

# strategies for living

www.mentalhealth.org.uk



ISSUE 19  
Summer 2003

**Northern Ireland  
Conference**

page 2



**Music group**

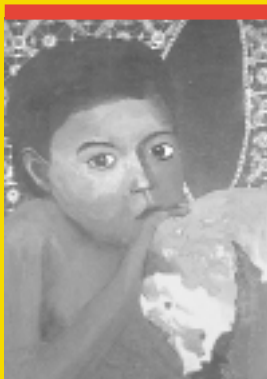
page 3

**Back To Nature**

page 4

**Human Rights**

page 5



**Black Spaces Project**

page 7

**Welcome** to the Strategies for Living newsletter, incorporating news on survivor/user led research, adult mental health and user empowerment.

## supported projects

We are on the last leg of supporting our user-led research projects around the UK and are excited to say that the researchers are busy writing the individual project reports that will be published in the next few months. As well as the next issue of this newsletter containing the key findings from all of the projects, we will also be publishing a major report of our experience of supporting the projects. This report will cover such themes as: relationships; resources; power issues; ethics; and training as well as containing the key findings from all the projects. As well as local individual dissemination work there will be an event in London in September to launch the overall report; a Strategies for Living online conference on the 30th of October; and hopefully dissemination events in both Scotland and Wales in the autumn.

## new proposals

Strategies for Living currently have three user-led research proposals about to go to potential funders with a view to starting early next year. One project will look into self-help groups: how they work in different settings; the key ingredients for how they support people; and their relationship to mainstream mental health services. Another will look into different aspects of user involvement in mental health services in Wales. The third will investigate how aspects of spiritual or religious belief relate to and support people experiencing distress to cope and to move towards recovery; what resources both personal and external, and what responses from others have supported them in this.

## au revoir and welcome

Monica Griesbaum, our Research Support Worker for Scotland and Northern Ireland has recently gone on maternity leave. We will miss her and wish her well.

We are pleased to welcome Jonathan Nicholls as our new Director of Research & Development at the Mental Health Foundation. Jonathan was previously a Director at MORI where he had lead responsibility for qualitative research. ■



Seahorse by Mandie Joanna  
Thompson-Legg



Anonymous



By Stewart

*The artwork above and where credited elsewhere in this newsletter is from work by service users featured in Speak Up Somerset's Positive Steps Diary.*



# getting together in northern ireland

Strategies for Living, in collaboration with the Down Lisburn Trust, recently held a conference on user-led research in Belfast.



John James and Pat Conway

We were delighted that around 40 people from across the Province were able to come together on the 7th of May in Lisburn to share their experience and knowledge.

Representatives from a wide variety of user-led organisations attended as well as individuals from up to the north coast.

## presentations

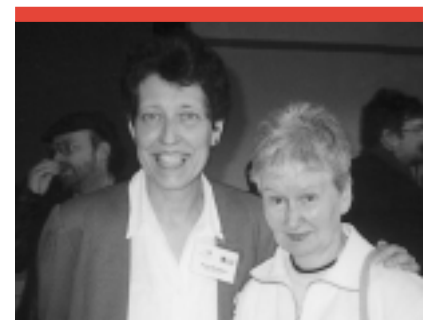
Vicky Nicholls from Strategies for Living (S4L), and then Jim Walsh, a S4L researcher and service user representative at the Trust, presented on S4L and user-led research and making a difference. Martha McClelland, from Mind Yourself in Derry, was inspiring on the Ireland-wide research that the Irish Advocacy Network has undertaken. One hundred and seventy-five interviews took place across all Trusts about service users' priorities. John James from STEER spoke about the successful development of a training and support programme for people with mental health problems and Pat Conway told us about the positive impact attending this course had had on his life.

## community

Jim Walsh and Joan Boyle, who are researching into people's coping strategies when in hospital, ran one of the three workshops. Their discussion concluded with the question 'How can we use research to illustrate that there is no need for hospitals and to promote the need for alternatives in the community?'

