



ANNUAL REPORT 2007-08

ACT MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMER NETWORK INC.
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Mental Health Consumers participating, improving and changing mental health services

Goals of the Network

- To provide accountable broad representation that is informed, valued and supported by ACTMHCN;
- To provide proactive systemic advocacy from a consumer perspective;
- To work collaboratively with other organisations and mental health consumers;
- To create and build a supportive environment within the organisation and outside which is empowering to mental health consumers;
- To govern the ACTMHCN in a responsible and sustainable way.

Committee 2007-2008

Jane Williams	Chair
Catherine Settle	Deputy Chair
David Lovegrove	Secretary
Jacqui Joyce	Treasurer
Peter Dwyer	Assistant Treasurer
Phillip Brown	
Kerry Fry	
Blake Andersen	
Bradley Foxlewin	
Stephanie Bassingthwaighte	
Lyle Upson	

Staff

Simon Viereck	Executive Officer	
Warren Turk	Bookkeeper	
Ines Pintos- Lopez	Office Manager	(until December 07)
Vicki de Silva	Administrative Officer	
Michael Firestone	Administrative Officer	(from January 08)

Chair's Report 2007-2008

So, another year has passed us by, and I would like to say that it has been an honour and a privilege to have served as Chair for the Network.

It has felt like running a race, and yet in some areas of the mental health field, it feels as though nothing has changed. We are still in the ongoing process of reviewing the Mental Health Act, and the Mental Health Services Plan is still, as yet, not finalized.

There has been a lot of activity around the new prison for the ACT, the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC). Unfortunately, it is now not due for opening until January 2009, which means the ACT families will again have to travel interstate for Christmas visits. Last year, the NSW prisons closed their doors to visitors on Christmas Day, so I suspect that this will probably happen again this year. I have been working quite hard on this enterprise, so that our ACT inmates with mental health issues will be properly treated.

The Network also played a small part in the public forum held in the ACT Legislative Assembly on the Community Coalition on Corrections book "Healthy or Harmful? - mental health and the operational regime of the new ACT prison", which opened my eyes to the plight of people incarcerated, who have mental health conditions.

By moving in the prison committees, I have come to explore issues around the safe injecting scheme, which unfortunately will not be running. The Government has made a sort of concession, in the form of supplying inmates with bleach to clean their needles, but this process does not stop the Hepatitis C virus. In an ideal world, drugs would not get into the prisons, and a detox programme would be a first step into the prison, but it is not an ideal world, and drugs will get in there, and so people will exit the custodial sentence with a Hep C sentence as well, which would be appalling.

Simon and I gave a lecture to second-year medical students at the ANU with Tom Faunce. It went well, and I feel it gave the students an insight into the world of mental health consumers.

We also gave a lecture on mental health to the heads of departments in ACT Housing. We both came away feeling that maybe there could be changes made, but from our feedback, this is nowhere near happening.

We are also still having members failing the Disability Support Pension reviews, whereby the folk at Centrelink feel they know better than the mental health experts.

Despite early intervention programs, stigma is still common in the community, and I personally can attest to being discriminated against, by a GP on mental health grounds. It is distressing to still get discriminated against at all in 2008, but when the medical profession can do it, what hope do we have in society as a whole?

As Chair of the Network, we had a lot of coverage on the television, radio, and the Canberra Times paper, on the very distressing suicide by a woman who had been deemed a 'person at risk' by a magistrate who had also asked for a mental health assessment on the woman, who then managed, despite being put in a 'tearproof smock' and handcuffed, to commit suicide in the back of a corrections van, on the trip from the courts to the Belconnen Remand Centre. It was an appalling situation, and for a person in distress, such an undignified way of handling someone who was so obviously mentally unwell.

But we are all too well aware that we are often treated appallingly at a time when we need care and compassion the most.

The Network is also involved in the issue of banning smoking in the Psychiatric Services Unit, probably next year, if ACT Health has its way. A working group will be convened on this issue, in which not just the Network will be involved. I am biased because I am a smoker, but I feel we have so few freedoms when we access the Psych hospitals, and this is just another liberty that well-meaning people want to take away from us.

Then there is the working group on the design of the new you-beaut psychiatric super-centre that is going to be built at The Canberra Hospital. I am the first to say that PSU is dreadfully inadequate, but I do have a vision of a 'super psych centre' - bring your mad and bad with signs like McDonalds, so we can really be visible from Mount Ainslie, for all to see. Good way to work on decreasing stigma!

I am also proud to have been Chair when we got a very nice budget increase for the Network. The years of hard work and being 'out there' have finally paid off.

Simon has worked like a Trojan this last year, and I would like to thank him most sincerely for his support, advice, and his tactical way of dealing with situations in which I would have just gone for the jugular!

