in a nutshell

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I recalled a conversation I'd had with Fran Phillips a couple of years prior to that time. I was working as one of the two Drop-In Centre coordinators at Trutch and finally the 6th Avenue Drop-In centres. I found myself working with people who were very much draining of my energy and who seemed to be accomplishing very little for themselves. I was fairly depressed and shaky myself. I asked Fran did people ever get it together at MPA because it often didn't look that way. I would see the same people coming in and out of the Drop-In, seemingly repeating the same kinds of behaviour that wasn't doing them much good.

She said that small changes like decision-making in minor matters take weeks and months to occur, while major changes like going back to work or school take much longer. Also that a lot of people did, indeed, go on to other things.

How that relates to me going to Langara and this article is that I feel in the last 4 years or so, I've really made some gains in my own life in terms of finding out what my problems were, doing something about them, setting out in some sort of positive direction to do something with my life. I feel that in a large way MPA contributed to that, so what this article is about is sort of a bit of my life history and the place that MPA had in it. MPA wasn't the only factor in working things out, of course, but it played a big part.

When I went into the larger community to attend classes at Langara, I was told by a chap in my class that he felt that the Mental Patients Association should be investigated in some way and that something should be done about it because people weren't getting any help there and he had some other vague kinds of criticism.

You CAN get there from here

I guess what he, and I pointed it out to him, failed to recognize and probably what other people fail to recognize also, is that the greatest majority of us who come to MPA have been through various kinds of professional, establishment mental health experiences and have just not been helped all that much or have not been helped enough. It can't be expected that MPA, which is basically a group of some very concerned, some less concerned, expatients and others, is going to solve all the mental health and other problems of the people who come to us.

I think what MPA does provide is friendship for some, probably for a majority of people; housing for some people; a place to go; somewhere to get help, with almost anything there's some one at MPA who will try to help and if they don't they can find out.

That's a hell of a lot more than lots of other places offer. You don't need an appointment, we don't adhere to office hours, the people who work here and the members aren't on a professional-client basis, they're your friends, they're your enemies, whatever, but they are people.

I think that is quite a bit. A lady said to me about 2 weeks ago in Riverview that weekends in the city are pretty unhappy times if you don't know anyone, especially Sundays. They're lonely, dull, very limited if you're on a limited income. Very much like the hospital. MPA, to some extent, meets that kind of need.

When I came to MPA almost 3½ years ago, I was newly discharged from hospital, had gotten a little room in the West End, not a very satisfactory place, a housekeeping room and the kind you can't really make an impression on, a very drab and dreary kind of place. I had no friends, was separated, and on the way to a divorce from my wife.

I had heard from her about MPA and I went there. I remember Glenn Underwood being the first person to talk to me and ask me who I was and just sort of chatting. At that time I found it difficult to stay in one place for any length of time because of the medication I

SPEAKS OUT

DAVE BEAMISH

"MPA IS A BIG PART OF MY LIFE"

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It has provided me with employment several times, opportunities to test myself. It's given me some really good, close friends, several of whom are no longer connected with MPA. It gave me a place to live where there were no or minimal demands on me, where people were supportive, where there was help if I needed it. I'm grateful for that.

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It was certainly a combination of chance and circumstance, good fortune oft' times that helped me but it was also, I think, having around me a lot of people who, even if they didn't care, were there. They were somebody that I knew. When I went into the Drop-In they recognized me, they said, Hi Dave. That's a hell of a lot better than sitting in the middle of nowhere in Vancouver.

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That's something I likely couldn't have gotten anywhere else. There's quite a span of opinion and ideology in MPA, from the very extreme to the very conservative, and I think that's a healthy thing. Doubtless it has led us into error at times but the exposure to ideas about mental health and psychiatry has been of use to our members and to other people. There are people I've had contact with in the community who have been able to benefit, perhaps, from some of the things I've learned through MPA.

When I applied for the program at Langara there were some 250 applicants for 20-odd seats. Knowing they would be strong on emotional stability as a criterion for working with young children, when I came to the application question, "Have you ever received psychiatric treatment" I lied, of course and said, "no, not me, not ever".

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I guess that I'm saying that in terms of my own personal experience, in the distant past and recently, yeah, there's a stigma to having been in mental hospital but if people are given a chance to know you as a person before knowing you as an ex-patient, that they're able to put that into perspective somehow.

That even applies to welfare. I remember, a long time ago, starting work at a place after having been on welfare for a time. In those days I was married and I felt guilty about being on the dole. We were working overtime one day and I came into this cafeteria setting and here was this fellow expounding to others the wastefulness of welfare and the fact, according to him that most people on welfare were not deserving of it.

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If you're using MPA a fair amount, think of this: where the hell would you be if MPA didn't exist? It would leave a gap in my social and emotional life if MPA wasn't here.

To people who are not active in MPA but feel negatively toward the organization I would ask you to spend some real time around the place over a period of weeks or months and just see what goes on. Whether anything is done for anyone, whether people ever do help themselves or others.

Apart from that, I'd like to encourage anyone who's going back to school or trying to reestablish themselves through work or anything else in the community, to go ahead and do that.

There may be times you'll wish you hadn't. If you haven't done anything like that for a while, don't be really upset or bummed out if it doesn't work right off. If it doesn't work the first time you can still give it another crack. It doesn't come that easily.

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Dave raps about MPA

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Not always. I have a strong feeling that maybe some people just don't want enough to change or make any changes. Some people just aren't able, for whatever reason. They feel so badly about themselves or don't have the strength, that they just don't make it, period. Some die.

