

SMALL VOICES

Newsletter of the UK Federation of Smaller Mental Health Agencies

Registered Charity No. 1058342

Autumn 1999

Your opportunity to shape the federation's future

Now is your chance to have your say on future plans and activities for the Federation for the coming 12 months. You should have received questionnaires and even a phone call by now to check out your views on what we do and what we should be doing.

The results of this consultation being carried out on the Federation's behalf by Charlotte Matthias will be reported to the Annual General Meeting being held on October 1 at the London Voluntary Resources Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London.

The Federation is your organisation so to make it work to your best advantage we need to hear your voice and views.

In addition to checking the Federation is on course with the direction its members wish it to take we want to

hear your opinions on the key issues in mental health today.

You may feel the most burning topics for you are around the Mental Health Act review, compulsion, disability discrimination or employment issues. Whatever concerns you most and you think should concern us we want to hear from you.

As you will have read in Hot News we also want to physically share your news and good practices with the entire membership.

We want to see examples of your good practice - there is no better way to ensure best practice continues than by sharing it and we hope to mount a dis-

play on the day.

Most importantly there will be opportunities to vote and you should make use of your proxy vote. Details will be with you this month.

Views of Members

The Federation's AGM is an unusual occasion. Unlike other organisations it chooses to use the opportunity to look forward as well as to reflect on its past successes.

The business part of the programme will be conducted during the morning and we hope you will be able to get along to hear how the views of members across the country have been incorporated into plans for 2000.

It is planned that the rest of the day will be given over to a keynote speaker around the theme of user involvement and workshops on the headline news of the day.

So see you there on October 1 at the London Voluntary Resources Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7.

WE HAVE LIFT OFF!



Plans are well underway for World Mental Health Day in Norwich and it should be even better than last year which is saying something.

Our picture shows a sponsored balloon race organised by Calthorpe House Users Forum just before take off. The wind was obviously blowing in the right direction the first balloon back to earth hit landfall in Holland only 45 minutes later. For more news on CHUF's 1998 event and plans from around the country for 1999 please turn to page 6.

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In my opinion... Tokenistic user involvement

Carol Jenkin writes

While attending many events as BUDIEST representative, I have been approached by concerned individuals and members who want the Federation's backing on the Government's key theme of consultation with service users.

These concerned individuals talk about certain people being targeted as the "tokenistic representation".

Groups are undemocratically formed, which are controlled by professional input and coercive tactics.

Tactics include withdrawal of funding, loss of status, loss of expenses, discrimination on gender, race and sexual orientation and even belonging to the wrong user group.

One consultation process is the "Ladder of Participation" model that has five levels - information, consultation, deciding together, acting together and supporting local initiatives.

The model uses nice, warm terminology - buzz words. Encouraging words for users' involvement - such as empowering, deciding together, choice, agree, shared vision, effective, confidence, sharing responsibility and finally trusting each other.

The purpose of documents such as this

is to provide independent community-based initiatives from an "empowering stance".

I see that the consultation process in my area (Bradford) is to take the safe option and ask the dominant group (MIND), knowing that the same old views will be put forward by the same old faces with the same old mind set.

Meetings are arranged for selective interested mental health group to attend who then rubber stamp the decisions as being passed as the views of the local mental health system users.

This does not allow for any fresh views and forward thinking to come through and change the systems that have been failing the general public who pay for their services with their taxes.

If MIND and the other professional-based carer organisations are as perfect as they feel themselves to be, why is it that there are so many smaller user groups springing up all over the UK? Many of these groups hold the same view that whilst MIND provides a lot of very useful information in the form of its literature, the culture of the drop-in services do not cater for everybody.

Bradford is one of the 26 new Health

Action Zones. Top of the list in their policy principles, is, and I quote: "Communities have the right to be consulted on their health needs and to have a say in the planning of health services".

They also state "Communities may want to take their own initiatives to identify health needs and tackle problems through locally based projects".

To me this means getting a wide variety of views from as many different perspectives as possible and helping user groups to develop and to serve their communities.

Health Action Zones have been developed to improve people's health or is it another way of coercing people into a false tokenistic dream?

The ladder of participation is only any good if it is implemented and not left as only words on reams of glossy paper.

What are your views on these new consultation processes? Are they working? Are you being consulted? Who is being consulted?

Please write with your views to Carol Jenkin (Federation Trustee) c/o UK Federation of Smaller Mental Health Agencies, FREEPOST ANG 1670, Grays, Essex RM17 5BR.

Introducing...

Steve Riddington has recently joined the Federation's Board of Trustees and brings with him 12 years of being "conversant from the inside with problems of mental health."

His is the carer perspective. The two eldest of his five children each have schizophrenia which plagued their lives at university.

In his working life Steve has been responsible for the National Grid, now a UK top 100 company, which has kept England and Wales in power.

More recently he has used this expertise to advise other countries including the Netherlands, China and Canada on how to deregulate and restructure these services.

Closer to home he reports his eldest son has become involved in working with user committees in Sussex.



Thanks Tony

Chair stands down

The UK Federation's Chair for 1998/9 Tony Heyes stood down from office in July but will continue to make his unique contribution to the organisation.

You could say that Tony was in at the birth of the Federation. He was heavily involved in getting the organisation off the ground and ensuring it worked towards its goals.