I would also like to thank my fellow committee members, and our Network Representatives. We all work hard to make changes and remind people that, despite having a mental disorder, we actually do need a voice, and can often speak not just for ourselves, but also for the members of our community that don't have a voice.

Also, a huge thanks to our admin staff, who struggle to keep sane when we are not.

So, it is good night from me, and a welcome to the new Chair of the Network.

Cheers,

Jane Williams
Chair

Executive Officer's Report

The financial year 2007-08 was in many ways an important year for the ACT mental Health Consumer Network (the Network). The Network had made tremendous progress in the couple of years before, but was now faced with a series of challenges and unknowns: A new, inexperienced Executive Officer, a new Chairperson, high demand for its services coupled with fatigue among key representatives, and midway through the year the loss of a highly competent Office Manager. The way in which the Network responded to these challenges could be seen to be indicative of its future sustainability.

So how did the Network respond to these challenges? In the year 2007-08 the Network increased its output in terms of hours of representation provided, participated in a higher number of recruitment processes, developed several submissions to the Review of the Mental Health Act, employed a capable volunteer to the vacant admin position, instigated Member's meetings, succeeded in obtaining a grant for a Consumer Participation Project, achieved a substantial increase in its core grant for 2008-09, and much much more.

Representation

The Network provided a higher number of hours of representation on committees and working groups compared with the year before despite experiencing some difficulties in recruiting, supporting and retaining consumer representatives.

The Network has established itself as a respected and credible player in the health sector, which is evident in the increased number of requests for representatives and invitations to participate in various forums, the Network has received this year. Below you will find a list comprising many, but not all, the representative activities the Network has been engaged in during 2007-08.

A new area the Network has engaged in during 2007-08 is the coming ACT Prison. Many community sector organisations have expressed their concern in many ways and the Network joined in arguing the case of the large part of the prison population who will suffer one or more mental health conditions.

Network representatives also attended a number of conferences in 2007-08, including the annual Mental Health Services conference and an international conference on Women's Mental Health. At the VICSERV conference in Melbourne in May Karen Blake from the Mental Health Community Coalition and I gave a presentation on the unique role of the Consumer and Carer Caucus. Ironically the Caucus is presently working hard to redefine its role, as the landscape of the community mental health sector changes around it. The Quarterly Consumer, Carer and Community Forums, which were a new Caucus activity this year, have been very successful and will play a role in the future of Caucus.

Two processes, which were very much on the agenda for the Network at the last AGM, are the Review of the Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994 and the Mental Health Services Plan. These processes have once again proceeded in a stop-start fashion, which has been a source of frustration, but probably is also a

reflection ACT Health lacking the capacity and manpower to really carry two such big projects alongside everything else they do. At this point I would not even expect to be able to report on the finalisation of these two projects at the 2009 Network AGM.

Projects

Projects for the year 2007-08 have included cooperative efforts with other organisations such as collaborating with Mental Health ACT & Richmond Fellowship ACT to bring Marlene Janssen, Hearing Voices Network Australia Coordinator to Canberra to deliver three Hearing Voices Awareness Workshops. This has prompted a renewed effort from Network member Kerry Fry to establish a Hearing Voices Group in Canberra with support from the Network.

The Network was also able to secure a grant from Dept. of Housing, Disability and Community Services for a Consumer Participation Project. At the end of the 2007-08 financial year this had not progressed much beyond the planning phase, but holds some very interesting prospects in terms of building capacity to promote and increase mental health consumer participation in the ACT.

Yet another interesting project was the establishment of a Members' Meeting. A few meetings were held before any further meetings were postponed awaiting further Network planning. The Members' Meetings are set to return in 2009.

Staff

This has been my first full year as Executive Officer of the Network and I feel I have played a part in guiding the Network through a challenging year.

Vicki da Silva has been a presence throughout the year as administrative officer. Vicki has a special gift for making visitors to the office feel welcome and I thank her for her contribution both in this way and as a support with admin, organising, shopping, typing, and all the other essential tasks of the Network office environment.

At Christmas 2007 the Network had to bid farewell to Office Manager Ines Pintos-Lopez. She had contributed a tremendous lot to the Network with her high-level business skills, systematic approach to the job, and strong work ethic. While we can hardly blame her for exchanging Canberra for Bariloche, Argentina, she has been sorely missed and we send her many thanks for her contribution to the Network.

A new administrative officer was employed to pick up some of the slack after Ines. Michael Firestone was a valued volunteer before starting in the position and has developed remarkably since the beginning of 2008. He has redeveloped the Newsletter, emails to members and a range of other procedures, as well as providing a constant critical eye and valued help and support to members and representatives. My thanks to him as well.

