



VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

# BOX

VOX Newsletter, Spring 2015

## VOX WINTER MEMBERS MEETING



VOX held its Winter Members' Meeting on Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> Feb and it was very much a meeting of two halves. In the morning, members voted on possible changes to VOX's constitution but – in the end – decided to stick with the current arrangement whereby VOX Directors step down (for one year at least) after being Board members for six years. This means that – at our Autumn AGM – several of our very hard-working and fantastic Directors will be stepping down and we'll be looking for several VOX members to step up to the plate and stand for election to the Board. If you're interested in this, think it over and let us know nearer the time - we can tell you a bit more about what being a Board member involves and any support we can give you.

Lunch was followed a passionate and lively debate around the topic of capacity, rights and 'impaired decision making'. These issues go right to the heart of everyone's life, liberty and wellbeing and will always involve judgement calls that not everyone will agree with. A wide range of views were expressed, with Dr. Gary Morrison of the Mental Welfare Commission doing his best to field several probing queries. We had such a lively debate around this issue that the meeting as a whole decided to stick with the Q&A session and not break into small focus groups as we normally do. And big thanks to Chris, John and Graham for three excellent presentations that kicked off the afternoon's events.

## TO SMOKE... OR NOT TO SMOKE



The 2013 Scottish Government document *Creating a Tobacco Free Generation* contains a clearly articulated exemption for the grounds of "mental health facilities" from attempts to introduce smoking bans in NHS facilities. And yet some agencies are using this very same document to try and justify the introduction of a 100% smoking ban – bizarre!! So VOX has written to Mental Health Minister Jamie Hepburn asking him to clarify this situation and say whether the Government intends to uphold the exemption or not. And with our good friends at Mental Health Network Greater Glasgow, we've written to all 28 members of the NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde Board asking them to reconsider their efforts to introduce a total smoking ban in their facilities in October. Not only would such a move totally ignore clearly articulated government policy, we also think it will be counter-productive as the best time to give up smoking is when you **choose** to do so – **NOT** when you're detained in a psychiatric hospital experiencing profound mental distress. Read a VOX director's views at <http://www.mindwavesnews.com/the-day-youre-admitted-to-a-mental-health-facility-is-not-the-right-time-to-be-forced-to-quit-smoking>

**KEEP UP TO SPEED WITH VOX AT: 0141 572 1633** or



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Voices Of eXperience

## UPDATE FROM RURAL COMMUNITY LEADER. MICHAELA GOAN

I've been researching life with mental illness in remote and rural areas. After some initial studies, I sent out invitations to take part in the research to mental health groups, health networks and the local press. People from Campbeltown, Bute, Islay and Dunoon all wanted to take part, so I set up five focus groups to capture their views. I also sent out a link to an online survey so – if you couldn't come to one of our focus groups – you can still let us know what you think by completing the survey at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/P8XQVPV](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/P8XQVPV).

I'm currently gathering all the responses from the focus groups and survey but two main issues seem to be coming up so far. Firstly, living somewhere rural is great for getting outdoors, going for walks, bumping into people and people noticing when you're not well. However, the downside is that living somewhere rural can make it difficult to access services and what is peaceful and restful to one person can sometimes mean isolation and loneliness to another. Transport is a major issue, both in terms of accessing services for yourself and visiting people in hospital.

We also wanted this project to generate some art so everyone who took part in a focus group got the opportunity to make a clay tile impressed with words and patterns reflecting their views on the good and bad sides of country living. Most people chose to emphasise the good part, even though we made it clear that good and bad were equally important. Once they've been fired and glazed, the tiles will be joined together to make one big colourful piece of art to be exhibited at the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival later this year (October) so keep your eye out for it ([www.mhfestival.com](http://www.mhfestival.com))



Six of the tiles dried and waiting for the kiln.

### *I joined the VOX Board because ...*

*... it's a great opportunity to work as part of a team of knowledgeable people to make sure our members' priorities are progressed. We know what's good and what's not so good about the mental health system - and working together is the best way to ensure our voices are heard.*

**Gordon Johnston, Clackmannan**

*... it helps me combat low self-esteem and self-stigma. Also, working with other people with similar issues keeps the feet on the ground & we can also have a good laugh at ourselves from time to time.*

**Donald Grant, Fort William**

**The VOX newsletter will start appearing again in full and beautiful form once we've finished revamping our website. This sheet has been put together as a quick stopgap to remind people that VOX is still very much alive(!) and to offer a quick update on some of our recent activities for our news-hungry readers... enjoy!!!!**