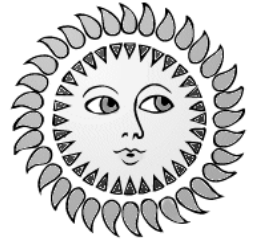




Welcome to our Summer 2010 Newsletter



Editor's Welcome:

Hi Linda here, this is my first attempt at editing the newsletter! Firstly, many congratulations to Heidi and Steven on the arrival of their son Felix from everyone at HUG and HCCF. I would like to thank all HUG members, volunteers and staff for their support and patience in helping me to at least partially step into Heidi's shoes while she is enjoying motherhood.

HUG is the Highland Users Group, a network of people with experience of mental health problems from across the Highlands.

Membership of HUG is open to anyone who has experienced a mental health problem. Just write, phone, or email us and leave your name and address – it's as easy as that!

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Note: The views expressed by our members in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of HUG.

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★ **Feature on HUG Member - Joanna Higgs** ★

★ **What is your name and tell us something funny about yourself?** ★

★ My name is Joanna Higgs and I once when I was at a self help group meeting I got really upset. Then I found I'd I lost my car keys. I found them down my knickers. ★

★ **How long have you been involved in HUG?** ★

★ I was working as a volunteer with NSF when I first met Graham on his first month in post at HUG. We were at a conference talking about how to combat the Stigma of mental illness. A wee while later some of the people at the NSF group told me that they had been part of deciding that the new self advocacy group for people with mental health problems was to be called HUG. I actually can't remember when I met with Graham to be briefed on being a HUG member and 'discovered' what I wanted to do to be involved. ★
★ Conversations with Graham and Emma still go that way. When I talk with either of them, I'm constantly 'discovering' where I can have a part in our work to make things different. I think it's about 7 years I've been speaking out. I think it's revealing that one of HUG's biggest pieces of work is still about combating Stigma. ★

★ **Who would you most like to invite to dinner and why?** ★

★ On a good day I'd want to sit across the table from George Clooney. Honest, it's because he is so intelligent. On a bad day, I'd love to have Maya Angelou come along to my house because she seems to me to be someone who tells her stories with so much candour and humour because she has learned to see the fun and humanness of all our experiences no matter how bad they are. I want to soak up her positivity and simplicity and keep it forever. And I love story tellers and dancers. And I think she'd like George Clooney to come too. ★

★ **Tell us the most exciting thing you have done this month?** ★

★ I want to say that reading my poems at Fine Lines launch was the best but I have to be honest and tell you that that same month I went to see Ross County in the Scottish Cup final. It stays with me as the most exciting thing I have done for years! I had forgotten what passion and unremitting hope could feel like. The noise and hugeness of the crowd and occasion added to it all and I still get teary eyed talking about it. ★

★ **What's your most precious possession?** ★

★ I am too flighty to have a constant winner in my list of precious'es. Maybe it's because 'possession' is such a flighty actuality. Today the comfort and tidiness of my home is precious. Yesterday it was probably a peace of mind sufficient to complete a good day's work and have energy left to enjoy my evening. It looks like I endow preciousness on the things in life that can't last long and so have to be enjoyed as much as possible. Every day I find I talk about my children and enjoy their lives so much. That is probably my most precious possession. ★



Graham's Update

MY RETURN TO WORK

Hello everyone.

It is really, really good to be back at work again. I came back part time at the beginning of April and am now busy working full time again which is wonderful.

It is so good to be in contact with such fantastic people as make up HUG, meeting you all and seeing new members is a constant delight. Getting stuck in to the huge tasks we all face is so energising and exciting.

It is very strange to be working full time in quite a responsible position but to still be on a section. By the time you read this I will have had my care reviewed in my care program approach meeting and they will have made a decision about whether to try to renew my section.

I was lying in bed late last night thinking of all the things that I would like to say to the people charged with my care and find myself full of things that I want to express and no understanding of how to say it.

It's trying to express the confusion of letting people know that I owe them my life, that I will always be obliged to them but that I am also angry. It's the simple thing of being able to go up to someone who has taken such a part in my life and to want to give them a hug to say thanks or simply to have a coffee to acknowledge the debt I owe and knowing that in our strange system you never give hugs to patients and you never have the space to acknowledge and respect the lifesaving connections that have been made but cannot be pursued.

It's knowing that being on close obs for seven weeks out of three and a half months was essential but feeling so angry that a huge amount of my time was preoccupied with working out which nurse was the least likely to watch me when I went to the toilet, things like that were so humiliating.

It's knowing that they needed to make me sleep with the light on every night and yet wishing so much for just one night of darkness with the door closed and no one watching me. Or the sadness of knowing that the thrill of being able to feel the fresh air and the grass under my feet for a scant five minutes more than offset the pain of losing the tribunal that made it possible to spend a short time outdoors.

And now I have to face my medication and, knowing on one level, that I hate it beyond measure and feel that it poisons my spirit and at the same time knowing intellectually, that if I don't take it I will become extremely 'ill'. I am a mass of contradictions about what I believe about my care and treatment, I both resent my helpers and rely on them, I dread beyond anything being in the state I was recently but cannot accept that it is an illness. It would be so good to sit down with those people and ask them to listen to my memories and perceptions of what I went through, to have people who can accept and listen to complete and utter bewilderment about my perception of my experience of the past and my present reality.

As it is I have you wonderful people and you always keep me tied firmly in the here and now and what we need to do to keep on going with some hope in our hearts!

