



Issue 9

HUG Newsletter

SPRING/SUMMER 2003

HUG is the Highland Users Group, a network of users of mental health services across the Highlands, which campaigns to improve the rights, services and treatment of people with mental health problems and to challenge the stigma surrounding mental illness.

Membership of HUG is open to anyone who has experienced a mental health problem. *Just write to, phone, or email us and leave your name and address - it's as easy as that!*

HUG can be contacted through

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Highland House
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This edition of the newsletter has a lot of serious content. We hope that you still find it readable.

Next month there are some very good reasons to celebrate:

June 3rd marks HUG's 7th birthday—the day after Emma returns from maternity leave. There may not be fireworks, but perhaps some chocolate cake...

Watch out for news from Skye. The official opening of the new "Cabin" is planned for June 17th

Graham's Talks

The talks and presentations Graham has given at various Highland and national conferences are available, free of charge, on CD and tape. HUG reports are also in this format and on our website

www.hug.uk.net

THANK YOU

A big thank you for all the donations to HUG that have been received recently.

Every grant and donation will be put to good use.

Marcia

As many of you will know by now, Marcia Reid died suddenly in Dr Gray's Hospital, E lgin on April 25th.

Marcia was a vibrant, astute, enthusiastic young lady with a great sense of humour. Her personal contribution to the challenge of reducing the stigma of mental illness was enormous. Marcia was part of Allies in Change; a "See Me" media volunteer as well as a HUG Mental Health Awareness Trainer. Her direct and straightforward responses to the Health and Community Care Committee during the Mental Health Bill debate were very highly regarded and recorded.

Over the last few months Marcia had been a great help to me in my work. Her constructive criticism made me stop and think – and hopefully do better! Marcia did HUG proud during the consultation event with the Mental Welfare Commission in Inverness.

Marcia will be sorely missed by many. Her family and friends are in our thoughts. Marcia's sister-in-law paid tribute to Marcia by reading her poem "My hopes for the Future" during the funeral service in Buckie.

Through HUG, we can best pay our tribute by continuing the work that Marcia was passionate about. Continuing to educate and inform about mental health issues; challenging inappropriate attitudes and campaigning for better services.

We still have Marcia's own words in her poetry "A Maze of Darkness".

Chris

NEWS FROM GRAHAM

The last few months have been very busy with lots of different things happening. Some of these are:

KEEPING WELL

At the end of last year we looked at the whole subject of keeping well when we have a mental illness. This really struck a chord with people - it made a great change from talking about all the problems to talking about what helps us and encourages us.

The report will be written up later in the year but if anyone wants to send us any contributions around this area or suggest other subjects that may be just as encouraging to talk about, we would be very grateful. Of course we need to highlight the problems but equally we need to publicise solutions and the things that work for us.

WHY WE AVOID PSYCHIATRISTS.

A little to our surprise we were asked by a consultant psychiatrist to hold a series of talks on "why

so many people don't want to see a psychiatrist even though they are clearly getting ill".

Well, we've held the meetings and people were remarkably frank; all we've got to do is find a way of presenting the comments in a constructive way.

If anyone wants to add their thoughts to this subject, feel free to as it will be a time before the results are written up. And for any psychiatrist reading this, we weren't completely negative - many of you have given us life saving help but it was a golden opportunity to have a grumble.

OUT OF HOURS AND CRISIS SERVICES

At last the powers that be seem to have acknowledged how important it is to get services outside of Monday to Friday between the hours of 9-5.

As our members constantly point out - its just not logical to think that we get ill only on weekdays and only in the day time.

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The Primary Care Trust has been looking at the issue in depth and you should all have received the minutes of the meetings we held on the subject which will soon be followed by a report.

It is very good to see this movement. However we do have to admit to cynicism; it is only a few weeks since someone spent 15 hours in the police station instead of the appropriate mental health facilities. We raised that problem a number of years ago and yet despite the huge amount of work that local people have put in to create places of safety to stop this happening again there is, as far as we are aware, still no place of safety operational yet in the Highlands.

