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More good news! As was said in our February newsletter, this year we're planning to put all the energy we can summons into advocacy. With a Federal election in September it is timely to be making our politicians more aware of the long standing inadequacies in mental health services. Margaret Leggatt and Sandy Jeffs spoke plainly from a huge depth of experience at our February meeting and who better to inspire us to further effort than **Professor Alan Fels AO, Chair of the National Mental Health Commission. Alan has agreed to speak at our meeting next Tuesday, 9 April.** Following his exhaustive re-examination of mental health Australia-wide last year he should be able to provide us with ample facts for our campaign. Please come because communication is a two way street and your feedback is a very necessary part of the process. Not only do we need to advocate at the Federal level but equally at the State level too. In 2013 the Victorian Government disbanded the Victorian Mental Health Reform Council, established in 2009, which was to have provided high level advice on implementing a 10 year reform strategy 'Because Mental Health Matters'. Also in 2012 the 24 hour mental health helpline was closed and in the May budget no money was allocated to maintain the Carer Advocate position pioneered by ARAFEMI. Despite the rhetoric, actions on the part of governments continue to ignore the burden of care placed on the families of the mentally ill. 'Respite' is but a sop, what is actually needed is timely, practical assistance to better manage the 'caring' task.

CO-OPERATIVE EFFORT

Groups such as ours rely on the voluntary efforts of our members and we have been very fortunate in the support we receive from so many. Please consider making an appointment with your local member of State or Federal Parliament and contact us if you'd like support. We should be able to find another member to accompany you if you'd like that. Some of the funded organisations such as the Victorian Mental Health Carer Network, MIF and ARAFEMI have material you could take to reinforce your case or come and hear Professor Fels speaking

on the National Mental Health Report Card which is also discussed later in this newsletter.

Talking of co-operation, Judy C., chair of our group for ten years, still contributes material for our newsletter to lighten the load. The following piece is hers:

COPMI

"COPMI stands for Children of Parents with a Mental Illness. Recently Judith R gave me a DVD called 'Talking together about Parental depression and Anxiety'.

I had been wanting to show my three grandchildren something like this for years to help them have a better understanding of their father's mental illness. He suffers from chronic long term depression and bi-polar 2. Their ages are 14, 13 and 7. The 7 year old did not understand the messages but the other two certainly did. The 13 year old asked me some very pertinent questions at the end of the DVD which I answered as honestly as I could. I did not show them the second part about anxiety as I thought it not so appropriate for them and they were getting a little restless, but the first part certainly held their attention and I could see they were relating to it.

P.S. I tried a little bribery to get them to watch it...I bought them McDonalds on the condition they watch it!! You may not agree with my method, but it worked.

Our group has this DVD in the library....free for those who ask."

[Ed. Not only do we have the COPMI DVD in our library, we have *lots* of copies which we keep in our office and also at the Betty Day Centre to distribute for free - come to a meeting and get one].

ELDON PARK

As flagged in February, a group of 18 members will be spending the weekend on the Mornington Peninsula later this month. If you put your name on the list but have not had your booking confirmed within the last couple of weeks please contact our office immediately to discuss transport. At such a lovely time of year it should be really relaxing and good fun.

**Care for Your Assets:
Money, Ageing and Family**

The Legal Services Board has funded a guide available from Seniors Rights Victoria which discusses asset management. This topic is of central concern to those of us caring for a family in which one or more members have a mental illness.

Many older people choose to move in with family members so they can get the care they need as they age. Often this involves selling a home or other assets and giving the money to a family member who has agreed to provide ongoing care.

Usually these arrangements work well for everyone involved, but Seniors Rights Victoria sees many that have gone wrong. Often it is the older people who suffer the consequences and frequently these could have been avoided. Hence this guide: *Care for Your Assets: Money, Ageing & Family* to help older people plan and secure their future interests. It covers topics such as making a family agreement, Centrelink and taxation implications and [where to go for more information and advice](#).

For a copy of the guide call 1300 368 821

To book for a seminar on the topic on 15 May at 10.30am-12 noon, at the COTA meeting room, 4th Floor, Block Arcade, City call 1300 135 090

Mental Health Support goes Mobile

A new mobile phone app is aiming to give young people experiencing mental health issues some hope.

The creation of Headspace, the national youth mental health foundation which specifically targets youth, it is titled *'The Fifth Army'* and aims to engage those between the ages of 18-25. It tackles three main issues, **bullying, homophobia and depression**, all of concern to that age group.

Once downloaded, the app is broken up into these three categories and participants choose whichever they wish to follow. They are then led through a series of missions which revolve around answering questions or completing exercises on that subject.

Given that suicide is the leading cause of death in this age group, getting the message out about mental health is vital so that young people act rather than suffering in silence or using alcohol and drugs to self medicate.

And remember that Lifeline on 13 11 14 can be just that!

A blood test for Suicide?

Research into depression has centred on serotonin but scientists have discovered that the severely depressed have high levels of another

neurotransmitter, quinolinic acid. Scientists at the University of NSW are participants in a worldwide search for a simple way to test for it. The same chemical is involved in other brain diseases including Alzheimer's, autism and schizophrenia. However, other researchers remain sceptical that a simple blood test will ever prove very effective in preventing suicide given that so many other factors influence suicidal behaviour.