I thought I would finish with a short poem I wrote for the creative writing group:

RECOVERY 4

I learn to sit on the ground
I shift where the stones clench my skin
I hear a scatter of voices
I stare at the green grass
I smell a rubbed leaf of lavender

I breathe
I breathe and I Celebrate my return to
the world

Emma's Update

"VOICES": a documentary about empowerment highlights the issues that face people with mental health problems across Europe. It looks at our past treatment, at attitudes to mental illness, at stigma and explores the reasons why it is vital that users have a recognised voice to speak out about their lives and treatments. It features the voices of users, carers, psychiatrists and government officials among others.

Central to the film is the 'Scottish model' of overcoming the problems we face and, especially, the work of HUG.

The DVD was commissioned as a result of the culmination of two European projects (Grundtvig funding) which HUG has been involved with over the last 6 years with colleagues from Poland, Spain, Romania and Portugal.

A brand new project... Drama, Young People and Eating Disorders – HUG is working on a new piece of interactive drama, along with Eden Court, which will be aimed at S2 and S3 pupils around eating disorders and will go into schools this September and October. We hope to reach over 500 pupils in 8-9 schools.

Jokes

'Who Said That ?

Topsoil: 'I hate it when people treat me like dirt!'

Rubber Band: 'I better snap out of it!'

Paper: 'I've gone completely blank!'

'Knock Knock'

'Who's there?'

'Waddle ...

Waddle who ...

'Waddle I do if you don't open the door ...?'

'Knock Knock'

'Who's there?'

'Hugo and Al ...

'Hugo and Al who ...'

'Hugo and Al stay ...'

Sign in a Pet Shop window

'Buy a Puppy - get one flea!'

Susan Kelly

Linda's Update

Firstly, may I say greetings to all our readers!

This is the first newsletter I have produced and I want to thank everyone who has contributed. It's your enthusiasm and commitment that make it possible to publish such diverse and interesting articles. We have had to limit the number of pages due to financial constraints so some contributions will go into the next edition.

Work has started on the new DVDs. Filming has taken place with four HUG members to date. Thank you to them☺. We are very excited about the new format we are using and are anticipating it will be very engaging to watch.

Mental Health Awareness Training is planned for GP`s in Wick, Deaf Services in Dingwall, Homestart in Wick, and Albyn Housing in Invergordon and Inverness.

If anyone would like to consider coming along and giving their testimony please get in touch. My direct dial is 01463 723559. I am also looking at collating a library of testimony, contributions would be much appreciated.

In partnership with Highland Print Studio, Inverness, there have been four meetings to discuss ideas and the way forward for the production of a new set of HUG postcards. This is a photography project. If you would like to be involved let me know.

A big THANK YOU to all HUG members and volunteers, who have supported, contributed and worked hard to keep HUG so effective. The weather has been unpredictable hasn't it? I am hoping for a sunny September!

FROM TIGGER TO EYORE

By Niki

I used to be Tigger
All bouncy and funny
Outside when it's sunny.

I used to be cool
Always playing the fool
Feeling so brave
I was nobodies slave
Having such fun
While I got the job done
Then getting excited
And feeling delighted
No challenge too great
Just tell me the date
I'll give it my all
If you give me a call.

I used to be Tigger
All bouncy and funny
Outside when it's sunny.

But now I am Eyore
A gloomy old grump
Who is having a mump.
Nothing seems right
I can't sleep well at night
My friends just don't care
That I'm going nowhere
My life is now stuck
I have run out of luck
I can't seem to cope
And I've run out of hope
I want to be Tigger
But can't seem to trigger
That bounce.....

News In Brief

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

We have spent a lot of time recently recording our progress in helping raise your voice over the last 18 months.

This is partly so that our funders can be sure that we make good use of the money they give us to do the work we do but also so that we can all be sure that we are keeping up to the standards we set ourselves.

We have two 18 months reports in table form. One for our stigma and awareness raising work and one for our speaking out work.

If you want a copy of either of these then do let us know

Empowering HUG Members

In the middle of May a group of HUG volunteers were lucky enough to participate in a two day training course on empowerment and working together. The event took place at Amam Cara where we donned our woolly socks, and gathered round in a beautiful airy room with a wood burning stove. The training was led by old HUG friends Ricard and Al from Barcelona. They did wonderfully well conducting the sessions in English, even if this did lead to the odd comic moment!

We undertook a series of exercises which were designed to illustrate what empowerment feels like, and how we can achieve things more easily when working together. I particularly enjoyed the exercise which involved trying to cross an imaginary river using our linked bodies and small planks of wood. Emma took charge of our group but was soon silenced by Ricard who had

the power to make people mute. (Emma now looked apoplectic!) Leadership emerged, co-operation resulted and we successfully completed the task!

As you can see we had some fun, and the course was far from boring. Al and Ricard worked hard and everyone was encouraged to contribute. Thanks to all concerned for a thought provoking couple of days in a lovely setting.

PS Everyone got a copy of the "Voices" DVD in which HUG and many international partners were involved.

Martin Russell



Highland Rainbow Folk is a group of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people who volunteer as a working group for Age Scotland and the Terrence Higgins Trust. The group was established in January 2009 and has produced a brochure for Health and Social Care professionals to raise awareness of older LGBT people. We have also organised two events for LGBT History Month. The group have a story telling focus and use this method to inform and raise awareness of issues facing older lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people. We meet monthly and work together to share experiences and ideas. Currently we are working on sessions to go out and talk to professionals. For more information please contact either Suzy Gentle at Age Scotland on 01309 673455 or email suzy.gentle@agescotland.org.uk or Caroline Snow at Terrence Higgins Trust on 01463 711585 email caroline.snow@ttht.org.uk

About Fine Lines

One day I was at work and out of the blue, a parcel arrived with the newly printed 'Fine Lines' along with some HUG promotional materials.

