

M.P.A. RIVERVIEW

EXTENSION PROGRAM

On September 10th, M.P.A. applied for a Local Initiatives Project grant to fund the Mental Patients Riverview Extension Program.

The goals of the program as outlined to L.I.P. are as follows:

"To provide companionship to patients of Riverview Psychiatric Hospital, Essondale, whatever their status.

"We especially desire to develop relationships with patients classified as "chronic", patients in locked wards and those with ground privileges and day passes, in order to aid in the process of reintegration into the community. Project staff will be available to accompany patients off grounds as requested. We will provide liaison between patients and appropriate local community service personnel. We will help patients about to be discharged from hospital to obtain suitable living accommodation within the community and attempt to provide transportation for this purpose when necessary.

"We will provide a drop-in centre at the hospital for patients to socialize, develop new relationships, secure assistance in legal matters, and obtain advocacy in hospital-related affairs.

"We will encourage patient use of services currently available both at Riverview and in the community. Also, we will provide neces-

sary services not presently existent such as an adequately developed housing registry, familiarizing patients with the Lower Mainland transit system, and attempting to provide or secure necessary and suitable short-term accommodation to enable patients to make use of overnight or weekend passes. In addition, an attempt will be made to supply any other services within our means that are deemed necessary but not available during the life of the project."

The total project cost which we seek from the Local Initiatives Project is \$51,558, of which \$42,560 will pay salaries to ten workers. The project will operate from November 1st, 1976 to May 31st, 1977.

Well, it sounds pretty good but what does it really mean? One of our women members who spent 5½ years over an 11 year period as a patient in Riverview, mostly in "chronic" wards, says that a new patient adjusts very quickly to the behaviour of fellow inmates. However, what may be acceptable behaviour in hospital is not necessarily acceptable in the community. Upon discharge, a long-term patient has lost touch with the outside world, is unsure how to behave and as a result, often returns to hospital.

She believes that visits by community members from R.E.P. to "chronic" wards

(where visitors are few), would give patients the opportunity through conversation and observation to learn about fashions, hairstyles, interests of people in the community and other ordinary things we take for granted but which are so necessary for survival.

At one time, M.P.A. was able to visit locked wards. A girl now discharged from the Order-In-Council women's ward, told me that our visits gave her the incentive to get herself together and out of there.

There are many patients in Riverview who would be given off-grounds privileges if they had someone to accompany them. Often, through lack of relatives or friends and staff shortages, this is not possible. Even if allowed off-grounds alone, it can be a very lost feeling if one has nowhere in particular to go and no-one to go with. R.E.P. staff would meet this need.

The need for support and companionship is equally pressing at discharge time when suddenly it is necessary to find a place to live and to deal with workers in the community services such as social assistance. R.E.P. staff will be available to offer moral and practical support in these situations.

The drop-in centre at Riverview will have information available regarding housing and community resou-

rces of all kinds. Legal assistance will be of the nature of connecting people to appropriate legal services and accompanying them to interviews if necessary. Advocacy in hospital-related affairs could be offering service on a review panel or perhaps helping a patient with a problem on the ward.

These are a few of the ways the program can work. It has the support of Mr. Ian Manning, Executive Director of Riverview Hospital. Requests for letters of support have been sent to various hospital staff and workers in appropriate agencies and organizations in the community. Replies will be forwarded to L.I.P.

If you would like to support the M.P.A. Riverview Extension Program, write us a letter as soon as possible and we will forward it to L.I.P. In your letter, please include our project number which is CX-1774-1.

In the third week of October we should know if the project has been accepted. If you want to find out or are interested in working with R.E.P., phone the M.P.A. Drop-In Centre (738-5177) around that time.

Meanwhile, keep your fingers (toes, legs) crossed and don't forget to take your medication.

Dave Beamish.



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