

CHATSWORTH WOMEN FIGHT SCHOOL TRANSFERS



WE ARE A GROUP OF WOMEN FROM UNIT 5 IN CHATSWORTH. WE WANT OTHER WOMEN TO KNOW HOW WOMEN IN OUR AREA OVERCAME A PARTICULAR PROBLEM. CHILDREN WERE BEING FORCED TO ATTEND SCHOOLS FURTHER AWAY FROM THEIR HOMES.

BUT WE FOUGHT AGAINST THIS 'REZONING'. WE WANT TO SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE WITH OTHER WOMEN. WE HOPE THAT THIS WILL HELP AND ENCOURAGE OTHER WOMEN IN THEIR STRUGGLES AGAINST THE PROBLEMS THAT THEY FACE.

'Rezoning' was happening all over Chatsworth at the end of 1977. The Department of Indian Education wanted to transfer children to different schools. This meant that some children would have to change schools. Many people found problems with this rezoning. As we all come from a particular road in Chatsworth we are going to write about the struggle which took place in our area & Astra and Newhaven schools. This is where our experience was, and we want to write about what we felt, hoped and fought for.

Letters of transfer were sent to parents with the children's reports on the day schools closed for the year December 1977. These letters

informed parents that their children were to go to Newhaven instead of Astra school from the beginning of 1978. When school re-opened on 18 January 1978, many parents went with their children to complain about the transfer. Parents supported each other in their protest and decided to sit-in at the schools until the transfers had been reversed.

The story below is written up from interviews with many of the mothers who fought over the transfers.



"Some of us had letters of transfer, those of us who were going to enroll our children for the first time in the school had no idea that there had been this rezoning. When we arrived at the school we found a lot of other mothers. So we sat down and joined them in the protest against the transfers. We were all very angry.

This school was in the same road that we lived in and yet our children were being sent to school somewhere else. The other school, New Haven, was a much longer walk away for some of the children. Why should our small children, and some sickly children have to walk so far to school. We were so angry!

"I cant allow this because my daughter is asthmatic and she suffers from short breath if she walks long distances."

When we asked the Principal why he was doing this he said it wasn't his fault, the Department had done the rezoning. So, we demanded to see the people from the Department who were responsible. When an Inspector did arrive we didn't give him much of a chance. We wanted to see Mr. Krog, the then Director of Indian Education. Anyway, the Inspector threatened to call the police if we didn't leave the school premises. We were so angry

at this that we started swearing him and shouting just any bad things at him. We weren't even a

"I wasn't scared of the police because I was fighting for my child."

tiny bit afraid because we were fighting for our children. So the Inspector said that he would be back in twenty minutes with an answer. Then he went away and didn't come back again! At one point when the Principal refused to talk to us he locked himself up in his office. But we were too angry to be put off so we rushed to his door and threatened to knock it down if he didn't come out and talk to us. Women were carrying their shoes and stones in their hands. We were prepared to do anything!

The whole school was being disturbed by us being there. Even the Press was there and that made the Principal even more frightened! The teachers and



children couldn't concentrate. This made it even more urgent for the Principal to do something quickly. So it was a good thing that we were fighting when school was open. We didn't go away until the Principal and teachers left everyday.

At a meeting with the Principal on one of the days we spoke out about our complaints. We wanted to know why our small children were being sent to schools so far away when this one was so near. And especially when some children who lived further away than our children were allowed to come



to this school....it looked like a bit of favouritism somewhere! We were afraid of what might happen if our children had to walk so far. Not only was it very tiring, but one child had already been killed in an accident on her way to a school far away from her home.

We went back to the school every day that week. It was a very difficult week because we had to rush to do our housework in the morning. Then we

had to rush back home in the afternoon to cook supper before our husbands came back from work.

"We were fussed about sending our children so far away. There were so many crossings."

Some women also had jobs in factories, shops or offices. When they missed work to join the protest they were threatened with being dismissed. So most of these women were forced to go back to work. One woman who didn't go back actually lost her job. But she didn't mind - she was fighting for the children of our area.

Some of us got a lot of help and support from our families. Some of the husbands came to the schools too when they could. In some families others who were at home helped us to go and fight by helping us with the cooking and housework.

Some of us didn't eat cooked food that week. We just had bread and tea and slept. And some of us had to do all the work at home, besides spending about five hours a day protesting about the schools.

It was just rush-rush to do all the housework, go to the school, then come back and cook.



Often young children came with the mothers because there was nobody else to care for them at home. We put up with many problems. For instance, amongst those of us who gathered in the street everyday to walk up the hill to the school in a group were a 66 year old grandmother and an 8-month pregnant mother! Everday for the whole week we managed. We were determined to do it because we were fighting for our children and all the other children of our area.

During the week of the protest, about thirty to forty of us who could manage also met in the evenings to decide what to do. We had started off by each fighting on our own but our struggle had become a united one. We were fighting together for the rights of all our children. So now we needed to plan together what we going to do and say. After a few days some people from Croftdene Residents' Association, the community organisation in our area, came and joined our meetings. They gave us support and helped us to plan our action. For example, we discussed how we should talk to the Principal. We



decided that soft politeness would get us nowhere. - we needed to be very angry and force these people into answering our demands. At these evening meetings we also learnt a lot about organisation. We each had a turn at being Chairperson at the meeting. This gave people encouragement and practise in talking in large groups so that it helped us to get more confidence..

"Some of the women couldn't come to the evening meetings. They got late and the husbands got very mad."

We were demanding to see the people responsible for this rezoning. An Inspector who had come to see us hadn't been given much of a chance because we wanted to see Mr Krog. As Mr Krog didn't come to see us, we went to see him!

Four chosen parents went to see Mr Krog to demand the immediate return to Astra of all those children who lived closer to it than New Haven. This delegation was asked to name these children. So, the names of the ten most urgent cases were given, mostly the sickly or very small children. These children were then returned to Astra immediately. You see we hadn't been afraid to speak out - because we were so angry

and
concerned
about our child-
ren.

On the Monday of the
second week we could all relax.
We heard that all the children from
the lower classes were allowed to return
to Astra. Through our determination to fight
hard together we had won our demand!



This is the story of what happened in our area. Many
mothers at other schools did similar things as us.
In one area the parents even went on a protest march
from one school to the next. All over the place
people were uniting to demand their rights.

As we said - it wasn't always easy. But we were
determined to fight. We became even more certain
through our struggle that we can win when we are
united. Many of us joined Croftdene Residents'
Association after this because although
we had won one battle, there were
still many problems in our area
that we needed to do some-
thing about. But now
we knew that
together we
could
win.



WE WOULD LIKE WOMEN TO WRITE FOR SPEAK SO THAT
WE CAN SHARE EXPERIENCES

WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO:-

- * LET US KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO READ ABOUT.
- * SEND IN ARTICLES ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR AREA.
- * SEND IN ANY STORIES, PICTURES OR POEMS THAT YOU AND OTHER WOMEN WRITE OR LIKE.
- * HELP TO DISTRIBUTE SPEAK - WRITE IN TO SAY HOW MANY YOU CAN DISTRIBUTE IN YOUR AREA.

WRITE TO:-

SPEAK COLLECTIVE
76 WALMER AVENUE
SYDENHAM
DURBAN