I picked up the book of writings during one of my 'sanity' breaks (I have a bad habit of working away without stops so have to force myself to do so). Dipping in and out of 'Fine Lines' was a great stress buster and the authors' honesty, humour and creativity brought me to a welcome calm. I loved that I knew so many of the writers and could hear their voices telling me their stories.

I have this theory that compilations often keep one of the best entries for the last page and so turned to see what 'Fine Lines' had there. I started to read a poem and was easily half way thought it before I heard my own voice telling this story. And that was when I realised it was my poem. I had forgotten I had agreed that it could be printed if it was chosen.

Calm whooshed out and I rushed round the empty office to find someone to show off to; to check that it really was there; to tell me where to hide the book so that no-one could read it; to tell me how to change my name at the end and let others read it without knowing it was me. I was a bit emotional. As usual. Then I had another look through the book to see if any more of my writings were there. There was. One other poem left me with the truth. People wanted to see what I had to say. The 'best for last' theory was a bit more in perspective now but I couldn't hide my pride and happiness.

It took me three more days to show someone it. Since then I have read both poems at the launch of 'Fine Lines' and again at a women's group meeting. It gets easier each time I do it. I might actually get to feel only pleasure when I ready my stuff, as my nerves and sense of awe that others want to hear from me diminish.

Joanna

Fine lines now online at
<http://hug.uk.net/pubswrit.htm>

Or go through the navigation menu - publications/creative writing

DISCUSSION TOPICS AT BRANCH MEETINGS

The issues we will discuss in our network this year include:

- Complementary therapies
- Older people and mental health
- What would reduce the suicide rate.

We have room to add some discussion topics so do let us know if you think there is anything vital we are not talking about.

If you want advance sight of the questions we will be asking in the network then do let us know and we will send them to you.

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR YOUR TESTIMONY

One of the important things HUG does is to compile a library of testimonies from our members. These testimonies can then, with your permission, be used in our awareness training sessions. You can write your testimony or if you prefer your voice can be recorded reading your story. When we give testimonies at conferences and training sessions the feed back forms indicate that they are very popular and effective. Our honesty is admired and they bring a sense of reality to the proceedings. I personally think it's very cathartic to relate my own story and hope that you will be encouraged to do the same. Long or short makes no difference so go, if I can do it I am sure you can and it greatly helps HUG's work. Feel free to post or e-mail your testimonies to HUGvolunteer@hccf.org.uk I look forward to receiving them
Judith x

Hello Cruel World

Hello again, ladies and gentlemen. Is it that time again? Yes, it is, as time goes screaming away from us, it seems like only yesterday, and yet it seems like forty years ago, since I last addressed you here in *Hello Cruel World*. Much like myself, *Hello Cruel World* is always different and always the same, but conversely when I write generic sorts of things like that I am conscious that there is a danger that I will have said them before, so we shall just get started.

On the internet there is a facility whereby people can ask me questions. Not only that, but sometimes they do. Often I don't know who it is that is asking, which is interesting, to me, anyway, and that is the case with the latest question I have received. It was this:

if you could have one superpower, what would it be? i'll also leave 'superpower' up to your definition.

I'll go with the standard sort of definition. That's the best place to start, anyhow, I feel. If I could have just one, something not complicated by caveats, the traditions are too compromised. I don't want to fly like Superman, wrapped up warm but dripping wet, collapsing in a ball of exhausted sweat, drawing attention to myself - they'd gather with projectiles and cudgels awaiting my descent, itching to blame the government, I'd be better off not flying like that. Accelerated healing would be okay, if people didn't notice, and start doing things to me so they could see, invulnerability would be too much, they'd find me out and then they'd keep trying stuff out of curiosity, Earthlings are very curious, they'd try mincing me but they wouldn't be able to, stake through the heart but they wouldn't be able to, then they'd take turns to sit on me, five at a time, while they tried to think of something else, but they wouldn't be able to, and even when they did it wouldn't work and they'd sit on me again, no thanks.

Invisibility, could I keep it a secret? And if not, who would trust me? Even if I could, could I trust myself? I like it how it is, if my friends want some privacy they can see they've got privacy, when they close the door they don't have to go feeling all around the room to make sure that I'm not there. Even if I used the power only for good, people would still mutter to each other... 'sure, he fights crime, and that's very nice - but you're not telling me he never, just occasionally, uses it to stare at women without being seen? I know I would...' that's what they'd mutter to each other... once they'd felt around the room to make sure I wasn't there - invisibility, no thanks.

Superhuman strength? For what, so I can work in a circus, bending iron bars behind my neck? It's 2010, those days are over. Superhuman vision? See invisibility. Crawling up walls? I think that's a bit rubbish, even if no-one thought I was looking in windows. I see a lot of walls, and generally there would be no point in crawling up them. Telepathy? No thank you - I find it hard enough to deal with what I know about what you are thinking, good and bad, without having the lot, it would be nice to believe that it would reduce misunderstandings but I reckon it would probably increase them. Superhuman intelligence? That would be pointless, I've already got more than I can use properly. I can't have the ability to apply myself, or better judgement, they're not proper superpowers. I know that 'superpower' was left to me to define, but I define them with arbitrary restrictions as I see fit.

