

VOX

Welcome to the spring edition of VOX quarterly. We are starting to see some signs of spring, the plants blossoming and nights getting lighter earlier, although it's still very cold. In this edition we have a warm hello from our new members of staff Mahmud Al-Gailani and John Steel. We have plenty of opportunities for you to get involved including having your voice heard on smoking and mental health.

We also have an article on creative writing and updates from projects and organisations. If you would like to find out more about any of the opportunities within the magazine, or would like to have your say on what you think VOX should be doing, please don't hesitate to get in touch. Contact details are on the back page.

Voices Of eXperience

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SATURDAY 6th June 2009

EDINBURGH VENUE

DRAFT AGENDA

- 10.00am Registration/tea and coffee
- 10.30am Welcome and introduction
- 10.45am Updates from staff/members/board
- 11.30am Tea/coffee and networking
- 12.00pm A.G.M. BUSINESS
- 12.30pm Keynote Speaker: - TBC
- 1.00pm Lunch and information stalls
- 2.00pm WORKSHOPS- "Key areas of work identified at the Winter Members Meeting"
- 2.45pm Feedback and thanks
- 3.00pm Close

A range of voluntary organisations and service user led groups will have information stalls. The event is free and reasonable travel expenses will be provided. Please contact us as soon as possible to book a place, please note places are limited and will be on a first come first served basis.

VOX would like to invite you to participate in a guided tour of an exhibition on the history of mental health in Glasgow. The tour is at Kelvingrove Art gallery, Glasgow on the 25th March at 10 am sharp, **booking is essential as places are limited**, Coffee/Tea and biscuits will be provided for our post tour discussion. The tour will be led by the curator of the collection Mr. Anthony Lewis, who will also be available for the post tour discussion contact **Mahmud on 0141 572 0519 for further information.**

The Benefits of Creative Writing by Alistair Paterson

Creative writing is perhaps the easiest and most immediate way we can get in touch with our creativity and express it most effectively. If you can read and write to a five-year old's level you are already up and running. Unlike painting, photography or playing a musical instrument, you don't need expensive equipment before you get started: have pen have paper will write!

In creative writing the emphasis is on the *creative*. It is different from the formal and functional writing you did at school or do at work. Even the written product is sometimes not as important as the act of writing itself. In creative writing the stress is as much on the creative process involved in writing as much as on the finished written piece itself. You need not perform to any set standard, for there is no such thing. In creative writing you find your own level, and your own standards are in turn set by that level at which you find yourself. Furthermore, there is not right or wrong way to tackle the agenda of creative writing. There are no rules as such, only a free space in which you can explore yourself and your subject matter according to the ability you have any given time. This is very liberating and the rewards are immediate.

Tutors and fellow group members exist to stimulate, encourage and provide a context for your creative expansion, not to act as critics or judges. Nine times out of ten creative writing groups are sympathetic and relaxed environments which allay fears and apprehensions and nurture your aspirations.

How to get Started, and Some Tips...

A tutored group will give you aims and direction, but you don't even need a group to get you started. There are countless books and websites on creative writing and although the sheer volume that exists out there can be daunting, if you nevertheless plough your way through the websites and bookshelves in your local library or bookshop, you'll find something that resonates with you. Alternatively, be brave and just pick up a pen and piece of paper and allow the two to connect. Write about your feelings, your hopes and aspirations and about the things you know. Write down a problem and see if your pen can find a solution. You'll see how easy it is. Don't think too much about what you're doing, just do it and you'll soon work up a head of steam. You should find yourself relaxing and enjoying yourself.

Otherwise there is no point. In the words of the American poet, Robert Creeley:
³ if it ain't fun, don't do it, for there's plenty enough that ain't fun that you've got to do anyway²

I should add here that I've never known anyone who has taken up creative writing and hasn't enjoyed it.

Alistair Paterson

In the next edition Alistair will give some practical examples, and we will be looking at how VOX could support creative writing as a means of having your voice heard. One area of work we are going to be involved in and would be very keen for our members to get in touch about is in getting involved in the mental health arts and film festival literacy strand. We want the ideas to be your ideas however, we have some ideas that may inspire you, Creative writing about images that capture what recovery means to you. Using humorous poetry to hear the views of older generations on mental health problems. Writing a radio interview which focuses on stigma and discrimination. A true story which describes why having a mental health problem gives you an additional skill/quality.

Please get in touch with your ideas and let us know if you would like to be involved!

Members Page

THE SENTINEL.

He sits by the side of the cycle-path
Watching the world drift by,
Ever alert to the thrush in the hedge
Or hovering hawk in high.
Heedless as seasons come and go,
Indifferent to heat or cold.
Engrossing in the never ending scenes
As nature's dramas unfold.

