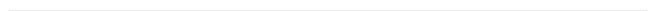




Mental Health Community Coalition
of the ACT Inc

Annual Report 2005



Vision

To be a dynamic focus for better mental health

Aims and Purpose

- To represent mental health consumers, carers and the community sector organisations 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 Organisations

Service Providers

Health Professionals

Government Agencies

Other interested parties





President's Report

A whole year later and I am reflecting on my hopes for the year and looking over the territory covered in the last year. I am remembering that I had wanted 'to be the change we want to see in the world'. I am remembering that this was about keeping the differing voices of the Consumer and Carer Caucus at the heart of the Mental Health Community Coalition (MHCC). What I am thinking now is that in order to hold anything I think it's important to focus on the vessel that does the holding. This is the MHCC and all that is encompassed in that from its staff members, to its Caucus of consumers and carers, to its committee and broader membership. I think the last year we have set about strengthening the structure of that vessel, understanding how it carries and what load it can carry. We have had a quite a few journeys to gather views and voices and collected them to pass them on, to inform our direction. The organisation is still finding ways to put intentions to action. I want to thank all who contributed to this in the last year, many people have contributed and a special thanks to our two paid staff team members Linda and Denise who have continued to show up and do the day to day carrying whether others were there or not to help.

So that was one year and we have come a little way towards our intentions. I thought it might be helpful and interesting to spend some time thinking about what sustains us in long journeys particularly when the kind of change we are wanting is still such a vision that will take wisdom, time and energy to create. No one person has the right way to make the vision turn into reality and lots of people contribute in meaningful and passionate ways. There are lots of ideas coming from lots of different organisations both community and government that will go into the mix of creating a respectful response that always maintains the dignity of the person whose life is affected by mental illness. Along the way we might feel discouraged, lose our way, spend energy on creating unhelpful polarities, and be just plain frustrated. What will sustain us in the year to come and more so in the years to come?

The following are some ideas and thoughts to share.

Giving and Receiving—learning and joining with other people and remembering the difference it makes to our lives. I received a letter the other day and one of the things the person wrote was 'I wouldn't be the person I am today without you all. You have shown me the strength, care and respect I need for myself by displaying these things yourselves.' What wonderful feedback but as importantly I remembered that I wouldn't be the person I am today without that person. She has shown me determination, courage and passion against all odds reminding me of what is possible even when you hardly can dare to believe it is. This thought sustains me and I have had many wonderful teachers in my life.

Remembering in nature there are no mistakes—there are just things that happen and nature adjusts to that. If a limb falls from a tree into a stream that is not a mistake it just is and the stream finds another direction and flows on. The limb can become a home for new critters or a bridge across the stream and have other purposes that were not imagined. So

accepting what is and moving our lives away from blaming can sustain your journey.

Doing the things that bring joy and happiness to you - remembering what is important and what things we do that bring joy, pleasure, satisfaction, peace, happiness, connection to our lives. They can be small things like taking the time to notice how the frost lands on the cobwebs and the sun sparkles in the morning light. Noticing when things feel okay or someone does something for you that make your day feel good. It could be a stranger smiling at you when out walking.

I am sure there are many more practices that people engage in that do sustain them and maybe what you could do right now while reading this is to think well 'what are those practices for me?'

In finishing it is my hope that in the next year of the MHCC we will move closer to some of our intentions and we will do so in a way that adds to our lives and doesn't feel like we are giving something away in order to achieve something else, and our sense of community increases. Happy exploring and travels to us all.

Winsome Willow

President, Mental Health Community Coalition ACT



Executive Officer's Report



To be instrumental in setting up a new organisation is a great opportunity; to be instrumental in setting up a peak body is a privilege.

The peak body for mental health has been established now for just over a year. Part time directly employed staff were engaged in September and November.

The aim of setting up a sustainable and functioning organisation is well under way.