The stretchy elastic superpower? No. I don't get enough exercise as it is, but at least I have to get up to fetch something now and then. The ability to turn into an animal? No. For one thing, none of my clothes would fit. And I may not always be completely happy with how I look, but I like not looking like a duck, or an elephant. A lot of superheroes have powers that I think are just plain rubbish. The ability to smash things. The ability to burn things. I don't want to smash things. I don't want

to burn things. Mind control? I want to persuade you of my point of view with the rightness of what I'm saying, not with superpowers. Not even with the power of persuasion. I just want to say things clearly, so you can see. That's all I want, nothing more.

I guess what I'd really like is to be able to turn things on and off. You know, inside.

Keir

ADDENUM: I have enjoyed bringing my nonsense to you in Hello Cruel World, but as I have learned that we are now having to keep the length of the newsletter down due postage costs I no longer feel I can justify the inclusion of my often irrelevant rambling at the expense of other stuff which is probably more relevant to mental health, especially as I get to express my rambly self every day on the internet in my blog, so this will be my last Hello Cruel World.

Working with and Living with Mental Health Issues

I have been diagnosed with Bipolar Affective Disorder for 15 years. During this time I have had six different jobs but only twice have I been honest on application forms. On both occasions when I have been honest I have been offered the post that I have applied for so why have I been economical with the truth on four occasions?

The first two posts were quite early in my diagnosis and I felt that I did not understand Bipolar well enough to try to explain to prospective employers the impact that Bipolar was having on my life.

I had a break from work when I became extremely ill and during this time I came into contact with HUG. As I became more active in anti-stigma work I became quite forceful that I would never again hide the fact that I had Bipolar. I did a lot of awareness training, media work and appeared in quite a few DVDs. My first step back into work was as a development worker with a mental health project so of course I could just be myself and nothing was hidden.

When I left that post I decided that I would like to continue to work with people with mental health issues so became a support worker with another highland project. I was honest on the application form and much to my surprise was offered a post. Good job really as six months into my post all the staff and all the clients saw a DVD in which I talked about my experience of being sectioned.

My next two posts were at a time when I was experiencing a period of stability and I didn't see the need for disclosure.

Was this a good idea? I don't know. Part of me fears my current employers finding out and having to explain how my illness affects my every day life. If they find out will their opinion of me change? Will my work colleagues treat me differently and would I feel different from everyone else?

Anon

Hello from Nova Scotia

Hello from Nova Scotia , Canada. For those of you that didn't know, Christmas Day 2009 saw me flying across the Atlantic to my next adventure in Canada. So far, I love it here. I probably moved at the worst time of year – Nova Scotia is very cold and has lots of snow in the winter, but at least I saw it at its worst. Now summer is here – today was 34C. Proper seasons is a definite advantage of living here – only a few months ago I was skating on the lake at the bottom of the garden and today my children have been out swimming in the same lake. There is much more of an outdoors lifestyle here and most nights I go canoeing on the lake. There are also lots of walking trails, cycle paths, etc. in both the town and more rural areas, and all these really make you want to get outdoors more. In addition, the TV here is awful so there isn't much incentive to sit in front of it for long, although BBC iPlayer is brilliant.

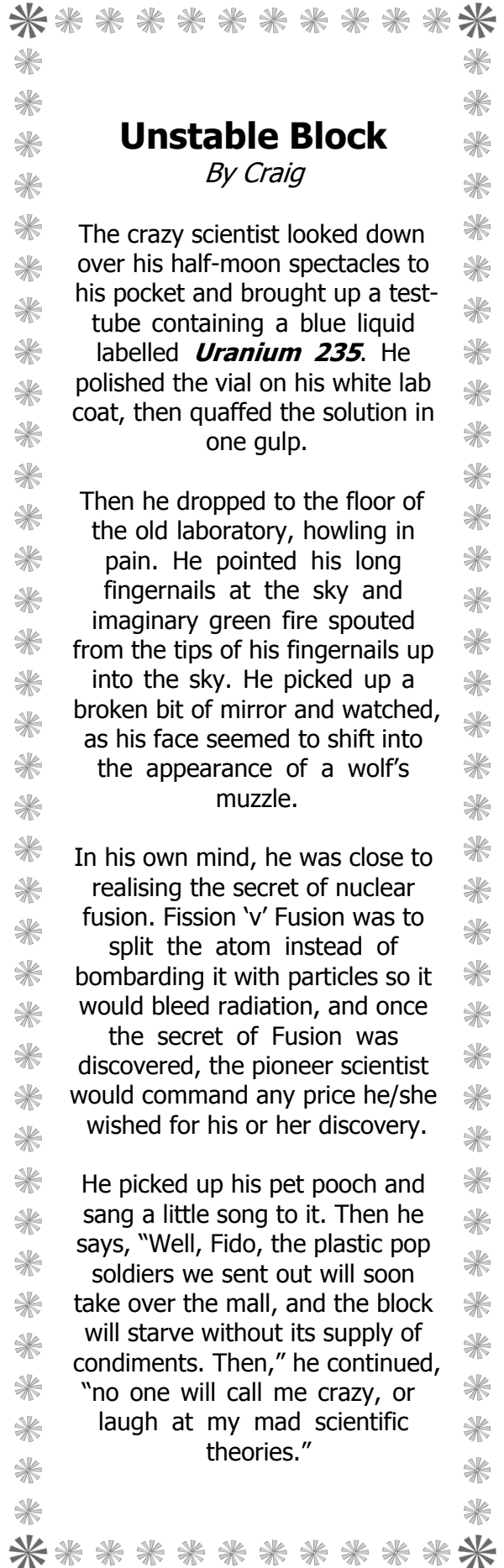
It has been interesting to discover how mental health services compare here – I've been a Board director of a consumer (it's the only term they use here) organization in Halifax for almost two years now but it's very different actually being here 'on the ground'. That organization is facing some challenges right now in terms of funding, which is all very familiar to me, however we are confident these

