

*The Schizophrenia Fellowship of
Queensland Inc*

2005 – 2006
ANNUAL REPORT

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The Schizophrenia Fellowship of Queensland Inc

EXECUTIVE BOARD

President	Gavin Bird
Vice-President	Meta Ransome
Treasurer	David Poon
Secretary	Ken Meissner
Members	Michael Artlett John Hunting Judy Leary Gayle Mann Nea Ovens Peter Vidgen

BRANCHES & COMMITTEES

Gold Coast Branch
- Federation Clubhouse
- Harmony Support Service
- Tekapo Accommodation Service
- Gold Coast Family Network
North Side Branch
South Side Branch
Sunshine Coast Branch
Darling Downs & South Western Region Branch
Research (The Sunflower Foundation)
Respite Getaways Committee
Newsletter Editorial Committee

The Schizophrenia Fellowship of Queensland Inc

OBJECTS

The Fellowship is established to benefit those with schizophrenia and other serious mental illness and those who care for them, through the promotion, support and raising of funds for the following objects:-

- a) Spread a greater understanding of the special problems arising;
- b) Offer support, education and social opportunity;
- c) Actively promote the improvement of community care facilities of all kinds, including accommodation;
- d) Encourage research into causes and treatment;
- e) Promote their welfare through co-ordination of the efforts of volunteers and professionals;
- f) Seek the co-operation of employers willing to provide a chance of employment;
- g) Safeguard their civil and legal rights;
- h) Advocate for their needs and rights to all levels of Government and in the community;
- i) Facilitate the achievement of comprehensive and accessible systems of ongoing care; and
- j) Encourage, support and implement activities aimed at rehabilitation.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The future of the Schizophrenia Fellowship of Queensland continues to hold all the hopes and visions of the founders of our organisation.

Your Board has laboured diligently and strategically throughout the year to secure our future. We remain committed to grass roots participation in our organisation through the nurturing of branch networks. This year we admitted Sunshine Coast Branch. The membership there has brought vigour and determination to our endeavours. Nevertheless, all the vigour and determination in the world will eventually dissipate if we can't offer self-sustaining strategies to our fledgling branches.

It is with this in mind that we have placed such importance on our *Well Ways* program. *Well Ways* is a nationally accredited training program for carers that empowers participants with coping strategies and knowledge and a social network to support their psychiatrically disabled loved ones. Research clearly demonstrates the superiority of this peer-to-peer program over traditional family education programs undertaken by professionals. We have met with the new Director of Mental Health, Dr Aaron Groves, to explore how *Well Ways* can become a standard feature of support in Queensland, and how we can free up scarce professional resources in the process. We are encouraged by his response and now await formal reply.

Our search for more appropriate premises has been a roller-coaster ride for almost a decade. With the help of various State Ministers including Judy Spence and Stephen Robertson, we have liaised with Brisbane City Council to acquire leasehold rights to a suitable site. The former Clubhouse of the Victoria Park Golf Course is presently abandoned and forlorn. Yet the location, public presentation and capacity of the heritage-listed building are superb. We have been assisted in our discernment of the building by a wonderful team of experts drawn together by Shane Thompson from Bligh Voller Neild Architects. On behalf of everyone who has dreamed of this outcome I want to thank Shane and his team for their generosity, and invite our members and the community to get behind this project in the coming twelve months.

Your Board now has in place superior and balanced human resources to drive our vision at a time of new opportunity in mental health. Our

recently appointed General Manager Gaye Keir complements the capacities of our CEO Wayne Clark and our Services Co-ordinator Deb Haley. Please give your encouragement to them as they lead our willing band of workers.

In these past couple of years, the prevailing culture of bureaucracy in Queensland has been subjected to public scrutiny.

Our submissions to the various inquiries have given detailed evidence of suppression and obfuscation. Our major recommendations with respect to psychiatric disease and disability have been these : -

- ⇒ That capacity funding for volunteer organisations be restored immediately in the interests of preserving their integrity.
- ⇒ That the current practice of demanding conformity with government yardsticks under the guise of accountability be exposed as the control mechanism that it has become.
- ⇒ That the morally repugnant survival practice of siphoning service funding that has been forced on many community organisations be exposed.
- ⇒ That the capacity of Disability Services Queensland to administer psychiatric disability should be reviewed, and that the critical, continuing and fluctuating interface between Health and DSQ should be reconstructed.

Notwithstanding, we suffer from the prevailing indifferent attitudes of Governments of all persuasions to the volunteer sector, as distinct from the quasi-government sector.

Meanwhile our Camp and Recreation Program continues to attract national attention because of its success. Schizophrenia Awareness Week remains the focus for the artistic endeavours of more than three hundred of our members from the Tweed to Bundaberg. Our research initiatives break new ground. Our social club remains a saviour for scores of individuals who are not yet ready to benefit from the structure of *Stepping Stone*.

