

CHAIR'S REPORT – 2005

Although I am writing this as Chair of The Federation, what follows is slanted by my own knowledge of the manifest activities of our organisation, I would welcome additional contributions from members whom I know have been engaged in a range of exciting developments. (Please feel free to send any contribution to Smart Groups / Small Voices so we can get a fuller idea of all that is going on.)

From my point of view then the Federation has been actively involved in The Mental Health Alliance which successfully lobbied Parliament on the Mental Health Draft Bill; this enabled changes in favour of users' rights to be embodied within the bill. There is a long way to go but we have made a good start.

At The All Party Parliamentary Mental Health Group we have been heavily involved where the interests of users and carers have been in the centre of our contributions. In addition we have had a positive input into NATPACT (Teaching of Primary Care Trusts / Engaging Learning Communities) and featured in their publication on the good practice initiatives 'STORIES' booklet which was distributed throughout the NHS. Our position, now incorporated into their national teaching materials, again puts the rights of users and carers foremost. Our recommendations were valued throughout the three years we participated in their consultative engagement with us. We also hope to enhance the new programmes taken on by NATPACT'S new body 'NETWORKING THE NHS'. On a number of occasions The Federation's contribution has received national recognition. The Federation by its nature has stressed the interests and rights of its member groups and the voice of individuals.

Members have also been productively involved in regional initiatives and research which explore the efficacy of 'talking' (non-drug) therapies that should have benefits for all our members.

The Federation members have advocated the value of Art as a tool for encouraging empowerment and recovery. I give a personal example: together with others I helped progress an Arts Project successfully through the various stages of a community initiative developed with funding from the Millennium Commission Awards scheme. (A report and illustration are soon to be available on Smart Groups / Small Voices, and can be read in the 'PPI Forum' Magazine.) Furtherance of this successful initiative may be possible when monies from 'UNLtd' are obtained.

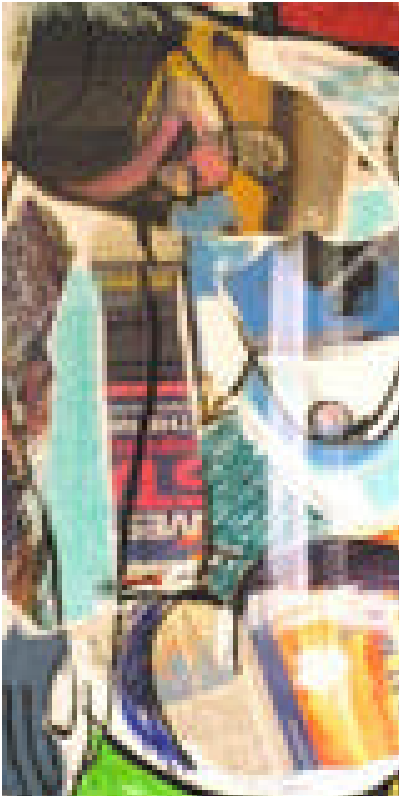
Like a lot of dynamic organisations with members busy with their individual projects and problems the year has seen a number of administrative hiccups: we were late in submitting our accounts to Companies House and several valued officers stepped down during the year, but other members and supporters offered timely help and we were able to weather the storm. (Tony Heyes has proved a valuable servant to The Federation as acting Company Secretary, and I would like to express my gratitude to him on behalf of the members. His administrative expertise has been - and is - helpful to us in fulfilling the values for which we stand.)

The spirit and values of The Federation remain remarkably resilient. We have had an exciting and challenging year - not without its problems - but we remain committed to following the vision created by our founder Peter Thompson: we will continue to give voices to users and carers as individuals who are often in very small groups which corporate charity may patronise or ignore .

From Philip Dixon-Phillips

AGM Report or Is that enough Admin, then?

The 2005 AGM was held at Spalding on October 8th and being inquorate was completed there on 15th. The Accounts and 2004 AGM Minutes were accepted and Robin Hanau and Phillip Newhouse were re-elected as trustees. Please see our web site for the minutes and Accounts.



This painting by Rod Mullen is reproduced with the permission of Lifecraft. See many more on their web site

www.lifecraft.org.uk/movingart/movart.htm

What about more member led projects?

One of my conditions for returning as company secretary to sort out some admin problems was that the committee should accept that the committee for a small unfunded charity cannot on its own fulfil the national mission. Only its members can do that.

A good example was our 2004 AGM. Without the work done by Taffy Thomas supported by Lifecraft of Cambridge, that AGM would not have taken place. We have learnt some lessons about controlling costs but the event was highly enjoyed by those who attended, and we thank Lifecraft for organising it.

On the Side Publications has continued this idea of a project being led by a member, though dealing with inquoracy and late accounts isn't everyone's idea of a project. Now the committee needs another volunteer group. Is there a group out there who is already doing something on real mental health issues?

Lifecraft have an Arts theme, perhaps someone else is doing parliamentary lobbying, benefits research, advocacy, anti-stigma work, or producing newsletters. We would like our next expenditure of £500 or so, perhaps £1000, to go to a member group who can use it to extend their own work on a one off initiative we could support nationally.

Email: project@ontheside.org

Tony Heyes

Part-time students will get 25% grant rise

Matthew Taylor, education correspondent of the Guardian, wrote today (18th October) that tens of thousands of the poorest part-time students are to get extra money to help pay university fees and meet rising living costs.. The students' grant will rise by more than 25%, while the money available through "hardship funds" which universities can allocate to students facing particular financial difficulties will rise from £3m to £12m.

Read the article on our message board to join, email smallvoices.org-subscribe@smartgroups.com

Please Email ukfed@ontheside.org with comments or queries