challenges will be met. As for services day to day, I don't have personal experience, being more of a 'service avoider' than 'service user', but what I have learned from others is that in some respects they are better and in some worse. There is an almost total reliance on the medical model – even more so than in the UK. That being said though, the local hospital employs several music therapists, although no art therapists, which would be quite unusual in Scotland. In many ways the attitudes here are years behind those in the UK – for a wonderful example of this you can see a column I wrote for the main provincial newspaper at www.aileenmcginty.com/library.asp (Halifax Chronicle Herald.doc). On a positive note though, although the locals complain about it, accessing services seems to be much less problematic even in the more rural areas. I suppose it depends on what level of service provision you are used to.

I have also been doing some work with the Mental Health Commission in Ottawa as part of the strategy stream of the second phase of the development of a new mental health system for Canada. This work arose from my participation in IIMHL in Australia last year. I have also become involved in the MHCC law

and mental health group which is really interesting and only yesterday I was offered the opportunity to undertake a research project looking at legislative benchmarking in mental health (a joint collaboration between Dalhousie University law and MHCC). The MHCC work means I get a couple of days every while in Ottawa but how I miss my Royal College of Psychiatrists work in London! They are such a fantastic group of people and I do miss them all. I recently met the president of the Canadian Psychiatric Association (who by coincidence happens to be English) and was appalled at how backward that organization is – service user involvement just doesn't exist at all and they are very against any change to that. I have subsequently written to this person but haven't even had an acknowledgement of that yet. Even within the MHCC, consumer involvement appears to be tokenistic. There is lots of work to be done... but I have met several like minded people and we are talking about a grassroots movement for change – we've even begun planning for a trans-Canadian meeting, so I'll keep you posted.

Please feel free to contact me by email – ailie@hotmail.co.uk.



Unstable Block

By Craig

The crazy scientist looked down over his half-moon spectacles to his pocket and brought up a test-tube containing a blue liquid labelled **Uranium 235**. He polished the vial on his white lab coat, then quaffed the solution in one gulp.

Then he dropped to the floor of the old laboratory, howling in pain. He pointed his long fingernails at the sky and imaginary green fire spouted from the tips of his fingernails up into the sky. He picked up a broken bit of mirror and watched, as his face seemed to shift into the appearance of a wolf's muzzle.

In his own mind, he was close to realising the secret of nuclear fusion. Fission 'v' Fusion was to split the atom instead of bombarding it with particles so it would bleed radiation, and once the secret of Fusion was discovered, the pioneer scientist would command any price he/she wished for his or her discovery.

He picked up his pet pooch and sang a little song to it. Then he says, "Well, Fido, the plastic pop soldiers we sent out will soon take over the mall, and the block will starve without its supply of condiments. Then," he continued, "no one will call me crazy, or laugh at my mad scientific theories."

Why I like Volunteering for HUG

My initial response to this was 'because it makes me feel useful' but on reflection it goes far, far deeper. I had been a member of HUG for 8 years and had not taken an active part other than reading the newsletters and reports and attending 2 meetings. I had reached the bottom of my personal pit and knew things had to change or I would go under. I had been isolated for 10 years, partly due stigma from family, acquaintances and some of the medical profession and their staff, I rarely went out, I continued to use destructive coping mechanisms and I had no confidence or self-esteem. I remembered that HUG had produced a resource pack on Borderline Personality Disorder and had always been curious as to its contents as that was 'my latest' diagnoses. I phoned the office and was invited by Graham to come for a chat. Our Anti-Stigma campaign and educating the public on mental health awareness was uppermost in my mind as I had suffered too much and too long from the results of stigma and ignorance. Their enthusiastic welcome and non-judgmental attitude validated what I thought and had said. I was hooked!

I attended the next Friday Forum and by the following week I was making the coffee and helping with the washing up as well as being involved in putting my voice and opinions forward towards interesting and important issues. It really felt good. I felt useful and more importantly **appreciated** for the first time in years. A formal volunteers day was just being set up and I went along for the first one. As soon as I walked into that Office I knew what had to be done and knew that I could do it! This was my forte! I loved organising and tidying and cleaning. Bring it on!!!

I then insidiously got involved with other volunteering tasks. The coffee machine was the first machine I 'mastered' but after 6 months I realised I was using the photocopier, the franking machine, the printer and so the list went on and I hated machines didn't I? However I was also using the computer. I had gone to TAG a decade ago and had done the courses they caringly provide but I hadn't used the skills I learned there. Now I was e-mailing right, left and centre and producing spreadsheets, making a bibliography of our books so we could operate a library and learning from Keir and Heidi the tricks of the trade. They are so patient. I felt cosseted, useful and **appreciated** and at times really quite proud of myself. Could it be that my confidence and self-esteem were returning? Mailing day is the day we send out the newsletters and reports and it's a big and important task – however else would you get these publications? There is a great camaraderie and team spirit often giving a high five when we have worked something out together! I have made loads of 'real' friends through becoming a volunteer something I seldom had before.