We have much to be thankful for, not the least of which is the diligence of Board members. This year three of our Board members bore the

dual role of Branch President and Board member. The dedication of Peter Vidgen and Gayle Mann and Michael Artlett has brought a new dimension to our deliberations, and for this I thank them. Special thanks are offered to Ken Meissner for his selfless commitment. He assumes the Presidency with the best wishes of us all. Thank you also to Meta Ransome for unstinting support in recent years.

Tonight we honour and acknowledge two of our pioneers by conferring Life Membership on Margaret Blackwood and Paul Heffernan. We congratulate them on their past contributions and thank them on behalf of future members.

Finally, thank you for the honour of leading the Fellowship in recent times. Fellowship is a rich concept. In the stigmatised field of mental health it confers double blessings and I count each one of those blessings with gratitude.

Sincerely,

Gavin J. Bird AM
PRESIDENT

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

The Fellowship's central office at 95 Arthur Street Fortitude Valley continues to be the focal point for membership services. It is also the administrative home of the incorporated association.

Major fundraising activities such as the Schizophrenia Awareness Week Art Show and the RNA Cloak Room at the Ekka are organised either by or through the central office. Both these events rely for their success on dedicated volunteers and Fellowship staff.

Arthur Street is also the home of the Fellowship's library and the drop-in centre for Fellowship members living with a mental illness. The library is available for non-borrowing use by all Fellowship members. Annette Edwards generously volunteers her time to keep the library (and other sundry paper work!) in order. The drop-in centre (aka 'the social club') continues to provide safe respite from the stresses of everyday life and is successfully convened by volunteer members who are themselves living with a mental illness.

Arthur Street is the meeting place for the Executive Board, the camp and recreation committee, and the newsletter editorial committee. It is also a place where Fellowship members can drop in, say 'hello', peruse the latest information about mental health, make themselves a cup of tea, smell the one rose that is generally flowering on the rose bush, and continue on their way.

The central office is open from 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday and is staffed by part-time Executive Officer Wayne Clarke, full-time General Manager Gaye Keir, full-time Services Co-ordinator Debbi Haley, part-time Accounts/IT/Property Officer Joseph Fung and part-time Receptionist/Information Officer Julie Richardson.

One of the key responsibilities of the central office is to support branch activities and initiatives. The Fellowship recognises that consumers and carers come together at branch level and represent the grass roots of our organisation. So the needs of branches must always be uppermost in our minds and our priorities.

The incorporated association continues to receive funding from Queensland Health and Disability Services Queensland. Qld Health provides the central office with in excess of \$230,000 a year to provide a range of services related to mental illness. These services include information provision, referrals, education, health promotion, support groups, and advocacy. Disability Services Queensland funds the Fellowship to provide respite getaways.

Providing information and referrals constitute a significant part of what happens at Arthur Street on a day-to-day basis. Information flows in a myriad of ways – through the bi-monthly newsletter, the web site, brochures, fact sheets, face-to-face conversations, telephone calls and e-mail correspondence.

The newsletter is compiled six times a year by the newsletter editorial committee – dedicated and generous volunteers Dawn Joyce, Annette Edwards and Lynette Sidney working in collaboration with the Fellowship's Services Co-ordinator Debbi Haley. The newsletter aims to provide members with up-to-date information about research into mental illness as well as current happenings in the mental health sector and personal interest stories.

The Fellowship web site (www.sfq.org.au) has been lying dormant in recent times, but it's about to undergo a growth spurt with Fellowship staff being trained in the use of the website design program

Dreamweaver. It will now be easier to update information and keep the website informative, user-friendly and current. The web site also provides access to fact sheets related to mental health issues.

Brochures and fact sheets continue to be distributed to individuals with a mental illness, family members, carers, community organisations, other not-for-profit organisations and members of the wider community. Providing information is one of our key responsibilities under our funding agreement with Queensland Health and the Fellowship delivers this service on a daily basis.

As part of the information service, Fellowship staff refer callers to other organisations that can more appropriately meet the caller's needs. The Fellowship has developed a comprehensive resource directory and uses this directory regularly to tailor advice to callers depending on the caller's specific needs and situation.

The Fellowship is engaged in advocacy at the systemic level. This advocacy occurs whenever and wherever the opportunity arises – filling the role of guest speaker for other organisations, writing letters to the editor of the mainstream press (not necessarily published!), meeting with departmental representatives of funding bodies in relation to policies and procedures that impact on people living with a mental illness, and organising public events such as the addresses by Senator Lyn Allison and Major Sam Cochran during Schizophrenia Awareness Week in May 2006. These 'public exposure' opportunities not only provide advocacy on behalf of people living with mental illness but also achieve the objective of educating the wider community about mental health issues. The Fellowship is also a member of the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) and participates on a national level in terms of mental illness services, information, education and advocacy.

