

# SMALL VOICES

A Briefing For the Focus Media Forum February 2000

From the UK Federation of Smaller Mental Health Agencies

## COMMENT

### *Give Users a Chance*

The UK Federation supports the efforts of the Focus group in bringing together all the major Mental Health groups on common issues. There are many issues where a single or special interest group needs to plough its own furrow. But areas such as the public stigma attached to a mental health diagnosis, employment hurdles, and reform of legislation, need all of us to co-operate and not duplicate.

As our policy statements overleaf show, the voice of the small user group and the individual user is far from being clearly heard.



Pawla Micaleff, who led all of our recent policy work, explaining our policies to the Mayor of Torbay and Philip Dixon-Phillips, Chair of our PR sub group.



Carol Jenkin, our Vice-Chair, sharing the joke at our Torbay AGM.

## Employment is an Issue too!

The UK Fed is a member of the Focus Employment Guidelines sub-group, because this is an area of critical importance to our members, and consistently appears high up in the list of our members' concerns.



Our Chair, Pat Still, receiving an award from the Mayor of Dartford for her work with volunteers



Elen Jones of the Starfish Employment project leading one of our workshops

## The reason for the Federation

In February 1996 the Matthew Trust organised a Forum in the Moses room at the House of Lords, hosted by Lord Reading. This followed a build-up of dissatisfaction in smaller charities with the failure of government and statutory authorities to consult small groups except in a token way. 86 organisations attended and voted unanimously for a new organisation to be formed to represent them on key issues, whilst they would fiercely defend their independence. The Federation does not seek any control over its members but to enable information and practice exchange and to liaise with government and other national charities.

Through our 1997 Lottery grant, now at an end, we have supplied policy and information services to our members through our paid and voluntary staff and our newsletter Small Voices. Overleaf we give a digest of some of our parliamentary and consultation work.

Membership has continued to grow and with 60+ new members this half year alone we number 233 independent groups representing 150,000 service users. We intend to keep the blend of user, carer and service provider members which gives us a unique perspective.

Visit our web site <http://www.ukfed.org.uk>

Our media contacts are over the page

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Registered Charity number 1058342

Registered in England as a Company Limited by Guarantee, number 3236769 Registered Office: Sherwood House 104 High Street Crowthorne Berks RG45 7AX

# The Grass Roots Voice

Views of members of the UK Federation of Smaller Mental Health Agencies

## “Developing Partnerships in Mental Health” Feb 97

The 1997 Government Green Paper admitted the failure of the current services, though it failed to identify the problems against which the Paper's options for re-organisation were to be assessed. In our response to the Government, our members identified a dozen or more such problems including lack of care for families of sufferers and lack of emphasis on non medical aspects (housing, benefits, employment, lifestyle)

## Consultation on Priorities - June 1998

Our Policy Group surveyed member views on 30 topics identified in a previous consultation. Fifty groups responded, representing 17,597 users, and votes were weighted according to the number of their users. The largest number of votes for any topic was 17,142 out of a possible 17,597. That topic was **Patient/User Involvement in Decision Making**.

We grouped the replies into nine categories. Two categories headed the list by some way. These were **Better Provision for Minorities and Increased User Involvement in Decision Making**. Each attracted 74,000 votes. (Members could vote for several topics in a category)

### The other categories were

- Wider range of treatment, including alternative treatments (59,000 user votes)
- More and better focussed funding (35,000 user votes)
- Improved statutory services and coordination (31,000 user votes)
- Side effects of treatment and safety issues (23,000 user votes)
- Employment restrictions (20,000 user votes)
- Legal matters (11,000 user votes)
- Housing issues (10,000 user votes)

## The Mental Health Act Review Feb 99

Our groups asked for greater choice of treatment and more safeguards for the patient. 98% agreed that the 1983 Mental Health Act should be revised, but that the Government emphasis on compulsion was excessive.

59% agreed that compulsory treatment was sometimes permissible but only where serious and provable risk of harm to others existed. ECT should not be compulsory.

Users' rights should be protected by significant safeguards and appeals and supervision, which made it difficult to envisage safe compulsory treatment outside hospital.

Our 30 pages of response also suggested that “mental distress” should replace the term “mental disorder” and should include mental illness and personality disorder.

## Statement on User Participation April 99

Service users, and organised groups of users, should have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the planning, delivery and evaluation of mental health services, including their own treatment and care. Those planning and running services should recognise that users are disadvantaged in all these aspects compared with professionals and should aim to redress the imbalance.

There may not be one 'user view'. Service users have a responsibility to seek out and give voice to the views of other members of their group.

Where users want little involvement this must not lead to criticism or any withdrawal of care.

## Statement on Severe Personality Disorder April 1999

The Home Secretary's proposals are considered potentially draconian and not in line with best forensic evidence. Only one form of Personality Disorder is associated to any degree with harm to others and the risk is that sufferers from other forms of personality disorder or mental illness will be deterred from seeking help or will be denied the most effective form of treatment, or even any treatment. This is not good mental health practice, will cause distress and increased media alarm, and is a risk to the civil liberties of the wider community.

Get the full statements from our web site <http://www.ukfed.org.uk/policy.htm>

Also see statements on **Equal Opportunities**, **Welfare Benefits**, **Volunteer Working**.

### Our media contacts are:

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