



ACT
Mental Health
Consumer Network

ANNUAL REPORT 2008-09

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; and
- To govern the ACTMHCN in a responsible and sustainable way.

COMMITTEE 2008-09

Bradley Foxlewin	Chair
Philip Brown	Deputy Chair
Maureen McInerney	Secretary
Stephanie Bassingthwaighte	Assistant Secretary
Peter Dwyer	Treasurer
David Lovegrove	Assistant Treasurer
Blake Andersen	
Kerry Fry	
Phillip Green	
Stephen Price	
Irma Norris	(from February 2009)

STAFF

Simon Viereck	Executive Officer
Sara Dias	Consumer Participation Development Worker (Jan-Apr 09)
Dalane Drexler	Policy & Participation Development Worker (from March 09)
Vicki da Silva	Administration Worker
Michael Firestone	Administration Worker/Information Worker
Warren Turk	Bookkeeper

CHAIR'S REPORT

It has been a very busy year for the Network. The Alexander Maconochie Centre which was due to open in January 2009 and after a few security issues, it finally opened two months later in March. All of ACT's prisoners that were being held in interstate prisons have now been able to return to the ACT which is a very positive outcome for the inmates whose support networks largely reside here in Canberra. The Network has continued to be involved in planning and monitoring the Centre and I am pleased to report that it seems to be running quite well. Our watchful eye will remain on the developments within and around the Centre over the coming year.

Over the past couple of years, The Network has been involved with the issue of banning cigarette smoking at the Psychiatric Services Unit (PSU). After much discussion a two year extension was granted on the issue, meaning that consumers are able to smoke in the smoking areas of PSU for at least the next two years, at which time there may be further discussion on the issue.

A lot happened from November 2008 to June 2009. The Network has been involved in both local and national mental health consultations in regard to planning for better mental health services. Two examples are our ongoing lobbying activity at the PSU and our influence in shaping what the Emergency Department at the Canberra Hospital might look like in the future. This has involved ongoing consultation with Mental Health ACT and nationally to the Australian Government and the 4th National Mental Health Plan. Locally we have participated in in-depth discussions surrounding the ACT Mental Health Services Plan, the Suicide Prevention and Early Intervention and Prevention, and Health Promotion documents. The Network has been engaged in a research project through the Australian National University around how the Network supports its membership and what is valued by the Network and consumers.

Members of the Network and other consumers attended Self-Advocacy training with Sandy Watson from the NSW Institute of Psychiatry. In addition, the Network, Recovery ACT and the Richmond Fellowship worked in close partnership to provide a training series for both mental health workers and consumers in the area of Recovery. Some consumers attended training in loss and grief in regards to mental health and others have consumer representative training through Health Care Consumers' Association of the ACT. The Network has also continued to hold our regular 'Hearing Voices Group' meetings for consumers with great drive from Kerry Fry.

The Committee has worked very hard this year attending both Committee Meetings and Executive Meetings regularly. In addition, the Consumer Representative Program Steering Committee was formed to support and enhance the ongoing work of our consumer representatives.

The following is a quote from the ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2009-2014 (p.5) which reads:

In the ACT in 2020 the mental health system will be consumer oriented and driven and focus on recovery and rehabilitation. Consumers and carers will have seamless access to a coordinated and interconnected network of services provided by the consumer, community, public and private sectors and designed to meet the mental health and psychosocial needs for individual health and wellbeing.

Personally, I think we still have a long way to go to reach this target. Step-up Step-down programs are very valuable but are in their infancy, and few and far between. There will be insufficient hospital beds, even with the new mental health units being built, as acute care will always be needed in high numbers. People with acute mental illness are often unable to decide how they should be cared for, with the exception of those with 'Advanced Agreements' which at last count only numbered six in the ACT. Advanced Agreements aim to provide consumers their choice of a treatment plan, in advance. A lot more needs to be done in this area including the *Mental Health Treatment and Care Act Review* which continues to be a work in process.

The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) conference was a success and we were able to finance more consumers to attend than in previous years. Bradley Foxlewin, our former Chair, was accepted to present a paper at TheMHS. TheMHS Conference is an ideal way of broadening the scope of how we see mental health, where the ideas can be bought back to the network and implemented, and used extensively in planning days. It is a good all-round brainstorm and a great opportunity to Network with people elsewhere in Australia and to take their advice and information on board.

It has been an eventful year with the addition of two new staff and the resignation of our Executive Officer, Simon Viereck. As I write this report, interviews are being held to recruit our new Executive Officer. For the financial year 2008/2009 we had a small surplus however we were directed to return that surplus to the funding body which was disappointing as we had hoped to use the surplus to broaden our reach over the coming year.