One aspect of the education component of MIFA has been the introduction of the *Well Ways* program in Queensland. This program was developed by the Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria to increase the capacity of families, carers and friends to care effectively for themselves, other family members and their relative living with mental illness. It is now offered nationally with The Schizophrenia Fellowship of Queensland entering into agreements to offer the program in Queensland. The program has been offered in Caloundra and Maroochydore during the year and it is expected that further programs will be offered in Ipswich, Gold Coast and Brisbane areas in the near future. The long-term objective is to develop a number of trained

SUNSHINE COAST BRANCH

An inaugural meeting held on 22 September 2005 at Currimundi was the starting point of the Sunshine Coast Branch. There was great support from the community, not only from consumers, carers and family members, but also from non-government organisations, service providers and Queensland Health. Meetings are well attended and our members travel to events hosted by other branches.

In January 2006, a *Well Ways* facilitators' course was held on the Sunshine Coast and attracted people from Toowoomba, Brisbane, Gold Coast as well as the local area. This has enabled *Well Ways* courses to be conducted at Maroochydore and Caloundra this year.

Our Vision:

- ⇒ To achieve with a professional, friendly and positive attitude
- ⇒ To extend the services with innovative projects
- ⇒ To never forget to reach out for help
- ⇒ To be able to keep your sense of humour and give out a smile

We would encourage the community of the Sunshine Coast to volunteer and/or become members to help raise funds for crisis accommodation so desperately needed on the Sunshine Coast.

Sunshine Coast Branch

facilitators who can continue to offer programs throughout Queensland.

The outcome for many people involved in the program has been an increase in information about mental illness, treatment and support options. It has increased new ideas and furthered skills to learn to cope with the impact of mental illness. In others it has increased confidence in dealing with the challenges created by mental illness and provided an opportunity to share experiences and learn from others' experiences.

The central office continues to be active in applying and tendering for new grant monies. Applications since the 2005 Annual Report include:

- Tender to Queensland Health for the supply of independent living skills and social support for individuals with a moderate to severe mental illness living in the community (awaiting outcome of tender process).
- Successful application to Queensland Health for funds to provide basic IT infrastructure for local volunteer-run branches and to upgrade IT infrastructure at Arthur Street.
- Successful application to Disability Services Qld for funds to upgrade furniture and fittings in the drop-in centre at Arthur St.
- Application to the Queensland Department of Communities for funds to further upgrade furniture and fittings in the drop-in centre at Arthur Street (awaiting outcome of application).
- Application to Disability Services Qld for funds for asset acquisition in the 06-07 year (awaiting outcome of application).
- Application to the Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs for computer equipment for use by volunteers at Arthur Street and at the drop-in centre (awaiting outcome of application).
- Application to Australian Ethical Investments for a community grant to install a water-wise garden at Arthur Street as a recreational and skills development project for members living with a mental illness.

In addition to grants received through applications, the Fellowship has also received the following monies from funding bodies:

- Grant of \$50,000 from Disability Services Qld for a six-month project to research options and to make recommendations for housing and support for people living with a mental illness. (This grant was made available to the Fellowship by Disability Services following vigorous lobbying by members of the North Side Branch, in particular Dawn

Joyce. The project is due to commence in October.)

- Grants totalling \$8,900 from Disability Services Qld to assist with the implementation of the Disability Sector Quality System and the Standard Chart of Accounts.
- Grant of \$6,000 from Queensland Health for training and asset acquisition.

In addition to grant monies from funding bodies, the Fellowship also relies on the generous donations received from members to provide its range of services. Without donations, the Fellowship would not have the flexibility it currently has to respond where the need is, rather than be restricted to government-funded projects.

The Fellowship is also very grateful for the assistance of volunteers who give their time and talents in a variety of ways to support the aims of the Fellowship. As with donations from members, volunteers enable us to respond to the needs of our membership. As part of our ongoing search for volunteers, we are currently in the process of formalising an agreement with Suncorp to enable their employees to volunteer their time to assist with Fellowship activities. As a first step in developing this relationship, Suncorp volunteers assisted with the Art Show during Schizophrenia Awareness Week in May.

The Fellowship would also like to express its thanks to Microsoft for its recent donation of software under its Microsoft Australia Community Program. This donation will enable the Fellowship to allocate more resources to IT infrastructure for the volunteer-based local branches.

*Wayne M Clarke PhD CFRE
Executive Officer*

RESEARCH REPORT

The Sunflower Foundation is the engine that drives our research initiatives. It is like a magic pudding. Each time we take out a slice, it replenishes itself. Thank you to those generous donors who contribute. Your trust in us confirms our belief that our members, like us, believe that better understanding is essential if we are to change the reality that we encounter.

relationship through the next twelve months.

