



Alison Faulkner was an in-house researcher at the Mental Health Foundation. She was instrumental in developing its service-user programmes and went on to become Head of Service User Initiatives.

Where did the idea for the *Knowing Our Own Minds* report come from?

When I first arrived at the Foundation in to 1994, June McKerrow (the then chief executive) said: "Let's do some research that is user-patient led". I was well connected with service users so got together different people from user organisations such as Speak Out and the UK Advocacy Network as well as Mind Link and the Brent user group, who had done so much work involving members of the whole community. We also had people from the African-Caribbean Mental Health Association. We designed the questionnaire by committee and I did all the work in-between.

Why do you think *Knowing Our Own Minds* was important?

The Foundation was making a transition away from being a committee-led organisation funding doctors, so it was a way of trying to change the emphasis and say: "It's all very well what research says about what's effective but what do we find helpful, what do we think about these different treatments and therapies?" There wasn't much research asking people their opinions about services and treatments. I think it was ground breaking because it really was designed by us.

How did the *Strategies for Living* program follow-on from that?

Our aim was to document and disseminate people's own ways and strategies for managing mental distress, primarily through user-led research. The core piece of work was the Strategies for Living report, but we also then invited applications from service users to do their own research. I think that was the most innovative and exciting part, because we were giving people training in skills and understanding research. I think it had a huge impact - I was at a conference recently and an occupational therapist came up to me and said "Oh gosh, you're the person who did Strategies for Living!" She almost wanted my autograph!

