



**LES AMIS INCORPORATED**  
Empowering People With Learning Disabilities



## The First 25 Years – 1974 to 1999

1999 was the 25th anniversary of Les Amis Incorporated and much has changed in the last quarter century. With a progressive shift from institutional care for people with learning difficulties (Mental Handicap) to community care, Les Amis along with other local statutory services has developed its services to meet present day expectations.

The story started back in 1971 when the States of Jersey purchased the run down and neglected Le Geyt Farm at Five Oaks for much needed stores and workshops for the Telephone Department and to allow construction of a senior adult training centre, now known by everyone as Le Geyt Centre.

The old Farm House and its ancillary buildings were not part of these two aims and these buildings were identified by a partnership between Jersey Mencap and the Variety Club as suitable premises for a home for young people with learning difficulties.

However even back in the early 70's the wheels of Government ground slowly and it was not until 1974 that the, then IDC, granted the necessary permit. The delay was due mostly to a campaign to save the 15th Century granite facade of the farm house and to building by-laws, Fire Officers' requirements and building licences. Eventually it became apparent that the old farm house and out buildings would never meet the standards required and a new building was the only way forward and work commenced in earnest in September 1974. By all accounts the autumn of 74 was one of the wettest on record but by February 1975 the first Management Meeting took place, and by June the first Manager was appointed, with the first residents moving in during the November of that year.

The cost of the building works came to £120,000. The estimated annual running costs for 1975 were in the region of £15,000, today the annual running costs of the entire organisation are closer to £1,000,000. The Admiral of the Fleet, The Earl Mountbatten of Burma, completed the formalities with the official opening of Maison Variety on the 10th March 1976.

Originally built for 18 residents, plus 6 rooms for respite care and emergencies Maison Variety soon filled up and by the early 1980's consideration was being given on how to provide additional accommodation. The building was originally intended to be a children's home, but it was soon evident that what was needed was a permanent home for adults with a learning disability. For this reason, the Variety Club, which, with Jersey Mencap, originally funded and managed the home, felt that the charity no longer met their charitable aims and in 1985, Les Amis was born, a new incorporated charity with the brief to take on the responsibility of managing Maison Variety.

Jersey Mencap has since then controlled and supported Les Amis and nominates four of the six Committee Members on an annual basis. In the early 1990's the old hostel at Five Oaks was completely refurbished into self-contained flats, bedsits and bedrooms. At this point the name Maison Variety was dropped, and the hostel and organisation became known simply as Les Amis. It was soon after this refurbishment that Les Amis was awarded the title of UK Care Home of the Year, an award backed by the National Institute for Social Work, given more for philosophy of care rather than quality of bricks and mortar. In 1994 in conjunction with Jersey Mencap and The Department of Health and Social Services a special respite unit for people with physical, as well as learning disabilities, was constructed at Les Amis at Five Oaks and this now provides weekly respite care to families and their sons and daughters.

Further refurbishment and change took place in 1998 when the remaining areas at Les Amis were converted into Flats so that all those using the old hostel, permanent residents or short stay guests, now live in small groups with staff support. In addition new office areas were created in areas where the old communal kitchen and dining rooms were no longer required.

Over the years, ideas about homes for people with a learning difficulty have changed radically and the concept of 'care in the community' has become the norm. This is a practice which is ideally suited to Jersey, where a 'community' still actually exist, and Les Amis has worked closely with the statutory bodies to put in place Group Homes in ordinary neighbourhoods where people can live ordinary lives away from 'institutions'.

Since 1987 Les Amis has acquired 12 additional properties and now manages 3 houses and 4 flats in the community. In addition the original hostel which has been adapted to provide 5 self contained apartments to now used largely as short stay accommodation offering respite and emergency care. We now provide homes for over fifty residents and respite care for another forty families. Hand in hand with all this development is the philosophy behind the way we work with adults with a learning difficulty. We aim to offer homely environments where people feel free to express themselves and make real choices that effect their lives. This is achieved through empowering residents, by helping them to gain the necessary skills to participate and contribute to their local community as equal and valued members.