*Geoff Brabrook
Chair, Darling Downs & South Western Region Branch*

tremendous job in ensuring all parties have a say about service delivery requirements for consumers and carers. Consumers and carers will have more of a say in the future planning for consumers/loved ones' clinical and social requirements. I look forward to being part of this significant change in direction.

Now from the Darling Downs and South West. We have continued with our informal get together meetings. Agendas for our get togethers start with light refreshments followed by interaction of all present. This can take the form of story telling or jokes followed by information on current events or activities. The get togethers last for approximately one and half hours and are held in the Grand Central Shopping Centre Jacaranda Room (Community Meeting Room) on mainly the second Thursday in the month. Those carers and consumers who attend enjoy the time together and are always very participative. Regular attendances have averaged around 8-9 per month for the year. Next Darling Downs and South Western Region meetings are scheduled for 21 September, 12 October, 9 November and 7 December 2006. All are welcome (contact Geoff on 0407 623 694 or Jeanette 0423 374 892).

Johanna (my wife) has continued to represent the Fellowship on the Toowoomba District Mental Health Participation Committee, providing updates on the Fellowship activities past and future.

During the year we presented a display in the Toowoomba City Council Library for Schizophrenia Awareness Week and we still work closely with our local partners ARAFMI and Carers Queensland. The Fellowship has again been part of the successful Break Free Concert, donating \$1,000 to the event which attracts over 350 people.

We are presently organising a three day camp in October in conjunction with Brisbane, with participants attending from Charleville and Toowoomba. During my recent working trip to Charleville I met with the Charleville Mental Health Team and was given a very warm welcome. Thank you to Russell for organising time on short notice and to Ian and his team.

To those who have participated with us over the last twelve months — thank you. I look forward to our continued

It is a privilege to act as custodians of the funds contributed by our members. We are proud to confirm that one hundred cents out of every dollar that the Foundation receives is passed directly to researchers. We regard it as our privilege to provide the where-with-all to direct those seed funds towards selected initiatives that do not meet the criteria for established government grants.

Dr & Mrs F Zaccari continue their generous award to support Amanda Jones for a study entitled "Autoimmunity in Schizophrenia". This prestigious award extends research into immune abnormalities in people with schizophrenia including the presence of antibodies directed against neurotransmitter receptors.

Besides supporting initiatives, we also try to keep our members abreast of emerging theories in research. We are pleased to report that the work by Dr McGrath on Vitamin D deficiency continues to gain plausibility through controlled animal studies.

The Fellowship is committed to evidence-based practice to make best use of scarce resources. Our *Well Ways* program demonstrates the clear advantages of peer-to-peer psychosocial education, and the benefits it can bring in partnership with government services. Several health districts are talking with us about the delivery of the program.

Nevertheless, research evidence can be suppressed if it is not publicly promoted. You will recall that last year we released a study that analysed the equity and accountability of Disability Services Queensland funding. The study found that on a comparative basis, some disability groups receive up to 100 times the funding of other groups with comparable needs. Moreover, it confirmed that of all the disability groups, the psychiatrically disabled are the most neglected.

I am sorry to report that the only response from DSQ to this powerful evidence has been denial. Research is a tortuous path – it requires not only scholarship and application, but also effective dissemination. And sometimes, it seems, it requires political agitation. We condemn the "flat-earthers" who are too complacent to lift their game in the face of this compelling evidence and we hope that next year we can report that reality has been acknowledged.

The Sunflower Foundation

THE SOCIAL CLUB

It has been a successful year for the Social Club and it has filled that social need for friendship and fellowship for its members. There is always someone in the Club to have a conversation with and all the members are accepting of people with a mental illness.

The Club (also known as the drop-in centre) has operated as usual where people arrive, have a free cup of coffee, tea or cordial, and sit down and relax to some easy listening music and some companionship. Then if they want they can play pool or read the paper or watch TV. That is mainly what we do at the Fellowship — just talk, relax and have something to eat or drink. The Club is a drop-in centre for mentally ill people and they don't want much organised activity and mainly want to relax and socialise.

One problem we have is that there are very few women who come to the Club — sometimes there are 16 men and no women. This is just another example of stigma where men with schizophrenia miss out socially.

During the year we had a few barbeques and we would like to have more during the summer months. There was a pool competition and a few other activities like bowling and Sizzlers.

The social club has stayed open Monday to Saturday throughout the year even on public holidays and this is thanks to the convenors who volunteer even at unpopular time periods. The convenors, who are paid a small travel allowance, volunteer their services and we have had convenors all through the year. The convenors, all members with a mental illness, have been doing well to supervise the operation of the Club with a little assistance from the staff. We have had a little bad behaviour in the Club but no major incidents. Members do get sick from time to time and tolerance is shown to them.

