



PRESIDENT'S REPORT AGM June 2013

The year since our last AGM has seen a giant leap in activity level. This is partly due to the fact that we were coming up to a provincial election, with the ensuing need to make sure that our aims, objectives and interests were on the agenda of all the parties. It was also partly due to the addition of new board members which has greatly increased the energy level of this still entirely volunteer organization.

High on the agenda from the Fall onwards was the development of our key messages. These are laid out in the document which you have hopefully picked up at the back table. "Addiction and mental illness are health, not criminal justice issues. Addiction treatment, including concurrent disorders, should be provided within the public health care system for youth, young adults, and adults. There is a need for a coordinated approach to diagnosis, treatment, post-treatment counselling, and housing, with the involvement and support of families wherever possible. Financial and public support for mental health-addictions treatment has demonstrable economic and poverty-reduction impacts." These messages reflect our original purposes and focus on the issues which we feel most need attention at this time.

Another major activity was the planning for, attendance at, and follow up after an important Knowledge Exchange event in November. Organised by the "Healthy Minds, Healthy People" Directorate (Ministry of Health, Mental Health and Substance Use Division 10-Year Plan), it involved one day at the Wosk Centre and a second full day meeting at which follow-up actions were discussed and drafted. Nichola and Mae were on the planning committee, and Mae and Chris were both very impressive speakers. It was a valuable networking opportunity for us and we felt that *From Grief to Action* made a considerable contribution.

One result was that FGTA was invited to send a representative to join the Family Mental Health and Substance Use Task Force, which will be coordinating mental health and substance use services with a greater emphasis on family inclusion. Mae is particularly aware of how important her role will be in making sure that the area of substance use/addiction is well represented.

We've also been active on the writing front. The Canadian Mental Health Association publishes a quarterly magazine called "Visions Magazine", and this year FGTA has been involved in not one, but two issues. The first was on housing, and Mae Burrows pulled together an article with contributions from various board members. The second is just about to come out, on families, and it has been co-edited by Jane Duval of the BC Schizophrenia Society and our own Nichola Hall.

Representation of FGTA has been far and wide: Nichola on the BC Alliance on Mental Health and Addiction and the Community Action Initiative; Mae on Family Mental Health and Substance Use Task Force; Chris bringing family as well as professional perspective to his work at St. Paul's Hospital; I meet with the Youth Agencies on Drug and Alcohol Committee; Susie sits on board of The Crossing (you will be hearing the latest on the Portage treatment centre later in the meeting). Stan, Nichola and Mae met with the NDP Social Issues Committee in Victoria in March.

Chris Richardson is on the committee named by Vancouver Coastal Health and Providence Health Care to respond to an external review that occurred after a stabbing that might not have happened if a St. Paul's patient, admitted twice for delusional behaviour, had not been released without a treatment plan. The review recommendations are being taken very seriously. They include defining patient confidentiality in favour of family inclusion. Chris is also staying current with the Inner City Youth Mental Health Program run by Steve Mathias, which he recommends as a model for the health authority to emulate.

Nichola been very busy on the Community Action Initiative. Two cycles of grants were given out over the year. Another Knowledge Exchange event – this time on on social exclusion/inclusion – is planned for November, in collaboration with Vancouver Foundation. The CAI has just been given another \$15 million (yes, that's right, \$15 million!), which includes both another \$10 million to give out in community grants, and a special \$5 million earmarked by the Provincial Health Services Authority "to support the CAI in capacity development in non-health authority funded substance use residential service providers in B.C." This is going to be a major project, and obviously FGTA will be an important player in it. To be continued!

A President's Report would not be complete without a mention of *The Coping Kit*. We first published this *Coping Kit* in 2001, putting out a revised version in 2007. Support has been provided in the past by the Ministry of Community Development, Government of B.C., the United Way of the Lower Mainland, the Christmas Family Ball Society, the Moffat Family Foundation, Driving to make a Difference, and Vancouver Coastal Health. Distribution has been as wide as we have been able to make it, and we have received many testimonials to the support and help it has provided families.

The Coping Kit is available on our website, and can be downloaded for free in PDF format. Our statistics show that someone downloads it at least once a week, from all over the country. However, one has to know about the website in order to access it. We also know from experience that if copies of the Kit are available in doctors' waiting rooms, in mental health teams' support groups, and in school counsellors' offices, a parent may pick it up and find that it is exactly what they need. A counsellor can use it as a tool for discussion: a hard copy provides opportunities that cannot be accessed in the same way on line. The outreach co-ordinator for B.C Crisis and Suicide Prevention Centre has expressed an interest in having copies available for people receiving training. The B.C. School Counsellors Association will be making a link from their website to ours, but again a hard copy left on a desk can often facilitate a discussion that might not otherwise happen.

We have therefore been seeking funding for reprinting the Kit in hard copy, and are very pleased that the Ministry of Health has come up with this. We've been collecting information about people who would be prepared to distribute it. If anyone at this meeting has ideas for how we can get this Kit out to as many people as possible, please let us know! We will be proceeding to printing after final revisions are in and we receive quotes.

The Ministry of Health grant also includes dollars to upgrade our most important resource, our website. A sub committee, led by our redoubtable Secretary, Catherine, who has overseen the website for the last several years, is working on updating and improving it in readiness for converting to a WordPress platform. We would also welcome any feedback on the website from those of you here... do you find it user-friendly? What would you like to see added or changed? I'm sure Catherine would be pleased to hear from you at coffee time.

We are touched by the response to the website, as evidenced by the daily comments posted. Quote: "I just want to extend my gratefulness and thanksgiving to all who have made this organization possible for women like myself. I am so relieved that there is help out there for us parents who are overtaken in every way by this horrible plague of drug addiction in our loved ones and the relief I found today, knowing I don't have to endure this alone any longer...Thank God for all the "angels" who help those who are so helpless,desperate,and hurting! Thank you and God Bless!"

In closing, I would like to extend a hearty welcome to our newly elected Board members – Trisha and Michelle - and a welcome back to Anita – it is so good to see her on the board again.

I cannot end this report without expressing the heartfelt thanks of all the Board (and I'm sure all FGTA members) to Susie Ruttan, who is stepping down after serving as our VP for the last two years. Of course that was only the latest in her inestimable contribution to FGTA which began when she and her husband Rob were founding members of the Society twelve years ago. Even in the few years she was off the board she and Rob were fully engaged with getting the Crossing up and running, serving on that board in its formative B.C. years, and for the last year fiercely fighting to keep it alive. Susie, every family in this province who has been touched by the scourge of addiction owes you a tremendous debt. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.