All services offered by Les Amis are staffed as required by the residents and this may mean 24 hour cover or just a few hours each day. With a strong commitment to staff training, Les Amis is an Accredited Centre for NVQ's in Care and many staff have completed or are working their way through Levels 2 and 3. Others are studying with The Open University and the Les Amis staff team always takes advantage of courses offered by Highlands College, The Department of Health and Social Services and the Registered Homes Inspector's Office. The day to day responsibilities for the organisation lie with a small Management Team but ultimately the buck stops with an Honorary Management Committee.

There is now a work force of over 50 staff, split into 3 distinct projects, Town Project, St. Saviours Project and Five Oaks Project. To cope with the massive paperwork and finances which go on behind the scenes in such an organisation, there is an Administration Project, and a small maintenance team. Add to this a fleet of vehicles, a suite of offices, 24 different telephone numbers, over 15 washing machines, cookers, fridges, bank accounts etc., and you begin to get a flavour of the complexity and diversity of the organisation. Care in the Community is not a cheap option. The Department of Health and Social Services and the Parishes have supported us in the moves that have been made and from these two sources come our main financial support for the running of the homes. In addition some residents have their own Social Security benefits, personal capital or wages

from work, or work experience placements which are forwarded to Les Amis as part of their weekly fees.

Les Amis works closely with other agencies in planning services and is represented at the Jersey Joint Secretariat for People with Learning Difficulties. Although these close working relationships are welcomed and indeed necessary, Les Amis is an independent charitable organisation and this independence gives it the flexibility and the freedom to take on new initiatives and to be at the forefront in changes improving the quality of life for people with learning difficulties.

Although our main objective is to provide residential accommodation, in the Summer of this year we launched a new service which, for some Les Amis residents, would provide a more holistic service. All of the Agencies that provide services for people with learning difficulties agree that an alternative to work placements or attendance at Le Geyt Centre should be made available. It was suggested that Les Amis Incorporated would be the ideal organisation to set up such an alternative and following discussions with Health and Social Services and a generous grant from the Lloyds TSB Foundation for the Channel Islands, Les Amis introduced a Community Opportunities Guaranteed Service (COGS).

The service offered by COGS is based on improving and developing residents' life skills and helps, not groups but each individual to live the life they want. Those who use COGS are now able to 'tap' into other services for adults with learning difficulties if they wish and to build their own unique package of activities. It also moves away from day centres for people with learning difficulties, to a service that supports people in spending their days, evenings and weekends in the same places in the community that everyone else uses.

We are able to develop such services as COGS because we are a charity, and we I believe that we must maintain our ability to remain independent. Occasionally we are viewed as part of a States Department but although we work closely with colleagues at all levels in various States Departments we defend our independent status fiercely.

To help ensure that we keep our independence, we continually need the financial resources to set up and maintain extra services which may not immediately be financed by the States. Secondly, we need the financial resources to maintain and improve the properties which we own, rent from the Housing Department or Housing Associations or which we manage for Jersey Mencap. To assist with these commitments and to coincide with the 25th anniversary, Les Amis Incorporated launched an appeal for funds to give us a nest egg from which we can maintain the properties which we either own or have the use of rent free.

According to a community living plan published by different States Departments and based on surveys of need, the developmental work of Les Amis has not yet finished. More houses over the next few years will have to be found so that other adults with a learning difficulty can have the choice of living in an ordinary house in their community. The Housing Department, Health and Social Services and the Parish Authorities have been extremely supportive over the past years and to meet the predicted need over the next few years, we will continue to work closely together. Meanwhile keeping the organisation ticking over each day and everything ship shape is a massive task, especially when everything we do and how we do it is directly related to providing quality and valued lifestyles to the residents' who live with Les Amis Inc.

As for the new millennium, we have no plans to slow up. Early in 2000 we opened our 13th community home, a flat for 2 residents, and with the generous help of the Masons we are developing a private secluded garden at Les Amis at Five Oaks. If required we may also look at extending our Day Service.

[www.lesamis.org.je](http://www.lesamis.org.je)

