

MENTAL HEALTH INTERNET ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

The Madness Group family of nested lists creates a decentralized electronic forum and distribution device for exchanging ways to change political systems that touch people who experience mood swings, fear, voices, and visions (People Who), and for distributing any information and resources that might be useful.

Since the 1960s some users of mental health services have developed local self-help alternatives to traditional services and advocated for due process and civil rights during involuntary and contingent psychiatric treatments. What mental health advocates call "the movement" has had a core value of respect for difference, that we each speak for ourselves, that no one person or group speaks for us. Historically, therefore, our efforts to join and create a national network have been unsuccessful. Some additional reasons are that much mutual support and advocacy is supported by local and national mental health systems and associations, drug manufacturers, and grants. Some believe that this kind of funding dulls the philosophic edge of the grass roots user movement and takes too much administrative energy. Some believe this distorts self-help. Current newsletters and mailings are distributed by post and the copying, collating, and mail costs have become prohibitive at the same time that the funding streams are drying up. This leads to restricted information distribution just when the global trends are for wider information exchange, even information overload.

Electronic mail (e-mail) is created once and sent to one or many with a few computer commands. There is no postage, no envelopes, no address labels, no folding. The receiver can read the mail on the computer screen or print out a paper version. E-mail saves money, saves time, and gets distributed faster.

In January 1994, I sent an e-mail message to seventeen people, all people who experience mood swings, fear, voices, and visions. Our numbers grew, and by November we were invited to join the cross-disability electronic community established by Bob Zenhausern at St. Johns University. What began as one e-mail discussion list has expanded to close to a score of lists, a gopher, two Web pages, an IRC channel, and a dozen administrators reaching at least 500 consumer/survivors of mental health services. One goal is to establish lists for all fifty United States; so far twenty lists are running. We are not yet at critical mass, and as we grow stronger and surer in advocacy, those who want to distance themselves from our genuineness continue to become more oppressive. Families are urging outpatient commitment and lower standards for involuntary interventions. But service users, together, have published articles and letters in journals and newspapers, presented at conferences, and affected parity legislation and community treatment policies. Together we've enacted the cross-disability motto "Nothing About Me Without Me."

MADNESS is the super-list for The Madness Group, a family of e-mail lists, and Web pages. Associated are:

ACT-MAD Mental Health Activism Discussion
CINMHC California InterNetwork of Mental Health Clients
CLUBMAD Safety and Support
GONEMAD Closed as a list, archives now a database
IF-WE-BUILD-IT The MADNESS Group infrastructure list
MAD-ADHOC Ad Hoc list for MADNESS Work Groups
MAD-GLBT Mad and Queer Voices
MADGRRLS Feminist Forum for Women
OZMAD Australian Mad Movement voices
TWOHATS Mental Health Consumer and Employee Discussion List
WFMH-SCL 1999 World Federation of Mental Health Congress
WNUSP World Network of (Ex-)Users/Survivors of Psychiatry
MadSpirit

To learn more, visit <http://www.peoplewho.net> or send me mail:
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