How are local areas going to get the staff who can help us when it seems so hard to recruit people with the necessary expertise in the Highlands? And how will they find the right people to help create the comprehensive community facilities we need so much?

Any ideas will be gratefully received!

BRUCE GARDENS

We are looking forward to meeting up with the Area Social Work Manager for Inverness. For some time now clients there have been very worried about the future and status of Bruce Gardens .

We have been passing on peoples views to Social Work as have the Bruce Gardens Users Committee. With luck peoples worries will be put to rest soon.

THE GARDENERS COTTAGE

For some time there has been anxiety over the future of the Gardeners Cottage in Nairn which is used ,amongst others, by the clients of the Community Mental Health Team.

They have made it into a homely, pleasant place to be through lobbying for funds for decoration and playing a part in its development - everything from choosing the paint to sewing the curtains.

Now because of the poor state of its roof and the redevelopment of the hospital, in whose grounds it sits, people are worried that it

may be demolished.
We have raised these worries locally as well as with the Trust and an MSP.
Good luck to the users of the Cottage

THE INVERNESS MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY PROJECT

Yet another facility whose future is uncertain. At an Inverness HUG meeting we discussed this valued resource and passed on our comments to Social Work and the Health Board.

THE MENTAL WELFARE COMMISSION ANNUAL MEETING

Graham gave a talk to the Mental Welfare Commission at their annual meeting which was well received - if a bit challenging!

It is refreshing to see a large organisation willing to expose itself publicly to possible criticism - I'm not sure how easily I would manage such a thing if it concerned HUG.

If any one wants a copy of the

talk contact the office.

R E P O R T S A N D P U B L I C A T I O N S

- We have in stock:
- all the reports we've produced
 - most of Grahams talks (both on CD and written)
 - copies of our newsletters
 - copies of Moonstruck (only available to members of HUG at present)
 - and a few odds and ends such as our postcards

If you want any give us a call or visit our website - for large orders or the CD's a donation is always gratefully accepted to cover expenses .

THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT

This now finally exists. Some of our members were dismayed by it, others thought it a great improvement on the previous one.

Overall we are getting the impression from groups across Scotland that it could have been better, but if not any where near perfect is a great deal better than what we had.

We made a number of comments on it over the last few months,

all of which are available from the office.

One thing that should be noted is that the new Act gives people the right to advocacy, thanks to representations by such agencies as the Advocacy Safeguards Agency.

SOME COMMENTS MADE BY GROUPS ACROSS THE HIGHLANDS

RESOURCES

If we could get grants and money to the very grass roots - to the support workers, care assistants and so on wouldn't it be worth so much more? A few hundred pounds in the right hands without restrictions could transform peoples lives - money for art materials, a self management course, books, videos, a meal together or a break away! Some of these things are what keep us all going.

CARING FOR OUR WORKERS

Some of the best work is done by people in drop in centres or training units or as support workers.

How do we protect them and keep them healthy - do we give them enough thanks or

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appropriate wages?

How do we ensure that the people (who sometimes are all that keep us going) feel good enough about their jobs that they stick with us?

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Progress is slow in the world of mental health - we are still waiting for many of the changes we first started talking about seven years ago to be acted on and sometimes even acknowledged.

Is it possible that the voluntary sector rather than the statutory sector of the Trusts, Health Boards and Social Work departments are more adaptable, flexible and innovative. Maybe they should be looking to take forward some of the changes we need?

ART THERAPY

Some people get a huge amount out of art therapy - it brings peace and understanding and relaxation. How easy is it to get access to such therapies?

DEALING WITH ABUSE

Tragically many of our members developed mental health

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problems as a result of childhood abuse. Whilst dealing with these issues is hard and not for everyone - how easy it is to get therapies to help with this?

We hope to have an article on this subject in our next issue of this newsletter.

ALL THE OTHER APPROACHES!

We tend to look at conventional treatments and services in HUG - we need to start with the basics! But what about the help that we can get from diet, or exercise or massage or homeopathy?