Just because I've been able to do a few things lately, I'm not trying to tell anyone to "Go and do thou likewise", but I certainly wish anyone the best in efforts to reestablish themselves or give a new direction to their life or whatever euphemism I might use for a tough struggle.

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got a day pass?
NOWHERE TO GO?
come to mpa

Come to the MPA drop-in centre for the day where you are welcome to sit around and talk to ex-patients, play pool, take part in any activities, drink coffee, use the phone, etc.

MPA co-ordinators will be glad to talk to you about housing in Vancouver, your legal problems, where to find inexpensive restaurants at reasonable prices, places to go for entertainment or dancing, hostels where you can spend the night if you have a weekend pass, and bus tours of the city.

HOW DO YOU GET HERE?

Catch the 933 Lougheed Pt. Coquitlam bus at the Tuck Shop. Get off at Hastings and Granville Sts. in downtown Vancouver. Transfer to a 10 UBC or a 7 Dunbar bus and get off at Broadway and Yew Sts. Then walk down Yew to 6th Ave.

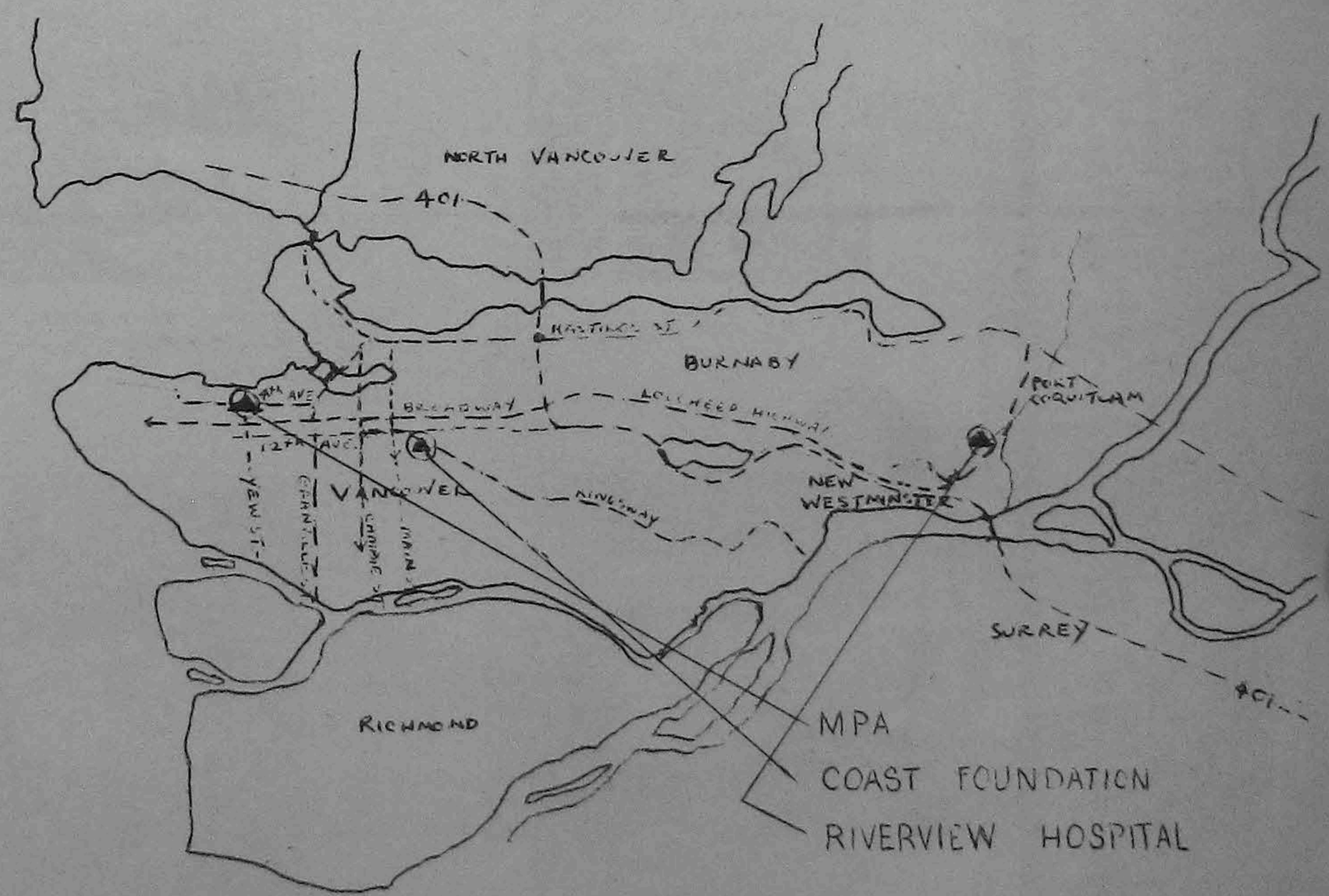
To return to Riverview: catch a No. 14 Hastings bus at Broadway and Arbutus. Get off at Hastings & Granville. Transfer to the 933 Lougheed - Cedar bus which runs every half hour directly to Riverview.

WHERE ELSE TO GO?

If you'd like to go to the Coast Foundation Drop-in Centre, 876 E. 18th Ave., travel to town the same way but get off the 933 Lougheed bus at Main and Hastings. Walk up to Pender & Main and transfer to 19 Kingsway. Get off at 18th and Kingsway.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Buy a 50¢ bus pass on Sunday and you can travel on it all day. At other times fare is 25¢ from 10-3 every day and after 7 every night. It's 40¢ other times.



IN A NUTSHELL is the official newspaper of the Mental Patients Association, 2146 Yew St, 738-5177

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