As it enters its third year the federation's profile continues to rise and its continues to add to its profile of activities on members' behalf. Much of this is due to Tony's tireless efforts and those of the organisation's trustees who give their time and expertise generously.

New trustee welcomed

An invaluable addition to the Federation's committee of trustees is Dr Marcia Martins Da Rosa Oo. She has extensive experience of mental health issues.

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Editor writes

Welcome to the latest issue of Small Voices which we hope you will enjoy.

In this issue you will find profiles of the Federation's new Chair and the country's oldest mental health charity, Mental After Care Association.

New features include news from member organisations from across the country. As you can see there is plenty going on and we would like to share your news and views with your counterparts out there.

As Small Voices went to press the Federation was preparing for its Annual General Meeting which it is hoped many of you will be able to attend. What better way to keep in touch with the best of practice.

The organisers of the 5,000 World Mental Health Day events are also putting the final touches to their efforts as you read this and we hope to hear from you how your events went. Looking forward to hearing from you.

New Chair for Federation

Broad and deep is the best description of the experience of mental health services that Pat Still brings to her new role as the Federation's new Chair.

Pat has more than 15 years experience of mental health services both as a service user and a carer and has played an active part in many local and national organisations.

Her own experience as a service user spans admission to a long stay institution now closing and use of community services including day hospital, psychology services, counselling, industrial therapy and clubhouse.

She is Chair and founder member of the Dartford and Gravesham Advocacy Network and Kent User Forum.

Other organisations with which she is involved include UKAN, the local Community Health Council, a sub-committee of the local Joint Planning Team on Alternatives to Hospital and

the QED United Nations Health Group.

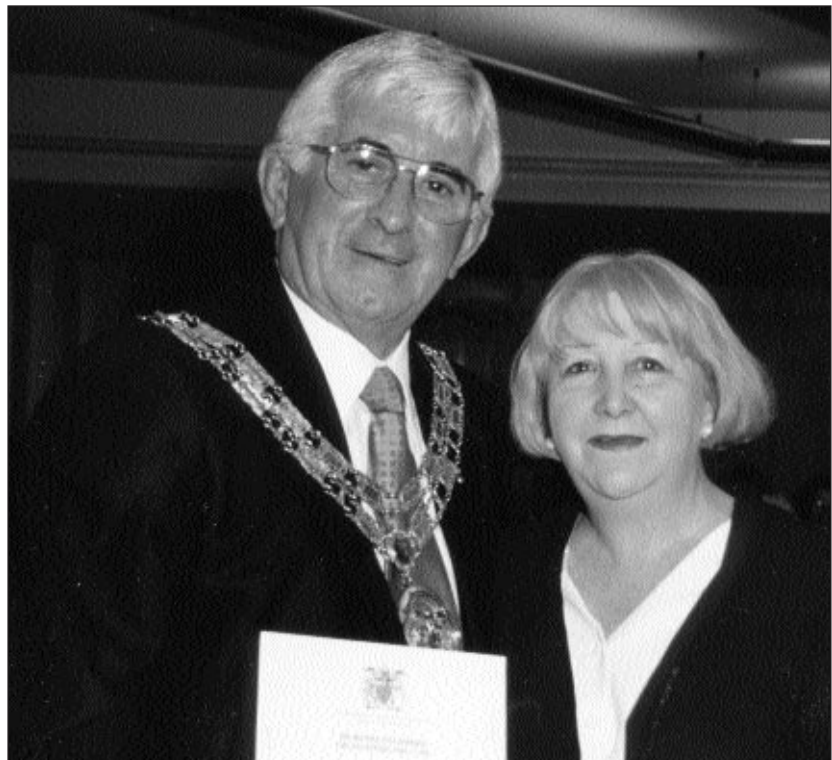
Over the years she has helped set up and run a patients lunch club, chaired the Thameslinks Patients Affairs Committee and helped develop the Advocacy Project for the Dartford and Gravesham MIND Steering Group which she also chaired.

The experience of turning a users' forum into an independent organisation with paid staff, an office and adequate funding should prove invaluable for the federation.

Kent Users Forum was originally set up by Kent MIND which later closed down "leaving the forum high and dry".

Now the forum meets regularly and is consulted on all policies related to the care and support of people with mental health problems across Kent.

CHAIR SCOOPS AWARD



The Federation's new Chair Pat Still has been given a well earned Volunteer of the Year Award for her work in mental health and learning disabilities field. Each year nominations are invited for seven awards to volunteers in the Dartford and Gravesham area. Pat is pictured with her local Mayor at the award ceremony held in early August.

PARLIAMENTARY UPDATE

*Pawla Micallef,
Director of Services*

This is the second parliamentary monitor to keep you up to date on what questions and debates have been going on regarding mental health.

If you would like copies of particular debates or questions you can contact Charlotte Matthias at 33 Malvern Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4BA, tel 011634 576197, email c-matthias@hotmail.com.

Alternatively you can access the Parliament and Hansard website on: <http://www.parliament.uk-parliament-index.htm>

The Scoping team has submitted its proposals to the Government but its findings are not to be made public, therefore we have to wait for the Government's proposals.

Once again we would like to thank all of you who contributed to the two responses submitted by the Federation to the Scoping team.