Has anyone experienced any of these alternative or complementary treatments - want to let us know about them?

LOOKING FORWARD

We have an increasing number of people who contact us having experienced the horror of their first breakdown.

They can feel lost and alone and wonder whether they will ever recover and regain the lives they once had.

Does anyone have any suggestions of what would help or words of comfort to offer?

HOSPITAL BEDS

The worry that hospital beds closures will pave the way for future community facilities is a constant rumour and worry amongst our members.

We have written to make the point that hospital and community services go together - they are both needed we shouldn't have to expect that if we have more of one we will inevitably have to have less of the other.

Do you agree with this? Do any of you think it would be acceptable to reduce hospital facilities to provide for the huge number of people who manage in the community without ever going near the hospital? Is there another way of looking at this?

GETTING PEOPLES VIEWS HEARD.

With the creation of the Mental Health Act, people have become

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aware that there is a need for the right services to support people with mental health problems.

Malcolm Chisholm announced a review of mental health services across Scotland to find out just what it is we do need.

A small team has been set up to look at services across Scotland and Graham has agreed to join it for six months to help find out what we all need as users of mental health services and what the priorities are in mental health in this country. This feels like a great opportunity to get peoples views heard at the highest levels. It does mean that Graham will be away from HUG for a time but the members that we have met so far have generally said that it is well worth it if it means that we really can be heard.

For a time there will be less activity in HUG – all our work that we do in challenging stigma will carry on as normal but the work that Graham normally does will be put on the back burner from now until the end of May. At that point Chris Evans will take over some of this work and will be available in the office to give advice and support to people raising issues on behalf of HUG members.

She will also come out to meet you all in the HUG branches in the summer – to catch up on news, hear the latest issues and let you know what we are doing.

Graham will return at the end of September and for a time we will have both Graham and Chris doing the HUG work .

Graham says “This seems like a golden opportunity – it will be lot of hard work but equally it will be great to find out peoples views and to see what is happening across Scotland. I am already missing HUG and I haven’t even left yet! – I expect the time will fly by and look forward to seeing you all again soon.”

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE.

Where ever there is a Mental Health Team in Scotland, you find a wish that that team be strengthened and expanded in order to cope with the needs of its local area. And, as each local area has different needs, not to mention widely different working conditions, there is a growing understanding that each area needs to identify and develop its own priorities.

Crises services are essential. Over the years many users have pointed out that one way to leave enough resources for the crisis, was to prevent as many of them as possible from happening in the first place. So, if people who are at risk of episodes of illness can be supported to maintain their health, this takes the strain off the crisis service.

At present the Caithness Mental Health Team has established a Group Work Programme to help patients maintain their health. The first aim of this service is to enable those taking part to “maintain, improve or restore good health, quality of life, skills and abilities that were lost through illness.

The programme for 2003 offers activities that help make people feel good, such as the walking group: activities for daily living, such as the baking and cooking groups: and activities that help with personal growth such as the creative group. There are also relaxation, healthy living and anxiety management groups.

Groups to do with anxiety management, relaxation and creating confidence are open to people on a referral from their G.P. Other groups are open to those who have a key worker.

Group size is important, six seeming to be the magic number for most groups as, whatever the activity, the social interaction is important in maintaining people's health and this is more easily achieved in a small group, especially for people who are struggling to regain their confidence. One of the concerns of the group leaders is the person who would benefit from taking part, but who has so little confidence left that joining a group is as difficult as scaling Everest. This is a concern that Fabian, who organizes the groups, and Fiona who helps him, spoke about at a recent meeting they had asked for with Graham, Chris and myself. It would be helpful to have the thoughts of some of our members on this, and other issues around small group working.

Garry

NSF Scotland

Most members of HUG will be aware of the work, which NSF (Scotland) (National Schizophrenia Fellowship) does in terms of social support in the community for those affected by mental illness.