We are currently converting the back laundry area into a TV room. There will be a smokers' area outside that is paved and covered by a pergola.

The Social Club has a strong core membership with some people coming each week for many years and giving great benefit to them. So long as the Club structure stays unchanged the Club will continue to be popular.

Kavanagh. Each speaker imparted knowledge about some aspect of research or treatment of schizophrenia. This made the evening very enjoyable.

In May we held a social barbeque at a park in Mansfield and hope to continue with some social events in the future. We have met with the Rev Ken Suddick from the Church of England in Mt Gravatt to look at forming a partnership to provide members on the south side with some services. As well, Kyabra, a community centre in Runcorn, has extended an offering of services if they meet our needs. At this stage of our development as a branch, we are seeking any assistance that is available.

Our aim for the next year is to start distributing packages of essential items for consumers. This can only be commenced when we find suitable permanent premises, which could be available shortly.

I would like to thank fellow members of the committee and others who have attended our meetings and given support and friendship in various ways.

*Gayle Mann
President, South Side Branch*

DARLING DOWNS & SOUTH WESTERN REGION BRANCH

We are well into 2006 and all of us involved in mental health are seeing major shifts in the proposed service delivery by Queensland Health and the non-government sector.

We in Toowoomba are doing our part to help with the shift. In May I was delighted to be appointed to the Queensland Health Mental Health Network as one of two carer representatives for the state. Michael Burge, the Qld Health Consumer Advocate for this region, was also appointed to be the Consumer Representative. Both Mick and I were invited to participate in a mini-summit with the Minister for Health to define and develop a new service delivery model for consumers and carers. Dr Aaron Groves, Director of Mental Health, and his team have done a

the SFQ); and Gaye Keir, the recently appointed SFQ general manager.

As initiated by Herlina Handoko, a number of branch members visited Bardon Rotary. Herlina Handoko, Dawn Joyce and later the Schizophrenia Fellowship executive officer Wayne Clarke and I attended meetings of the Bardon Rotary Club to outline the objectives of our branch and the branch's current projects. The club recognised our need by kindly donating \$1,000.

The branch's social events this year included a Christmas party at Dawn Joyce's place at St Lucia, and a picnic.

It would be a nice luxury for carers and those with mental illness not to be weighed down with the significant stigma that still exists in the community. It would be a luxury not to have to lobby for basic human rights that are still being denied to our members; and to obtain the basic services from State and Federal Governments that other groups expect and already receive without question. We would be able to concentrate our efforts on fellowship and support of each other and not have to worry what will happen to our loved ones when we pass on.

*Michael Artlett
President, North Side Branch*

SOUTH SIDE BRANCH

The South Side Branch was formed in January 2006 with the required elected members of the Management Committee. The meetings for our group are presently held at QE11 Hospital at Coopers Plains on the last Tuesday of the month.

The highlight of the past year were the two dinners that we held to raise awareness of schizophrenia. These dinners gave consumers the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities in the area of catering for the public. A special thank you to all those consumers from Stepping Stone Clubhouse who made the dinners such a success. At the last dinner we had excellent speakers, Prof Brian Mowry, Tricia Nolan and Prof David

*Jonathan Ure
Voluntary Convenor, The Social Club/Drop-in Centre*

SCHIZOPHRENIA AWARENESS WEEK

Throughout Schizophrenia Awareness Week, promotional posters for various events and brochures on mental illness were displayed in council libraries throughout Brisbane.

Art Exhibition

This year our annual art exhibition was held at the Riverside Centre due to construction in King George Square. A cocktail party was held on Friday 5 May to open the exhibition, with the Minister for Health, Hon Stephen Robertson MP giving the opening speech. Over 200 guests enjoyed the evening and art sales were brisk.

The extra space and specialised lighting assisted in creating a vibrant, exciting and colourful display of work from approximately 120 artists. Karleen Gwinner from Nundah House tastefully arranged the works by subject matter, enhancing the use of various media and colour to the best advantage.

Although opinion was divided as to which is the preferred venue, the opening night at the Riverside Centre was a great success. Thank you to everyone who assisted and contributed.

Major Sam Cochran

Major Cochran, a 31 year career law enforcement officer with the Memphis Police, spoke about critical intervention in mental illness and the ways that the community, families and law enforcement agencies can systemically improve crisis response and services for people with mental health issues.

Senator Lyn Allison

Senator Allison, Chair of the Democrats-initiated Senate Mental Health Inquiry, addressed members of the Brisbane Institute and the Fellowship. The reports of the inquiry are probably the most comprehensive reviews ever undertaken and have moved mental health onto the national agenda.