I could wax lyrical about volunteering for HUG till the proverbial cows come home. I extol its virtues- the return of confidence, self-esteem, of feeling useful, of being genuinely appreciated, of being treated with respect, of learning new skills, of making new friends and acquaintances, of being included and of being given HOPE. Even if you are geographically estranged from Inverness there are things you can do to help HUG and help yourself. For more on what you can do to help, e-mail us at hugvolunteer@hccf.org.uk and watch this space. Cheers HUG!

Judith ☺ X

Budget Cuts in Highlands

As many of you will now be aware Highland Council needs to make savings of £56 million in the next few years. NHS Highland and Northern Constabulary are also making cuts the extent of which we are still unaware.

Since becoming aware of the possible scale of savings that key agencies need to make we have been taking action on your behalf:

- We have written to all the mental health teams and key people in NHS Highland and the Council to ask just what savings are being made and what savings are likely to be made in the future. We have had a very limited response to these letters
- We have acted on our members behalf where we are aware of savings that have already started to be made.
- We have contacted VOX our National User Voice to ask what action they are taking. We will follow this up with a more formal request for support from them to local users across Scotland and hopefully they will realise how important these issues are to people with a mental health problem.
- We have discussed with policy officers in Highland Council our need to discuss the current circumstances and they have committed to attempting to set up a meeting between us and key agencies to discuss the issues.
- We have helped Highland Council recruit more people with mental health problems to their citizens panel which is one forum at which savings will be discussed.
- We have met with you to discuss what you would like us to do.

The overwhelming message from you our members (we met with 103 of you) is that we should do everything we can to resist any savings that are to be made in mental health services. You thought there were too few services as it is already and that the need for help for people with mental health problems would only rise as the effects of the world financial crisis are really felt in our local communities.

Some of you were however disheartened and felt that there was little point in doing anything; believing that we would have minimal influence and that mental health was an easy area for people to target.

Most of you said we should engage with officials from key agencies in Highland. You also said that when we heard of services that are being reduced that we should encourage those services to consult the people who will be affected and that where we can we should gather evidence of the services value and communicate this to officials, politicians and the media.

We discussed the best way that agencies could make savings and you said that if there is unnecessary management it should go, that services that duplicated each other should go, that services that are essential should be protected. Some of you thought a little bit should be cut from everything across the board and others felt that it might be better to get rid of those services that are less helpful in their entirety.

We discussed how savings could be made fairly and equitably. For example we didn't want our need for mental health services to be protected to mean that older peoples needs for their services was seen as less important. We didn't know how this problem could be solved and worried that people with the loudest voice might be the most listened to. We didn't think this was fair but decided we couldn't influence this and could do our best by trying to represent your views as faithfully as we could.

We need the help of you, our members, in this. At the moment we don't think that there have been major cuts and that in the main there is just a delay in filling and advertising posts as they become vacant rather than any definite decrease in service. However we don't know for sure and are having trouble finding out. If you become aware of any major changes do let us know, if you want gather evidence of the value of services or get involved in these issues do let us know.

How times have changed

by Margaret Macdonald

I have been a continuous self harmer in the past but have been free of it for two years. In the last 6 months I have had two relapses; one causing a heart attack after an overdose.

I cannot say what contributed to these relapses, it was all a state of mind. On each and every occasion hospital was not given me as an option; in fact it was denied me, even though I begged them for it. The alternative treatment offered to me was a set amount of weeks at Braeside on a daily basis for a set amount of hours. I cannot fault it, I was given time, I was listened to. But I did hear my psychiatrist say to a fellow worker as I ask why I can't go into hospital? The word "dependency" and that I liked being hospitalised; almost as if it was a part of my addiction and that I manipulated with self harm to get there.

How times have changed! The new psychiatry seems to be different from the old psychiatry. I ask myself; "Which was better? the old way or the new way?"

The old way was more therapeutic; a more rapid response, you did get a place of safety in hospital. You were in for however long it needed and you got better, plus you got company, plus you were safe. You had 24 hour care and you got better and recovered. There was a warmth and a comfort and a safety.

The new psychiatry re diagnosed me as borderline personality disorder. I've heard it said that I liked hospital too much but what is wrong with liking the hospital? Nowadays you are given the day hospital 7 days a week if you want it, with very good therapy. But it is over a set amount of weeks and then you are discharged. Granted I did get

better but I had to go through all the reality of my relapse mostly on my own in the flat.

When I present myself with my arms dripping with blood they dismiss it as attention seeking to get in to hospital, this word dependency!

On discharge I had a support network put in place so that I will not have a revolving door to hospital or Braeside. There is still an element of support but maybe it would all have been quicker sorted with a few days in hospital. It might take a few nights rather than all the weeks with Braeside and then support in the community to re motivate me, re evaluate whether self harm works for me any more. Could it get worse? Knowing that I can never have hospital as I used to know it.

In times of hysteria I have self harmed and perhaps drunk alcohol and presented myself on my flat landing as needing help. Fortunately I live in a good area where people have been kind and have sat with me, taking up the hours with me, but they have left worried whether I was safe on my own.

I have often campaigned for the right to have safe house; a place with 24 hour care; which for some could have been Beechwood. My friend ended up in the cells recently; she could have gone to Beechwood or a mental health place of safety.

