

Co-chairs Annual Report 2007/8

This has been an exciting and productive year for SPN in which the organisation has grown in membership, organised hugely successful study days, produced publications and faced a financial crisis- in other words the up and down world of many voluntary organisations.

Keeping service users and carers at the heart of our activities remains a top priority. We have strong and active involvement in our governance; we reserve free places for users and carers at all our study days; and we have an increasing proportion of service users in our membership.

Recovery was a major theme throughout the year. SPN shaped the paper on recovery 'A Common Purpose' which was jointly produced by CSIP, SCIE and the Royal College of Psychiatrists. This was a major step forward in recognising the importance of service user having control over their own lives although it lost something of the directness of the SPN draft.

We have continued to work on the topic through Feeding the Flowers, a web based review, and a very successful study day on Recovery and Diversity. We will continue to press for recognition that service users themselves have to define what recovery means for them and to shape their own journey.

Minorities face double discrimination if they have mental health issues as well as being regarded as 'different' by the majority community. The poor performance of mainstream services in adapting to the needs of minority ethnic communities is well recognised.

Our Recovery and Diversity study day addressed these issues. Melba Wilson who chaired the day is now to head the Delivering Race Equality programme. We were pleased to work with the Department of Health's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Orientation Group in planning the day.

The degree of concern on these issues was reflected in the decision by one of our Executive Committee, Suman Fernando, to reject the offer of an honour and to send an open letter to the Prime Minister calling for the withdrawal of the Mental Health bill then before Parliament.

Influencing policy and practice is an important strand of SPN's work. We worked through the Mental Health Alliance in lobbying against some of the elements in the Mental Health Bill. We commented on the revisions to the Care Programme Approach. We have worked in partnership with others on social inclusion issues.

One of the key ways to develop influence is through building partnerships. We have met with the Mental Health Network, the group within the NHS confederation which represents providers. We have played an active role in creating and supporting the Mental Health Social Work and Social Care Forum. This draws together some of the key bodies representing and regulating social work and social care staff to strengthen the influence of social care in mental health.

Terry Bamford, our Director, is co-chair of the Forum and also sits on the New Ways of Working subgroup of the Mental Health Network.

Study days and publications have long been a core activity for SPN. This year in addition to the Recovery and Diversity study day we ran two study days on behalf of the Parental Mental Health and Child Welfare Network on 'Safeguarding Children in Fragmented Families' and 'Beyond the Smile-working together for positive maternal mental health'. Both were successful and the latter drew the largest ever attendance at a SPN study day- 120 people.

The publications this year were 'Our Health Our Care Our Say', a study day jointly with CSIP Eastern Region; 'Recovery and Diversity' jointly with SCIE, the Delivering Race Equality Programme and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Orientation Group; 'Safeguarding Children in Fragmented Families' (all available in print form) and 'Feeding the Flowers' available only in PDF.

The Parental Mental Health and Child Welfare Network is run by SPN. It has gone from strength to strength this year. A survey of its 850 members drew a remarkable 20% return and has helped to shape the programme and priorities of the network.

In addition to the study days the network is closely involved with developing thinking around the social exclusion of parents with mental health problems. SPN was successful in securing 3 year funding for the Network from the Department for Children, Schools and Families which will help the development of the network and safeguard its future.

Funding has been a recurrent concern this year. The uncertainty about the future shape of CSIP/NIMHE meant prolonged uncertainty about the prospects of our grant continuing into 2008/9. In February that uncertainty was translated into a firm statement that no support would be available. With strenuous lobbying and the help of friends within CSIP/NIMHE we have been given a transitional grant of £50000 on condition that we become self-financing next year. The implications of that are discussed in the funding paper.

It has meant that a lot of time and energy has gone into bids for funding. Our 3 bids for section 64 funding were unsuccessful but that to the DCSF did bear fruit.

Vicky Nichols developed a successful joint bid for SPN with Shaping our Lives to INVOLVE for a review of user-led research. Just after the year end Raza Griffiths was successful in securing funding as part of a University of Greenwich project on learning alliances.

People are at the heart of SPN. We thank our Executive Committee members for their support throughout the year. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Judy Foster who decided to stand down as co-chair of SPN to concentrate on her doctorate thesis. Judy was one of the original progenitors of the network

and as co-chair has given tirelessly of her time energy and imagination to the organisation.

SPN too is fortunate in its staff group- Jean who offers continuity and soothing charm to other staff and SPN members alike, Vicky , Raza and Terry who work hard to keep the newsletters publications and activities which SPN needs to justify its continued role and relevance.

Looking forward is not really part of the Annual Report but the financial challenges facing the organisation are real. For our part we want to reassert the importance of a network geared to promoting social perspectives. The new legislation, the demise of the Mental Health Act Commission and the development of Foundation Trusts are all developments which could result in the marginalisation of social perspectives. It is our task to ensure that does not happen.

Alleyn Wilson Stewart Hendry

Co-chairs