

# Patterns of mental health

by Kim Marchant

One day last May, the brakes on Mr. Brown's car gave out. He crashed into a six-foot wall and came out of it with a broken leg and cracked ribs. Rushed to a local hospital he received excellent care from his own physician, a surgeon and a consultant.

Friends and neighbours were sympathetic. They sent flowers and visited frequently. Many of the nurses and other workers in the hospital were known to Mr. Brown; some were members of his bowling league, some attended his church. He was as much at home as a man in the hospital can be — surrounded by people he knew, visited by people he loved. Four months later he was welcomed back to work. All in all, a painful four-month experience for the family, but one they were able to take in their stride. The understanding and support of both friends and co-workers made it easier for Mr. Brown to pick up the normal pattern of his life.

## A Stress Problem

Tension and the demands of an exacting job finally took their toll. Mr. Scott's physician concluded that his breakdown was caused by stress. Friends and neighbours shook their heads sadly; their children asked the younger Scotts if it was true that their father was a "screwball."

Mr. Scott was admitted to a mental hospital 30 miles away. The attendants were friendly, but strangers. Friends found it difficult to visit. Relatives fretted that "the news would get around and what will people think?"

Skilled care made it possible for Mr. Scott to return home in three months. In spite of feeling well and his doctor's assurance that he was back to normal health, things were not the same.

It was not his imagination that friends avoided him, nor did he entirely blame them — hadn't he once taken the same attitude towards those who had been mentally ill?

When his employer refused to take him back, he realized that his fight was only beginning. Not a fight against pain, but against ignorance and fear and superstition.

Why the difference? Sonia Verabioff, volunteer co-ordinator for Mental Health Halifax, says the difference lies in attitude.

"Attitudes are important. They can be the most important factor in determining whether or not a mentally ill person can be rehabilitated."

One of the oldest and most baffling of human afflictors, the problem of mental illness was first met with sorcery and witchcraft, then with cruelty and incarceration and, until

recently, merely with custodial care. But people are no longer being locked up in the attic because they have a mental problem like the hero's wife in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

"I think the attitude is improving toward the mentally ill-away from segregation and into integration into society," said Tracey McKinley, a third year Commerce student at Dalhousie who began volunteer work with Mental Health Halifax in September 1980.

## Mental illness is the neglected hinterland, the great blind spot of all the health problems confronting our nation today.

Dr. William C. Menninger, one of North America's most famous psychiatrists calls mental illness "the neglected hinterland, the great blind spot of all the health problems confronting our nation today." These words are not very comforting when one considers the facts published by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) that mental illness strikes more Canadians every year than all other diseases combined, and that almost half the people in Canadian hospitals are there because of mental or emotional problems.

## Mental health services in the metro area.

There are four mental health services in the metro area: Ab-

bie J. Lane Memorial Hospital, Halifax; Mental Health-Dartmouth, Prince Albert Road; Mental Health-Halifax, Brunswick Street, and Nova Scotia Hospital, Dartmouth.

In the Mental Health-Halifax area volunteers give their time at a drop-in center on Brunswick Street. Each volunteer is requested to donate at least two hours of his/her time per week on Monday, Tuesday, or Thursday evenings between 7:00 and 10:30 p.m. Table tennis, pool, sing songs, cards and Bingo are just a few of the many activities which go on at the center. According to Miss McKinley, "Anyone who is willing to go and just talk and listen is a benefit to the program."

Barbara O'Connor, a volunteer in the Dartmouth Mental Health Services area said, "I know that my very presence in an institution that often lacks cheer and happiness is an asset. On days when I volunteer my services at the N.S. Hospital, I make a difference." Ms. O'Connor continued to say that, "As an unpaid functioning member of our society, I came to them because I see they are of value."

"A client responds more readily to a volunteer because they know they're there because they want to be and

not because they have to be," said Verabioff.

According to a brochure published by the CMHA, "In terms of changing public attitudes, one enthusiastic volunteer is worth a hundred pages of printed literature or a dozen public speeches."

## How do I become a volunteer?

Mental health services volunteer co-ordinators are sponsoring a workshop which will take place on Saturday, February 14 between 9:00 a.m. and 4:15 p.m., at the N.S. Hospital in Dartmouth. Some of the topics which will be discussed are human relations and communication skills, the psychiatric treatment team, alcoholism and schizophrenia. A reception will follow the workshop.

## Feel satisfied and proud that you can make the difference.

Anyone who is interested in attending the workshop is asked to submit a registration form to Pam Langille, Director of Volunteer Services, Drawer 1004, Dartmouth, N.S., B3Y 3Z9 or call her at the N.S. Hospital at 469-7500, extension 712 by January 31st. Registration forms are available at the four mental health service centers.