First and foremost planning and implementing organisational structures were and are paramount to the future stability and sustainability of the MHCC. This may seem a tedious task but without structure a small organisation with many demands on its time and resources is left with feet of clay. The MHCC has achieved much on this score in the first year but it has meant devoting time and energy to understanding issues such as broadband connections, server administration, the vagaries of printers and effective file management. This doesn't have a lot to do with mental health, other than affecting the staff adversely, but it has much to do with the sustainability of the organisation.

The far more interesting challenge of defining and establishing the philosophy and parameters of the organisation have been ably addressed with the assistance brought to the MHCC by the Board of Governance. The knowledge, hard work and support of the Board ensured the strategic plan was in place by January 2005. Without reference to the Strategic Plan the first of the MHCC forums held in February 2005, 'Setting the Agenda' endorsed the essence of the strategic plan. There was a clear indication that the issues addressed in the strategic plan were indeed the issues of concern to the membership of the MHCC and to the larger mental health community.

The staff of the MHCC look forward to a year with reduced practical organisational issues and ongoing development of a two way engagement with our constituency.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the current Board, staff and volunteers who have worked so hard to establish the MHCC and I would also like to thank all those who lobbied from the 1990's onward to make the idea and vision of a peak body in the ACT acceptable to and appreciated by the funding bodies.

Linda Rosie

Executive Officer, Mental Health Community Coalition ACT



MHCC Consumer and Carer Caucus

The Consumer and Carer Caucus is an integral part of the governance structure of the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT. A planning group of consumers and carers supported by ACTCOSS commenced meeting together in September 2003. This group worked hard to brainstorm and ultimately decide upon a blue print for what became the Consumer and Carer Caucus.

Caucus works with the MHCC to ensure that the work of the MHCC is informed by, and is supportive of, the interests and views of consumers and carers. The Caucus is made up of mental health consumers and carers. There is a small membership fee that can be waived where necessary. Two consumer and two carer members sit on the MHCC's Board. Caucus reports directly to the Board and receives a report from the MHCC through the MHCC's Executive Officer at each of the monthly meeting held by Caucus.

Caucus holds monthly meetings to provide a safe and supported venue for consumers and carers come together and to

Share information

Support each other

Identify issues of priority and concern

Develop collective positions on key areas of mental health policy, law and service provision and development.

The inaugural meeting of Caucus was held in March 2004 and then met every month since (15 meetings in total). A total of 48 people have attended. The membership of Caucus is currently 33 and is growing. Major achievements of Caucus to date include

1. Engagement of a facilitator to work with Caucus during its establishment phase
2. A public consultation forum in October 2004 to enable consumers and carers to have input into the review of mental health care and treatment in Australia being conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Mental Health Council of Australia (18 people attended and a further 10 contributed either orally or in writing)
3. A submission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Mental Health Council of Australia
4. A public consultation forum in February 2005 to enable consumers and carers to be briefed by the Consultant conducting the Mental Health Services Feasibility Study 2004/2005
5. A submission to the ACT Mental Health Services Feasibility Study 2004/2005
6. Advice and contribution to the production of a film/DVD/Video on 'Mental Illness and Relationships' being produced by NSW Health Southern Area Health Services' Mental Health Services Family and Carer Support Program

7. With the MHCC, a submission to the Australian Senate Select Committee Inquiry into Mental Health 2005
8. Contribution to the MHCC's Raising the Roof Forum: Accommodation and Housing for People with Mental Illness, May 2005
9. Contribution to a range of MHCC activities and events
10. Obtaining of a grant from HealthPact to continue the establishment of Caucus and to provide members with training and opportunities to have input into policy and service development
11. Collaboration with other consumer and carer groups as well as service providers for example contribution to the planning, organisation and initiation of the first Christmas in July (2005)
12. The development of a Work Plan for the next two years 2005/2007

Individual members of Caucus also sit on a number of committees and working parties and provide reports to Caucus about the work of these committees. Initiatives about to commence include a four day training and development program for Caucus members and the establishment of Strategic Working Groups to conduct and publish research on the experiences of consumers and carers in the ACT when seeking assistance in a crisis or when seeking follow-up in the community.