Committee

The 2007-08 Network Committee of Management started out with tremendous spirit, enthusiasm and good will. While that has for the most part continued throughout the year, we have been sad to see a couple of members not be able to continue their involvement with the Committee for personal reasons and one member for rather more pleasant reasons - full time work.

The Committee has put a lot of effort into planning in 2007-08. I acknowledge the extra load this has put on members of the Committee, who have sometimes struggled to manage the workload without compromising their other commitments or personal health. Much effort has gone into planning for the expected budget increase, which luckily came through at the end of this financial year, for the Consumer Participation Project, and for the changes in the organisation of the Network, which will hopefully enable the Network to better support representatives, better engage members, and better promote consumer participation in the ACT.

Conclusion

I think it is fair to say that the financial year 2007-08 was a challenging one for the Network and that at times the Network did not manage to do as good a job as we all would have liked it to. It is also fair to say, however, that the Network did have a number of very significant achievements, considering the circumstances. The Network has not only continued, but expanded its delivery of quality representational services on behalf of consumers in the ACT, has engaged in new areas and projects and has been successful in arguing for an increase in its core budget.

With this in mind the 2008-09 financial year will be challenging also, but I remain confident that the Network will be considerably stronger at its next AGM.

Simon Viereck
Executive Officer

Treasurer's report

The ACT Mental Health Consumer Network Inc. began the 2007-2008 financial year with a budgeted expectation of a deficit comparable to the \$8,982 deficit reported in the previous financial year, because of increased wage costs from mid-2007 without a substantial budget increase.

The Network's income increased slightly due to the indexation of our HACC Grant from ACT Health to just under \$134,000 for the 2007-2008 financial year. The deficit as reported in the income statement was \$8,800.

Three years of successive deficits have depleted the Network's financial reserves and it will be necessary to budget for surpluses over the next few years.

Simon Viereck
On behalf of Jacqui Joyce, Treasurer

Main Policy Areas for 2007-2008

Review of the Mental Health Treatment and Care ACT 1994

Submission to the Review of the ACT Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994 developed in response an Options Paper.

The Review of the Mental Health Treatment and Care Act (1994) was identified as a significant area of work for the Network in 2007-08, as it had been the year before. The Network participated actively in the Review of the Act Advisory Committee. The Network focused in particular on putting Advance Directives on the agenda, on forensic issues, on consumer and carer rights, the definition of mental illness, and on involuntary vs. voluntary treatment.

In late 2007 an Options Paper was released for the Review and the Network developed a submission in response to this as well as collaborating with the Mental Health Community Coalition to inform their response to this paper.

Mental Health Services Plan

The Network dedicated considerable resources to representation on the Review Steering Committee. Unfortunately there have been long delays in the Review process, as ACT Health worked on a draft Mental Health Services Plan. Network representatives have repeatedly iterated that the process has not been satisfactory for consumers or other community sector stakeholders, but has also attempted to work constructively to progress the process, including participating in a small drafting group to progress the development of the draft Mental Health Services Plan. The resulting draft Plan was amended by ACT Health before being presented to the Minister for Health.

A draft Plan was released for public consultation in September 2008.

Mental Health and Prisons

With the opening of the new ACT Gaol, the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC), coming closer, the Network involved itself with a number of community groups engaged in advocating for prisoner rights, women in prisons and other issues. A large part of the average prison population suffers from a mental health disorder when arriving in prison and many face a co-morbidity problem where mental health problems are accompanied by drug or alcohol abuse. In addition common prison experiences such as isolation, strip searches, and disconnectedness from the general community are proven to be detrimental to mental health.

The Network advocated for a better understanding of the challenges of preserving mental health in prison settings and for better services for prisoners suffering mental health disorders by presenting at an ALP seminar on the subject, providing input to the publication 'Healthy or Harmful? - Mental Health and the Operational

Regime of the New ACT Prison', and contributing to the Community Coalition on Corrections and other community groups. The Network has also secured a place on the AMC's Community Reference Group.

Representation on Committees

The Network continues to support the consumer voice on committees across Mental Health ACT and other related areas. The Network provides mechanisms for the nomination, selection, training and ongoing support and accountability for those in this role. Regular Consumer Forums were held to share information, experience and to identify common policy themes, although this important area was not adequately upheld in the second half of the year. Network representation on committees in the last year included:

Mental Health ACT Strategic Executive Meeting
Mental Health ACT Risk Management Committee
Mental Health ACT Strategy and Action Plan Implementation Group
Mental Health ACT Clinical Practice and Quality Improvement Committee
Mental Health ACT Clinical Review Committee
Mental Health ACT (MH Act Review) Review Advisory Committee (RAC)
Mental Health ACT Professional Development and Training Committee
Mental Health ACT Suicide and Self-harm Reference Group
Mental Health ACT Policy Review Committee
Mental Health ACT Suicide Prevention Working Group
Mental Health ACT Seclusion and Restraint Working Group
Mental Health ACT Better General Health Programme Steering Committee
Mental Health ACT Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy and Action Plan Implementation Group
ACT Health Mental Health Services Plan Steering Committee
ACT Health Consumer and Carer Participation Framework Working Group
ACT Health Care coordination Project Advisory Group
Mental Health Community Coalition Sector Development Reference Group
Mental Health Community Coalition Board
Mental Health Community Coalition Consumer and Carer Caucus
PSU Continuum of Care Group
Calvary 2N Continuum of Care
Mental Health Recovery Group ACT
ACT Division of General Practice Mental Health Committee
ACTCOSS Social Health & Inequalities Committee
ACTCOSS Peaks Meeting
ACT COAG Mental Health Working Group
ACT COAG Mental Health Reference Committee
WCHM Women and Mental Health Working Group
Advanced Agreements Working Group

Transcultural Mental Health Network
Centacare STEPS Youth Step-up/Step-down Steering Committee
ACT Community Coalition on Corrections
ACT Women & Prisons Group
ACT Mental Health Legal Centre Forum
Alexander Maconichie Centre Community Reference Group

Education and Training

Consumer Advocacy Training

The Network was once again proud to present the Consumer Advocacy Course developed by The NSW Institute of Psychiatry Consumer Advocacy Training. Sandy Watson delivered the Consumer Advocacy Course in Canberra in May 2008. The Consumer Advocacy Training Course aims to provide consumers with an understanding of a rights-based approach to consumer advocacy and the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in service planning and policy development, represent on committees, and to understand the roles of advocates and representatives. The training assists consumers to identify and reflect on the ethical dimensions and boundaries of advocacy and representation and presents a model of consumer advocacy based on social justice principles.

Other conferences and training attended

MHCA "Mentoring for the Future Program" including attendance at national workshops.

The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Conference, Melbourne, 5-7 September 2007.
Evidence-based Practices in Supported Employment for People with Psychiatric Disabilities: Geoff Waghorn, Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research
Telling It Like It Is: Mental Illness, Communication and Relationships, MHCC (5 workshops).

Launch of Anti-poverty Week

ACT Human Rights Community Forums 2007

ADFACT Co-morbidity Coordinated Care Forum

Health Care Consumers Association: Forum w. Executive Director of ACT Health Planning Division, Megan Cahill - topic: Health Services Plans.

ACTCOSS Budget Forum 2008

3rd International Congress for Women's Mental Health, Melbourne, 17-20 March 2008

VICSERV Conference 2008: Joining the Dots - Creating Community, 8-9 May 2008

Australasian Anxiety Disorder Conference, Sydney, 15-17 May 2008.

Department of Territory and Municipal Services, 2008 Recreation Summit, 16-17 May 2008

Community Coalition on Corrections: Various Forums on Prison issues.
Christians for an Ethical Society: 2008 Seminar Series on Prisons
ACTCOSS: Raising the Standard
ACTCOSS: Governance for Non-profit Organisation Board Members (series of 4 seminars, 2 members attended training)

Drop-ins

The Network holds regular fortnightly forums on areas of interest including mental health programs and policy areas directly impacting on consumers. The following forums have been held:

Advocacy Services for MH Consumers, Ivette Gonzalez & Dalane Drexler, ADACAS
The Consumer and Carer Forum, Leanne Craze, MHCC
BCS, Open Art Programme, Meredith Hughes
The Southside PHaMS Programme, Paul Russel and team, WCS
The Better General Health Programme, Kim Hooper, BGHP Coordinator.
The Northside PHaMS Program, Team Member
Consumer Participation in MHACT, Gary Spence, Participation Coordinator
Transcultural Mental Health, Aine Tierney, Chair of ACT Transcultural MH Network
Advance Directives, Karen Blake, Secretariat, Advanced Agreements Working Group
Mental Health and the new ACT Prison, Bill Bush, Community Coalition on Corrections
Day-to-Day Living Program, Michael Latimer, Team Leader Southside D2D Living Program

Joint Forums and Partnerships

ACTMHCN, MHCC and MHACT: Quarterly Consumer, Carer and Community Forum (4 forums: August, Nov, Feb, May)

ACTMHCN, MHACT & Richmond Fellowship ACT: Hearing Voices Awareness Workshops (two for workers, one for consumers), Marlene Janssen, Hearing Voices Network Australia Coordinator.

ACTMHCN, MHCC, ACT Community Coalition on Corrections: Healthy or Harmful, Forum on Mental Health and the Prison Environment

ACTMHCN, ACT Health: Care Coordination Project Consumer and Carer Focus Groups (23, 24 April)