

Bob HUNTER

"Insanity is really a social rather than a personal fact. It's a social and cultural phenomenon. Experiences which are considered 'normal' in a particular culture or subculture may be defined as 'mad' in another cultural setting. Insanity is synonymous with behavior or experience that is 'unacceptable' within a given cultural framework." —Dr. Joe Berke.

This is an excerpt from an excellent book, *The Radical Therapist*, produced by Jerome Agel.



It is subtitled: *Therapy Means Change, Not Adjustment.*

I highly recommend it to anyone who has any friends or relatives locked up in Riverview. Especially, I recommend it to anyone who is even thinking of allowing anyone they know to be committed to that institution.

There is a manifesto of sorts contained in *The Radical Therapist* which puts the problem clearly into focus. It was written by several therapists, who should know as well as anyone the weaknesses and dangers inherent in the modern institutional and psychiatric approach to what is called "mental illness."

"Concerned with maintaining and justifying current practices," they write, "therapy avoids moving towards making life more meaningful for all people. . . . Our notions about therapy are obsolete: elitist, male-centred, and obessional. Our models of practice are often racist and exploitive. The therapist in this society is safe: he lives near the top of the heap, pursuing moneyed comforts, influence and prestige, while the rest of society is racked by violence and war.

"He buys land and boats while others die in the streets. Often he seems unaware of the bias he perpetuates or the oppression he enacts in the name of 'liberation.' Therapy today has become a commodity, a means of social control. We reject such an approach to people's distress."

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THE PUBLICATION OF *The Radical Therapist* some months ago brought into the open a conflict which had been brewing within the headshrinker establishment for a long time. It pulls together many of the alternative approaches to therapy which have been developed in opposition to the old tricks of forcing people to adjust to a sys-

tem which is often far more insane than they are themselves.

The book includes a statement from the New York-based *Insane Liberation Front*.

Here in Vancouver, we are in a relatively fortunate position. Or at least we are well ahead of these anti-psychiatric movements in the United States and even Britain.

The Mental Patients Association was formed last year as an alternative to the automatic reflex of sending people to Riverview — where the best they can hope for is to be drugged into a stupor.

Organized initially by a group of former mental patients who had first-hand experience with the horrors of Riverview and the general irrelevancy of psychiatric practices in this province, the MPA is now entering its second year of operation.

It was started on a shoestring. But the support which emerged, mainly from other former patients, has broadened its base considerably.

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THE ORGANIZATION NOW has two centres in Vancouver and a 28-acre farm near Matsqui. The West End centre is equipped as a home for patients being released from hospitals who would otherwise have no place to go. Employment and housing arrangements are made for the patients. Crisis telephone lines are open all day and night for emotionally disturbed and lonely people.

The East End centre is designed more for sensitivity and therapy sessions. The Matsqui farm can be used by people in need of rest or recuperation.

tem that of B.C. But as the operation has grown, the need for volunteers has likewise grown. Mainly, what the MPA is looking for are people who can help to prevent needless hospitalization of the emotionally disturbed, help place ex-patients back in society, and cut down on a lot of unnecessary suffering.

This week, the MPA is conducting a drive to get more volunteers. Starting April 11, a volunteer training course will be held. Anybody interesting in getting involved can call 738-3325 before 6 p.m. Wednesday Thursday and Friday, or 733-2375 after 6 p.m.

It's worth keeping in mind that one out of three families in B.C. can expect to see at least one member committed to a mental institution sooner or later. With places such as the MPA in existence, that experience — a bummer, to say the least — may be avoided.

M.P.A. NEWS

The Mental Patients' Association was formed a year ago enable ex-patients to build an alternative to the brutal, inhuman institution known as a mental hospital. Volunteers, and now with the help of government grants, paid staff, work out of three half-way houses.

The West Side Centre, 3191 W. 10th, is equipped as a home for releases for a period of one month. At the end of this period, employment and suitable housing arrangements are made for them in the community. During the day it is a place to drop in and have coffee. Crisis phone lines (738-5177 and 738-5178) are open day and night for lonely and disturbed people.

The East End Centre is designed for slightly more restive activities. Sensitivity and therapy sessions are conducted and the one-month stay for ex-patients still applies.

The Matsqui farm house lies on twenty-eight acres of wooded land and is used for one-month stays in the country, as well as weekend excursions.

The MPA is responding **CONSTRUCTIVELY** to a very life and death issue. Emotional illness is the nation's number one health problem. Consider that one out of three nuclear families will have at least one member hospitalized in a mental institution. 50% of suicides are committed within three months of a release from an institution.

In other countries, halfway programs have proven themselves both psychiatrically and financially sound. Fewer people return to hospital, more get jobs, public money is saved.

The MPA needs volunteers for a crisis training course to start April 11th. Other volunteers are needed to give emotional support to residences: chat with people, play guitar, etc., and just be friendly.

If you are interested, phone Terry before 6 pm, April 5, 6 or 7 at 738-3325 or Avi after 6 pm, April 5, 6, or 7 at 733-2375.

- Jon York and Korkey Day

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