These cases were taken from a brochure published by the Canadian Mental Health Association.

# Communication a problem for Owen and Champion

by Paul Creelman

The executive of the Student Union has not been effective enough in communicating with Council and the student body, especially on student issues and involvement in political bodies such as SUNS, according to Graduate Council rep Greg Graham. Others involved in student politics, such as ex-council member Umesh Jain and graduate rep Peter Rans echo the charges that Council has failed to reach the students at the grassroots level during the past term.

Peter Rans, outspoken graduate rep on Council, criticizes the effectiveness of the present executive.

"It seems to me that there's been little real coordination between the president and the vice-president of DSU. A lot of promises were made that they would solve the problem of communication, but it's my opinion the communication is worse, if anything, this year in terms of what the average student knows. I don't know whether that's because they haven't tried very hard or just haven't succeeded in solving the problem. I suspect that the techniques they have used just haven't been very effective."

The publicizing and distribution of Student Council news and the involvement of the student body were the mainstays of last year's election cam-

paign by the present executive.

"We haven't been nearly as successful in the area of communications as we would have hoped," says Gord Owen, president of the Dalhousie Student Union.

"One of the things that we're going to suggest next year's Council to do is to have an information secretary to look after these matters. Although it's our responsibility to see that issues are communicated to the students, during the day to day business of committee meetings and so forth, some things get shifted to the back burner."

Owen states that there were two main channels of communication, through Council representatives and the societies, and through media such as CKDU, the Gazette, and the new encased bulletin boards which formed part of Owen and Champion's election platform last spring. Owen regrets the difficulties which delayed construction of the bulletin boards for the first academic term, but feels that their usefulness will be demonstrated in the next few months.

The other channel of communication, Council members taking information back to their societies to distribute, has not been entirely successful either, according to Owen.

"I would hesitate to say that it hasn't worked," said Owen.

"On the other hand, there's not much we can do if individual Council members don't fulfill their responsibilities to take matters back to their societies to discuss."

Jeff Champion, Vice-President of the Student Union, also feels strongly that about the importance of having the average student informed of Student Council issues.

"One of our major concerns on campus is letting people know what student council is doing and getting more people involved in that respect, one of the things I've been trying to do is have the societies on campus play more of a role in informing the students. The time is long past when Dalhousie was the size of campus where people could be informed about things merely by word of mouth."

Another major plank in the election platform of the Council executive was the establishment of a course evaluation anti-calendar. The calendar has not been published this year because it was found to be infeasible, according to Owen.

"Carleton ran a course evaluation program some years ago which cost them \$3500 and was a complete failure," said Owen.

"It's the sort of thing that

can be very successful if it is run correctly, but can also be a real disaster if these little problems aren't worked out."

Owen states that the main reasons the evaluation was decided to be infeasible were the problems of reworking the survey results, which would have had to be condensed and edited for the calendar if the presently agreed on format was used, and the lack of support in Council to handle the workload.

"Last year we had Rob Brittain from the Science society put a lot of time into the course evaluation project. Now that Rod is gone there isn't anybody to take up the slack."

However, Peter Rans feels that there are people on the Science Society upset by the lack of action this year because Brittain had done so much of the groundwork for the evaluation project.

Rans also feels that the troubles with the course evaluation calendar and of other issues such as funding problems, involvement in SUNS and the referendum on the CKDU-FM proposal are all related to the larger problem of communications.

"All of these issues are centrally related to the problem of communication on campus. It's alright for 25 councillors to sit in a room somewhere and sit and say we believe in

SUNS, but if you don't have the mass support of the student body behind you, then the whole organization is top-heavy... What I'm worried about is progress in a direction that will leave the executive and committees sitting in a room with no contact at all with the students on campus. This is the real problem we have to solve."

Owen defends his executive's involvement in SUNS as one of the definite accomplishments Council has made so far in his term of office.

Noting that the SUNS brief to the MPHEC was actually drafted by Champion and himself, and that Champion had been elected as the external affairs representative of SUNS, Owen stated that involvement in these student bodies was important for Dalhousie because they could bring back issues from SUNS to the Council and get to work on them immediately.

"In some areas you really wonder whether you're doing any good on Council", sums up vice-president Champion.

"While in other areas you can see results right away, in the external relations between the Student Union and SUNS, the results are much slower, and what you are doing is laying a foundation for a framework people can build on in the years ahead. It's still worth while, though."