We are also working on key themes with other mental health charities on the Mental Health Act Review and will be informing you in due course of any developments.

The severe personality disorder consultation paper has been published by the Home Office and the Department of Health, entitled "Managing dangerous people with Severe Personality Disorder, proposals for policy development".

Federation Response

Copies can be obtained from the Department of Health, PO Box 777, London SE1 6XH, fax 01623 724 524. Email: doh@prologistics.co.uk. It is also available on the Department of Health and Home Office's website: <http://www.doh.gov.uk> and also <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

We hope to be working on a Federation response at the next Policy Group's meeting in September and have contributed to a joint statement

with a number of other organisations including Liberty and the Law Society.

If you want to send in an individual response these have to be submitted by December 31 to Dee Bourke, Joint Home Office/Department of Health Working Group, Room 228, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT.

You are also welcome to join the Policy Group. If you want to be a member contact Charlotte or Katy Axford on 0181 491 1373.

The Disability Rights Commission Act received Royal Assent on July 27 as did the Health Act 1999 on June 30.

The Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill has just finished the committee stage in the House of Commons.

We are in the process of arranging meetings with the Minister and Shadow Ministers. In the not too distant future we hope to arrange a meeting where members can meet MPs and Peers interested in the work of the Federation.

Golden rules for working with volunteers

Many if not most voluntary organisations rely heavily on volunteer help to provide all kinds of services in the front line and in the back room.

Without pay as an incentive how do you manage this diverse army of immense talent and retain those talents when there are so many other calls on their time.

Set out below are the seven golden rules for charities using volunteers arrived at as a result of a recent survey.

- 1 It is important that volunteers are told as much about the organisation as possible - how it operates and what jobs need doing for the organisation to be successful.
- 2 It is desirable that volunteers have a trial period of induction so that all concerned have a chance to make sure the placement is right.

- 3 It is essential that volunteers are matched to jobs where their skills can be used fully, as many volunteers feel that their skills are under used.
- 4 If volunteers are too formalised they can feel like paid staff without pay and this can make them very resentful.
- 5 Many volunteers have a wealth of experience and skills that can be shared by the charity. So many paid workers treat volunteers as second rate because they are unpaid which can be hurtful and insulting.
- 6 It is important that a proper insurance scheme is in place in the interests of health and safety.
- 7 Volunteers can often afford time but not money. They should be reimbursed for out of pocket expenses.

Since I took early retirement I have worked with several charities as a volunteer and have had many varied experiences.

It is surprising that even now volunteers can be viewed as Lady Bountifuls - well meaning but really a bit naive. Good for bringing along lots of goodies at party times and making tea and coffee for the clients. But allow them to have an opinion - no way!

If any readers have had similar less than happy or even (dare I say it) positive experiences as volunteers - please write to Small Voices and let us know.

Pam Freeman
Volunteer Trustee
UK Federation of Smaller Mental
Health Agencies

PARLIAMENTARY MONITOR CUMULATIVE INDEX

Subject

Hansard Reference

Written Answers

NHS and Local Authority policies on children excluded from school	15 Mar 99 HC/WA 565
Number of children admitted to psychiatric care	15 Mar 99 HC/WA 566
Support and information to relatives following a death in a mental institution	22 Mar 99 HC/WA 5
Charging for long-term nursing/personal care (Scotland)	22 Mar 99 HC/WA 70
Number of children admitted to psychiatric care (Scotland)	22 Mar 99 HC/WA 71
Change in funding for complementary medicine	30 Mar 99 HC/WA 649
Procedures for dealing with medical emergencies in mental institutions	30 Mar 99 HC/WA 649
Timetable for implementing recommendations of Royal Commission on Long Term Care	30 Mar 99 HC/WA 649
Planned investment in psychiatric services for children	30 Mar 99 HC/WA 650
Questions on police training and involvement of police with people suffering from mental health problems	13 Apr 99 HC/WA 14/15
Review of CS spray research	13 Apr 99 HC/WA 107
Potential role of police in Community Treatment Orders	13 Apr 99 HC/WA 107
Number of people conveyed to hospital by police under the MH Act/ Supervised Discharge Orders	13 Apr 99 HC/WA 107
Deaths in mental institutions	13 Apr 99 HC/WA 108
Percentage of NHS budget for Wales allocated to MH services	14 Apr 99 HC/WA 286
Inequalities of treatment affecting members of black and ethnic minority communities (Wales)	14 Apr 99 HC/WA 287
Comparative rates of schizophrenia and depression among Afro-Caribbean population (Wales)	14 Apr 99 HC/WA 288
Total number of patients treated (Wales)	14 Apr 99 HC/WA 288
Number of deaths in mental institutions and breakdown by ethnicity	16 Apr 99 HC/WA 374
Guidance to Trusts on appropriate staffing levels and policies, in relation to use of restraint techniques	16 Apr 99 HC/WA 374
Meetings to discuss mental health with black and minority ethnic communities	21 Apr 99 HC/WA 543
Percentage of NHS budget allocated to MH services	21 Apr 99 HC/WA 543
Advice to health authorities on MH treatment for members of black and ethnic minority communities	21 Apr 99 HC/WA 543
Principle advances in treatment implemented since 1995	21 Apr 99 HC/WA 543
Number of mental health patients treated on NHS	21 Apr 99 HC/WA 543/4
Rates of schizophrenia and depression among Afro-Caribbean and white populations	22 Apr 99 HC/WA 650
Number of people suffering from depression (Wales)	27 Apr 99 WA/HC 87
Mental health promotion strategy (N Ireland)	7 May 99 WA/HC 475
Contribution conditions for Incapacity Benefit	7 May 99 WA/HC 476
Time scale for consultation on Scoping Committee's Draft Proposals	11 May 99 WA/HL 141
Questions about Benefit Integrity Project	11 May 99 WA/HC 127
Deportations under MH Act 1983 s. 86	21 June 99 WA/HC 266
Availability of acute beds	28 Jun 99 WA (HC) 48

