

Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT

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Canberra City
ACT 2601

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The Mental Health Community Coalition was incorporated in October 2003. It was auspiced by ACTCOSS and had the services of a project officer. In October 2004 the first worker was employed and the first office found. Two weeks later the office moved location to the Griffin Centre. A second employee is expected to begin working in late November 2004.

February 2005 will be the month of our first Community Forum. Watch your email for details.

Setting the Agenda Workshop

The work of the Mental Health Community Coalition will be set by its members. But whether you are a member or only thinking about becoming one come along to the very first half day Community Forum to help set the agenda of the Mental Health Community Coalition.

The first forum is planned for February 2005. Keep watching your email or flyers at many of the venues you may attend.

For further information call the Mental Health Community Coalition on: 02 6249 7756 or email admin@MHCC.net.au

Information will be available mid-December.

Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT

Annual Report
2003—2004

Our Vision:

To be a creative and dynamic
community for all people

Mental Health Community Coalition

Aims and Purpose

To represent mental health consumers, carers and the community sector organizations who share a common goal of enhancing the wellbeing of people affected by mental illness and promoting the mental health interests of the ACT community and surrounding region

To advance and promote adequate and high quality mental health services in the ACT

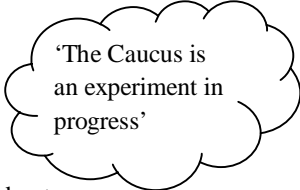
To enhance cooperation and information sharing among all stakeholders including:

- consumers
- carers
- community organizations
- service providers
- health professionals
- government agencies
- other interested parties

Board Members 2003–2004

President :	Winsome Willow
Vice President:	Judy Bentley
Secretary :	Margy Wylde-Browne
Treasurer :	David Allen
	Joan Alfreds
	Pat Daniels
	Mary Gays
	Ian Morison
	Katherine Porritt (co opted September 2004)
	Stephen Price
	Aine Tierney
	Kim Werner (resigned July 2004)

'What are the best things about Caucus?'



'The Caucus is an experiment in progress'

'Its a chance to discuss, to talk about issues, and get all points of view.'

'It gives consumers and carers a chance to work together and to take issues further.'

'The beginning of many discussions within the Caucus start with personal experience, and shows the value of that perspective. Everyone has the right to give their own view.'

'Caucus offers a constitutional guarantee that consumers and carers have a fundamental interest in the Mental Health Community Coalition as a whole... and act as a very important part of it.'



'I think in Caucus there are no disagreements between the carer and consumer position, which is what was always hoped for. So the separation that some agencies try to create doesn't worry us, because we are concerned about the issues. We have a primary interest in the success of the mental health sector, we want it to work better and for people to get a better deal. Carers and consumers share a common interest.'



'The Caucus is the canary of the mental health system, just as the canary was the early warning system for miners.'

'The potential for consumers and carers to put forward a position statement on mental health issues, for example the forum we had put forward a submission to the HREOC enquiry. This potential is still largely untapped.'

'One important problem is representation now we have Caucus and the Coalition government agencies can talk to us as a representative body.'

'People can attend who aren't necessarily in other organizations. You can just turn up and become part of Caucus.'

'Visibility of the organisation is important.'

Some faces of the MHCC



Ian Morrison
MHCC Board Member
Caucus Member



Margy Wylde Browne
MHCC Secretary



Mary Gays
MHCC Board Member



Winsome Willow
MHCC President



Linda Rosie
MHCC Executive Officer



Stephen, David, Mary and Pat at a working group session

Presidents Report

Welcome to our first Annual Report. The Mental Health Community Coalition is chalking up its first milestones with a grant of \$100,000. It has its first elected committee, a Consumer's and Carer's Caucus, an office (or two!) with furniture and equipment, an Executive Officer (paid staff member) and one more staff member on the way. It's great to be part of something taking shape and forming a space for its work. Thank you to all the people who stayed in there for many a year creating the space and opportunity for this organisation to put itself on the map - and its feet on the ground. (There goes that foot again!)

My hope for the Coalition is that it continues to make space for the voices of community members to be heard.

In September 2004 I was fortunate to attend the 14th Annual TheMHS Conference in Queensland. I didn't find many of the speakers that inspirational but when it happens and there is resonance it's inspiring and encouraging. I listened to many of the speakers and felt they were probably great people doing what they thought was great work but I couldn't connect to their idea of great work. It's very alienating to be sitting in a conference room wondering why you can't get excited about all the ideas being talked about - but then it happened!