## inspiring

It was a privilege to be part of the inspiring group of people who were there and to hear about the amazing



Martha McClelland and Joan Boyle

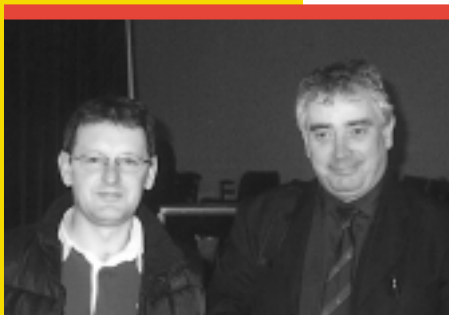
Desi Bannon, Performance and Commissioning Manager of Mental Health Services at Down Lisburn Trust, spoke about the history of user involvement in Ireland; of local services where strategy development has included significant user involvement and consultation; and current user-led work. This led to a lively discussion on user involvement in policy development; working with Trusts; the user voice and diversity; users' priorities as different; and constraints on services.

The day was chaired very sensitively and creatively by Stephen Gharboui, previously involved with S4L as a member of the advisory committee, who also presented an amazing poem that spoke to the spirit and heart.

work that has been undertaken in the Province. A summary of Valerie Bunting's valuable research on user involvement in NI will be included in the conference report.

As one of the delegates commented when asked what the best thing about the day was; 'The participation and eagerness to exchange news and experiences'. Conclusions at the end of the day: service users need to be involved at professional body level and need media presence; they also need a central person who's main role would be to bring all the work together and encourage the development of more user-led research and involvement. *Vicky Nicholls* ■

'The participation and eagerness to exchange news and experiences'



James Walsh and Desi Bannon

# sounds good

Lisa Bramley, a service user at Friend Community Mental Health Centre in Weston-super-Mare, describes the inspiring development of their music group.

Having previously experienced the therapeutic effects of music as a member of a community group in London, I was interested in setting up a music group at Friend. Many other service users were interested in taking part, but some were reluctant because they had always been told they were useless at music. I decided to press ahead and initiated the group in January 2002. With the support and encouragement of the staff and the enthusiastic response of other service-users, I now facilitate the group on a weekly basis. We started off by making a number of percussion instruments, for example shakers, drums and sticks. I also brought along an old guitar I had. These instruments provided us with a brilliant start and we were able to build up a really positive creative atmosphere in the group.

## achievement

Everyone who comes along has gained something positive from participating: 'I come in feeling depressed and it lifts me up'; 'It's really good fun singing and making music together'; 'I never knew I had it in me'; 'I love it! I always feel so much better after a good old jam'.

We also got really positive feedback when we ran a Music Workshop at a Mental Health Fun and Information Day in Clevedon last October. Forty people attended and many commented how much they enjoyed the session and how much better it had made them feel. Our members who ran the workshop had a real sense of achievement and now feel more confident about taking on similar challenges in the future.

## cd release

The group is continually developing. In March 2003, we set up a second weekly group to focus on instrumental expression and music composition which is already proving a real success, and we have already had some really inspiring sessions. We have plans to put personal poetry and testimonies written by service users at Friend to music and we would like to create some recordings to help people with relaxation and anxiety management. We would also like to take our group to events such as World Mental Health Day and the Weston Multi-Cultural Festival of Music



Lisa outside Friend and Dance. Last year we made our debut CD. This was recorded by a studio engineer and then my husband made one hundred copies from the master CD on our home computer. All of these sold out and we got really positive feedback from those who bought them. We hope to get some proper equipment of our own so we can make more CDs in the future and we will also be able to help other local community groups who would like to do recordings.



Image from the group's CD cover

So if you are thinking of setting up, or joining, a music group, Go For It! Music really can be the best therapy. It can help increase confidence, communication skills and creativity. And it's really good fun! ■

If you would like to find out more about the group, ring Lisa at Friend on 01934 622292 or email: friend39a@aol.com

## back to nature

Angela Morton describes how the beauty of the natural world helped her recovery.