Debbi Haley

Services Co-ordinator, Central Office

RNA CLOAKROOM PROJECT

As the show bags become larger, heavier, and more complicated, storing them calls on us to become more creative with the space available. The year the toy guns were popular and they were too tall for under the shelves, we created a hanging rack to accommodate them — quite a scary sight. This year skateboards gave us a challenge. It is wonderfully surprising just how innovative our volunteers can be to overcome these sorts of situations.

As always we have a ton of fun in the midst of the hard work it takes to store and retrieve 600 to 2800 items on any one day. We had a great team of volunteers throughout the 10 days of the Ekka for 2005. Many thanks to all who were involved. Main Roads Dept provided us with 20 or more volunteers which was fantastic. They were all so keen to interact with our members and “learn the ropes” from their experience.

This year my daughter Cheryl shared the daily running of the cloakroom. Her feedback was “hard work, long days, yet very rewarding”. Cheryl says she will come back again next year Thanks heaps, Cheryl.

It never ceases to amaze me just how many striped carry bags our

NORTH SIDE BRANCH

It's hard not to be despondent at the branch level when you consider Australia has one of the lowest expenditures on mental health in the western world – half the expenditure of our closest neighbour New Zealand. Furthermore, Queensland has one of the lowest expenditures on mental health of all the states and territories.

I would prefer not to have opened my report on a negative note; however it is this political imperative that has driven some of the main activities of our North Side Branch since its formation three years ago. We have lobbied state and federal governments to develop long-term housing and support for our members. The biggest hurdle to overcome has been trying to get any support or recognition for our cause from governments for mental health issues, even though it is predicted that by 2020 depression will overtake cancer and heart disease to become the leading cause of illness.

We achieved an important milestone by gaining the opportunity to present two deputations to the Aspley Community Cabinet Meeting in October 2005. The first deputation was on **long-term housing and support**. The second deputation requested **community input for the assessment of the 10-year Mental Health Strategy for Queensland 1996-2006**. Hopefully we will be able to announce some progress from this lobbying in the near future. I would specially like to say thanks to our branch members Ron Graham and John Fox and make mention of the key role of Dawn Joyce. Dawn has continued on from the community cabinet meeting to attend numerous meetings progressing the issues raised with representatives of Disability Services Queensland, Queensland Health and Queensland Housing.

The North Side Branch hosted a series of guest speakers during the year. These were Professor John McGrath (Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research); Tom Meehan (chief researcher with the Project 300 evaluation study, The Park - Centre for Mental Health); Carol Birrell (Gold Coast Branch of

volunteers, their continuing dedication is gratefully acknowledged and sincerely appreciated. I would like to particularly acknowledge Dr Peter Vidgen, Gold Coast President, whose output has been outstanding. I would like to honour the Management Committee's commitment to continue to develop and implement a well resourced, effective and caring community-based mental health service. As always, it is a pleasure to work with them.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to **the Gold Coast employees** past and present for their courage, tenacity and professionalism, friendship and good humour. I commend and acknowledge their individual expertise and idiosyncrasies that constitute the great team they represent.

*Carol Birrell
Area Manager, Gold Coast Branch*

show patrons consume each year. We sold around 2.5 thousand in 2005. I keep thinking that there will come a time when everyone will have one from last year and sales will slow down. So far, this is not the case — which is great for us. The bag sales not only give us a bit of income, they also make handling the show bags more efficient. Many thanks to Shaun for implementing these all those years ago.

Apart from a few minor hiccups which were always sorted, this year's Cloakroom Project was another great success, providing meaningful activity/work experience for our members, social interaction, and a chance to give back to the community. More and more volunteers on a limited income appreciate the personal challenges this project affords them, while providing them with a little extra disposable income for a few luxuries like ...tailor made ciggies, breaky at Maccas, take-away food, strawberry ice creams, pop Idol T-shirts or CD's of their favourite artists, all of which would normally be beyond the budget. Some people tell me how this opportunity impacts on their lives in so many ways, including our keen landscaper, Andrew, who orders the gear he needs for his next project to be delivered on the last day of the show, to give him something to continue keeping busy for months.

My heartfelt thanks to all who were a part of this year's **Ekka Project**, especially the office staff, who do a lot behind the scene. Thanks Deb for all your help and encouragement.

*Judy Leary
Co-ordinator, RNA Cloakroom Project*

RESPIRE GETAWAYS COMMITTEE

Five getaways have been successfully organised by the committee this year. These include:

- ⇒ A low impact getaway to Numinbah Valley, with people having time for some gentle bush walks, a visit to glow worm caves, canoeing and falling in the dam, and a trip to Numinbah Trail Rides for tea and damper.
- ⇒ A four day art weekend, facilitated by Karleen Gwinner, in the Numinbah Valley. Some wonderful artwork was created,

with participants having a wide variety of activities to enjoy, including creating a visual journal of the weekend. There was also time for bush walks and swimming.