Granted A & E took me seriously when I had a heart attack after my overdose. They kept me in for 24 hours and did lots of tests. I got discharged from the ward to the community via Braeside. I was so unwell and mentally unstable, I had thoughts of hanging myself and a morbid obsession for death. I was in danger in my flat and wasn't allowed in hospital; a safehouse could have been a solution.

When Do I Get My Shoelaces Back?



.....A Diary of a Psychotic Breakdown
ISBN 978-054809232

'Sometimes I want to kill myself so much that the air grows thick with the urgency of it all.'

In Spring 2008 Suzy Johnston, who suffers from bipolar disorder along with its psychotic symptoms, fell ill with viral hepatitis A. Immediately she had to come off all her

psychiatric medications and experienced her worst ever episode of severe mental illness, resulting in her recovering in a psychiatric ward for seven months. This is the actual diary she kept during those fraught and dangerous times. This is a raw, immediate and highly literate account of psychosis, written 'in real time'. Suicidal impulses, paranoia, hallucinations and delusions are described in acerbic and uncompromising language. The account is a must-read for both mental health practitioners and anyone wanting a first hand impression of mental illness. No other account captures so vividly the unrelenting pain and pressure of in-patient recovery.

Suzy Johnston is also author of *The Naked Bird Watcher* & *The Snow Globe Journals* – accounts on living with and managing recovery from mental illness.

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See Me Photography Competition

See me photography competition now open, with the theme of "support" . Keith walker at Highland Council is the contact this year, and details are on the see me website. There will be a creative writing competition announced later in the year. See me are hoping to arrange a regional visit to Highland in September.

New Craigs Patients Council – if anyone is interested in helping re start the council please contact the management team office at New Craigs. Work is not yet complete on the update of the **Psychiatric Emergency Plan**. I had a lovely four weeks on a boat in the Aegean – dolphins; a fantastic lightening storm off Rhodes; interesting people and good food and company. What more could anyone ask!! Except the wind was always in the wrong direction!

Creative Writing Course at Moniack Mhor

A group of HUG members have just returned from another brilliant weekend a. It was a full house, with 13 of us.

The Arvon Foundation runs creative writing courses, taught by professional authors, at four beautifully situated centres - the others being in Yorkshire, Shropshire and Devon. At Moniack Mhor we were very fortunate to have the well-established authors Laura Hird and Kevin MacNeil as tutors. Both these tutors are based in Edinburgh, Kevin having come originally from Stornoway. Laura writes novels and short stories, while Kevin writes novels, poetry and plays. Both tutors are not only expert writers but highly encouraging and inspiring to their eager students.

As we all sat round the long wooden table, some anxieties bubbled up - 'can't think of anything', 'don't understand the question', 'can't remember my childhood' - but, after some patient reassurance from the tutors, we settled into our writing stride - with some quite amazing results. This was a time of no irritation (well, almost none!) and no competition. Total mutual support was the name of the game.

In addition to the group exercises, we were given one-to-one tutorials which were much appreciated. There was also an opportunity to walk in the spectacular scenery above Loch Ness, and even to swim in a nearby small loch/swamp.

Some of us discreetly kept away from the kitchen while the Saturday dinner was being prepared by a little band of HUG members, happy to believe that the smell of burning and thick black smoke were nothing to worry about. Thanks to those brave volunteers we ended up with a feast of a dinner, just like the one cooked for us the night before. Special thanks belong to our hero, Judith.

Saturday evening was ceilidh time. Such was the spirit of camaraderie that no-one was too shy to contribute something - a song, reading, tune, or even a dance. An assortment of cases opened up and out came guitar, ukulele, flute, whistle, fiddle, bodhran and ocarina.

We were over the moon to have Graham back with us, unobtrusively keeping a brotherly eye on us to make sure everyone was well and happy. We were grateful to everyone involved in making the weekend such a success. Cynthia Rogerson was a lovely welcoming hostess as usual. For Cynthia, our local tutor at the monthly meetings, the provision of these courses for HUG has been a years-long 'dream come true'.

When the time came to leave on Sunday, a number of threats to hide in the cupboards were whispered. Unfortunately the plan didn't work - we had been counted! All we could do was to look forward to next time, and meanwhile to keep on writing.

Elizabeth Smith

Dealing with Employment Support Allowance (ESA)

I am a welfare rights Officer at Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB). That means I specialise mostly in helping people sort out problems with their benefits. A very large part of my work over the past year has been taking people through appeals of the decision that they are well enough to work. Or to use the jargon, they have "been found not to have limited capability for work" and so are no longer entitled to ESA.

A large proportion of my clients who have had to appeal have anxiety and depression. There has been much media comment about ESA and expressing deep concern about the pressure and distress people experience when they are unfairly found well enough to work. You can appeal any decision about benefits that you think is wrong. There has been a very high success rate at appeal for ESA and many people are now getting the increased weekly payment they should have had without going through the stress of an appeal.

Several reports about ESA have recently been released, including one by Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), highlighting and illustrating with case histories, the extent of the problem. CAS is the agency that, in addition to many other things, gathers information about issues arising at all of Scotland's CABs. Their name for the ESA report, I think confirms the general opinion about how people on ESA are being treated. The report is called 'Unfit for Purpose'. It is hoped that such high profile and wide spread comment from so many agencies will cause change to how ESA decisions are made and how people are affected.

Any one who believes they are not well enough to work and who has a decision that says they are able to work should feel encouraged and seek help to appeal or get a benefits check. Details of where your local CAB is can be found in the yellow pages or at www.cas.org.uk.