Oral Answers

Containment of people with personality disorders, considered to be dangerous	27 Apr 99 OA/HC 3
Compulsory treatment in the community	4 May 99 OA/HC 701

House of Lords

Treatments for Schizophrenia	14 Jun 99 HL 4
Psychiatric medical services in prison	13 Jul 99 WA/HL 15
Data Protection Act implementation progress	13 Jul 99 WA/HL 16
Decision making for mentally incapacitated adults	13 Jul 99 WA HL 32
Mental Health (Amendment) Scotland Bill	23 Jul 99 1506

World Mental Health Day 1999

Friendship - recipe for good health

You heard it here first - friends are good for you. So say the experts at the Health Education Authority who have tracked down the research to prove it in time for World Mental Health Day.

Along with giving up smoking, adopting a healthy diet and taking some exercise, building and maintaining those social networks are seen as key to good mental and physical health.

The studies picked out show that friends cut the risk of heart disease and boost chances of surviving a heart attack, young people find carrying out stressful tasks that much easier with the support of a best friend and social isolation weakens the immune system leading to more infections.

Mental Health Programme Manager Dr Lynne Friedli expands the social networks from friends to include family, workmates, the GP, health professionals, local voluntary groups, churches and other social clubs.

To mark this year's day the authority is launching Positive Steps 2000: surviving the new Millennium a booklet full of tips from celebrities and individuals from all walks of life on how to cope.

Credit card sized Positive Steps cards also give advice on how to cope and sources of help.

Celebrity tips

"Friends, walking, friends, painting, friends, talking, friends, meditating, friends," that's veteran actress Stephanie Cole's secret for beating stress and depression.

Exercise seems to be the key naturally enough for Sharon Davies but also Rabbi Julia Neuberger while Sophie Dahl beats depression by doing "girlie things".

Ann Diamond recommends counting to ten while Sue Lawley likes to focus on something other than what is making her miserable.

One annual event that is now very clearly a fixture is World Mental Health Day. The day is certainly answering its brief to provide a focus for groups all over the country and to raise the profile of mental health where it counts - where you live. World Mental Health Day is on Sunday October 10 but it's clear that the organisers are hoping to make more than a day of it as our reports show.

WMHD reclaims the streets

Norwich town centre was closed for traffic to enable the World Mental Health Day Alliance in the area to celebrate the day in 1998.

Service users staged plays and live bands played everything from jazz and blues to folk and successfully kept the passing public entertained all day.

Members of the Alliance were able to get the right messages across on a more serious note by handing out leaflets and stickers.

Around 2,500 people were logged in as attending and the street fair was followed by an evening service at the local church at which lessons were ready by service users.



All in all a day with something for everyone and 1999 is expected to repeat that success.

Our picture shows members of the Norwich World Mental Health Day Alliance with Betty Boothroyd, Speaker of the House of Commons, and local MPs Tony Wright and Ian Gibson. They are shown with the five-year-old winner of the salver donated by the MPs as prize for the art competition.

WMH Day in brief

So who is doing what on World Mental Health Day? There is no way that Small Voices can encompass all 5,000 events nationwide but here is a brief selection.

- Norwich - look for a whole day fair involving many organisations
- In Congleton VISYON plans an activity engaging its younger users
- Anniversaries are being celebrated in Manchester by Having A Voice.
- At Hillside in North London going independent and with a tenth birthday day for Golf Links Estate Project in Southall.

And more . . .

No fewer than 48 organisations have secured grants from the Health Education Authority to help them stage World Mental Health Day in style.

And of those just under a third have

been awarded to organisations working with black and ethnic minority organisations who aim to combat the stigma attached to mental health problems.

Among those sharing the £30,000 pot are London based Footprints which plans to present the Black Users Appreciation Awards to individuals who have overcome mental distress, Islington Music Forum's multi-cultural music festival and the London Chinese Mental Health Day.

Outside London a day of alternative therapies, entertainment and displays is being organised by the North Birmingham Mental Health Trust while black women living in Leicester will be the focus of information and advice workshops.

In all the HEA expects more than 5,000 local groups from all sectors to be holding events across the country for fifth World Mental Health Day.

Spotlight on MACA

Care and support in the community is of course nothing new - the Mental After Care Association, claims to have been offering just this for the last 120 years.

Set up in 1879 this charity claims to be the oldest in the country in the field. It now provides around 75 services to some 1,400 people with mental health needs and their carers.

