

Fight by mentally ill for dignity must be expanded, says Reville

By JIM MONAGHAN
Staff Writer

The fight by people with mental illness for dignity and recognition will take many paths, said an adviser to Ontario Premier Bob Rae Wednesday night.

David Reville told 40 members of Survivors In Action (SIA) it isn't enough to reform psychiatric hospitals. They must also clamor for expanded community-based services, new housing options, social assistance reform and a louder voice in provincial and municipal politics.

According to Reville, only five per cent of the \$1 billion spent annually on mental health services in Ontario goes to community supports. The rest is paid to institutions and doctors.

Reville said the fastest growing portion of the mental health budget is the amount paid to family practitioners providing psychotherapy to marginally ill patients — what Reville called "the worried well". In the meantime, many people with more severe problems live in poverty and hopelessness after being discharged from hospitals.

START REFORMS

The former MPP said mental health consumers must start the reform process by building partnerships with friendly professionals and working through their own alliances to change a system which treats the symptoms of mental illness but fails to help its victims rebuild their shattered lives.

"You have to face the politicians, look them in the eye and tell them they have to be on the right side of these issues. If they don't, kick the buggers out."



JIM MONAGHAN/RECORDER AND

David Reville, former MPP and now special adviser to Premier Bob Rae, says some inspiring words for mental health consumers in Brockville Wednesday night. Behind him is Tom Haggart, coordinator of Survivors In Action, which sponsored the dinner meeting.

Reville, hospitalized for mental illness while a law student, spent 18 months as an inmate at Kingston Psychiatric Hospital in the mid-1960s.

Using jokes to mask the suffering he endured there, Reville made light of his institutionalization. But his audience, many of whom have similar experiences, knew exactly what kind of ordeal he'd been through.

Reville conducted most of his speech along those lines, giving funny but revealing descriptions of the different wards. And his cracks about mental illness, particularly one anecdote from the time he tried to organize a group for manic-depressives, had his audience splitting their sides from laughter and understanding.

"I was able to organize a lot when I was in my manic phase, but the organization al-

ways fell apart when I was depressed," he deadpanned.

SCARY MOVE

Leaving the humor to one side, Reville congratulated the SIA and other consumer groups on their accomplishments, acknowledging the fact that coming out of the closet can be a scary move for a former psychiatric patient.

The SIA named its first official board of directors following Reville's speech, a group that includes Mary Hart, Eileen Willan, Linda Beaupre, John Sims and Rodney Crozier.

"It's only in the last few years that consumers, or survivors or whatever you want to call yourselves, have been able to get together and try and figure out how those of us who have had that direct experience can get control of our own lives again against some pretty stiff odds," Reville said.

"Some progress has been made for the physically disabled and some progress has been made for the developmentally handicapped. But society still hasn't gotten its head around people with psychiatric disabilities. We have to do something about that."

ADVOCACY SYSTEM

Reville said a new advocacy system proposed by the Ontario government may help prevent some of the more important discrimination and abuse levelled at people suffering from psychiatric problems or other disabilities.

Legislation to implement the system — which he said will clarify and enhance the existing guardianship and substitute decision-making arrangements for people made vulnerable by their disabilities — is now being drafted.



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Personality conflicts and philosophical differences have caused a split in the local psychiatric survivors' movement.

Several founding members and mainstays of Survivors In Action (SIA) broke away this week to form a chapter of the Ontario Psychiatric Survivors Alliance (OPSA).

Eight people attended an organizational meeting Wednesday night and the new chapter has sent out feelers to the Rideau Valley District Health Council seeking consumer representation on various boards and committees.

Members of OPSA say they created a separate organization because the Family Focus agency is trying to co-opt the movement and is calling the shots at SIA, which was created last spring as an independent advocacy group in order to press for changes within the mental health care system.

Lynne Smith is one of several survivors who resigned from the SIA advisory committee. Her feelings are representative of those who joined the new group.

"A lot of people have quit SIA because they're tired of being controlled. SIA still exists, but it doesn't represent the views of psychiatric survivors," she said.

SEEK INDEPENDENCE

Janice Giffin, executive coordinator of Family Focus, says her agency is caught in a Catch-22 situation. Its goal is to make SIA independent as soon as possible, but in the meantime it must administer the \$25,000 it channelled to

SIA from its mental health funds in August because the survivors' group doesn't have a board of directors.

SIA will form its own board of directors at a meeting in January, at which point it will assume responsibility for hiring personnel, setting policies and deciding on membership criteria, she said.

But Jim Roker, SIA's former consumer liaison and interim leader of OPSA, says complete autonomy, right from the beginning, is crucial to the success of the survivors' movement. "That is so important to people who have been institutionalized. We were conditioned, we were controlled, we were told when to take our pills, when we could go out and who we could see.

'LOST SELF-ESTEEM'

"We lost our self-esteem and we lost everything you need to function as a normal human being in society. We know the effects of control by abusive caregivers. As part of our healing, we must get back our self-esteem and self-respect."

Roker praised Family Focus for its role in helping launch and support SIA during the organization's fragile beginnings, but he said even compassionate caregivers must know when to remain on the sidelines.

For survivors, the journey towards independence is as important as finally reaching the destination, he said.

"If we fall down and skin our knees, we must be able to get ourselves back up, dust ourselves off and keep going. We look forward to working with sympathetic professionals and using their resources and help — as long as they know we're working together."

OPSA welcomes professionals and family members of

survivors into the organization, but only as associate members. Only people with experience as consumers of mental health services will have full membership, sit on the executive and be permitted to cast ballots when matters come to a vote.

Roker said OPSA will embrace not only Brockville but the entire tri-county area of Leeds, Grenville and Lanark.

Giffin and Bev Hurst, coordinator of Family Focus's Brockville office and a member of the SIA advisory committee, say SIA has a similar aim.

A membership drive is scheduled to culminate in a meeting January 16 where members will elect a board of directors, launching the SIA on its own independent course.

Despite the similarities between the two survivors' organizations, members of both insist the anger generated by the split will soon subside and the two can work together on the more important business of improving the lot of former and present psychiatric patients.

Roker's comments echo Giffin's when he describes how much work needs to be done.

"Just as there is more than one supermarket in town and more than one car dealership in town, there is room for all of us. Getting well is not a monopoly that any one organization can claim as its own."

Dr. Hugh Lafave, the director of rehabilitation at Brockville Psychiatric Hospital, who some of the survivors claim inspired the local movement, says the current dispute may simply reflect the natural growing pains of a fledgling organization.

Although the Community Living and Community Involvement agencies parted ways on a more amicable basis, they have found separate but complementary niches in advocating for, and providing direct service to, the developmentally handicapped, Lafave pointed out.

"Splintering isn't always bad if it makes more people interested in it and gets more people charged up. And sometimes people get their strength by having something to rail against."

Survivors in Action trying to settle fight