



VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

**ANNUAL REPORT
2015-2016**



FOREWORD: GORDON JOHNSTON, VOX CHAIRPERSON

I'm delighted to report on another productive year of hard work and, at times, frantic activity across all of the priorities set by our members at last year's conference. We've made good progress on several areas of work, as detailed in this report, as well as continuing the "day job" of promoting and representing our members' views in many consultations, working groups and other forums.

As we move towards a human rights based approach to mental health, I was delighted to be involved in the development and launch of the Rights For Life Declaration and Change Agenda in February 2016. Working with our partners in the Scottish Recovery Network and See Me we developed a series of actions that will challenge the discrimination and stigma that still blights the lives of many. This is just the start of a process, and there is a lot more to come as we seek to deliver on the Declaration.

Another major piece of joint work this year came through the Scottish Mental Health Partnership, which brings together the main national third sector organisations in mental health. Together we developed a Briefing Paper prior to the Scottish Elections setting out our views on the best way to improve Scotland mental health.

We called for a fundamental shift in approach, moving from a system primarily focused on crisis intervention and maintenance towards one aimed at preventing distress and the promotion of good mental health and wellbeing for everyone in Scotland, by right. We also called for a high level Commission to be formed, independent of government and fully involving people with lived experience, to review the current system and to propose a new and transformative vision and strategy for the future.

As the Scottish Government consults on a new Mental Health Strategy we will continue to work with our partners to influence and to press for the transformation in promoting good mental health that we all know is needed in Scotland.

Over the past year our group members have come together under the banner of the VOX Collective to share knowledge and learning



and to work together on a number of initiatives. The voluntary sector has always promoted networking and sharing resources and the organisations involved will continue to build on the good work they've already started.

After almost six years on the Board I will be standing down at the AGM, having served the full term allowed. I've very much enjoyed the opportunity to be involved and to help shape the direction of a crucial and successful national voice in mental health. I'd like to thank all of the Directors and advisers I've worked alongside over this time for their hard work and commitment – I've learned a great deal from everyone. I'd also like to give my sincere thanks to the VOX staff team, Wendy, Mahmud and John, for their many years of commitment, hard work and consistently strong support.

I look forward to seeing VOX continue to thrive in the coming years.

Gordon Johnston

**AN
ORGANISATION**

**OF, BY
AND FOR**

PEOPLE

**WITH A LIVED
EXPERIENCE OF
MENTAL ILLNESS**



Why Advocate?

“Unless someone like you cares
a whole awful lot, Nothing is
going to get better. It's not.”
- Dr. Seuss, The Lorax



BACKGROUND TO VOX

The need for a way to bring together the voice of mental health service users in a meaningful way was explored at an Open Space Event which was held in Dundee in 2004. The event was attended by 102 service users from across Scotland and as a result of the ideas shared; a clear mandate was given to the steering group to develop a national members' led organisation at a national level.

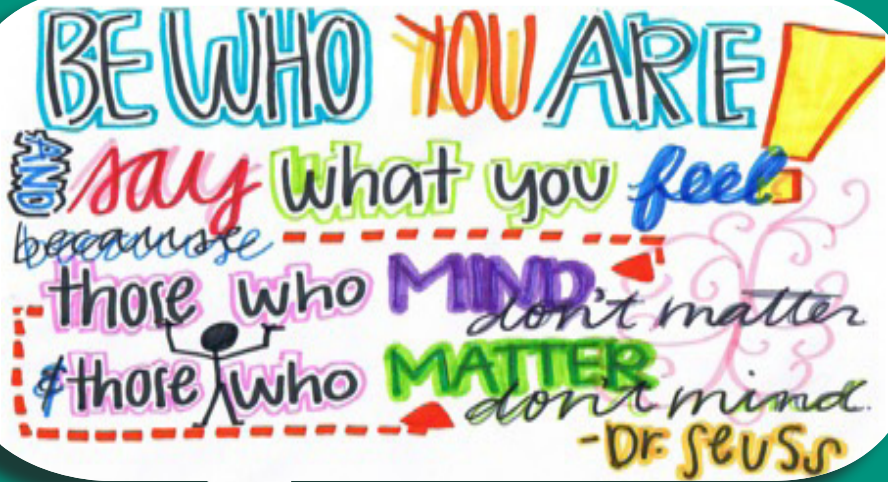
The Scottish Governments Mental Health Division in recognition of the need to have a national voice agreed to fund VOX during its development period. VOX was launched in December 2006, and has since been developing and growing to become an inclusive and sustainable organisation. On the 25th of June 2010 VOX became a company limited by guarantee with charitable status.