In the past year it has added assertive outreach, helplines and advocacy to its range of services and in some areas it is helping up to 50 per cent more people than the previous year.

MACA employs a large specialist team whose core activities are centred on providing supported accommodation, some of which it runs in partnership with other organisations sited across the country.

It also provides support to people in their own homes, day schemes including employment training and court diversion for people in contact with the criminal justice system.

User participation is seen as vital and service users are now included in the trustee body through the introduction of a special regulation enabling this.

In order to reach out more effectively into the wider communities that MACA's various services are sited in local parts of the service now have the power to develop groups of supporters.

Research

Other new areas in which MACA is now operating include research and education. At least one major research project is currently underway and its findings will be widely disseminated.

Overcoming the less than perfect knowledge of mental health issues among the general public is also of concern and now covered in the organisation's objectives.

MACA has developed a range of policies to address important issues:

Nimbyism

MACA recognises that local communities can be vociferous in their opposition to mental health projects opening up in their neighbourhoods.

The charity suggests that prospective neighbours should be kept informed from an early stage even if planning permission is not required. This avoids the need for public meetings.

Round-the-clock

Reinstating 24 hours nursed care into

Caring in the community for century plus



Bringing the age-old link between mental health and creativity up-to-date MACA held an art show alongside its week-long festival of films in June. Service users from across the country took part in a competition organised by MACA and were able to witness their efforts being showcased in London's West End. Barbara Symmons, one of the winners of the MACA art competition, with her winning entry, Bird Landscape.

hospital settings could be counterproductive. The charity believes not everyone with mental distress necessarily needs professional nursing care. Instead a multidisciplinary approach is needed to cater for individuals with multiple needs. MACA supports and advocates crisis models of care run locally.

Employment

Personal packages of work are designed by MACA staff and concentrate on the individual's strengths rather than problems. Participants attend college courses which might include computer training, undertake voluntary work and gain jobs in open employment.

Advocacy

Enabling service users to play their full part in society, MACA staff often act as advocates on a one-to-one basis. The charity also runs an Independent Advocacy Scheme at Rampton Hospital and supports the hospital's Patients Council.

Filling the gaps

Some 19 per cent of the prison population and 25 per cent of those on remand have some form of mental health problem. The charity provides a range of services for those who come into contact with the legal system.

These include the Leicester Prisoners Project, a mental health court worker and specialist mental health workers attached to the Inner London Probation Service.

Screen icon remembered

To mark the 30th anniversary of the death of actress, Judy Garland, Britain's oldest mental health charity MACA held a week long film festival in London's West End during late June.

Featuring Garland films such as *A Star is Born*, *Babes on Broadway* and *The Pirate* the festival also included movies which highlighted mental health issues.

Problems

Garland battled against drink, drugs, weight, self esteem and husband problems but was still able to produce amazing screen and musical performances.

Festival Organiser David Cohen said: "We put together a programme that people could come to see including Garland films but also other films that would make them think about what she had to go through."

Included was a short film by her daughter Lorna Luft detailing the problems her mother faced.

Hillside goes independent

From October there will be no fewer than three independent clubhouses when North London's Hillside House joins those in Leatherhead and Streatham, South London.

In the nine years it has been running Hillside House has welcomed 200 members through its programme and although a third may no longer be involved that is no sign of failure.

Manager Ginny Porter, who addressed the 1998 Federation AGM, says many move on to other things which is vital "we are not about stagnation" and that applies to the individual as well as the clubhouse itself.

Launched under the wing of homeless charity St Mungo's, Hillside was a recognition that there was more to getting people off the streets that providing a bed for the night.

Now as it approaches its tenth anniversary (scheduled for 2000) Hillside is looking towards its very own Independence Day.

"We have a small board of trustees, are researching our own finances, making sure we can maintain it. Its scary but very exciting," says Ginny.

The key to Hillside's sustainable version of success as far as users are concerned is in giving people the time to go at their own pace and supporting them in their chosen paths.

One individual had started colouring in cards about two years ago, graduated to the clubhouse's snack bar and is now talking about what he terms a "proper job".

Some move towards their goals more quickly. Others progress on to the education system and one member is starting a degree in English.

Still others do not envisage a job but would like to get into a routine and the clubhouse supports that.

Small Voices hopes to report on the tenth anniversary celebrations next year.

Rather than waiting for your news to come to us Small Voices has been out and about armed with notebook and pen collecting your news - hot off the press. In future issues we would like to turn the spotlight on particular regions but still want to hear of your success stories. Here is a taster of what is to come.

Norfolk users demonstrates the ups and downs

The game of snakes and ladders provided an appropriate running theme for the first Norfolk area Users and Carers Conference organised by the service users themselves in March 1999. Approximately 100 people called in at some point during the day to take part in a totally participative event giving them the chance to air all their views.

The report of the event penned by Dennis Sawyer of CHUF provides a very thorough guide to just about every identified need - a very exhaustive list indeed.

Those present wanted to see better training for GPs, better services at the weekends, better education on Government policy to combat rumours, better use of current resources, more good quality information for the general public and better access for those on low incomes.

The lack of services for teenagers, scarcity of day services in rural areas, lack of public transport and paucity of leaflets in GP surgeries joined the ever growing list.

