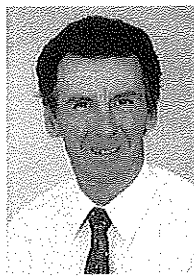


President's Piece



At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Fellowship in September, the Executive Board reported on the year's achievements. The financial report revealed a very healthy position

and the meeting also formally elected a new Executive Board for 2009–2010. Full details of the Executive Board members are reported separately in this newsletter.

By the time this bulletin goes to print, we will have entered into a contract with Bligh Voller Nield (BVN) Architects and Formula Interiors for restoration of Fellowship House. Some preliminary work has actually begun, in particular a thorough clean-up of the legacy of lack of occupancy, official neglect and deliberate vandalism.

We have committed approximately \$1 million to the restoration process and based on the best professional advice, we are confident that the first stage can be brought in very close to that figure. Nothing worthwhile comes cheaply, however we are receiving significant help from our architects, builders and suppliers by way of donated products and cost reduction for trade work, furniture, and building materials.

The first restoration stage involves total refurbishment of the ground floor, leaving the top floor sealed off and ready for the second stage when additional funds become available. We had hoped to occupy the building prior to Christmas, although this now appears rather optimistic and occupancy will more likely occur early in 2010.

During the recent AGM, the final agenda item was general business. This is a useful opportunity for dialogue between the Executive Board and Fellowship members, particularly on matters relevant to the governance and management of the Fellowship. Several members took the opportunity to raise matters of interest, which was certainly welcome. However, I must admit I was surprised that there is still a fundamental misconception regarding publicly funded programs conducted by the Fellowship.

The Fellowship was originally formed as a grassroots organisation to provide support to persons with a mental illness and their families. This support comprised a variety

of practical services to members, including advocacy and education. It also extended to sponsoring schizophrenia research activities. In the years that followed, the Fellowship in Brisbane continued its original member support approach, whilst the Fellowship on the Gold Coast ventured into government-funded programs with considerable success.

More recently, changes to government funding policy made it extremely difficult for the Fellowship to maintain a focus on traditional services and activities for members alone. Fortunately, the timing was right for the Fellowship to become a provider of newly established Commonwealth-funded programs, following recommendations by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to significantly enhance mental health funding nationally. An application was submitted and the Fellowship was awarded a contract to deliver the Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) program on the Gold Coast.

The Fellowship successfully delivered services under this initial program and has since been awarded additional contracts in other locations to provide PHaMs programs administered by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The Fellowship also successfully applied to provide programs offered by the Department of Health and Ageing in other regional centres of Queensland.

The acquisition of major program responsibilities has resulted in significant expansion for the Fellowship. It has enabled the Fellowship to undertake activities that might not otherwise have been considered. However, success as a service provider has not been without a cost – specifically the controversial issue of organisational growth. It must be realised that government provides funding for programs to be conducted when and where it determines. The services must meet an agreed standard and performance is strictly monitored. If we are to meet the agreed standard, adequate resources are essential.

There is often very little room for funded organisations to achieve economies, however efficiently the services are delivered. Services require staff to deliver them; they do not magically run themselves. Additional staff must be recruited and adequate resources such as office accommodation and equipment must be made available. For example, motor vehicles are an essential item for staff

operating in the field and these must be acquired within the program budget.

The Fellowship's financial statements in recent years have naturally reflected a much larger operating budget, accompanied by a substantial increase in expenditure on salaries and associated costs. This is a necessary feature of any growing organisation. The reality is that most of the expenses incurred by not-for-profit organisations relate to salaries and on-costs. It is also a reality that most of the salary and on-costs relate to staff engaged to provide the funded programs and not to a growth in bureaucracy.

The other aspect is a more philosophical one – how does a growing organisation meet its obligations for service delivery both to government and the wider community, while simultaneously maintaining a commitment to its traditional membership base. This is a dilemma which we as an Executive Board face constantly, and there is no easy solution.