OBJECTIVES

VOX's objectives are as follows;

- To develop, support and sustain an accountable, national organisation of, and for, people who have or have had mental health problems.
- To be a source of information, support and guidance in developing the capacity of people who have or have had mental health problems to participate in civil society and in the development of services which they may manage.
- To offer a structure for people to communicate with each other and other organisations, so that they can exchange opinions, perspectives and experiences.





WHAT WE DO

We are a national mental health members' led charity and we work in partnership with mental health and related services to ensure that people with mental health problems get every opportunity to contribute positively to changes in the services that serve them and society more generally. VOX has individual, group and associate membership.

VOX produces information and opportunities to allow individual and group members to have their voices heard, and it is a chance to hear about and influence a range of work across Scotland in relation to mental health.

VOX also arranges consultation events and focus groups, developing opportunities to allow people to have their say on specific topics. We like to balance out our focus between members' priorities and the policy direction at the time.

VOX Staff Team

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| • Wendy McAuslan | VOX Development Coordinator (part time) |
| • Mahmud Al-Gailani | VOX Equality and Development Coordinator (part time) |
| • John Steel | VOX Administration Officer (part time) |

WHO'S INVOLVED?

Member Directors

- Gordon Johnston (Chairperson)
- Amanda O'Connell (Vice chairperson)
- John Sawkins (Secretary)
- Chris White
- Laura Caven
- Tracy Laird
- Carol Mapley
- Dianna M. Manson
- Chris Evans
- Pauline Bradley
- Donald Grant (resigned)
- David Atiyah (resigned)

Non-Member Directors

- Alison Thom

Most importantly – VOX's members!

Today you are **YOU**,
that is **TRUER** than true.

There is **NO ONE** alive
who is **YOUER** than **YOU!**

- Dr. Seuss



YOUR VIEWS SHAPE HOW VOX DEVELOPS

We continue to ensure that at our members' meetings you have the opportunity to set VOX's priorities, remember it's your organisation not ours!

VOX held our priority setting members' meeting in September 2016 (attended by 58 people) which set our work plans for 2015/16. This work was further developed at our winter members meeting in February 2016.

You wanted us to focus on the following areas Advance statements; Spending cuts work, Human Rights, Discrimination and Isolation.

WE SHARE GOOD PRACTICE WITH OTHERS

VOX held (in partnership with the Mental Welfare Commission and the Mental Health Network Greater Glasgow) a good practice event at the end of March to raise awareness of peer led models of developing advance statements. We have since developed an action plan for how to take forward the promotion and development of advance statements.

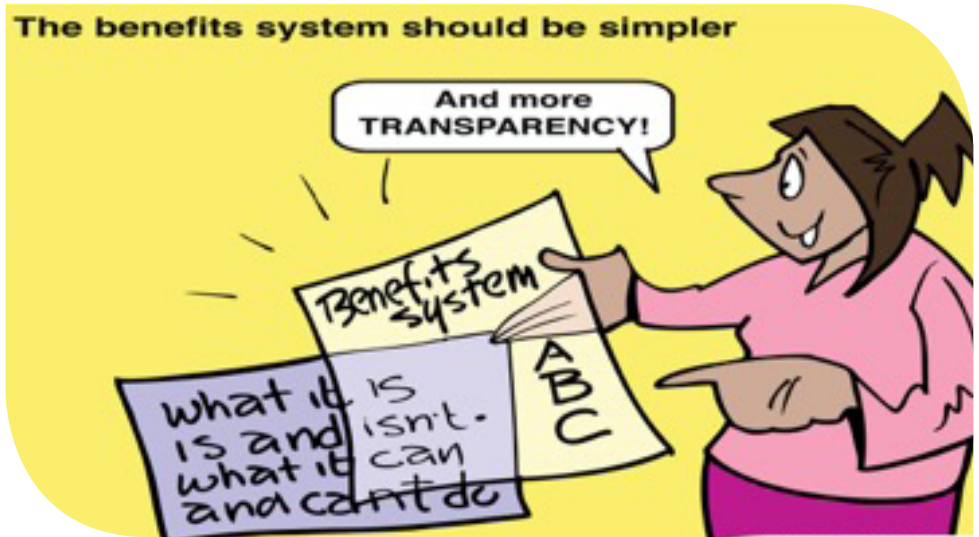
VOX has also started to develop a project looking at good practice in involving those with lived experience, focussing on wellbeing for those who attend events and thinking about safe space and a range of methods of involvement.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND LEADERSHIP FOR INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS

The VOX collective (VOX's group members coming together) provides a helpful arena to share learning/and identify when something works well. We also have a new website which provides a hub for opportunities relating to capacity building and leadership.