In a magical world, where robins have names,
He savours sweet bramble or berry,
And like some landed lord, surveys his domain
Twixt the Rothesay Dock and the Ferry.
Where once steam monsters huffed and puffed
Along the Caledonian line,
He's found an urban sanctuary
Transcending human design.

Where silvery sylvan sounds compete
With the roar of a jet o'erhead.
Where a man can forget the world's woes
And calm his guddled head.

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Be Free by Tony Chan

We can't change who we are
We can't change our nature
We can't change our calling
Its not going to go away
It won't be taken away from you

You've been given a gift, use it, enhance it,
Improve your life with it
Live life the way you want to live it
Live life the way you mean to live it
Be true to yourself; do not be false to yourself
There is only one of you, be yourself
You can't be anyone else,
Be free!! By Tony Chan

THE ADVOCATE by Rick Henderson

You think you see inside my head
Why don't you just skin me instead?
Might be surprised at what you find
When I finally speak my mind
All those things you want me to be,
All those plans you have for me,
It's not what I want; it's not what I want!

All those dreams and hopes and fears
Don't place those guilty feelings here,
They're not what I want; they're not what I want!
We find ourselves silenced by them,
No voice of our own, no new beginning.
History becomes the enemy,
I need the advocate to help set me free,
That's what I want, that's what I want!

Black Dog by Diana Hendry

Here he comes, padding
Across the surface of your mind
At the first sniff of sadness.
He weighs a ton. Looks at you
With those post-Hiroshima eyes
Until the silent howl of him sinks deep
Into your gut. What does he want?

You feed him all your hurts you've got.
He can't get enough of it, love, love.
He wants his mammy. He wants
To be back in the womb with his paws
Over his eyes. He wants. He wants.

Poor black dog with the wildness
Trapped in him and nowhere to go.
Toss him your funny bone,
Let him gnaw on that.

Hello from Mahmud and John

As some of you know my name is Mahmud Al-Gailani and I am VOX's Diversity Facilitator, but most of you may not know that I describe myself as an Iraqi Scot, having been born and brought up in Baghdad/Iraq to an Iraqi father and a Scottish mother.

I consider myself very lucky to have grown up in a multicultural family, celebrating and experiencing a mix of two traditions from two different and at times similar cultures and religions, not to mention things like three lots of pressies and lovely food with different religious festivities throughout the year.

I have been living, working and studying here in Scotland since 1995, adding to Scotland's diversity by marrying a Danish lady and having two children who are half Danish, a quarter Iraqi and a quarter Scottish.

My philosophy in life is that people are essentially all equal and uniquely different at the same time; people must have the right to be treated equally but also must have the right to celebrate their uniqueness and to be treated in a way that respects and facilitates that right.

Hi everyone, I am John Steel, now that I have settled in to my new post as Administration Officer, it is time to give you some information about myself. I am, and have been, a mental health service user since 1991. I have reached a stage in my life where I qualify for a free bus pass; however that has not stopped me from wanting to live a full and active like both in the community and as a full time employee.

I am extremely grateful to VOX for giving me the opportunity to use the skills that I have gained over the years, and that would include some skills gained through being a member of Scotia Club-house for the past eight years. I am very keen to see more service user involvement in actively influencing policies for mental health service users and could not have joined a more active organisation than VOX. I am very excited to be working alongside Wendy and Mahmud and of course meeting with as many members as possible. I have been aware of the Mental Health Foundation (VOX's host organisation) and the excellent work that it does for several years now, so I'm pleased to be part of that organisation as well.

The Scottish Recovery Network

The Scottish Recovery Network has been working since 2004 to raise awareness of recovery from mental health problems, to learn more about the things which help and hinder recovery and to encourage action locally and nationally. The Network is funded by the Scottish Government and is involved in a large range of activities. Over the past few years the interest in recovery has greatly increased and the Network has been supporting a wide variety of initiatives designed to ensure that people who experience mental health issues have the best opportunity to get better and stay well.

At SRN we are very conscious that recovery and mental health mean different things to different people. To help us get a better understanding of this we regularly ask people from different backgrounds about the things which matter to them. Our narrative research project involved people from a wide variety of backgrounds and confirmed that people can and do recover from even the most serious and long-term problems. Recently we have been promoting a tool called Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP). This tool helps people better manage their wellbeing and in one exciting project we have commissioned research to look at the tools effectiveness with a group of women from South Asian background and initial findings are encouraging. We also work with mental health services to ensure that their activities are always informed by people's lived experience of mental health issues and recovery. A significant project in this area has been the development of the Scottish Recovery Indicator tool which helps services providers and people using services look at what is going on in a service and consider how it can be improved. To learn more about the work of the Scottish Recovery Network or to share your personal experiences of mental health and recovery visit: www.scottishrecovery.net , email info@scottishrecovery.net or phone 0141 240 7790.

