undertaken, and also in my personal life. Like many transgender women, my partner wanted to improve her female voice, and through *Bulletin*, I was able to link her needs with an SLT. My Swedish grandchildren (now aged 5 and 8) speak English, Swedish and Danish, and listening to and being involved (and occasionally giving advice) in their language development has been fascinating.

Soon after retiring, I trained to volunteer on a telephone helpline for IPSEA (Independent Parental Special Educational Advice), a demanding but satisfying commitment that I have now been involved

with for 14 years. Although much of my working life was with children, the IPSEA work has been a huge learning curve, especially since statements became EHCPs (Education and Health Care Plans) in 2014. I joined a board at the RCSLT for two years, where I was actively involved in working to support retired members, in particular. For five years, I was also a governor of a local special school for secondary-age pupils with moderate learning difficulties, where I enjoyed the contact with staff, parents and students.

I am also involved in local health groups as a member of the patient panel at my local surgery, my local Trust, and also of Healthwatch in Warwickshire. The challenges facing the NHS are huge, but so too is the commitment of its staff at all levels.

Retirement has also given my partner and I the time to travel in the UK and abroad. A walking trip to Patagonia, a kayaking holiday in Mexico, a visit to relatives in Australia and, most recently, a two week walking trip to Iceland have been some of the highlights.

So far retirement has been kind to me—my partner, myself and our daughters are all fit and well, and we follow with delight the exploits of our four grandchildren. As for the future, I hope to carry on with my present commitments and continue to develop our garden using the tools given to me as a retirement gift. ■

This article was written at the suggestion of the late Gill Stiffins, to whom thanks are due.