We attended the lived experience leadership academy at Yale to support development work on good practice leadership, this involved supporting development work, a business plan and producing a bid document which will influence leadership in Scotland.

The benefits system should be simpler



WE REPRESENT OUR MEMBERS' VOICES

VOX is involved in a range of steering groups and meetings including; the Rights for life partnership steering group, the Scottish Mental Health Partnership, the Scottish Patient Safety Programme, the national prison advocacy forum, the Mental Health Cross Party Group, the Stakeholder Reference Group of the Implementation of the Mental Health Act, the mental health arts and film festival group, and many more. Those who represent VOX at these meetings always try to ensure your views are represented, in particular the priorities you raised at the priority setting session e.g. human rights, isolation, discrimination and advance statements.

Involvement in a range of steering groups has led to the following;

- Further development of the rights agenda in mental health
- Influencing the terms and language used in Scottish Prisons

- Ensuring culturally diverse communities are heard (in partnership with the Insight Institute)
- Influencing the content of the community conversations empowerment tool
- Delivering diversity training to Community leaders
- A greater focus on advance statements
- Contributing to the Amaan Resource for refugee women
- Influencing the transport and accommodation agenda (with independent living in Scotland)

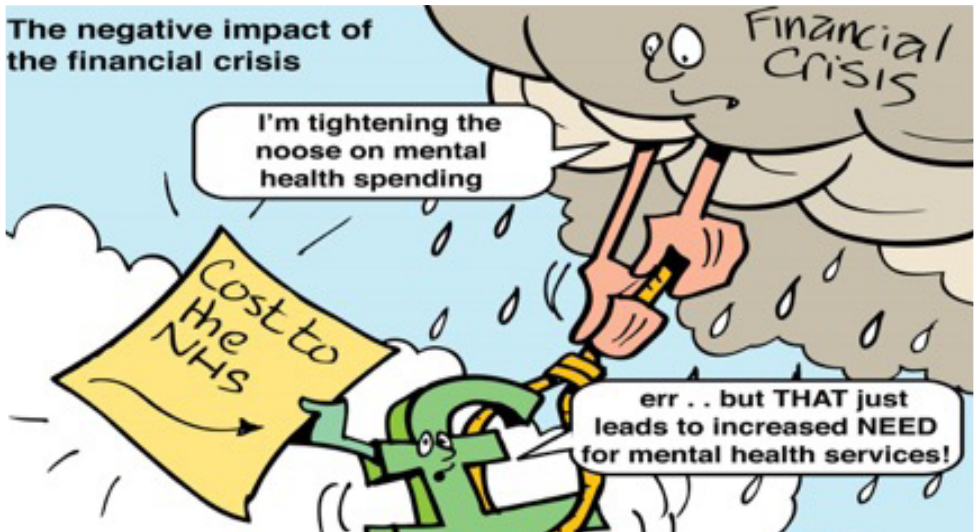


“ let us share our
voice of experience
in mental health ”

PROMOTING JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

VOX worked with 358 directly people through the mental health diversity/ community leaders programme, developing reports and identifying key actions, again ensuring we adequately represent and understand a broad range of views. This included work through prisons, those who have experienced domestic abuse, black and minority ethnic women, dual diagnosis and remote and rural issues.

This year's Mental Health Arts and Film festival event at the Kelvingrove art gallery was led by our community leaders. A range of events, activities and performances were used to highlight social inclusion and diversity issues in relation to mental health.



THANK YOU

We very much would like to say a huge thank you to all of our directors for their dedication, hard work and commitment to VOX, and would like again to say that without our members and member directors VOX would not exist.

A particular thanks to our chairperson who has supported VOX for the last six years and has provided a great deal of dedication and support to the work which we do.

We would also like to thank VOX's advisers who help us to understand policy context and provide invaluable advice.

Finally we would like to thank the Mental Health Foundation for their continued support and passion to ensure VOX continues to thrive.

We hope you will continue to support VOX in its aim to increase the opportunities¹ to contribute positively to changes in services and society!



You're off to great places.
Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting.
So... get on your way!



DR - SUESS



VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

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