



VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

BOX

VOX Newsletter, June 2015

SMOKING, PART TWO



**VOX
NEEDS
YOU!!!**



This is a special edition of the VOX newsletter calling for VOX members to step up to the plate and think about standing for election to the Board. Four (yes, four!!) of our lovely directors are standing down in September and we need fresh talent and fresh vision to replace them and maintain VOX as a vibrant member-led force.

Do you have what it takes to be a VOX Director? Would you like a little taster of a Director's duties to help make up your mind? If so, you're very welcome to attend the next VOX Board meeting on Monday, 22nd June as an observer. The morning begins at 10:30am with a meeting of the Training, Research and Development sub-group which will be a great way to find out what Directors have to deal with. You can chat informally with the Directors over lunch, then you can sit in on the first part of the afternoon Board meeting and get a flavour of the issues that arise at Board meetings throughout the year. The Directors are a friendly bunch and will do everything they can to make you feel welcome and answer any questions you may have about standing for the Board. This is a no obligation trial run! If you decide you don't want to stand for election to the Board, that's fine and we'll understand, but if it is something that appeals, this is an excellent way to stick your toe in the water and see for yourself. And it won't cost you anything as VOX will reimburse any travelling expenses you may incur in attending this event in Glasgow. If you're interested in coming along on the 22nd, please contact Graeme Bowman on 0141 226 9856 or gbowman@mentalhealth.org.uk to book your place.

In spring 2015, VOX wrote to Mental Health Minister Jamie Hepburn and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde asking them to uphold the smoking ban exemption for the grounds of psychiatric hospitals outlined in Scottish Government policy in 2013. Their responses didn't answer all our questions and we were about to draft follow-up letters when we learned that Public Health Minister Maureen Watt plans to introduce a Health Bill later this year which will make it "a statutory offence to smoke in the vicinity of hospital buildings." The Minister argues that "it's wrong for people to have to walk through clouds of smoke when visiting hospitals. Following our consultation... we believe the time is right to make it a statutory offence to smoke near health buildings." This is all very well but the smoking ban exemption for psychiatric facilities was put there for a reason and the reason is that it's not entirely helpful to force people to endure nicotine withdrawal while they're also experiencing profound mental distress – this double whammy will add to their suffering, delay recovery and, for those who resume smoking on discharge, their medication levels will have to be monitored and adjusted to keep them safe which will demand extra resources. Anecdotal evidence gathered from health professionals also suggests that "the new smoke free policy is resulting in some voluntary patients choosing not to be admitted to hospital because they can't have a fag in the grounds" so this new policy is already having an unhelpful effect on many people. VOX represents the views of its members so we shall be writing to Ms. Watt asking for the exemption for psychiatric hospitals to remain in place even when the new law is passed.

VOLUNTEER WITH VOX

Why do volunteering?
The research? Questionnaires?
Brothers, sisters, struggling,
Show them someone cares.

Be it blooms or broken bottles
The choice is up to you
What a difference you could
make
In just an hour or two.

You don't need 'Lived
Experience'
Just empathy, to care,
A wish to make a difference
And a little time to share.

Our aims at VOX are simple
Our flightpath straight and true
We're here to make 'That'
difference
But we need folk like you.

Want to make a difference?
Turn the wrongs to right
To take the movement forward
Flush stigma out of sight?

Then fill the application form
There's so much you could do
To change the thoughts, the
attitudes,
Stigmatic points of view.

GLENN MERRILEES



Wednesday August 14th 2014 saw myself and Susan Scott from Plus Perth make our way to the Opera House in Tallinn for Day 1 of the 15th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour. Despite its name, this wasn't just a European conference, but featured 300+ global participants - but only two service users and both of us were from VOX! The other delegates included clinicians, researchers, suicide prevention trainers and at least one Irish parliamentarian.

Day 1 was a plenary session - very intense but we were made to feel very welcome and asked loads of questions, challenging inputs from our service user perspective. It certainly stretched my personal interpretation of statistics! The long day culminated in a reception with an opportunity to network, which allowed me to meet up with an old acquaintance, STORM Trainer Gill Green.

The following three days provided some choices and smaller interactive workshops and numerous opportunities to move away from the strictly clinical/medical model of suicidal behaviour. I was interested to participate in Gill's workshop as she'd trained me in STORM ten years ago. There was also a fascinating presentation by a Mexican doctor who later emailed me his account of therapy with a suicidal patient. Steve Platt presented suicide data which I could relate to the Scottish Patient Safety Programme (SPSP) and Rory O'Connor was another Scottish representative I enjoyed learning from. And this was followed up by further networking opportunities at a fantastic conference dinner!

Susan and I would like to say a big thanks to VOX for funding our involvement at this event. As I said, there were lots of inspiring people at ESSSB but you can't really have a meaningful mental health conference without the service user perspective and VOX made this happen in Tallinn. After Estonia, I was elected onto the VOX Board which gives me a great opportunity to be an influential member of this national mental health organisation. All new directors are trained before taking up their place on the Board and I certainly learned a lot about governance, despite having been on the board of other bodies for several years. So, if you're thinking of standing for election to the VOX Board, don't be shy - you'll get lots of backup to make sure you can really contribute.

Chris Evans (VOX and HUG)

The best thing about being a VOX director is...

... getting to know and understand what is going on in the area of mental health. But more than that, it's about realising you can and do make a difference by being at the table.

John Sawkins, Edinburgh



@VOXSCOTLAND

www.voxscotland.org.uk



Voices Of eXperience

KEEP UP TO SPEED WITH VOX AT: 0141 572 1663 or info@voxscotland.org.uk