Bipolar Fellowship Scotland

Who are we?

Bipolar Fellowship Scotland are a national voluntary sector organisation. We are membership based and our current Board of Directors are either service users or carers. We currently employ four members of staff and our office base is in Paisley.

What do we do?

We currently support a network of 16 self-help groups throughout Scotland and are in the process of setting up further groups. The groups are open to anyone affected by bipolar disorder. Most groups meet monthly and provide people with the opportunity to discuss issues that affect them in a peer support setting. Also the groups will sometimes have a guest speaker.

BFS also run a self-management training course. We have so far delivered five training courses and are planning to deliver two more during 2009. The self-management training course has been evaluated and our long term aim is to secure funding that will allow us to provide a rolling programme of training in Scotland.

BFS provide information on bipolar disorder, through information leaflets and recommend books to read. You can obtain a list of publications, by either contacting our office or by viewing our website (details below). We also publish a quarterly newsletter, On the Level which is distributed to all our members. It can also be viewed or downloaded from our website. We also run a national annual conference which normally takes place in September. We have a number of guest speakers and workshops and the event is always well attended.

BFS are also represented on a number of national and local committees/forums – these include the Cross Party group on Mental Health at the Scottish Parliament, Mental Health Review Tribunal, Service user/carers group, local ICP implementation groups and many more.

For further information you can contact Bipolar Fellowship Scotland on 0141 560 2050, or view our website on www.bipolarscotland.org.uk

VOX Update

First of all, thank you to those who attended VOX's winter festival celebration, we had great feedback from the event, in addition to updating you on what we have been doing over the past few months it was a good opportunity to hear what's important to our members. VOX were pleased to hear that our members agreed with the key areas of work that we are involved in, and that they still had a strong desire to look at employment and meaningful activity, to improve services and to develop service user involved research.

It's been busy and exciting time for VOX, as you will be aware our staff team has grown and we are developing many new areas of work. Our employability and mental health work is now starting. This initiative will capture what works when it comes to supporting those with mental health to move onto training, volunteering, meaningful activity or work. Some new areas of work focussed around diversity have included working with Men in Mind to find ways to hear the voice of BME men on mental health issues and raising awareness of mental health in Scotland with newcomers to Scotland. Recently local and thematic mental health service user led groups have been offered diversity training for board and/or members. In addition to this we have started holding coffee mornings to explore mental health and older generations. VOX continue to work to support service users, last year VOX facilitated a successful event to support Orkney service users to develop a local service user led group. We are also currently worked with Esteem (a project which supports young people with early onset psychosis) to encourage their members to be involved in developing their service.

We are currently gathering mental health service users' views on the achieving smoke-free mental health services consultation; we want to form a national response to this consultation. We are doing this by supporting local groups with questions which may be helpful in thinking through the key concerns around smoking and mental health and offering to support some focus group work. **More information on page?**

Some of our members were involved in the production of a DVD to train psychiatrists on what matters to those with mental health problems, this should be completed in the next few weeks. VOX have also been involved in the development of an information resource on self directed support (previously called direct payments), information will be distributed shortly.

VOX continues to work on projects and developments which value the expertise of the mental health service user; this recently included an event which was held in partnership with a range of organisations on the 6th March looking at how we could develop service

user involved research. We have also carried out work with NHS Education Scotland regarding developing good practice guidelines in service user involvement in mental health nursing education. We are also continuing to raise awareness of what is important to our members at a range of steering groups and networks.

In addition to the above we have received quotes from a range of organisations to redesign our website and we are looking to have a facility which will allow us to communicate in a range of ways with local groups. Please get in touch with us if you would like to know more about any of the above or chat to us about any ideas you may have regarding **VOX telephone 0141 572 1663 or e-mail jsteel@mhf.org.uk**

VOX has many opportunities to ensure that your voice is heard this includes influencing at a range of networks and steering groups, see the table below, there are other groups not listed which we are involved in, however this should give you a flavour of the kind of groups we are involved in. Please get in touch if you would like to share your views (as an individual or group member on any of these topics).