The launch of Mental Health Week at Floriade went well. We were pleased to present two David Perrin Awards, presented to a consumer or consumers who live independent and self-determined lives beyond what could ordinarily be expected, to JEF CARDWELL and JAMES ROWELL. The Network also awarded two Reciprocity Awards to MERRILYN FAHEY for her longstanding and exceptional contribution in making a difference in the lives of others, and to BILL BUSH for his longstanding and exceptional contribution to mental health in the prison system. The recipients for each award were very excited to be honoured in such a way. Afterwards a number of Network members and staff took part in the "big smile" which was displayed in The Canberra Times the following day.

We plan to hold a variety of consumer forums next year. It is important that members and other consumers have a say and be given a platform to give us some feedback. You may remember that we have held some Members Meetings in the past that fed directly into our Strategic Planning Days. We intend to repeat this process in the coming year and you will be invited to attend a Members Meeting following the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Our Committee has been diligent in its responsibilities and, most importantly, we looked after each other. It has been a difficult year but the Network has pulled through because the Committee and staff have worked extremely hard this year. I wish the new Committee all the best and look forward to seeing the Network grow in its duty to serve its members who direct the Network and its business.

Best wishes and warm regards

Philip John Brown
Chair A/g

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

This report was compiled with the assistance of Simon Viereck, Executive Officer for the 2008-09 financial year.

Funding and staff

Near the beginning of the 2008-09 financial year the Network's core funding was increased to nearly double the level of the year before. This shaped the year in important ways. As it turns out, it is surprisingly difficult to spend lots of money.

In an effort to put the new funding to best use the Network Management Committee spent a great deal of time planning and mapping out a new staff structure and new initiatives and activities to pursue the Network's aims and objectives. Among the key outcomes of this process was the identification of a need to enhance the capacity of the organisation by recruiting a Consumer Participation Worker (later renamed the Consumer Representative Program Coordinator) and a Policy and Participation Development Worker. The Committee also identified other key goals, such as developing the Network as a learning organisation and a training organisation with the capacity to facilitate and deliver training and consultancy services in the area of Consumer Participation.

To pursue this objective the Network was also able to dedicate funds from a grant we had secured towards the end of the previous financial year to the development of a series of short papers on consumer participation in mental health from the consumer perspective. These papers, although not quite finalised, have great potential to promote a new and unique perspective on consumer participation.

Recruitment of new staff is always challenging in the community sector and the Network had more problems recruiting staff than we had hoped. After putting in a great deal of effort we were not able to employ any new staff before the end of 2008 however Sara Dias was recruited and began working in the Consumer Participation Worker position in early January 2009. Sara engaged with great enthusiasm in a demanding job under challenging circumstances with limited hours and began some important processes for mapping the Network Consumer Representative Program (CRP) and outlining structures for developing it. The CRP is dear to the hearts of many active Network members and the passion of representatives was always going to make the process of developing the Program challenging. Unfortunately Sara and the Network had to decide at the end of her three month probationary period that she and the Network were not the best match and she would not continue her position at the Network.

The Consumer Participation position was given further consideration and re-named the Consumer Representative Program Coordinator to emphasise that its main focus is on supporting the on-going further development of the CRP. The Network also established the CRP Steering Committee to guide and support the future Coordinator in his/her work. We are very pleased to be able to welcome an old friend of the Network, Sarah Stringer, into this position from mid-July 2009.

In March 2009 Dalane Drexler started in the job of Policy and Participation Development Worker. Dalane brings a high level of skills and very useful experience from years of work in individual advocacy for mental health consumers and other disadvantaged groups. She has showed initiative and enthusiasm and got straight into important areas of work such as drafting a new Policy and Procedures Manual and supporting organisational development and policy work. From the end of June

Dalane has also acted in the position of Executive Officer and accepted the position permanently as of 22 October 2009.

This brings us to another significant change for the Network during the last year. Executive Officer Simon Viereck resigned towards the end of the financial year after a good two years in the position. The process of employing a new Executive Officer has taken up much time and effort over the last months. Simon was a valued team member during his time at the Network and we wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

Much thanks must go to admin officers Vicki da Silva and Michael Firestone for providing support and invaluable continuity over the last year. One important recent change to note is Michael's redesigned position. In light of the clear differences between Michael's and Vicki's actual roles within the office, we are please to introduce Michael Firestone as our very first Information Worker. In this role, Michael will continue to manage Drop-ins and other programs, as well as providing information to members and others. Vicki will continue in her valued long-term role as Administration Worker.

Policy and Projects

Over the past year the Network and its dedicated consumer representatives have continued to devote a great deal of time and effort to representational activities. At this point many thanks must go to the Network's consumer representatives who do much work and too often get little thanks for their efforts. A list of committees on which the Network provides consumer representation is included below in this Annual Report.

