



Survivors' history and The Survivors History Group

The Survivors History Group was founded in April 2005 to value and celebrate the contribution that mental health service users/survivors have made and are making to history.

We are working towards a comprehensive history on our website **Mental health and survivors' movements and context** <http://studymore.org.uk/mpu.htm> where we will also preserve historical material in digital form, for easy access. The website will be preserved by the UK Web Archive.

We are also investigating ways of preserving printed and other material archives.

A long history

Survivors of mental distress and people who have been in psychiatric care have been speaking out for a long time. We want to record their voices and their campaigns. The campaigns are as old as the asylums. The voices are older. In 1436, for example, Margery Kempe dictated an account of her spiritual life that also revealed how she had gone "out of her mind" after childbirth and was bound in a storeroom to prevent her self-harming. John Thomas Perceval, the son of a Prime Minister assassinated by a lunatic, was himself confined in 1831. He helped to found

the Alleged Lunatics Friend Society in 1845 and was its honorary secretary from 1846. His campaigning was the major cause of Parliamentary criticism, on civil liberties grounds, of the 1845 Acts that made public asylums compulsory throughout England and Wales. In the United States, the autobiography of ex-patient Clifford Beers in 1906 stimulated the formation of the National Mental Health Association. In 1972 Scotland established the first "union of mental patients" (SUMP) that we have written archives of. Psychiatric patients have been out and proud ever since. In 1986 an anthology *What They Teach In Song - Poetry About Psychiatric Experience* was published by Frank Bangay and others. It has been followed by several others. Since 1990 there has been a legal requirement, in England and Wales, for service user input into community care planning and parts of the movement are now fully engaged in the political process. Our history is long, rich, deep, varied and extensive. With your help, we want to record, preserve and celebrate it for all.

Do you have a collection?

If you have a collection of pamphlets, or records of a local group, or files of newspaper cuttings, or other material that is part of survivors' history, you can share your treasure with other people by listing what it contains.

Anne Plumb, from Rochdale, has already catalogued her extensive collection of pamphlets and articles dating back to the 1960s, and we are making this list available for others, as well as using it as a source for our history. Helen Spandler has made the bibliography of her book *Asylum to Action* (2006) available, and we are using this in a similar way. We are encouraging people with files about the

movement to catalogue them and share the list with others. Peter Campbell has offered to go through his diaries, extracting the dates of relevant meetings that he was involved in. Other people have provided us with copies of documents that help us construct the history. Please let us know if you could provide a list of your own collection, or can contribute to the history in any way.

Literature list

We want to list and summarise what people have written about survivor history. You will find our present literature review on the website. Please tell us about key articles, books, theses or whatever that we should add to our literature section.

The Manifesto

In January 2006, the group published its manifesto. Key points from this include being service user led, with the majority on the steering group being survivors. We seek to record, preserve, collate, and make widely available the diversity and creativity of service users through personal accounts, writings, poetry, art, music, drama, photography, campaigning, speaking, influencing and all other expressions. We encourage wide dissemination of our work and will make as much material as possible available electronically. We seek to draw on the resources of the full range of people involved in the mental health service user movement, including minority groups.

Our basic founding principle is that service users own their history. The work of the group is a way of sharing it, and that means we need you to take part.

The history project relies on the enthusiasm of volunteers. We are also helped by Together and its staff. In June 2007 we received £4,000 from The Hamlet Trust. This has enabled us to appoint Phil Ruthen to work with us for nine months developing the project.

Our logo

The picture was painted by Janet Forge in April 1973. It was the logo that the Mental Patients Union did not adopt. In it nothing twitches on a hook and nothing struggles to be free of a net. The fish swims free in the water, the snake moves free in the grass and the heart beats free in the breast. The case for a mental patients' union had been made in a pamphlet decorated with a fish on a hook. The logo the union adopted was the face of a patient caught in a spider's web. We are now free.

Contacting and joining in

As well as contacting us via the website, you can write to us at **Survivors' History, c/o Together, 12 Old Street, London, EC1V 9BE.**

We have a core group of members who meet there from time to time and you will be welcome to join us. Contacts are also being established throughout the United Kingdom. We would welcome you as one of those contacts.

The group plans to produce a series of newsletter leaflets like this one which we will distribute by email and as printed copies. Please let us know if you would like to receive this, and whether we should send your copy as an email attachment or by post. We encourage everyone to distribute and republish our leaflets freely.