The state government provides funding to maintain some of the traditional member services enshrined in our constitution, eg advocacy and education. Whilst these categories have been imaginatively interpreted over the years, it is becoming increasingly difficult. The Fellowship is subjected to very rigorous annual accreditation audits. The Fellowship's performance in achieving government policy objectives is evaluated and the tangible benefits achieved through expenditure of public funds must be demonstrated.

We are able to allocate funds for some purposes but not others, and discretionary expenditure is minimal. Members who request support for specific projects are probably surprised when it cannot be readily provided. It is not that we do not consider the purpose worthwhile, it is simply that the purpose may fall outside the prescribed activities which the government determines are consistent with our approved funding agreements.

I would ask members to be understanding of this important distinction – we can only do what we are funded to do.

Another important issue relates directly to our constituency. We are now funded to deliver services to the population at large and not simply to our membership base. The Fellowship continues to provide a diverse range of activities and events specifically for its members and supporters. However,

continued on page 3

continued from page 2

government-funded services must be made available not just to members, but to the broader community. This will naturally include persons who are participating in a funded program offered by the Fellowship, but who have no connection with other elements of the Fellowship's work in the mental health sector.

Whilst the Fellowship's original charter remains significant, in terms of past achievement and future direction, it unfortunately does not pay the bills.

Personally, I am not comfortable with reliance on government funding and would prefer the Fellowship to be much more financially independent. Dependence makes an organisation vulnerable to political

decisions, makes it reluctant to bite the hand that feeds it, and distorts its organisational priorities. Until our organisation is able to develop a substantial independent funding stream through private donations and other revenue raising activities, we must rely on government as a means of improving the lifestyles of the mentally ill and their families. This is the challenge for the future.

May I take the opportunity to wish all our members and supporters a safe and enjoyable Christmas. I have a feeling that 2010 will prove an eventful and rewarding year, and I look forward to your continuing support of Fellowship initiatives.



*Ken Meissner
President*

How many more sleeps till Christmas?

When we were young our parents nurtured the wonder of the festive season with careful anticipation. Of course they protected the secret of Santa, but that didn't prevent them from building our excitement so that we could delight in the enjoyment of the gifts they had prepared for us.

Fellowship members can anticipate a celebration in 2010 that will be every bit as wondrous as anything we have ever been able to imagine.

Since incorporation, the Fellowship has had much to celebrate. The list of achievements on the cover of this Newsletter is a source of pride to everyone who has contributed to the growth of the Fellowship over the past 25 years. We should be content, and we are. But always, from day one and throughout the ensuing years, our ultimate yearning has been for some definitive understanding of the cause of schizophrenia, and an assurance that its occurrence can be prevented.

That is why, from day one, the Fellowship supported the establishment of The Queensland Centre for Schizophrenia Research at Wolston Park. That is why the Sunflower Foundation was established. That is why the Fellowship has remained intimately involved with what is now the Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research, the

Queensland Brain Institute, and the Queensland Institute for Medical Research.

And of course, we were never alone. Throughout the world similar groups encouraged the investigation of an enigma that continuously revealed clues. These clues tantalised the scientific community whilst disguising the causal factors behind them.

Now, at last, people in London and New York and Tokyo are about to be confounded by a story that is part detective work, part intuition, part serendipity, and part miracle. Local researchers have cracked the Holy Grail.

They are bound, of course, by scientific protocol. Peer review has been undertaken. Scientific papers are being prepared for publication. Despite the excitement, appropriate discipline is being maintained.

Fortunately, we have no such constraints. We worry that it would be unfair to our members to have the news creep up on them after it has been shared with the rest of the world. We want you to fully rejoice that you have helped nurture the revelation that is about to unfold.

So count the sleeps in anticipation. Watch the new space among the list of the Fellowship's achievements. **And when the World awakes in wonder to the story of VITAMIN D, take pride that you own a small but very significant part of that story.**



*Member Contribution
November 2009*