

**LIKE THE TONY DROUIN ROCK OPERA**

**ACT II: THE MENTAL PATIENTS' ASSOCIATION PAMPHLET (FINALLY!)**

We are mental patients. My MPA is our organization; mental patients thought of it, mental patients got it going, mental patients run it and own it. It is our thing.

We have joined together to help each other, and to do the things that need to be done; especially to provide each other with the kinds of help we really need and to do the kinds of things that really need to be done; both of which the existing mental health institutions are not doing.

MPA is part of the mental patients liberation movement. We provide real, humane services for the immediate needs of mental patients--such as a 24 hour a day, 365 day a year crises service. In giving these services we co-operate with mental health institutions and professionals. But we also exert a legitimate influence to change the mental health services and society to make life better for mental patients (and for everyone indirectly). We exert this legitimate influence as the only organization in British Columbia which represents mental patients who do not agree with many of the mental health professionals' ideas (myths?) about mental patients and "mental illness."

## Co-ordinators

You need to understand co-ordinators before you can understand what MPA is and does.

Co-ordinator is what we call people who get a salary from MPA (they are called a lot of other things from time to time but that is another story). The only reason we have co-ordinators at all is that we need to have people who can spend most of their time doing MPA work, so that MPA things can happen the way we want them to. Unsalaries could theoretically do anything a co-ordinator does, but few members have been willing to spend full time working at MPA. We try very hard to prevent a split between co-ordinators and unsalaried members, but from time to time and in certain areas this does occur. This is one of our major organizational problems. It seems to have come from our very rapid growth, especially in the number of salaried positions we have. We don't want a division happening in our organization between the people who give help (and who are paid to) and the unpaid people who must receive help; which would amount to a "patient-staff" atmosphere. MPA started as a self-help organization in which everyone helped when they could and everyone received help when they needed it; we don't want this to change although we have been drifting this way a bit.

Getting back to co-ordinators: All co-ordinators have the same salary, although people with dependents receive a larger salary. All co-ordinators have the same title, although we specify a bit--such as drop-in co-ordinator and residence co-ordinator. And all co-ordinators are elected by the general membership in a general meeting--there are no exceptions to this rule. No one is boss, one one works for anyone else; everyone, both unsalaried members and co-ordinators, has an equal say in what we do as an organization and how we do it. We work co-operatively or we don't work at all (which occasionally happens).

For most co-ordinators this is not just a job but a real commitment. Many co-ordinators think of themselves as "being part of MPA" and not just "working at" MPA. Most co-ordinators

were members for a long time before they got elected to co-ordinator positions.

We try and recruit new co-ordinators from the old members. Usually a person who is elected to a position has worked in that position, or at something else worthwhile at MPA, as an unpaid volunteer for a month or more before they were elected. Most co-ordinators could be working someplace else at a much higher salary; they do not have an excessive status, nor are they shown an excessive ~~due~~ deference.

There are currently twenty salaried co-ordinators (there are also some unsalaried co-ordinators--maybe, this issue is still being settled; all that I can say now is that there are, and have been, a few people who put as much time and energy into MPA as co-ordinators but who do not ~~draw salaries~~ draw a salary). There was a move to do away with titles all together, but a majority felt that the people getting a salary should be identified as to their general area of responsibility. Anyway the twenty co-ordinators can be identified as follows: four residence and two farm; two drop-in, one activity, one crafts and one transportation; two community and two research; one membership, one communications, one office and one treasure. These titles give only a rough idea of what ~~the~~ that co-ordinator does some of the time. It is quite misleading to For example everyone does crises work and people are always helping each other with their jobs. classify co-ordinators according to their titles. At MPA a person gradually evolves a set of jobs or roles which suits the person and satisfies the rest of the people at MPA.

Co-ordinators are not a homogenous group. About half are women. Some co-ordinators have not had much formal education; others have almost finished a Ph.D. The range is from the early twenties to over forty. Some are married, some ~~have~~ <sup>are parents</sup> ~~are~~ divorced, some are separated, some single, some have made other arrangements and others are some combination of the above.