For several months I was unable to take comfort from language, written or spoken, and for weeks I was almost unable to speak. Each day when he visited me on the ward, whatever the weather, my husband would take me for a walk beyond the hospital grounds. Our walk led us to a waterfall, and while we were there I felt a lot less awful. I wonder how often

**dusk and daybreak**  
Yet if we can remind ourselves to let them come in, the qualities that come from nature can help us come through and stay well, wherever and in whatever state of health we are. Since getting back into the everyday world and getting better, I've increasingly realized what a significant part the natural world plays in helping me to keep well. I'm fortunate to live in a beautiful part of the country but even in hospital or in a dingy room in an inner city it's possible to be in touch with the natural world: plants and flowers; natural foods; fresh water; essential oils; the rhythms of our breath and of the seasons; of dusk and daybreak; to look at the sky; see how air moves; and feel the water on our faces. While recovering, I've done a lot of writing and some of this has been published as a poetry collection. *A visitation on the path* is a true story of a turning point. ■

*A visitation on the path* is from *The Holding Ground*, The Collective Press, 2002, ISBN: 1 899449 90 6, price £6.50, post-free from Angela Morton, Cilwych, Warren Rd, Brecon LD3 8NS

we overlook a wonderful source of healing and renewal? Through times of mental distress I've lost all awareness of the natural world (and nowhere was I more cut off from it than in an upper floor psychiatric ward beneath the buzzing of fluorescent lighting).

### A visitation on the path

When, like her tongue, her talk  
was dried to dust, and all her sound was clamped  
inside her mind, and day by day  
by day they took their speechless walk  
along the path that led to Pwll y Wrach  
bad thoughts

conspired to thrust a weight  
across her shoulders

but there came, he told her after, a sudden moment  
when he felt the silence in her  
start to stir, and rift,  
as on the path she stopped. Slowly  
she shifted her thinned body  
across a boundary and stooped down  
to the earth; and then she

spoke: *Look*, she said,  
*look where I've seen*, and in her palm  
there shone, newly fallen,  
a small feather - this was the first sign:

and they went on, and day by day her mind  
began its slow releasing.  
She watched how trees began their shimmer;  
saw the bend of coming summer grasses  
as they sheened in the winnowing wind

and then she knows how clear the birdcall is,  
how keen the distant falls; she feels air's  
stir, as she witnesses the water's nimbus  
as it rises and  
disperses from its sharp pitch  
of sighing stone, down. Down, down  
deep into the silenced dark of Pwll y Wrach, touching  
the meniscus of the verdant cauldron, shining  
within the weird alembic  
of the witch's pool. On and on she moves  
towards the water's fall of filtered light, a sun stream

as dust motes churn, and, feather-fine,  
the countless atoms  
chime into the sun. Grace notes

rise from the fall, and calm. As if  
some feathered form  
she'd later come to recognise  
approaching silently  
had raised some sorrow from her shoulders.

## human rights

The British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR) has been granted an award by the Community Fund, to fund a Community Outreach Programme. Through this programme BIHR will work with voluntary or community groups who help marginalised and vulnerable people, raising their human rights awareness and developing an understanding of how human rights can combat disadvantage and discrimination. In particular the programme will focus on people living with mental health problems, refugees and asylum seekers, disabled people and older people who are disadvantaged by poverty, social exclusion, illness or disability.

### free sessions

The activities, in the first year, will include delivering tailor-made awareness-raising sessions. These will be free of charge for voluntary and community groups that provide assistance and advice, including advocacy, to people living with mental health problems, refugees and asylum seekers in London and the surrounding regions. ■

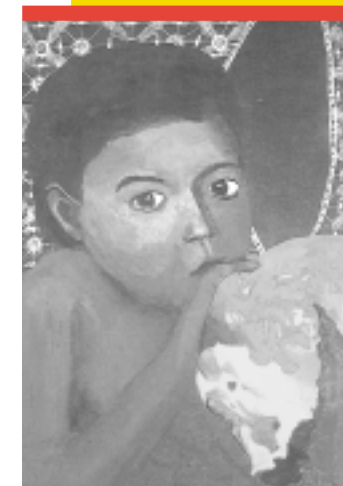
## making decisions

Over 7000 postcards have been received by the Lord Chancellor's Department in support of the Making Decisions Alliance's lobby of the Government to make parliamentary time for crucial mental capacity legislation (see last newsletter). Indications are that a draft bill may be imminent. To support this campaign either visit the Alliance website at [www.makingdecisions.org.uk](http://www.makingdecisions.org.uk) or contact us for a postcard to send to the Lord Chancellor.