NSF (Scotland) has been active throughout Scotland for nearly twenty years providing and developing user led services. It is user involvement at the local level which has created a diverse and often innovative approach to many of the services provided. The drop-in projects from the south to the north of Scotland will each have their own unique blend of support, advice and education services, as well as employment and social opportunities.

In the Highland Region there are four drop-in centres, two outreach workers covering Ross-shire and a Highland Carers Officer. For some individuals, the drop-in is not a facility they see themselves

using on a daily basis. But did you know that you could come along just to join a specific group or activity? The group work and social activities are organised at the request of users of the centres.

The following are just some of the organised activities in the drop-in centres in Golspie, Alness, Inverness and Fort William:

Stress Management, Arts and Crafts, Relaxation, Music Group, Women's Group, Voice Hearers Group.

In addition to these formal groups there are activities and social events such as cinema, meals out, holidays, swimming, badminton and aerobics. Cairdeas Cottage in Inverness also hold regular meetings of the NSF (Scotland) and Manic Depression Fellowship for those affected by schizophrenia and manic depression, and their carers.

For further information please do not hesitate to make contact with someone in your area:

Gatehouse Drop-In Golspie
01397 700574
Companas Cottage Alness
01349 884566
Cairdeas Cottage Inverness
01463 713928
Glengarry Centre Fort William
01397 700574
Carers Office, Outreach Easter Ross
07764 784504
Outreach Wester Ross
01599 511416
Highland Carers Officer
01463 704660

Advocacy Highland

Advocacy Highland should be offering individual advocacy later in the year. Initially the client groups will be people with mental health problems and people with dementia; vulnerable older people; people with learning difficulties and people who are homeless. As well as being Highland wide, the service will eventually be generic.

Chris

MY LIFE AS A MENTALLY ILL PERSON IN A SMALL VILLAGE

Living here is stopping my good side showing (like my art).

I have just become a Grandad at 58 and should be proud.

However my self-esteem has suffered a double blow.

I have a complex about my face, which has been the butt of ridicule since boyhood and has dulled all paternal feelings. Alongside is my anxiety state - I feel very vulnerable here but I wish to try to stay here as I work for a few elderly folk whom I am good friends with. What will I do when they are no longer here?

The younger people, especially men, are cruel - Full stop! I am seen as someone not to be seen with.

What I mean is, a person, mostly male may potentially want to be a friend but would be afraid of his mates turning on him for associating with me.

I avoid all the children in the village because I am terrified of children and male youths.

The latter, however have carried out active abuse against me. They have damaged a caravan I have and bang on doors and windows late at night or they phone me and stay silent. (I've had to change my BT number three times).

Gossip has gone around that because I am male and live alone and have a mental health problem that I am a paedophile. This is a fruitful field for further abuse. I have a slightly effeminate look and a hunchback.

I am a talented artist and would love to teach people about it but that is impossible to do here, even in the new village hall with all its facilities, as few people would want to associate with me.

I feel sort of trapped, bursting to express myself, not negatively but positively with my art - I would like to describe what I do with chalks on a

blackboard. Perhaps talking about the weather, on why hailstones form or why a tornado forms or where lightning comes from. Some people have really admired my art scenes of lighting and tornadoes and I have sold some.

However life here is generally lonely and frightening - I thank HUG, Graham, Emma and others for easing some of the terror I feel.

I hope that via HUG I will be able to express myself more and help other mentally challenged folk.

Chris

Why Does Everyone Shout at me?

WHY DOES
EVERYONE
SHOUT AT
ME WHEN I
AM ILL AND
THEN I AM THE ONE
WHO HAS TO
APOLOGISE - EVEN
WHEN IT WAS THEY
WHO WERE IN THE
WRONG?



YOU DO NOT APOLOGISE
IF YOU HAVE A BROKEN
LEG AND COMPLAIN.

IT IS A VERY UNFAIR
WORLD SOMETIMES?

WITCHES FELL TODAY

Witches are in heaven and hell
In the church in the army
With lightning the witches fell
If you're blind they'll drive you
barmy.

