

Editorial

By Peter Bates

One of the limitations of a quarterly magazine is the long time lag between writing and publication. The first article aptly illustrates this reality as Paul Brewer shares a few pages from his Christmas 2002 diary, and you will read this as the blossom is out. Paul's log vividly captures the frantic timetable, the range of skills needed to promote creative opportunities and the wealth of talent that is all around us. Again, we are reminded of one of the central themes of *A Life in the Day* – a determination to replace a preoccupation with problems with a focus on possibilities.

In the last issue, I made a plea for more submissions on ethnicity, so I am delighted to include a report on the *Hidden Skills, Hidden Talents* project, which asked Black and minority ethnic people with mental health problems about their experience in finding and keeping work. Some 300 people contributed to this consultation and the article shows the extent to which discrimination compounds distress for people throughout both the mental health system and the employment sector. The recommendations for changes in attitude and behaviour at the individual and organisational levels deserve careful reading and a determined response.

The theme of employment is continued in Robin Acton's account of his journey through crisis and recovery, and in Peter Relton's paper on his role as a User Development Worker. Some survivors are employed in advocacy organisations, but there is always the risk that defensive professionals treat them as marginal. Other survivors take up 'ordinary' vacancies within statutory agencies, where their voice may not be heard. Peter Relton offers a third way. He is employed as a full team member with the clear objective of developing the team. He is involved in staff recruitment and induction training, discussions about the values of the team and interventions with individuals.

The last issue contained Sherry Clark's survey results about the mental health benefits of volunteering. In this issue, Hazel Schofield describes an initiative by one Volunteer Bureau to provide a placement service for people with mental health issues. People who have used mental health services are seeking opportunities to contribute to their communities as volunteers, and many of the quotes in this article show that they are receiving the benefits summarised in Sherry's paper.

New inter-agency partnership opportunities increase the potential for non-mental health agencies to engage with mental health services and users. As editor, I will be seeking contributions from non-mental health organisations over the next couple of years (as well as those from the mental health sector), and so would encourage readers to attend to the message rather than the style. As it happens, Hazel has written well for a mental health audience, but other contributors may not be quite as sensitive to all the nuances of our world!

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The last *A Life in the Day* included several items on sports projects and this time Diane Crone has reviewed the evidence on the mental health benefits of exercise. While the detailed mechanisms through which physical activity delivers its benefits are only partially understood, there is no doubt exercise helps. Diane's paper offers a welcome and clear summary of a complex field.