- ⇒ Hervey Bay getaway for some of our rural members – this group enjoyed an outing on a glass bottom boat, fishing and water sports, mini golf, ten pin bowling and a visit to Vic Hislop's Shark Museum.
- ⇒ A holiday getaway to the Sunshine Coast, with visits to Australia Zoo, Underwater World, Wappa Falls Astronomical Observatory and games at Top Shots on the way home.

Thank you to all the volunteer staff and committee members who have ensured, through their hard work and commitment, that these breakaways were held. The respite getaways are funded by Disability Services Queensland.

Debbi Haley
Services Co-ordinator, Central Office

GOLD COAST BRANCH

At the end of my second year as President I can reflect with great satisfaction that the Gold Coast Branch has much to be proud of. Each year we seek out additional services and activities for consumers and carers. It will be important that the new committee appreciate and reflect in its decisions, the wants and the needs of the Gold Coast community and the members of the Schizophrenia Fellowship.

A tenet of the Schizophrenia Fellowship is that the organisation provides a means for carers and those with a severe mental illness to meet with others, share their experiences and hopefully profit by this. With the growing range of consumer and carer services and activities, we feel this area is adequately covered, however we are always looking to broaden this.

A constant and recurrent focus of complaint revolves around the access to and rapport with the Gold Coast Mental Health Services. As mentioned earlier in the year, the Gold Coast Branch probably currently has a closer working relationship with the Mental Health Service than at any other time in the history of the Branch. With two

possible services.

Carer and Consumer Activities: In addition to the services, the Gold Coast offers on average more than 18 consumer and/or carer activities every month. These activities are prioritised in accordance with the needs identified by members, clients and the community.

During **Mental Health Week in October 2005** the annual **Vigil of Light** was offered as a Sunday service through the Robina Uniting Church and was well attended by individuals and families remembering those lost to suicide and mental illness. Also as part of Mental Health Week, the Fellowship held our annual **Hare and Tortoise Fun Day** at Broadbeach, which was supported by over 150 people. More than 30 participants came from Brisbane and Redcliffe / Caboolture to join in the fun filled festivities. This event has become a traditional event for Mental Health Week.

Schizophrenia Awareness Week May 2006 was celebrated with the annual **Community Breakfast** at the Royal Pines Resort. Over 140 guests enjoyed a delicious and plentiful breakfast whilst listening to Anne Garton and Dr Frances Dark. Having a mental illness herself, Anne knows the struggles with day-to-day life. Anne however, during the past 2 years, managed to become a National Australian Tri-Athlete and went on to compete in the 2005 World Triathlon Titles held in Hawaii. Anne's story is one of inspiration and determination. Frances gave a presentation on the importance of balancing clinical treatment with psychosocial rehabilitation and the benefits experienced by the person. The breakfast also provided the Fellowship with the opportunity to inform the guests about the Gold Coast services. During Awareness Week information display boards and brochures were displayed in municipal libraries throughout the Gold Coast.

Gold Coast Management Committee members have worked hard to facilitate improvements and provide future direction for the Gold Coast Branch. They are a wonderful group of professional and perceptive individuals who manage to work together in a collaborative and fundamentally unified manner. As

Tekapo accommodates 14 residents supporting them to increase their daily living skills development leading to independence within the community. Tekapo also seeks to provide a sense of community within the community, which encourages the formation of friendships within the service. The ultimate goal is for residents to be able to move into independent accommodation of their choice. During the past year a number of residents who have formed friendships have moved out into shared accommodation together and this is one of the regular progressions when leaving Tekapo. Residents leaving Tekapo also have access to continuing lifestyle support through the Harmony Support Service if there is an identified need and the opportunity to participate in other activities offered by the Branch.

The Federation Clubhouse celebrated its 4th birthday in March this year, and in June celebrated the completion of the downstairs enclosure. The enclosure was made possible through a successful funding application to Jupiter's Casino Community Benefit Fund and will enable more activities to be offered to consumers. The Clubhouse currently has over 265 members and conducts fortnightly tours for potential members. The Clubhouse supports an Employment Program which offers transitional employment with local businesses.

Carer Services provided by the Fellowship have continued during the past year with the generous assistance of our volunteers who are carers. Bill and Jan Reid have continued to facilitate the Elanora Carer Support Group meetings every month as well as organising social evening teas for carers and families. Kay Buchanan and Mercedes La Mond have facilitated the Southport Carer Support Group. Both groups have maintained a steady attendance as well as welcoming a considerable number of new carers. The Management Committee offers their gratitude to Bill, Jan, Kay and Mercedes for their continued dedication and effort. The Fellowship also extends its appreciation to all those carers who have helped out in any capacity throughout the year. The Fellowship has hosted a Carer Workshop in conjunction with ARAFMI Queensland Inc which focused on consumer recovery and was well attended by carers. During the past year the Fellowship has continued to foster and develop partnerships with other carer organisations including the Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre, ARAFMI Queensland Inc and Carers Queensland to provide carers with a diverse range of

members of the Management Committee actually working for the Gold Coast Mental Health Service it enables better communication and while this doesn't resolve all the problems, it certainly does assist in their resolution.