Being a co-ordinator is not a 9 to 5 job; we try and work when we are really needed, which occasionally means from midnight to 4 in the morning. To often mental health in-stitutions and professionals and up doing the kinds of work that suit them at hours x

that suit them--such as just talking to people in a pleasant office during business office hours. We try to do the things that are really needed and that really mean something to people--such as being with someone as they look for housing, usually a miserable, depressing task for anyone.

Oh yes, money: We get our money from various Federal, Provincial, Municipal and private sources. We are well funded as our kind of organization goes, but our total budget is less than the salaries of two psychiatrists and we have little doubt that we do much more than any two psychiatrists around.

## Residence Program

The impulse to have residences is basic to MPA thinking. We believe that living in ~~an~~ a good interpersonal environment is the best way of resolving the personal difficulties

(that probably arose from living in a bad interpersonal environment). If a mutual trust

and respect happens among residents, then a process of confronting one another and

resolving problems as they occur in daily living can take place. What also can take

place is emotional support for each other in the process of discovering ~~an~~ yourself

and in creating a life for yourself. ~~Both~~ Help from other residents in both ~~of~~ these processes can happen at the time

they are needed, not in two weeks when your next appointment with your psychiatrist comes

up. In fact MPA started as a short-term residence (and a 24 hour drop-in centre) in

February of 1971.

We currently have four residences which have a total capacity of 42 beds. We have

three residences in the city: ~~The~~ The Kitsalano residence at 1754 West 11th, 732-8222; The East End residence at ~~369~~

369 East 21st Avenue, 874-9422; The Shaughnessy Heights residence at 116 West 19th

avenue, 872-1190, and one farm residence in the country (where farms belong) at

in Whonnock  
26942 108th Avenue, 462-7750.

The residences are all democratically run, self-help operations. The people living

there make the rules and enforce the rules. ~~(The~~ They decide who is to move in and if

necessary who is to be expelled. The residents are responsible for the common living

costs, including rent, utilities and communal food. Most importantly the residents are

responsible for their own lives; they control their own money, their own medication (if

they are on any) and what they do with their lives. This also means they have the freedom

to make a ~~gawdawful~~ horrible, complex mess of their lives (which occasionally happens,

This may sound like a cold, uncaring attitude; it isn't, it represents our respect

for people and our feeling that everyone should have the right to run their own life.

What can and frequently does happen at the residences is a voluntary sharing of each others lives; warm, real friendships; understanding and a genuine sense of belonging to a community.

The residences are supposed to become self-sufficient, financially and emotionally. However it takes a lot of effort to get a residence going. It took five co-ordinators months to get the East End house going and occasionally it takes a lot of effort to keep a house going even after it has started. Sometimes homes fall apart (you might say they have nervous breakdowns). This can happen in a typical, conventional, family home or in a communal home. It is more likely to happen in a communal home in which people ties to one another are weak and people are unsure of themselves (as most mental patients are after they are "cured" and leave a psychiatric hospital). So we have found that even after we got a house going we still needed co-ordinators around to keep it going. We tried just giving people, who are trying to straighten out their heads or unsure of themselves, a house and let them run it themselves. It didn't work out--people got freaked out and left and a lot of physical damage was done to the house. We had hoped that all that would be necessary would be to give people control over their own lives and all would be well, but ~~dx~~ sadly this ~~dx~~ did not happen.

So on the seventh day MPA created residence co-ordinators. Currently we have two each co-ordinators for three of the residences and an unknown number for the newest residence (the Shaughnessey House). *Move to another section* (In reading this pamphlet you may have noticed a number of currentlies and maybes and unknowns and other sort of ~~saage~~ vague, wishey-washey statements. Aside from the fact that the pamphlet took so long to write that so many changes occurred while it was being written, MPA never stands still. We are constantly changing things around ~~as~~ as conditions change)). The residence co-ordinators are elected by the residents of their houses and then the election is ratified or rejected by the general membership at

a general meeting. The co-ordinators do not live in the house, primarily because it tends to prevent the residents from ~~x~~ helping each other and taking responsibility for their own lives and the running of the house. The job of the residence co-ordinator is to keep the houses going with as little effort on the co-ordinators' part as is necessary. The co-ordinators especially help out in the heavier emotional scenes and it helping the house move toward self-sufficiency. Currently (January, 1973) in the two established city houses it seems that only one co-ordinator in each ~~x~~ house is necessary and some people are talking about no co-ordinators (or an on-call or part-time co-ordinators).