I am sawn in two by craft and
church
The craft a scapegoat wants of
me
God and Christ have left me in
the lurch
Expendable Rosetta stone no
liberty

Make heaven perfect or hell
bearable
Hell is absence of God in your
life
Unless you can see God as
people able
Life will be filled with strife

I cannot forgive the witch army
For what they did to me in my
mark
Thus I'm not whole but instead
barmy
My hell awaits but am kept in
the dark.

VOLUNTEERS
WANTED FOR:

***Research Study on the Experiences
of People who Self-Injure***

I am a postgraduate research student carrying out a study on the experiences of people who self-injure, and I am looking for volunteers to take part in the study. People aged 18 years or over who are currently self-injuring or who have past experience of it, are invited to participate.

Taking part will involve speaking to me in private for approximately one hour about your experiences of self-injury. The interviews can be held at a clinical site, a voluntary organisation or at my workplace (Highland Campus, beside Raigmore Hospital) where support is available if necessary. Travel expenses will be reimbursed. All information will be treated in confidence and your name will not be used in any reports, as code numbers will be used instead.

With your help I hope to increase understanding about what life is like for people who self-injure. The findings from the study may help clinicians and researchers to develop treatment strategies which are more

suited to the individual experiences and needs of people who self-injure.

For further information please contact me on (01463) 718517 or email dianne.cameron@stir.ac.uk

Or you can contact Chris Evans at HUG on (01463) 718817 or email CEvans@hccf.org.uk

Your help is much appreciated.

Many thanks

Dianne Cameron
PhD Student
Department of Nursing and
Midwifery
University of Stirling
Highland Campus
Old Perth Road
Inverness
IV2 3FG

CONSULTANT CHANGES

The recent departure of two of our Consultant Psychiatrists to work in other parts of the country has led to some changes in some of the consultants patches of cover and areas of responsibility.

We are sorry to lose Dr Alison MacGregor who is going to work in Dundee and Dr Graham Jones who is joining the Elgin services. We wish them both the very best of health and good fortune in their new posts.

Following detailed discussion with all the Consultants the following changes have been agreed:

Dr David Gordon will move from the Inverness General Adult Psychiatry cover to undertake liaison work with the Hospitals and sessions in the Addictions Service. David will also become clinical tutor guiding the junior doctor's educational requirements.

Dr Chris MacGregor is taking over Dr Gordon's Inverness General Adult "patch" and taking on the role of Clinical Lead for Mental Health. In order to do this she is moving from her East Highland area and has given up the clinical tutorship to David.

There are therefore gaps that require filling. These are for General Adult Psychiatry in Badenoch & Strathspey, Nairn and East Highland. There will also be a need for consultant psychiatry support for Learning Disabilities, Rehabilitation and there are also still some sessions unfilled in Child and Family Psychiatry.

Dr Chris MacGregor and Dr Gordon moved to their new posts in early March and the vacant posts will be filled in the interim by locum Consultants.

A new Consultant, Dr Donald Mowat recently joined the Older Age Psychiatry Team and is helping determine the best way to provide services to our growing elderly patient group. We hope to have another senior doctor join Dr Mowat and Dr Karen Blagden over the summer.

You will understand then from this brief explanation that whilst we are trying very hard to ensure as little change for as many people as possible there will inevitably be some changes for a number of patients (as well as the staff).

There is a national and indeed international shortage of Consultant Psychiatrists and this is also true of the locum pool.

There have been suggestions that rather than trying to always completely fill the compliment of vacancies with Consultants it would be important to consider other grades of doctors and other workers who would be able to support patients also. Whilst this is kept under constant review there is pressure to have a full team of Consultant Psychiatrists in post as their absence jeopardises the training grades and therefore our ability to employ junior medical staff. Clearly the junior medical staff are important for the running of the service and it is also important that whatever changes we agree to make do not undermine our ability to have junior medical staff working, learning and being taught in posts in Highland.

Future recruitment depends to a large degree on our having a vibrant and enthusiastic team of staff such that potential recruits wish to come and join us here in "faraway" Highland.