## involvement & payments

In response to concerns raised by service users to Strategies for Living, the Mental Health Foundation has commissioned **A Guide to Benefits, Service User Involvement & Payments**. The guide is intended to provide advice to potential employers and to service users who are considering becoming involved in improving services. It includes information and advice on:

- \* recent changes in legislation affecting benefits entitlements if any work is undertaken
- \* key responsibilities of employers involving service users in any aspect of their work
- \* good practice considerations for potential employers
- \* suggested questions for service users to ask of potential employers
- \* permitted work rules
- \* benefits rules regarding earnings, disregards and conditions. ■



By Diane Brody  
(Positive Steps Diary)

For additional information contact Carolina Gottardo on 020 7593 0043, [cgottardo@bihr.org](mailto:cgottardo@bihr.org) or [www.bihir.org](http://www.bihir.org)



Angela Morton

The guide will be published in the summer. For more information contact the Foundations' publication department.

## this is survivor research

**The Survivor Researcher Network, which is supported by Strategies for Living, has recently produced a proposal for a book on survivor research.**



By Michelle  
(Positive Steps Diary)

The book, 'This is Survivor Research', will explain what underpins survivor research – its philosophy, principles and theory. It will also highlight the practicalities and issues involved in planning and carrying

out survivor research by including a range of examples of real experience.

### understanding

The aim is to promote understanding of survivor research among non-survivors; to promote the possibilities of survivor research to survivors; to provide a knowledge base otherwise unobtainable to a range of stakeholders who are now required and encouraged by government to involve service-users in research and evaluation, i.e. commissioners, policy

makers, research managers, academics, educators and research students; and to meet the need created by increasing official interest in user involvement and survivor research in mental health policy, practice and education.

### contributions

Discussions are taking place with a potential publisher. If you think you would be interested in contributing, either by writing or offering editorial support, please contact us. ■

## survivor workers support and training

***Stronger Than Ever* is the report of the first and only national conference of survivor workers in the UK.** The training, development and support of survivor workers is high on the mental health education and training agenda. *Stronger Than Ever* addresses the topic directly. It is a comprehensive guide to how to get it right for survivor workers - from the horse's mouth! Hailed as a manifesto for survivor workers, it's informative and a good read too. Eighty pages, full references and a genuine mandate from survivors workers across the board. Ring or fax Asylum Publishers on 0161 718 6677 to get your copy. *Rose Snow*

## mental health in higher education (mhhe)

**This one-year project sets out to identify and build upon good practice in the teaching of mental health across the disciplines and professions in higher education.**

It aims to improve links between all those involved

in - or with an interest in - learning and teaching about mental health.

We aim to ensure that the perspectives of users of services and carers inform all aspects of the project. Plans include development of a web-site at [www.mhhe.ltsn.ac.uk](http://www.mhhe.ltsn.ac.uk) with a

linked discussion group; a series of workshops on learning and teaching about mental health; and good practice guidance in specific areas e.g. service user and carer involvement in teaching about mental health. Further information is available on the project website (address above). ■



# black spaces

**Strategies for Living's Black Spaces Project\* spent some time with a small sample of Black mental health voluntary sector organisations, in order to understand the services that they deliver and assess lessons to be learned from their experience.**

Black people in the UK are over-represented in secure psychiatric units and are twice as likely as white people to be diagnosed with a mental health problem. Yet many Black people feel their needs are not met by the mainstream mental health system. As a result a number of Black voluntary organisations have tried to fill the gap. They have created culturally sensitive environments, offering alternative forms of therapy and advocating for Black people in the mainstream mental health system.

## expertise

However, many Black organisations do not have time to find out how other organisations operate as they are stretched to the limit trying to provide a range of services. The Black Spaces Project aimed to plug this gap by engaging a team of consultants, including users, to visit and document the experience of seven Black and Asian

organisations, so that both Black and mainstream mental health services could benefit from their expertise.

