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## June 2012

After much debate our committee has decided we should modify the name of our group to Inner South Families & Friends (ISF&F) because it more closely identifies with who we are. For those of you who were not at our 20th AGM last year, at which Judy Carroll gave an historical perspective, it is perhaps appropriate to give some background. The group was formed in July 1991 by two staff members to give relatives and friends of people attending the Malvern Clinic (an Italianate mansion located in Glenferrie Road, Malvern) an opportunity to meet together each month for support and education. The group has undergone many name changes before adopting the name Inner South Parents and Friends so that families connected with the Junction Clinic and other regional services would feel they too were welcome to be involved. We now have more than 200 on our mailing list not including clinical staff, MH organisations and others who advocate for carers and our meetings are well attended. As a group we have less interaction with consumers because many other organisations provide them with direct support. However, our group is open to anyone interested in mental health and a number of our most loyal members are consumers. After all, it is their welfare that is at the heart of our concern.

We have less frequent interaction with clinical staff than we did 20 years ago but have the privilege of regular meetings with the leadership at Alfred Psychiatry, Dr Stafrace and Sandra Keppich-Arnold.

We have gained a wonderfully supportive Carer Consultant in Violeta Petersen and work closely with her particularly in the involvement of members in clinical training around carer issues. Judith does an amazing job in our office and has recently

completely redone our website which had been hacked into. The new web address is:

[www.ispaf.org](http://www.ispaf.org)

We don't have any 'staff' and so exponential growth is not our aim! Our chief intent is to try very hard to help our members find the right assistance for themselves and their family member so that all of them can shift their focus onto living more satisfying lives. However, we have many members for whom it is depressingly difficult to find the right help, despite an array of services, and in that regard we mourn the loss of Michelle Swann who for nearly three years has been Carer Advocate funded by ARAFEMI whilst external funding was sought unsuccessfully.

So, 20 years on, we see the same issues prevailing and some are now far more critical. Housing is by far the biggest problem. The supply of low cost rental accommodation has dried up, especially in our area. One could blame negative gearing and the fact that a great many people have invested in housing on the advice of their tax planners. Until recently, Governments had almost completely withdrawn from the provision of low cost housing wanting the private sector to take up the slack - which didn't happen. There has been an explosion in need which private/public partnerships have only just begun to address. The unmet demand for low cost housing is still daunting and particularly affects the mentally ill.

These days mental illness is more openly discussed and the community is better informed of the issues involved. However, despite all efforts to break down stigma, and buckets of money to Beyond Blue, stigma is still a huge burden on those with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder and discourages many families from speaking

too openly about their problems. We so appreciate those brave politicians and families who have been willing to share their experiences and value the very considered and well researched efforts of SANE. We look forward to hearing from Barbara Hocking, who is retiring as their CEO, at our AGM.

Progress is being made in some areas. The connection between mental illness and substance abuse is now acknowledged. The Victorian Government recently launched *Say When*, a tool to assess whether an individual is drinking too much. It is easily accessed by typing 'Say When' into Google or your chosen search engine. However, we continue to promote alcohol and gambling prominently and have an incoherent policy on other substances. One senses a strong desire to improve the situation but often Government policies are completely discordant so perhaps it's no wonder we become unhinged!

What a digression! To return to our change of name - it would be far easier not to bother which would accord with the KISS principal - but 'Families and Friends' much better reflects our membership and our outlook. Many members are indeed parents but they are conscious that they won't be around forever. Building a supportive network around their family member with mental illness is possibly the most effective aid to their recovery and aligns with the new *'Recovery Framework'* to be launched at Alfred Psychiatry on 17 September. The number of people at our 'Siblings' meeting in May is another indication of the wider need for information and support within one's family. You may groan that we've not been more imaginative but we have to 'keep it simple stupid' and even this minimalistic change will need a quorum at a General Meeting immediately before our AGM on Tuesday 14 August. We seek your support: please mark the date in your diaries now. Details of exact time and venue will be circulated next month.

#### ST KILDA ROAD CLINIC

Junction Clinic is to be re-named St Kilda Road Clinic and is now to relocate on 23 July. As in our case, a name has been chosen reflecting reality - it may not be

very imaginative but it is uncomplicated. We wish staff, for whom it will be a strenuous, but also an exciting shift, all the very best and hope clients and their carers will be delighted with the new premises too.

#### MIND AND LANTERN UNITE

Two important service providers in the adjoining region and ours have recently joined forces under the chairmanship of Mr Julian Gardner who chaired the review of the Mental Health Review Board. The merger is in alignment with State Government reforms encouraging organisations to work together rather than 'building silos around one another'. 'Increased capacity to provide services in the middle south of Melbourne, a more sustainable organisation and career opportunities for staff, a sharing of expertise, greater economies of scale and potential support innovation' were all cited by Mr Gardner as benefits that would flow from the union.

#### KILBRIDE CENTRE PROGRAM FOR MH CARERS

It is some time since we publicised a Kilbride program co-sponsored by the Carer Respite Centre, Southern Region which is still available and has been of great support to a number of our members

If you care for a person who is suffering from mental illness, they offer **free-of-charge**, a variety of courses conducted at Kilbride, such as massage, counselling, Enneagram, card making, hand painted silk scarves and more!

The location is 52 Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park and is easily accessed both by car and public transport.

For more information, phone Judy Treacy on 9690 1076 on a Wednesday.

#### A MESSAGE FOR GPS

The CRCC has provided us with copies of their letter to GPs. Please would you take it to your GP when next you visit. We hope that by making them more aware of 'carer' issues they will be more active in referring their patients to appropriate services.