As you will sense it is a time of great change and not a small measure of uncertainty in terms of the

recruitment and retention of clinical staff.

Please be assured that the safety of service delivery to patients is the overriding concern in all of the discussions and difficult decisions that have to be made.

The Consultants work with the Local Healthcare Co-operatives (LHCCs) and the Local Mental Health teams constantly to ensure the service remains safe and is sustainable.

Dr Ken Proctor
Medical Director
Highland Primary Care Trust

News from Chris

It's been really busy so far this year, as you'll see from other items in this newsletter. Delay in publication is down to me... will try to do better!

Graham's secondment is enabling me to be employed longer with HUG. I'm delighted! It's also meant I've left my bedsit and now live on a boat, which is absolutely great (if a bit chilly!).

Mental Health Awareness Training

90 Adults have participated in 7 sessions from January to March. They have included some TAG staff; Adult Literacy Tutors; Crossroads Care Attendants on Skye; New Opportunities staff (Skye); and nursing home staff (Nairn). The evaluations have been really positive, and we are receiving many more requests for training. I would like to thank the HUG members who have participated so enthusiastically and have really helped me so much. I know there are more members who wish to be involved - I will be in touch with you.

Future training is booked for tutors at Moray College, Elgin along the same lines as with the Adult Literacy tutors. Also with the HPCT on Advocacy.

Work with young people

55 5th and 6th year students at Ullapool High School have been involved in the first of two sessions. The Head of Guidance and five of her staff were present, indicating the importance the school puts on this experience. HUG members will work with the students in the second part next month.

Work on the Commissioning of a drama production from Eden Court by HUG is progressing. This is being developed in conjunction with Lochaber Youth Minds, with a drama workshop day planned for Saturday June 21st at An Drochaid, Fort William. Young people are being invited to come along, together with HUG members. We hope that ideas along the theme of stigma will emerge in a way that can be portrayed in a meaningful way to young people.

Iona Munro, a drama outreach worker will script the production, with HUG owning the rights once it's completed. The production will tour Highland secondary schools in the Autumn, including during Mental Health Week. This is being financed by the Scottish Executive, and will receive major publicity.

A support group is working with Philomena de Lima on a project to establish the attitudes of young people in the Highlands with regard to mental health issues. Thanks to those of you who have taken part so far. Philomena or her assistant hope to be with us to meet the "See me" team on June 10th.

June 10th - Round Table Meeting with a difference!

This will not take the form of our usual business meeting. There will be two main parts to the day at Caley Thistle Stadium in Inverness.

Morning 10.30 - 12.30: Graham consulting HUG members re. services for people with mental health problems as part of his work with the Scottish Executive.

Afternoon 1.30 - 4.00: "See me" coming to HUG to consult us as a focus group for our views on the next stage in the advertising campaign. Also to work out how HUG and "See me" can work together to use their networks effectively.

Please can Round Table Members see if there are any additional people who might like to attend this particular meeting, for either or both sessions. It would be very helpful if you could let us know as soon as possible if you wish to attend, and whether you would need any accommodation or help with other costs.

Graham's consultation on behalf of the Scottish Executive:

In addition to the information Graham can gather on June 10th, he would like to receive the views of service users, especially anyone who has experienced being sectioned.

Graham's remit also includes consulting carers. He can be contacted by leaving a message on 01479 841499.

IT equipment

We now have some laptops and more up to date computers in the office. The software is gradually being installed, and we are working on the systems we need to have so that they can be put to maximum good use. This has been funded by the Scottish Executive.

HUG Members Training

The Windsor Hotel in Nairn was the venue for HUG members, "See me" (Pippa Baker); CitigateSmarts (Catherine and Gemma); and HCCF (Ailsa) to spend two days exploring different ways of "getting a message across". I think everyone enjoyed it and got a lot from the time together. The hotel looked after us very well. There's always space in the newsletter for an individual account or reflections on the event! We are hoping that we may do some follow up work with Ailsa.

