

Knock, knock, knockin' on mental health's door

A few weeks back a nurse came down to the lobby looking for one of her charges who she thought was attending our event. She was one of the caregivers on the job when I was a patient upstairs 7 1/2 years ago. It soon became clear that she thought our whole event was going on in the lobby. She was surprised that there was an auditorium down here. I was appalled to think that she had been practicing upstairs all that time and somehow resisted the notion that there was a great little facility in the same building, home of two of the best resources for her patients.

Both FRIENDS OF MUSIC and MOVIE MONDAY have been operating under her nose, working with many of the parade of patients she has seen passing by the ward for seven years. Many involved have been her patients. FOM and MM were both cited as Best Practices in BC's Mental Health Reform process. We've both been knocking ourselves out all these years to provide fun and "psycho-social rehab" to both patients and past patients of those wards. We've posting our events on the bulletin boards, practically pressganging folks down to the auditorium so they could realize there's something there for them, a positive activity to engage in during their time in hospital and especially after they're discharged.

This little incident brought home to me one of the very basic problems in our mental health system. One of the solutions, I think, is to let us help. For instance, I've offered to do inservices for staff of our psych wards. Such events could have introduced that nurse to the facility and knowledge of programs that she could pass on to her patients. She'd also get to see an ex-patient as a whole person, back functioning in the real world. Those who deal with us when we're sick need hopeful examples of recovery as much as their patients do.

Many psychiatric survivors are managing their lives well. Their hard-learned first hand knowledge, the credibility that comes with it, and their empathy are invaluable to those trying to find their way. We already run support groups and thrifty, innovative programs, and informal counselling. We

mostly volunteer our ability and time and are largely ignored by the mainstream services.

There are lots of initiatives moving ahead involving people with personal experience of mental illness. A recent IAPSRs*-BC chapter newsletter outlined a number of processes throughout BC. International bodies like IAPSRs, NAMI**, and next year's World Congress for Mental Health in Vancouver are calling for papers and workshop proposals. (unfortunately if it's not your day job it's prohibitively expensive to participate)

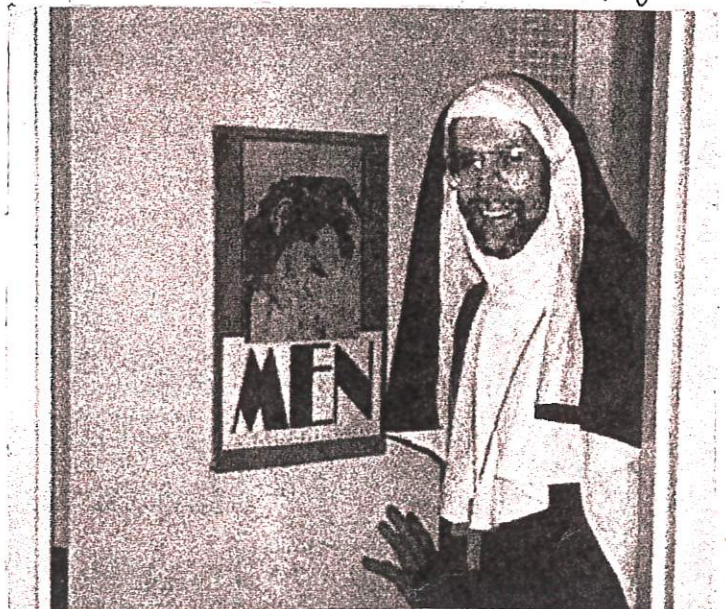
*International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services

**National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

I'm giving up a day's paying work Sept. 13 to be involved in a workshop in Vancouver featuring Horst Peters, a consumer who is now Program Coordinator for Partnership For Empowerment in Manitoba. It will be a great opportunity to meet active participants in this process from all over the province as well as some of the pros who set policy. Dean Holt, the Reel Madness Film Festival Video Guy will be coming as well to produce a short video on some of the shakers and movers in the consumer movement.

It's time the mental health system realized and appreciated that one of it's greatest assets can be the people it is set up to serve. We're waiting for the chance to help. I'm super appreciative of those who have given me opportunities to help, that encouragement is one of the things that keeps me well.

Aug 7/00



Here's the fun part! *Sister Bruce*
from the "Sing Along Sound of Music"