In late 2008 the Network submitted a response to the draft ACT Mental Health Services Plan. We pointed to the many weaknesses in the draft Plan along with many other community organisations and individuals who submitted responses, which pointed to the same and similar weaknesses in the draft Plan. To the Government's credit they collated all the comments and set about re-drafting the Plan to address the comments and issues raised. The Network, as a member of the Steering Committee, was given the opportunity to provide further comment on the re-drafted Plan and put significant effort into providing words and language to improve sections on consumer and carer focus and participation.

The ongoing review of the *ACT Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act (1994)* was revived, only to once again return to being dormant. A workshop was held to explore a paper on the concept of 'capacity' to make decisions as a basis for mental health legislation. The Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT and the Network also held a Quarterly Consumer, Carer and Community Forum on this topic. While not wanting to definitively tie itself to any model of legislation the Network is supportive of a move to a hybrid model of legislation based significantly on capacity. Unfortunately we are yet to learn of any outcome of the workshop as the Review has returned to hibernation.

In the beginning of 2009 the Network was contacted by an organisation promoting assistance dogs for mental health consumers. Finding the idea of mental health assistance dogs a worthy cause to pursue, the Network agreed to help facilitate the coming together of a group of interested individuals and groups to promote mental health assistance dogs in the ACT. Over the next few months the Network supported the formation of a working group. Having achieved the establishment of a working group for the initiative the Network decided to pull back from the project. This was

due both to not wanting to be aligned to any particular service provider and to having questions about how a mental health assistance dog program would work.

It has in many ways been a difficult year for the Network. The funding increase meant significant organisational change was necessary. While the funding increase was very welcome and very much needed, the change process has been difficult at times and in particular the process of recruiting new staff has been challenging. We should not however lose sight of the important progress that has taken place in developing the Consumer Representative Program and in developing the basic organisational infrastructure by updating policies and procedures and by being able to purchase new equipment to support consumer representatives and future training and other activities. With these things in place, the recruitment of a new Executive Officer, and a new, strong Management Committee the Network should be well placed to forge a path forward into a bright future.

I thank you all for your continued support of the Network and look forward to working with you over the coming year as a Network staff member.

Yours sincerely

Dalane Drexler
Executive Officer

TREASURER'S REPORT

ACT Mental Health Consumer Network Inc. ended the 2008/2009 financial year with a cash surplus of **\$19,758**. This surplus was in contrast to deficits reported in the three previous financial years which occurred because of increased wage costs from the period mid-2007 without an adequate budget/grants increase. A small cash surplus was deemed necessary due to the previous deficits which had depleted the Networks financial reserves. The operating surplus (cash plus assets) as reported in the Income Statement/Annual Return for the Office of Regulatory Services was **\$61,307** for 2008/2009.

The Network's income increased substantially this financial year due to our HACC Grant from ACT Health rising to **\$265,350** for the 2008/2009 financial year. This was in contrast to the amount of **\$133,990** from the previous financial year with total income reaching **\$279,658** for the year. The large increase in funding led to approval for two additional part-time positions; a policy worker and a consumer representative co-ordinator.

Peter Dwyer

Treasurer

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:

- **ACT Council of Australian Governments** Mental Health Working Group
- **ACT Council of Social Services** ACT Community Coalition on Corrections
- **ACT Council of Social Services** ACT Women and Prisons
- **ACT Council of Social Services** Peaks Meeting
- **ACT Council of Social Services** Sector Viability Group
- **ACT Council of Social Services** Social Health & Inequalities Committee
- **ACT Division of General Practice** Mental Health Advisory Committee
- **ACT Health** Acute Adult Inpatient Unit Executive Reference Group
- **ACT Health** Adolescent and Young Adult Mental Health Inpatient Unit Executive Reference Group
- **ACT Health** Care coordination Project Advisory Group
- **ACT Health** Consumer and Carer Participation Framework Working Group
- **ACT Health** Mental Health Assessment Unit Executive Reference Group
- **ACT Health** Mental Health Project Control Group
- **ACT Health** Mental Health Services Plan Steering Committee
- **ACT Health** Mental Health Week Planning Committee
- **ACT Health** Secure Adult Mental Health Inpatient Unit Executive Reference Group
- **ACT Health** Transcultural Mental Health Network
- **AWARE Dogs** Mental Health Assistance Dogs in the ACT
- **Calvary Hospital** 2N Continuum of Care
- **Calvary Mental Health Patients** Safety Committee
- **Catholic Care** STEPS Youth Step-up/Step-down Steering Committee
- **Community Development Network** Working Group
- **Corrections ACT** Alexander Maconochie Centre Community Reference Group
- **Mental Health ACT** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group
- **Mental Health ACT** Better General Health Programme Steering Committee
- **Mental Health ACT** Clinical Practice and Quality Improvement Committee
- **Mental Health ACT** Clinical Review Committee
- **Mental Health ACT** Forensic Working Group Review Advisory Committee
- **Mental Health ACT** Mental Health Act Review Advisory Committee
- **Mental Health ACT** Mental Health Recovery Group ACT
- **Mental Health ACT** Policy Review Committee
- **Mental Health ACT** Professional Development and Training Committee
- **Mental Health ACT** Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy

- **Mental Health ACT** Publications Committee
- **Mental Health ACT** Risk Management Committee
- **Mental Health ACT** Seclusion and Restraint Review Meeting
- **Mental Health ACT** Seclusion and Restraint Working Group
- **Mental Health ACT** Strategic Executive Meeting
- **Mental Health ACT** Strategy and Action Plan Implementation Group
- **Mental Health ACT** Suicide and Self-harm Reference Group
- **Mental Health ACT** Suicide Prevention Working Group
- **Mental Health ACT** Smoking Policy Implementation Working Group
- **Mental Health Council of Australia** National Consumer and Carer Forum
- **Mental Health Community Coalition (ACT)** Sector Development Reference Group
- **Mental Health Community Coalition (ACT)** Board of Governance
- **Mental Health Community Coalition (ACT)** Consumer and Carer Caucus
- **Psychiatric Services Unit** Continuum of Care Group
- **St. Vincent de Paul** Compeer Program Advisory Group
- **Women's Centre for Health Matters** Women and Mental Health Working Group
- **Young Women's Christian Association** Well, Able and Mobile (WAM) Advocacy Group
- **Young Women's Christian Association** Well, Able and Mobile (WAM) Steering Committee
- Advanced Agreements Working Group
- ACT Mental Health Legal Centre Forum

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Self-Advocacy Workshop

The Network, in partnership with ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS), was pleased to present a Self-Advocacy Workshop developed by The NSW Institute of Psychiatry. Sandy Watson delivered the workshop in Canberra in June 2009. The Self-Advocacy Workshop aims to provide consumers with the skills necessary to speak up and represent themselves to ensure their individual needs are met appropriately. It helps consumers to learn about their rights and speak up if they feel their rights aren't being respected. It is also useful for consumers to prepare instructions about their wishes before they become unwell, and assisting them to be more successful in raising concerns or making a complaint.

Conferences and Training Attended

- The Mental Health Services Conference (NZ), 31 August-05 September 2008
- Seclusion and Restraint Beacon Project (Sydney), 2008
- Recovery in Psychosis Conference (Perth), 02-05 November 2008
- Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia Training (NSW), 28-29 January 2009
- Human Rights Training, 17 February 2009
- Transcultural Mental Health Training, 20 February 2009
- Inclusion Forum, 04 March 2009
- Lifeline Conference, 12 March 2009
- The Mental Health Services Summer Forum (Sydney), February 2009
- Mental Health First Aid (Harden)
- Co-morbidity Conference (Sydney), 13-14 May 2009
- Grief and Loss Workshop, June 2009
- Leadership Seminar, 15 June 2009
- Governance Training, 16 June 2009
- Self-Advocacy Workshop, 25 June 2009
- Social Ventures Launch, 30 June 2009
- Prisoner's Aid Orientation, 27 July 2009
- The 10th International Mental Health Conference (Gold Coast), August 2009
- Developing Peer Workers, 06 August 2009
- AVP Non-violence Training (Sydney), 14-16 August 2009
- The Mental Health Services Conference (Perth), 01-04 September 2009
- World Mental Health Day, 08 October 2009
- Co-morbidity Chronic Health Forum, 23 October 2009

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:

- *healthdirect* Australia – Prue Borrman
- How the ACT Human Rights Commission handles complaints – Mary Durkin
- Mental Illness Education ACT – Pam Boyer

- Legal Aid ACT – Martha Ibrahim
- Dieticians – Annette Byron
- Advanced Directives and Voluntary Euthanasia – Beryl Rawson
- Eating Disorders – Kate Scott
- Learning from Conferences – Consumer Representatives
- Researching barriers to accessing legal advice, representation and support – Leigh Hale
- Recovery Planning – Melissa Leigh
- Movement and exercise to relax by – Kelly Cole
- Schizophrenia – Chris O'Brien
- Human Rights protection in Australia – Gayatri Nair

Joint Forums and Partnerships

ACTMHCN, MHCC and MHACTION: Quarterly Consumer, Carer and Community Forum

- The New Zealand Experience (August 08)
- Mental Health Services Plan & ACT Budget (Nov 08)
- Mental Health Legal Centre (March 09)
- Mental Health Act Review & MHCC Consumer Carer Caucus Review (June 09)

ACTMHCN and Mental Health Recovery ACT: Hearing Voices fortnightly Support Groups.