Media Work; Website

We have made a link with a particular journalist who writes for the

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Press and Journal. This resulted in a feature article in mid-February. HUG was approached by BBC Radio Scotland and Grampian TV regarding involvement in two programmes (Medical Matters and Medics of the Glen). In the end we did not make direct input, but Medical Matters at the end of April discussed Mental Health in Rural Areas, and featured Dr Malcolm Kerr, the RARARI Bid '79 Project Leader.

HUG members are working on our website and hoping to recommend improvements/changes. We have added a few links. Please let us have your views!

If you haven't looked at it recently, a reminder of the address: www.hug.uk.net

Sending an e-mail with any comments would be great.

"See me"

As part of the management team we meet monthly to further developments. Stigma Stop Watch was launched in March. This is aimed at the media, to encourage their reporting of mental health issues to be more accurate and less sensational.

The story board for the next "advertising" campaign will be available in June, and will be considered at the next Round Table.

Pippa is getting married in June; Catherine is leaving CitigateSMARTS for other employment – best wishes and good luck to them both.

Other current involvement

HUG is working with various "policy" groups at present. These include the Highland response to the Reduction in Suicide Strategy; New Craigs Management Committee and a task group working on the transport of psychiatric patients to hospital. More details will be in the next newsletter, but do get in touch if you want to contribute ideas or concerns.

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The RARARI bid'79 report is still in draft but we are continuing working on it with Malcolm Kerr (Arran).

The National Advisory Group for the Mental Health and Well-Being of the Scottish Population met in February. There was a very full agenda and future meetings will be more focused and smaller. The second edition of "Well" is now out.

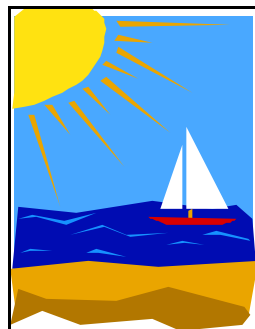
Keir regularly attends meetings aimed at creating a Scottish Network for mental health users (currently known as SIN.....)

Sandra is still working on the topic of genetics and mental health - contact HUG for more information.

Thanks

A huge thank you to all HUG members who've worked so hard and helped me enormously this year. I'm not going to name individuals - I might just leave someone out. Just as you support HUG, we hope to support you - this is something that I feel is one of our strengths.

Cheers from Chris



INTRODUCING SHEILIS OF ADVOCACY HIGHLAND.

My name is Sheilis Mackay and I started as the new manager with Advocacy Highland at the end of February.

Usually the first thing people say to me is “what does your name mean?” or “is it Sheila?” To set the record straight Sheilis is Gaelic for Julia. I was born and brought up in Inverness and both my parents spoke Gaelic. My family live in Inveness.

When I was 18 I left Inverness to study first in Aberdeen and then in Edinburgh. I qualified in 1979 and worked for five years as a Community Occupational Therapist in Edinburgh.

Then I worked with Lothian Regional Council and West Lothian Council working with and supporting people with mental health problems, older people, people with acquired brain injury, physical disabilities and learning disabilities. Over the years I have done a lot of work with people in their community and with the voluntary sector to develop new services.

Next I moved to City of Edinburgh Council to manage a social inclusion project supporting adults and school leavers with learning disabilities to speak up and make choices about their lives.

In April 2002 I returned to West Lothian Council to a Community Development post again listening to local people and assisting them to speak up about what affects their health and well being, such as damp houses, lack of money and poor transport. My job was to identify what the Council and other agencies could do to change the difficult circumstances that people who are excluded have to live with.

My own personal experience of living with and supporting family and friends with disabilities has had a huge influence on me, my values and on my work.

I have always believed that people (any one of us) should always be at the heart of any decision making, particularly where it affects their lives and I do actively assist and support people to speak up for what they want in life.

So this new job is very exiting for me as I can continue to support people to get their views heard and to assist people across the Highlands.

*Sheilis can be contacted at
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The Gateway,
1a Milburn Rd.
Inverness
IV2 3PX*

Tel: 01463 233460