**The Mental Health Services
TheMHS - 23rd Annual Conference
Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre
20 - 23 August 2013**

Once again it is Melbourne's turn to host this excellent conference - a valuable forum which brings together mental health clinicians, managers, consumers, carers, researchers, educators and policy makers in a mix which no other mental health conference attempts. TheMHS aims to promote positive attitudes about mental health and mental illness and to stimulate debate that will challenge the boundaries of present knowledge and ideas about mental health care. If inspiration is to be had you will find it here. The theme this year is 'Forging the Future' and more information can be found at www.themhs.org.au including keynote speakers. Contact is Jeff Saul (02) 9810 8733 or jeff.saul@themhs.org

Cannabis, IQ link more than socioeconomics

A study by Dr Madeline Meier of Duke University was reported last August in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (PNAS). It provided strong evidence that teen use of cannabis could cause a significant drop in IQ. Subsequently the same journal published a paper in January this year by a Norwegian economist, Rogeberg, suggesting the study was flawed and that the reduction in IQ had a socio-economic basis. Dr Meier has since responded that a re-examination of the data shows that if one included only middle class cannabis users the results are the same. Professor Hall, of the University of QLD supports Meier's research adding that neuro-imaging studies suggest heavy cannabis users have a reduction in parts of the brain involved in memory and cognitive performance which would suggest cannabis is having some sort of toxic effect.

**Study shows Ice Users at
greater risk of Psychosis**

Another recent study, by Australian researchers, has found that methamphetamine (ICE) users are five times more likely to show symptoms of

psychosis than non-users. The link has been known for some time so the results were not surprising. However, it has not been clear whether the drug brings on psychotic symptoms or if people who use the drug are more prone to mental illness in the first place.

[Many family members possibly consider their substance abusing offspring/siblings mad to go near the stuff - so it can be hard for them to work out which came first, the chicken or the egg! Ed. being flippant].

The researchers into the drug, ice, say most users will stop experiencing symptoms if they quit using. However, when they're not on the drug, about 10 per cent of users continue to have psychotic symptoms, and when they're taking the drug heavily, more than half of them will have psychotic symptoms.

[Ed. again: As with the harmful effects of tobacco, there will almost certainly continue to be many nay-sayers, however, the 'jury' can't remain out much longer!! Education is one of the keys because the outright banning of substances (as with many other products including guns) tends to promote an undercover supply chain which has huge ramifications for the conduct of an orderly society].

Home Energy Saver Scheme (HESS)

The Federal Government has invested more than \$50 million under the HES Scheme to help low income Australians reduce their energy costs and in January AGL announced that their company would invest a further \$2.1 million to allow HESS to offer even more support to vulnerable individuals. The scheme provides practical help on how to become more energy efficient and reduce power bills. It can include one-on-one budgeting assistance, help to access no interest or low interest loans to buy energy efficient appliances and advice on eligibility for rebates and other assistance. HESS is delivered in Victoria through the not for profit organisation Kildonan Uniting Care, 1 Gold St, Collingwood Tel. 9412 5600.

Eye Care Services

The Australian College of Optometry (ACO) provides low cost eye-care services to eligible Victorians through clinics in the Melbourne Metropolitan areas, via outreach programs or by a network of private optometrists in rural Victoria. To be eligible one must hold a Pensioner Concession Card or a Health Care Card. For further enquiries or to make an appointment in Carlton - our nearest clinic - call 9349 7400.

Mental Health Carer EXPO Tuesday 16 April 2-7.30pm St Kilda Town Hall

Attached to this newsletter is a flyer for the Mental Health Expo taking place in two weeks time. It will be a great opportunity to find out what you can do to help someone with a mental illness and what community supports are available for you or your family member. The Expo will showcase services in and around our region - some 35 will be represented. ISFAF has two of our committee members on the Inner South Mental Health Carers Network which has arranged the expo. If you would be interested in contributing in future to this sort of venture or helping in other ways of improving mental health awareness please let the organisers know. Invite your multi-lingual friends to come along too. A presentation by a guest speaker will be provided in a variety of community languages including Greek, Chinese, Polish and Russian and interpreters will be available as well.

Contact Lindy Alcorn on Ph: 9076 6204 for more details and to register your interest.

Donations to Voices Vic

Those who came to our March meeting and heard Sue Belmore, Fiona Robinson and Initially No, speak about their experiences were inspired by their accounts of how they had coped with hearing voices. Subsequently the ISFAF committee decided to make a small donation towards the international Hearing Voices conference which Voices Vic will host later this year. The funds we receive from the Department of Health specifically prohibit our making donations to other groups so the contribution has come from donations. It is open to individual members to donate directly via Prahran Mission (PO Box 68, Prahran 3181) with instructions that the funds are to be directed to Voices Vic. Further information on 96929417 or vvadmin@prahranmission.org.au

Carer Support Cheat Sheet

Put together by Tim Twining and Violeta Petersen, Alfred Psychiatry Carer Consultants, to promote awareness of carer issues within Alfred Psychiatry - we're including it with this newsletter because we think it worthy of the widest circulation. Thank you both!!