Our liaison with the Gold Coast City Council is better with Councillor Susie Douglas being on our Committee. At the time of going to press, the seat of Gaven, previously won by Susie's husband Dr Alexander Douglas in a by-election, was still undeclared following the recent state election. Our local MP's — Peter Lawlor, Christine Smith and Peta-Kaye Croft — have always strongly supported the Branch and the services we offer.

The Gold Coast Branch is also vigorously endeavouring to communicate and form partnerships with other NGO's in the area and this may become a reality through recently submitted funding applications. There is evidence that this will become a necessity for many future funding projects as government funding bodies are now stipulating partnerships as part of the funding deals. Fortuitously the management under Carol Birrell's lead is very adept at dealing with the other NGO's.

I would like to thank the Management Committee members for their well respected input into the future direction of the Gold Coast and congratulate their dedication to the Schizophrenia Fellowship of Qld Inc Gold Coast Branch.

Finally, the Management Committee acknowledges and commends the work of the Fellowship staff. Without their commitment, consumers and carers would not have the support that they have become accustomed to.

*Dr Peter Vidgen
President, Gold Coast Branch*

Gold Coast Area Manager's Report

Last year I mentioned in my report that growth is an important factor, not for the sake of being in a position to say that we've

grown, but more from the perspective that we are doing more than ever before. During the past year I'm pleased to report that the Gold Coast Branch continues to respond to the needs of the Gold Coast community through more of the services and activities they have highlighted as a priority. The past year has seen us advance its position as a leading non-government mental health service provider on the Gold Coast. This has been possible due to the strong commitment of the Management Committee and staff working hard to improve services for consumers and carers on the coast.

Well, the major highlights of the past 12 months were the announcements of \$5.5m additional mental health funding from Queensland Health, and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committing to reforming the mental health system in Australia.

Government and the community have identified several major gaps, which need to be addressed. These include the need for more primary health and clinical services; however, as we acknowledge, there also needs to be a significant increase in lifestyle support and supported accommodation for people with a mental illness living in the community, and improvements in emergency and crisis services. I remain positive that in 2011, we will look back and be in a position to acknowledge the progression of the mental health sector and recognition of the valued role of the non-government sector as partners in the provision of mental health services.

I am extremely proud to be working with a committee and staff who continue to demonstrate a willingness to embrace diversity and implement new and innovative approaches as a means to an end in operations. We have worked well as a team, having contributed to the services to the very best of our ability and can take pride in what we have achieved over the last year.

The growth I refer to is **Respite for Carers 65 and Over** and an injection of further monies into the **Break-Away Project** (a peer support program for teens between the ages of 13 to 18 yrs who have a parent with mental illness), both of which have been funded by Disability Services Queensland. These projects will provide well needed carer respite for the young and not so young, by taking timeout from their caring role, building supportive friendships, developing coping mechanisms, promoting wellness, and sharing their knowledge,

experiences and strategies with their peers.

The '**Sense of Self**' program continues to be in high demand due to the successful outcomes being achieved. The Sense of Self program encourages and empowers participants to rediscover who they are whilst developing a strong sense of self. One of the greatest challenges for people diagnosed with a mental illness and their carers can be their loss of identity. That is, the person they were prior to the diagnosis. The project aims to rekindle their interests, dreams and aspirations by combining attitude and support in building relationships. People will be able to recapture their dreams and regain a valued social role in the community. It also aims to maximise the quality of life for both consumers and carers and will provide an avenue for consumers to normalise their lives which will benefit the carer also.

The Information and Referral Service has responded to member, client and community needs with the growth in resources provided through our site in Olive Street. During the past year our Intake Officer has received an increasing number of enquiries either in person or by phone and has offered mental health information, referrals to our service, and referrals to other mental health organisations throughout the Gold Coast.

Harmony Support Service currently has twelve support workers who provide lifestyle support to people who are living independently within the community. Harmony has increased the independence and quality of life of many people through individualised support and working collaboratively with clients to establish achievable goals. Joint funding from Queensland Health and Disability Services Queensland enables Harmony to provide this service. Harmony Support Service works closely with Gold Coast Integrated Mental Health Services to enable a holistic approach for client support. Although a number of Harmony clients have successfully exited the service during the past year, many continue to be actively involved in the Fellowship's social and group activities.

Tekapo Accommodation Support Service has provided supported accommodation for people with a mental illness for the past 17 years in partnership with Gold Coast Housing Company.