I attended a key note speech by Robert Bland. His paper was "Confronting the Paradox - helping by being, or helping by doing". His message was simple, concluding with what was described as 'a radical and confronting basis for professional education in mental health': that professionals should value the lived experience of mental illness of consumers and carers and that they should value the power of healing relationships between workers and consumers, and workers and family carers. Hallelujah! It was a moment in heaven to my ears and heart.

Robert first identified that discourses have power to shape powerful cultural stories as they determine who can talk and who can be talked about. No surprises in that. Further he talked about the dominant discourse being the professional scientific discourse which values evidence based treatments, competency standards, expertise in staff, analytical thinking and professional autonomy. His view was that the real challenge was to elevate and foreground, the alternative and marginalised discourse which brought forward stories of lived experience, relationships, humanity of workers and spirituality. He urged people to take this voice more seriously. In this discourse the human qualities of the worker/client,

Presidents report continued

their being, is valued.

A story was related concerning a person who had lost hope for life was asked after they had recovered a little, what was helpful in their recovery. The person related how a 'worker' had met them and taken the time to have a cup of coffee with them. What was valued and remembered above all else was an act of kindness. Robert further urged that the ideas and learnings from different positions not be pitted against each other but balance and value found in each.

I loved listening to this. I was encouraged in my view, in my work and in my own believing and in what I thought was important in my relationships with the people. These people being the women I work with as my team members, the clients of the service I work at and other co-authors of this story that are trying to make space for this story. How often do I sit there feeling silenced as I watch a 'professional' cast a critical gaze over someone's life, completely negating their view of their life. What a struggle it is to make space while advocating for someone whose life is at the centre of this 'speak'. And yet I know I must be courageous and I encourage others to join in this courageous speaking up for others who, for a time, are not able to speak for themselves. We are in a

privileged place to be doing this.

We need to take the courage of our heart felt thoughts and as a community join with those that struggle to get their lived experiences heard, to be granted legitimacy for what is known through these knowledges. There is not one truth that anyone can live their life by. So for me, that seems a great place for the committee to begin this part of its journey. How can we as a Coalition bring the Caucus voices to a central place in our committee, in our community and 'be the change we want to see in the world'? How can the differing voices of the Caucus be held together, sometimes intertwined and sometimes at a tension, but always at the heart of the Coalition? How can we stay respectful of relationships, keeping close and caring.

Well this is what I hope to be part of in the coming year. While I ponder these things I'll go and check on the quiche I promised for tomorrow's committee meeting. Ingredients: compassion, hope and courage – a large dollop of each, mixed together to be enjoyed by all.

Thanks to everyone who has participated in the last year in the Coalition, Committee members, Caucus members, workers and helpers.

Winsome Willow

8 November 2004

Treasurers Report

The financial year July 2003 — June 2004 saw a very young organization with membership fees being the only income. No expenditure was made in this year. The fees were held by ACTCOSS until the end of the financial year.

Please see the audited report available from the MHCC and at the AGM

David Allen

Mental Health Community Coalition

Members

ACT Mental Health Consumer Network
Barnardos - Canberra
Belconnen Community Service
Calwell Community Centre
Canberra & Queanbeyan ADD Support Group Inc
Canberra Schizophrenia Fellowship Inc
Carers ACT
Centacare Canberra
Community Connections
CREEDA CLASS Program
FaBRIC
GROW
Inanna
Kincare Community Services
Mental Health Foundation Inc
Mental Illness Education ACT
Multicultural Women's Advocacy
Northside Community Service
Respite Care ACT
Richmond Fellowship
Skills for Carers
Toora Women Inc
Woden Community Service Inc
Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc

Associate Members

Pat Daniels
Nadia Docrat
Sheelah Egan
Kathy Egan
Merrilyn Fahey
Kerry Fry
Rupert Gerritsen
Jane Giles
Carly Hertel
Charmaine Honey
David Hopkins
Trevor Jacobs
Eunice Jolliffe
John McMurray
Gael Menzies
Ian Morison
Charlie Pahlman
Stephen Price
Amanda Raward
Ron Rockmann
Kelly Rothschild
Moirra Rowland
Denise Small
Aine Tierney
Edward Wallace
Andrea Walsh
Kim Werner
Peter Wise