Needs were equally varied and included more education on the workings of the brain and the effects of medication, a mental health officer in every casualty department and more activities in winter months.

Many of the problems voiced could be argued to be peculiar to a largely rural area but others including more information on how to complain and better funding for voluntary groups could have been voiced anywhere in the country.

Delegates were made to work hard in the afternoon discussing specific topics from a pretty comprehensive list covering representation on primary care groups, setting up a network, better communication, keeping in touch on-line, and rural area concerns.

A general conclusion from the day was that although much progress has been made in Norfolk there is still much to be done and unfortunately rather too much is still performed on the proverbial shoestring. Areas where most attention needs to be directed are education, communication, housing, support, funding and resourcing for as Dennis concludes "user and carer groups to achieve real care in the community".

Postscript. One lesson learnt from the day was the need to check for other potentially conflicting events. Local social services positively wanted to attend but had to be elsewhere that day at a previously arranged event.

Celebrating breaches

It was not just the Berlin Wall which came down in late 1989 a metaphorical barrier collapsed around the same time many miles away in Manchester. For around the time that news cameras were focused on capturing the reunification of Germany Manchester was about to give a voice to its own marginalised people.

Having A Voice was established to help community based mental health groups develop their own strengths and now employs three staff.

Development worker Tony Riley explains although they tend to concentrate efforts on North and East Manchester there is also a drive to forge city wide links as there are pockets of need in even the more salubrious suburbs.

Having secured limited company status in 1995 the micro organisation also recognised a need to convert one of its existing posts to concentrate on its own management and development needs.

From little acorns... Big Forests grow

At least that is the hope of the Federation in providing one of its £200 grants to the Forest Mental Health Action Group in Gloucestershire.

The money it is hoped will go to provide a study by a horticultural student into the feasibility of the group being able to take over the maintenance of the grounds of one of Severn NHS Trust's facilities for older people with mental health needs.

Graham Crawshaw is keeping his fingers firmly crossed. If the forecast is good he will then approach a major local grant making trust to help get the scheme fully off the ground.

During its four years in action the

group has continuously broken new ground and has been seen as the user voice on mental health audit and the planning of mental health services.

Graham also appears to provide an "emergency" service parachuting in wherever the group's skills are needed.

He recently brought fresh colour to users of a drop-in centre in Gloucester in a very literal sense. When they had finished complaining how bored they were he got them choosing paint and then got them to give their surroundings a fresh new look.

Other activities can include helping patients complete satisfaction surveys, the list can be endless.

Sunny outlook for network

Thanks to the MIND Millennium Awards scheme the Distress Awareness Training Agency has launched the Survivors United Network Project in the North West.

Co-ordinator Andrew Hughes will be launching a new website, e-zine and newsletter for the region as this issue of Small Voices hits the streets.

He explains:

Currently funded until March 2000 SUN will act as a focus for the sharing of information and resources between mental health service user groups in Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

Groups and individuals will contribute news, views, requests and offers. Sharing our news, information, opinions and skills will enable groups to collaborate when possible, and ensure we take informed action at other times.

The aim is to promote some positive images of people with experience of mental distress to counteract some of the very negative stories we often see and hear.

Every month a printed newsletter and audio-tape versions in English and other languages will appear. An on-line version will also be accessible by e-mail on a monthly basis while the website will be updated weekly.

The service is free to groups of mental health service users or survivors of psychiatry who subscribe. There will be a small fee to cover costs for other groups.

To find out more write by snail mail (post) to SUN, 5 Wellbank Close, Oldham OL8 1NX, phone 0161 627 1391 or email sun@eggconnect.net

Preparing for Independence Day

There will be plenty for Southall based Golf Links Estate Project to celebrate in the coming months - a tenth anniversary in October and independence some time in 2000.

Charity Status

The Rev Linda Smilie explains that the community based organisation has enjoyed the shelter of two larger organisations, CARIS (Christian Action and Responsibility in Society) and Brent Welcare, but now is planning to spread its wings.

Charity status is being sought for the organisation which sees its major role as one of prevention hence the dropping of the words mental health from its title.

Such efforts are channelled through two services operated for the community by the community on the estate.

Former community beat officer Helen has encouraged many of those who drop into Workbox to try their hand at glass and tile painting while Gwen passes on her dressmaking skills.

Benefits Session

Project worker Audrey Godding who has worked with the scheme for eight years also helps organise the invaluable drop-in legal and benefits session each Thursday.

Meanwhile plans are afoot for the tenth birthday celebrations aimed to tie in with World Mental Health Day.

A number of the Federation's member organisations have also recently received a £200 grant to help further worthwhile work and projects.

Pilot study A pilot study at the Hale Clinic is being supported through another of the Federation's grants. The study is being carried out by Maria Clerk on behalf of ECT

More Grants

Anonymous. The aim is to target help at the large numbers of people in the UK who are still suffering from the after effects of ECT.

Crossing barriers Yorkshire based BUDDIES

works extensively with black and Asian people with mental health problems in the area.

In tune Huntingdon based Young Person's Music Project the Rock Group is topping the recognition charts. Not only has it secured a Federation grant it has also recently won the MIND Good Practice Award.

Patients' Councils - a real voice

Hospital Patients Councils are usually patient-only meetings at which patients can collectively discuss problems they have on the wards in a safe environment without the presence of staff.