Leanne Craze

Facilitator, MHCC Consumer and Carer Caucus



Caucus at Work



Information Sharing

E-bulletin

The MHCC needs to have direct information flow from and to its constituency. The constituency is mental health consumers, carers and community organisations. A direct and clear flow of practical information and issues has been established with the fortnightly e-bulletin. The e-bulletin (which is posted to people without internet access) has two functions. The first is to provide a simple information flow of meeting times, dates and places. The second function is to co-ordinate and distribute information of relevance to the mental health community from local, national and intentional sources. Relevance is a major factor. Highlighting issues that are being addressed in other parts of the world which also have resonance in the ACT is of prime concern. How can we know of different models of care and treatment modes unless we are informed? The e-bulletin aims to bring information to the sector. The e-bulletin distribution list continues to grow and currently reaches over 300 individuals and groups.

Forums

A direct method of information sharing is by holding public forums. Since January the MHCC have hosted three major forums, 'Setting the Agenda' mentioned earlier, 'Raising the Roof' and 'Welfare to Work - fair or unfair?'. The last two forums were directly related to political issues and circumstances and their impact on people who have or are caring for people with a mental illness. The guest speakers at 'Raising the Roof' addressed the issues of concern around accommodation and housing for people with a mental illness in the ACT and provided the groundwork for submissions to



Speakers at the 'Welfare to Work Forum'

the Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Mental Illness and Housing in July 2005. The forum also provided the opportunity for service providers who have major concerns in the area to meet and communicate those concerns with each other. 'Welfare to Work – fair or unfair?' welcomed speakers who informed the forum of major concerns relating to Federal Government policy as it is being slowly unfurled. Question time at the forums is important to raise issues not already addressed and to bring to the larger audience

major concerns from individuals rather than organisations. All forums have been well attended and could not have been possible without the support of a remarkable band of volunteers who produce exceptional lunches and afternoon teas in a short time frame and to a very small budget.

Mental Health Providers Network

The MHPN (Network) is facilitated by the MHCC. The Network meets bimonthly to share information and to learn more about the projects and programmes of member organisations. The knowledge is essential to establish linkages and partnerships between community organisations. Thanks to the 'hosts' of the meetings this year the Network have enjoyed Tongan dancing, a mental health treasure hunt and home made soup.



Community Technology Centre

CTC

With assistance from the ACT Government, the Community Technology Centre was set up in June 2005 in the office of the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT.

There are two fully functional computers available for use by members of the MHCC Consumer and Carer Caucus. Individual training is available in the use of emails, the Internet, Word 2003 and Excel. Skills learned can assist in the streamlining of the many jobs needing to be done when lobbying and seeking support in mental health advocacy. An added bonus is gaining skills and knowledge in a helpful and supportive environment.

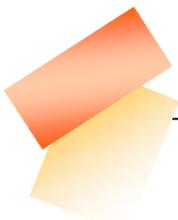
The computers can be accessed by making an appointment and being allocated a designated time slot during Monday to Thursday between 10.00am to 2.00pm. Assistance is provided for any level of expertise.

Since the doors opened several brave souls have fronted up for their time slot and have been surprised at how much fun it can be learning to use a computer. They have taken away with them expertise in a skill thought mysterious and incomprehensible and have been taken aback at how much they already know about these impossible machines.

It is exciting for the staff at the MHCC to be part of this process. They see unfolding around them a confident and active Caucus members made possible because of the individual's willingness to 'have a go' in the Computer Technology Centre.

Denise Burton

Administrator and Finance Officer



Technology Report

The first year cannot go by without a comment on this major piece of work. In the MHCC's short existence the technology has been upgraded twice. From a stand alone computer the MHCC moved to a two computer networked system. With the benefit of a Digital Divide grant from the ACT government two computers were added to the system for the exclusive use of Caucus members. To enable users to have their own private space on the system and to have internet access the final upgrade was achieved when the MHCC installed its own server. The MHCC have been very fortunate to have had the pro bono services of a computer systems engineer to achieve this work. Without this voluntary donation of time and knowledge the current position would not have been possible to achieve.