## themes

Key themes that emerged from this work include:

- \* the importance of working in partnerships
- \* how advocacy is vital to secure Black people's rights
- \* unsuitable premises cause problems for service users and staff
- \* the importance of empowering users
- \* coping with expansion while not losing the focus of core services
- \* strategies for preventing people from unnecessarily entering the mainstream mental health system
- \* the importance of cultural sensitivity to Black service users
- \* how the cultural stigma of mental illness impacts on Black services users and services
- \* organisations having to dance to the funders' tune
- \* the importance of outreach work to engage positively with service users
- \* involving families and the community in care
- \* creating organisations with a sense of Black identity.

The consultant team has distilled information about how these themes impact

on users and staff into a set of suggestions for best practice, learning from the experience of the projects.

## recommendations

The report also sets out recommendations for future work for the Black mental health sector as a whole.



A maze in (Positive Steps Diary)

This includes setting up a user consultancy team to help develop organisations. It also advocates closer collaboration between organisations in order to learn from each other and to influence the mainstream mental health sector.

There will be a limited number of free copies of the Black Spaces report available from the Mental Health Foundation from August. The report will also be available on the Foundation's website at [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk).

\* *Although acknowledged as not ideal, the phrase 'Black Spaces' has been used in the title of this project as a way of connecting Britains - African, Asian, Chinese, and other non-white communities under one banner.* ■

Also relevant are a review produced by The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health entitled *Breaking the Circles of Fear (2002)* about the experience of African-Caribbean people and mental health services and the Department of Health's report entitled *Inside/Outside: Improving Mental Health Services for Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in England (2003)*.

# values conferences

The on-line consultation on the Government's National Framework of Values for Mental Health hosted by the Mental Health Foundation in March was very successful.

Five hundred people logged in to the conference on the day with another two hundred and fifty joining in after the 'live' discussions. Hundreds and hundreds of messages were posted in the discussions. We now look forward to seeing what the National Institute for Mental Health in England does with the feedback provided via the conference.

*Whose values are they anyway?* is the conference being run by the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, in association with the Mental Health Foundation, in Manchester on the 7th and 8th July.

The conference will examine how the values of mental health practitioners and providers of mental health services, as well as service users and carers, can affect the care provided. Through a series of interactive seminars participants will explore the dilemmas that arise in mental health care and develop practical



By Steve Thomas  
(Positive Steps Diary)

strategies for achieving positive practice and outcomes. For further information please contact Sarah Lord on 020 7827 8384, e-mail: sarah.lord@scmh.org.uk or register on-line at [www.scmh.org.uk](http://www.scmh.org.uk). Some reduced price places may be available for service users. ■

Please contact us if you would like to join our mailing list or would like more copies of this newsletter for local networks.

## what's going on . . . at the mental health foundation

### Youth Crisis Project

In March 2003 we held a residential weekend to bring together young people to share the results of four consultation projects which asked them what they would like from mental health services. We are committed to ensuring the young people's views reach policy makers and service providers in the UK so they can contribute to the development of better crisis services.

For more information please contact Lucy Leon or Annie Blunt on 020 7802 0300.

### Level 2 Certificate in Mental Health Work (City & Guilds Initial Award)

This award provides an introduction to individuals who are new to their role in adult mental health sector, and is designed to complement or provide a framework for an employers existing induction programme.

It comprises of five units covering themes such as: the experience of mental distress; effective communication; and the working environment. The programme uses a combination of group learning sessions with input from a trainer and independent learning activities.

For more information call Pavilion on 0870 161 3505 or go to [www.pavpub.com](http://www.pavpub.com)

To order any publication please call the Publications Department on 020 7802 0300

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The Mental Health Foundation  
83 Victoria Street,  
London SW1H 0HW

Tel: 020 7802 0300  
Fax: 020 7802 0301  
e-mail: [mhf@mhf.org.uk](mailto:mhf@mhf.org.uk)  
website:  
[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

Mental Health Foundation  
Merchants House  
30 George Square  
Glasgow G2 1EG

Tel: 0141 572 0125  
Fax: 0141 572 0246  
e-mail: [scotland@mhf.org.uk](mailto:scotland@mhf.org.uk)

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