A range of issues can be discussed which can encompass medication, standard of meals and shower facilities among many others.

Patients' Councils were first established in the Netherlands in the 1970s and were eventually set up in the UK in the 1980s.

They are forums in which patients have the opportunity to voice their opinions and press for change and better services.

They should be an integral part of the mental health system and a fundamental tool if we are to challenge stigma and prejudice which are all too pervasive in psychiatry and the wider community.

It is important that Patients' Councils are user-only forums because mental professionals have a different agenda and therefore they cannot be the mouthpiece of patients in many respects.

To establish Patients' Council there has to be careful planning involved which means negotiations with hospital managers and user consultation.

They are often held in hospital for in-patients only but they can also take place in the community for example in

day centres.

Volunteers can be recruited to organise and help run the Patients' Council and ideally it would be a positive step if the volunteers were ex-patients themselves.

Patients' Council representatives would undertake a variety of tasks, for example, visiting wards to speak to patients about ward issues and their own treatment. They would be supported by advocates and encourage patients to attend council meetings.

Issues discussed at Patients' Council meetings are then raised with hospital manager by the council representatives, either advocates or volunteers.

Number of difficulties

It would be advisable to hold council meetings at least once a month, ideally fortnightly so that patients' concerns can be swiftly resolved.

Representatives from the Patients' Council can be confronted with a number of difficulties when visiting the wards.

How will patients detained under the Mental Health Act attend meetings? In some cases, patients cannot attend meetings because there is not enough staff to escort them. In this case council workers should note down their concerns or hold council meetings on the ward.

How can a patient with severe dementia put his or her views across? Perhaps a carer can act as a spokesper-

son. But it must be stressed that the views of the care can be at odds with what the patient wants.

Patients' Council workers need to be aware of their boundaries and what is expected of them. They are not befrienders, therapists or counsellors.

It is important to note that a major function of the Patients' Council is to empower patients. So council facilitators should avoid using language which is difficult to understand.

In other words do not overuse jargon. Otherwise you would be alienating and excluding some patients from having a say in decisions affecting them. It is also important not to use oppressive language, for example, racist or sexist language.

The Patients' Council movement has helped advance the rights of mental health patients and over the past 50 years the rights of people using mental health services have increased but there is still a long way to go.

As we approach the end of the millennium, mental illness continues to be misunderstood and the mentally ill ostracised.

The British Government's plan to reform the Mental Health Act reinforces stereotypes and the emphasis is on coercion rather than consent to treatment although not all the proposals are negative.

Jeffery Fernandez
HUBB, Essex

Brighton commitment to user involvement

At least 40 per cent of the management committee of Brighton based Care Co-ops are users of the various services offered demonstrating a real commitment to user involvement.

Care Co-op is a non profit making community care provider offering housing and day services for adults with mental health and learning difficulties.

Working practices reflect and acknowledge the changing nature of individual's abilities and also their emotional states providing more sup-

port when needed and offering a hands off approach when appropriate.

Services offered include sport and recreational activities, work placements and educational support plus access to vocational and academic studies.

Core activities range from arts projects, through education, drama, carpentry, candle-making, fabric and soft furnishing, horticulture, conservation, IT skills and do-it yourself. The list is not exhaustive.

Other support that is provided

includes befriending, home and hospital visits, money and benefit advice, support with medication and counselling.

One particularly appropriate scheme, considering the near rural location is the community farm project at Stanmer Park. The project is also extensively used by the wider community.

Each new member is given an individual plan which has been agreed in conjunction with others involved in their personal networks.

Influencing the next generation of professionals

The buzzwords on every health and social care practitioner's lips at the moment seems to be user and carer involvement and educators of these professionals prove to be no exception.

Now is the perfect time for users to make an impact on the way mental health services will be shaped over the coming years and make sure their contribution is valued appropriately.

An example of where this has worked reasonably well is the involvement of users and carers as partners in the delivery of a masters degree for a whole range of practitioners working in the field of mental health.

The social services training council, CCETSW, funded Middlesex University to check that the academic staff's current techniques for involving service users were effective and to explore other ways to increase involvement.

Consultancy work was carried out by Mike Took from the National

Schizophrenia Fellowship (Southern) in collaboration with members of the MSc/Postgraduate Diploma in Mental Health Interventions teaching team at Middlesex University.

The two year, one-day per week programme attracts psychiatric nurses, social workers, occupational therapists plus others from the voluntary or independent sectors.

The programme provides advanced skills training and assessment in areas such as behavioural family therapy, anti-discriminatory practice and case management.

Invaluable

Previously the teaching team had attempted to involve service users in the course in various ways, including presenting seminars or discussing aspects of the course.

Mike Took had discussions with the staff and attended student classes where his perspective and knowledge proved invaluable, especially for

research projects.

He also sought out opinions from staff at MIND and NSF and through questionnaires asked both users and carers their views on user involvement. His report also includes information about relevant literature and organisations.

Mike is particularly keen to stress that course designers and researchers should pay user advisors for their time particularly if other people would be paid for the same work, e.g. lectures.

He believes they have something useful to say at all stages of course design and later delivery including helping students work on their research.

Word of caution on the fee paying front - seek advice on how any fee would affect social security entitlement before you get involved.