Linda Rosie

Policy and Procedures



The Policy and Procedures Workgroup was established in January 2005 to set up the Policy and Procedures Manual for the MHCC.

Before the Workgroup was established a number of policy and procedures documents had been written by individual Board members and staff but were not collated into a workable document. Momentum gathered at the strategic planning meeting when some of the attendees nominated to write policies initiated by discussions at that meeting. These written gems were captured electronically and filed on the computer.

Along came the Workgroup and rescued these policies from the computer, read them, dissected them and, if necessary, edited them presenting a hard copy to the Board for final approval. As the Workgroup gained experience in their task, other sources were accessed for additional policies and procedures. These included Raising the Standard, the Policy and Procedures Manual of VCOSS and policy and procedures familiar to the group and already established by other community organisation.

The Workgroup met regularly and after each of these meetings made sure that a number of the policy and procedures were prepared to be presented to and approved by the Board at their next meeting. These approved policy and procedures were transformed from Draft to Passed, reformatted, dated and stored electronically and in a hard cover manual. Gradually the Manual started to take shape and the group discovered there were more policies and procedures completed than not completed.

The Manual now stands proudly on the MHCC bookshelf and is available for quick reference and information to assist the organisation in its processes. It is divided into three sections - Governance, Human Resources and Organisational and set out in accordance with the Rules of Association.

The wisdom of knowing what was relevant for our organisation, out of the copious amounts of information available, was testing at times but using the combined efforts of the Workgroups' skills and experience, the Manual became a reality. The Workgroup and the Board know this is not the end of the story as the Policy and Procedures Manual is a living document and as the MHCC grows and changes the manual will need to be edited to mirror the needs of the time.

The Workgroup started out as 'just another meeting to attend', but as the Manual became a reality those who participated realised they had completed a major task and were pleased to be involved in the process.

Denise Burton

Administrator and Finance Officer

Board of Governance 2004-2005

President	Winsome Willow
Vice President	Judy Bentley
Secretary	Margy Wylde-Browne
Treasurer	David Allen
Members	Joan Alfreds
	Pat Daniels
	Mary Gays
	Ian Morison
	Katherine Porritt (co opted Sept 2004 resigned May 2005)
	Stephen Price (resigned June 2005)
	Aine Tierney
	Kim Werner (resigned July 2004)

Staff 2004-2005

Executive Officer	Linda Rosie part time Sept 2004
Administrator & Finance Officer	Denise Burton part time Nov 2004
Caucus Coordinator	Leanne Craze consultant July 2004
Regular Volunteer	Chrissie Allen part time Sept 2004



Representation—Submissions—Comment

Representation

The MHCC has represented the constituency at meetings this year. Some of the major meetings or committees attended are listed below

Mental Health Council of Australia Board

Mental Health Peak Bodies meeting

Promotion Prevention and Early Intervention Forum

Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan Implementation Group

Education Workgroup

Complex Needs Workgroup

Mental health ACT Adult and Adolescent Feasibility Study Reference Group

Mental Health and Human Rights

Human Rights Commission Forums

ACTCOSS Prison Forum

Submissions and Comment

Comment

Government Community Engagement Service Charter

Carer Participation Policy

Preventing and Managing Violence in ACT Health

Women Only Psychiatric Wards

Submission

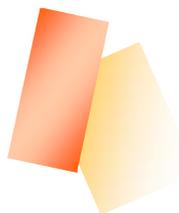
ECT Inquiry

Mental Health ACT Adult and Adolescent Feasibility – (two submissions)

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry - MHCC Consumer and Carer Caucus

Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Accommodation and Housing for People with a Mental Illness

Senate Inquiry into Mental Health - MHCC Consumer and Carer Caucus



Financial Report

