

Hands-on Berrell got community centre out of a fix



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BERRELL Jensen, who has died aged 83, was an apartheid refusenik who left her native South Africa for London in the late 1960s and became a key figure in running community centres in Highgate and Hampstead.

She will be remembered for using her energy, determination and patience to help people in need.

Berrell (*pictured*) had graduated from Natal University in South Africa after taking a course in metalwork. Her family recall this was partly so she could make metal mobiles for sale to help bring much needed money in – but it also appealed to her practical nature. She was known among friends for being able to fix anything and went on to have a series of exhibitions. She had commissions for the Netherlands Bank Building, Phillips Radio Factory and Windhoek Museum, among others.

After the weight of the apartheid regime became too much for her and her husband, Anton – they feared their son Michael would be conscripted into the army – the family relocated to the UK, stopping off “en route” in Crete. It was here that tragedy struck: the couple, with two children, were involved in a car accident in which Anton was killed. Berrell and her children stayed on in Greece for a while before she took up an invitation to start a craft centre in County Donegal, Ireland, in 1977.

She moved to London and helped establish the Highgate Newtown Community Centre. She later worked at the Hampstead Community Centre, and was its director for nine years. She

set about reorganising the centre and maximising income in order to improve and expand activities. After funding cuts in 1993 the centre was under threat but Berrell's work helped safeguard its long-term future.

She loved classical music, and would work to the strains of Bach and Mozart, while enjoying meals out at the Ethiopian restaurant Lalibela in Kentish Town, Marine Ices and Manna in Primrose Hill. She would enjoy a drink at The Flask in Highgate, walking through Waterlow Park and watching films at the Hampstead Everyman.

Berrell is survived by her children, Michael and Sandra, and by her three grandchildren, Oliver, Hugh, and Lucia.

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