You must appeal within one month of the date on your letter telling you about the decision. You must explain why you think the decision is wrong. Advice agencies can help you do this. If it is more than one month since the decision has been made you should speak to an advice agency to find out what you can do. You may be able to appeal late or go back on ESA.

The Community Care Plan

This is the plan which will play a large part in deciding how mental health services and other community care services will develop over the coming years

We discussed the plan in our last round of branch meetings and these views will be passed on to the council and health board.

We had lots to say but one of the overwhelming messages we heard was that the aspirations of the plan are so far from reality that we don't believe it is at all likely to happen.

Time and time again we heard that you don't feel safe in your communities and that stigma and discrimination is such a burden that some of you doubt it will ever end. We talked of the intense loneliness many people felt and about the lack of things for us to do. We talked of the value of drop in centres and self help and being able to contribute and wondered whether officials would make sure that the value that these sorts of things have to many of us is accepted and recorded.

We got fed up when we talked about living in our own home because we know that many of us can get into situations where it would be dangerous to us to live at home and that in those situations hospital safe houses and various sorts of shared accommodation are just what we need.

We did not like targets as we distrusted the motivation for setting targets. Too many of us saw the wish to reduce the prescribing of antidepressants or hospital admissions as a measure designed to reduce costs rather than a response to a changing pattern of need. A lot of us looked at the proposals to reduce and prevent crisis and said that most of the examples had nothing to do with the needs of people with mental health problems and although we want to have choice and be in control of our lives we also need people to accept that there are times when we want to hand responsibility over to people for a time and to be supported and looked after until we regain the capacity to look after ourselves.

Despite this some of us said that if the document could deliver on what it was promising us then life would be greatly improved but unfortunately a large number of us doubted in that likelihood.

Earlier in the year we discussed the main things that we wanted to see acted on irrespective of this plan. This will come out in a future report but for the meantime the following are the main areas for improvement and change that we identified. Some of them fit with the plan and others don't but hopefully those views will be incorporated too.

KEY ACTION AREAS:

STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION
– We need continued national and local investment to stop the discrimination we face and to challenge the stigma of mental illness.

CRISIS AND OUT OF HOURS SERVICES – We need to be sure that we can get help when we need it and that, if we are in crisis, we have an appropriate safe place to be cared for until we can face the world again.

POVERTY AND BENEFITS – We need a review of current welfare reform legislation reform which is having and will have a severe negative effect on people with a mental illness.

EMPLOYMENT – We need to challenge discrimination in the workplace, make the workplace a mentally healthy place to be in and acknowledge the value of unpaid work.

SAFEHOUSES – We need to see the establishment of a network of ‘safehouses’ across Highland area.

SERVICES – We want to be sure of the security of our hospital services and to see increased investment in our community services.

THE RECESSION – We need to recognise that the fall out from the recent recession will lead to increased mental ill health and that attempts to reduce mental health expenditure would be counter productive.

Transport and Mental Health

This was the last report we sent out. It was quoted in the Scottish Parliament but we have had little other reaction to it until recently when it had some more publicity.

If anyone is interested in this subject but hasn't seen the report it is on our website hug.uk.net or we can send you a copy. If any of you want to follow up any of its recommendations then do contact us at the office.

Another Planet

by Keith Murdoch

We are all puppets of another planet,
according to some theories,
having come from one millions of years ago. Beings exist,
which we can't see, who guide and control us.
Who's to say if it's true or false?
Or if there is a god? Can't be proven
either way. Or can it?

First Memory by Elkie

The warm grains of sand were stroking my bare feet, as I hurried after my two older sisters. I heard them giggling suspiciously, feeling left out as so often. The sharp blades of the sea grass, lining the path on either side, viciously lunged at my bare skin. To a child, age three or four, it seemed like a jungle. The air was still; no cries of seagulls, nor the hissing of the waves rolling ashore. Not a breath of wind to stir the rushes. Only the whispering and giggling of my sisters ahead, a sound more painful than the scratches inflicted by the sea grass.

Round the bend and the sand was covered by a wooden walkway. The jungle grew denser around us, as we descended into a hollow filled with brackish water. It smelled of death – dead plants, dead leaves, dead sea creatures, all rotting together in the swamp. Our footsteps sounded like drum beats on the wooden planks. Then my sisters slowed down and stopped. They were still whispering and giggling, while carefully turning to me. I sensed fear welling up in my chest. This place smelled of death. The deadly silence made my heart beat louder. Death and decay stared at me from every side. I could taste the bitter vile of death. There was no escape. Two against one. It would only take a minute before my body hit the brackish water and the rushes closed their grip on my legs. Only a minute...

Before they could pounce on me, I had turned and fled. Once more, my feet pounded against the wooden planks, then silently raced through the soft, warm sand. I no longer felt the pain from the sharp blades of the sea grass; no longer noticed the silence only punctuated by my frantic breath. I ran, as I had run many times before. I ran for my life.

ON THE BRINK

BY Toni Gordon

Inside as I start to cry
I see the knife lying by,
the urge to use it was so strong,
I put it back where it belonged.

Now years after it makes me think
what I'd missed when on the brink,
there were people who understood
when I thought they'd poisoned my food,
always remember you're not alone
there is help on the end of a phone.

Every month I hear from H.U.G.
and it makes me feel so snug,
the talent that the users show
fills me with pride that grows and grows.