We have had good relations with all of our neighbors (none of OUR mental patients has murdered anyone or molested anyone's children). However in the latter part of 1971 when we tried to buy a house, a rather ugly petition was circulated and we were stopped. We tried again (you can't stop mono-maniacs!) and MPA is now the proud owner of the Kitsalno House at 1754 West 11th Avenue. We have had other problems with the community but mainly from people who don't know us.

You don't have to be crazy or a certified mental patient to get into one of our residences. What you do have to be is willing to become really involved in communal living and ~~x~~ have a desire to straighten out your own head (and help others do the same) through communal living. If you want to get into one of our houses call one of the houses or the drop-in centre and tell whoever answers what you're interested in and that starts the ball rolling. What happens is you will talk to a residence co-ordinator about what it is like to live in a MPA residence and then if you're still interested you'll talk to the members of the residence you might move into. Then if you and the residents think you can live with each other, you'll move in--simple, ~~and~~ isn't it? Oh yes money, it costs 75\$ a month for room, board and utilities. We fixed that cost

of people getting their heads together through a communal farm experience (with a little help from Gestalt groups). However the farm was having trouble attracting and keeping residents. We believed in it so we put some more energy and another co-ordinator into the farm and like magic it ~~was~~ really got going. The farm is now usually filled up (as are the city houses--but dont let this discourage you from looking into living at an MPA residence if you're interested; openings do come up).

At one time the farm was called (and probably still is) the Foundation for the ~~Understanding of Nervous and Neurotic Illnesses Farm~~ --which of course is the ~~Exhibit~~ F.U.N.N.I. Farm. We have always fought the stigma attached to being mental patients by embracing them it and ridiculing it.



because it approximates the average monthly running costs of a filled residence and, more importantly, many of our members are on welfare and 75\$ is enough of a bite out of a lean 102\$ a month check. If the costs go over 75\$ a month per person and the residence has no reserve, or if a ~~ma~~ major expenditure is necessary, MPA will pay.

Both having residence co-ordinators and giving financial ~~amb~~ help violates the principle of residence self-sufficiency; however both ~~are~~ are necessary to keep the ~~houses~~ residences running and neither prevent people from taking responsibility for their lives.

In fact both have made it possible, ~~for people to take a~~ by creating a humane atmosphere, for people to take a more complete control over their own lives.

The MPA farm is part of the residence program. It offers an even more intensive experience in communal living because of its comparative isolation and more importantly because the ~~farm~~ farm community also works together. We have chickens, an extensive garden, some other livestock (with plans for getting more), In the spring there are plans for a further expansion of the <sup>o</sup>farming<sup>o</sup>. The farm is also more into crafts, making their own things and ~~things from~~ ~~aspects~~ self-sufficiency in general. The farm operates on the ~~same~~ same egalitarian, self-help, democratic principles that the city houses run on. It is also 75\$ month for room ~~a~~ and board and other communal expenses and the process of getting into

the farm is ~~the~~ also ~~a~~ the same as in the city houses.

The original MPA farm started with ~~the~~ the gift of ~~the~~ the use of a 25 24 arce farm if we ~~for a year~~ would pay the taxes. The farm came as the result of one of Bob Hunters columns on MPA; it belongs to a person who spent a lot of time in Riverview. It started slowly and had a lot of problems but by the summer of 1971 we had a few people living there and it was a good scene.

In the summer of 1972 we had to move out and we rented our current farm. The co-ordinator that was elected had a strong interest in farming and in the possibilities