Mental Health Cross Party Group, Scottish Parliament	To act as a forum for assessing the implications for people with mental health problems and their carers of any relevant proposed legislation which may impact upon them. To raise awareness and understanding of mental illness and mental health and wellbeing.
Royal College of Psychiatry Executive Committee, Scotland	The Division is asked to respond to the many consultation documents from the Scottish Executive and the other organisations in Scotland that seek advice from the College.
Peer Support – delivering for mental health (DFMH), Scottish Government	To progress commitment 2 in the mental health delivery plan “We will have in place a training programme for peer support workers by 2008 with peer support workers being employed in three board areas, later that year”
Scottish Recovery Indicator – DFMH, Scottish Government	To progress Commitment 1 in the mental health delivery plan “We will develop a tool to assess the degree to which organisations and programmes meet our expectations in respect of equality, social inclusion, recovery and rights. The tool will be piloted in 2007 and be in general use by 2010”

<p>Applied Psychology Working Group – links to DFMH</p>	<p>This group is looking at workforce planning within psychology, and they are looking to try and link in with the developments within the delivery plan as stipulated in commitment 4 in the Mental Health Delivery Plan “We will increase the availability of evidence-based psychological therapies for all age groups in a range of settings and through a range of providers”</p>
<p>Mental Health Implementation Board, Scottish Government</p>	<p>Delivering for Mental Health sets the agenda for mental health in Scotland to 2010, it is made up of 14 commitments and 3 targets across a range of initiatives to help improve the care and treatment of people with mental health problems. The Scottish Executive are making progress in a number of areas including the appointment of an Implementation Board to provide leadership, influence and drive to the implementation process.</p>
<p>Service User Led Research Group, Partnership Steering Group</p>	<p>This group is exploring the best way to move forward a partnership working group on service user involved research.</p>
<p>Royal College of Psychiatrists U.K. Service Users Recovery Forum</p>	<p>To Support and provide input into the work of the College to ensure that all policy and activity will be informed by the experiences and perspectives identified by service users.</p>
<p>Mental Health and Employment Network</p>	<p>Partnership group which brings agencies together to provide employment services to people with mental health problems, or research or policy around this subject.</p>

Consultation on the achieving smoke free mental health services in Scotland

Background

In March 2006, Scotland introduced the law that banned smoking in public spaces such as workplaces, pubs and restaurants. Designated rooms in psychiatric hospitals and psychiatric units were exempt from the ban however, the Scottish Government made it clear that it would review the position.

A consultation entitled achieving Smoke Free Mental Health Services in Scotland is taking place, and we are keen to obtain views from those who may be affected by any changes which may take place.

The following questions will form a response to the consultation, there are set questions within the response, however, we have decided to focus on some key areas which we feel will tease out the areas which are important to those who have, or have had, a mental health problem.

1. What do you think are the important issues in relation to mental health and smoking?
2. There is a drive to improve the health of those with mental health problems, what do you think is the best way to do this?
3. What would make it easier for people with mental health problems to give up smoking and how could we achieve this?
4. Is it appropriate to ask someone to stop smoking when in crises and in hospital?
5. What additional support would be needed for smokers who have been made to stop smoking in hospital if a ban was imposed?
6. Is the right to smoke a basic human right? Is taking the right away to smoke in hospital a violation of our human rights?
7. Does the fact that most people want to give up smoking justify making hospitals smoke free?
8. Do you think it would be good if all public places were ultimately smoke free?
9. Are psychiatric hospitals more like public places or people's homes?
10. Would making hospitals smoke free prevent people from admitting themselves to hospital?
11. Could you tell us about your experiences of smoking in a psychiatric hospital/unit, good and bad?

What do you think about smoking and mental health? We want to make sure your voice is heard on this issue. Please find enclosed a questionnaire which we would appreciate if you could send to us your responses by the 2nd March.

Epilepsy: Psychological and Social Wellbeing

14 May 2009, Apex International Hotel, Edinburgh

Chaired by Dr Alan Carson, Consultant Neuropsychiatrist, Royal Edinburgh Hospital

This conference aims to examine the links between epilepsy and mental health; understand the needs of people with epilepsy in order to maintain good mental health and examine the service pathway for people with epilepsy and mental illness in Scotland. It's a full day event with some great speakers from neurology, psychiatry, neuropsychology, academia, nursing and the voluntary sector. There will be opportunity for discussion and debate, networking and learning. **The delegate rate is £100. To register please call Epilepsy Scotland on 0141 427 4911 or visit our website and download a registration form.**

Booking Form: Launch of the Independent Living in Scotland project

5.30pm, Monday 23rd March 2009

Apex Waterloo Place Hotel, 23-27 Waterloo Place, Edinburgh EH1 3BH

Please note that places are limited and we will contact you to confirm your place. This event is free of charge. **For more information telephone Claire McLaurin on 0141 228 5933.**

60th Anniversary of Psychological Medicine

An invitation is extended to attend the 60th anniversary celebration of psychological medicine in Glasgow, the event is being held on Friday 5th June 2009 in the Hunter Halls, East Quad, Gilbert Scott Buildings, Glasgow University from 10.00am until 5.00pm (lunch provided) For further details contact **Evelyn Smith, Section Administrator on 0141 211 3927 or email Evelyn.Smith@clinmed.gla.ac.uk**