His report "Voices of experience: promoting the involvement of mental health service users and carer in inter-professional training" was launched at a CCETSW conference in November 1997.

Depression - the hidden epidemic

It has been well known for some time that a large proportion of people with depression fail to be diagnosed as such. The picture for elderly people is even more pronounced - some 75 per cent with the condition remain undiagnosed.

Individuals over 65 have half the chance of younger people of receiving cognitive behavioural therapy even though the treatment is regarded (by the professionals at least) as very successful.

Professor Shula Ramon of Anglia Polytechnic University told the

The views expressed in Small Voices are not necessarily those of the UK Federation of Smaller Mental Health Agencies, the organisation's governing body or the Editor.

Primary Care, Mental Health and Older People Conference in London in January 1999 that Primary Care Groups and Health Action Zones have the potential to deliver real change for older people.

Views of readers

Small Voices would be particularly interested in hearing the views of readers on this not just for older service users but those of working age too. Concerns are being expressed in some circles that the creation of larger mental health trusts, as is happening in many areas, could serve to shut out service users even more than previously.

The health authority side of the equation believes that long term service agreements due to be in place from

April 1999 will enable a longer term view as care pathways replace the previous emphasis on episodes of care.

The national service framework on mental health is also expected to make a huge difference.

A joined up approach would now include social care and citizenship needs alongside health care requirements.

** Whatever your question, no matter how complex or simple, Information Officer Katy Axford will do her best to research the answers for you.*

So if you have a question begging an answer contact Katy Axford on 0181 491 1373 or email katy@axford.clara.co.uk

Making the most of your soap

Securing realistic and fair coverage of a mental health condition on the popular BBC EastEnders programme was a major coup for the National Schizophrenia Fellowship.

And on September 27 at 6.30 for 7pm at El Vino's, 47 Fleet Street, London, Fiona Carr, the charity's then press officer and lead consultant to the programme, will talk to members of the Fifth Estate Group about how it was done and the lessons learnt.

The BBC perspective will be given by

Henry Foster, one of the directors on the BBC programme.

Fifth Estate provides a support and educational network for anyone in the not-for-profit sector with public relations in their job.

If you want to take advantage of this invaluable route to the viewing public book your place now. Cost, inclusive of refreshments: Fifth Estate members £7, non-members and guests £10. Contact Lyn Smith on 0181 977 3710.

Your say on rationing

Representatives of patient groups and members of the public are being given a rare opportunity to hear the latest thinking on health rationing and have a say.

The Second Annual Doctor Patient Partnership Conference, Choices in Health, is being held at Aston University, Birmingham on September 21 and is offering places at £35.25 to the public. Speakers include

the NSF's Gary Hogman who will share a platform with Jean Trainor to look at good practice in mental health.

Other workshops well worth pencilling in include choices for black and ethnic minority health, patient participation and holding your own patient record.

For more details contact the booking line on 01483 306912.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Arts breach the barriers

Three years in the making but more than worth the wait that's the second residential Arts in Mental Health Forum scheduled for November 5-7 in Loughborough.

If the first one, organised by the Mind the Gap performing arts organisation, is anything to go by places will be going like hot cakes so phone 01274 544683.

And if you are really lucky you may secure one of the absolutely free bursary places being allocated during September. Otherwise fees are graded according to whether or not an individual's organisation is funded.

You can expect three days of debate, practical sessions in many art forms, presentations on projects going on across the country, exhibitions and a lot more besides. No wonder its called "I am live".

Mind the Gap was set up in 1988 to operate "on the margins of the arts world, developing ideas that others overlook".

By the sea

Blackpool summons up visions of sticky rock, illuminations and conferences so it was appropriate that the annual MIND conference should be held there too. Your chance to combine sand, sea but not necessarily much sun with some good conversation on November 9 - 11. The theme: "Real lives, real people: creating opportunities for change".

Cost is £145 to MIND members. For more details ring 0181 221 9672.

Tips from the field

Are all service users claiming to be bored and with nothing to do? Take a leaf out of Graham Crawshaw's book get them doing something for themselves.

Normally based with the Forest Mental Health Action Group Graham was called in to provide holiday cover at a Gloucestershire day centre and found a certain sense of end of summer ennui. His answer to phone round some of the do-it-yourself chains to beg some cans of paint and get them painting.

The users picked their own choice of colours from a vast range abandoned by shoppers who decided they did not like that shade after all.

He also suggests you build contacts with local grant making trusts. Some of them are very rich and if your cause is one they like you could get support for everything from small projects to large construction jobs. Give it a try.

BBC goes Diverse

Does your organisation represent a hard-to-reach group? It would seem the BBC wants to hear from you.

The BBC Broadcast Equality Unit based at the Wood Lane Television Centre is building up the Diversity Database to help programme makers "reflect the full diversity of UK society".

It is intended that the database will become "a central resource of contributors and experts who have either a minority or specialist interest on mainstream issues or expertise in a minority or specialist field".

The database is added to constantly and at the moment it is interested in people from ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, women (especially older ones), lesbians and gay men together with related organisations.

To find out how to sign up contact Cathy Aitchison of the Diversity Database, BBC Broadcast Equality Unit, Room 7021, Television Centre, London W12 7RJ.



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