

Foreword

This booklet provides an introduction to mental health from the perspective of people who have been diagnosed with 'mental illness' (in this booklet, we call ourselves 'consumers').

It has been produced by Our Consumer Place (www.ourconsumerplace.com.au), a groundbreaking mental health resource centre run by consumers. Funded by the Department of Health (Government of Victoria) and auspiced by Our Community, we offer information and advice to individuals and groups who are providing or thinking about providing consumer developed initiatives (CDIs).

A number of issues introduced in this booklet are expanded in other booklets – check our website for more information.

Most of the available information on mental health has been written by other sorts of 'experts' – mental health professionals, mental health charities or researchers who are not consumers. This booklet is different – it is written by people with 'mental illness', based on our experience-based expertise. It is intended as an introduction to the issues that consumers have identified as being important for us.

This booklet provides an introduction in two senses: firstly, it introduces important aspects of the mental health system to those who have been diagnosed with 'mental illness' and want to know where to go next. It also provides an introduction to 'consumer perspective' – a way of looking at mental health that values the lived experience of those having been diagnosed with a 'mental illness' as a crucially important source of insight. In this sense, the information and views presented in this booklet are unlike the information and views presented in most other available information about mental health.

We want to stress, right from the start, that people with a diagnosis of 'mental illness' do not all have the same views (of course!); we disagree with each other on many points.

When people are diagnosed with 'mental illness', they can have a range of different reactions – some people feel lost, out of their depth or panicky about what will happen next. Others will hear the news with enormous relief – a diagnosis may explain things that were otherwise mysterious and troubling. Many of us may have a mixture of all of these emotions.

Over time, people move in different directions as they search for a path they want to follow. ***There is no right or wrong path.*** Some people want to find the best, most respected and accessible treatment. In Australia, this tends to mean working with mental health clinicians. Others rage against a



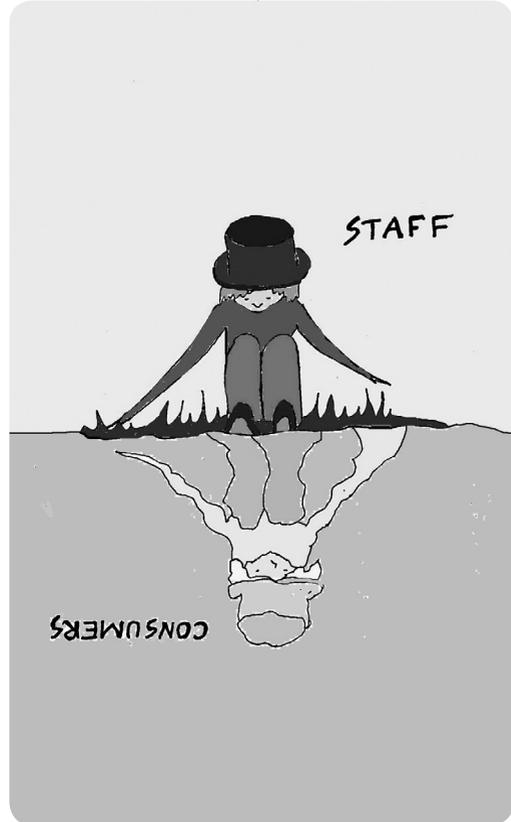
system that they find judgemental and damaging, pointing to loss of liberty and human rights abuses.

We know that you will find your own path – we offer this booklet in a spirit of “take what you like and leave the rest”.

Dedication & Acknowledgements

This series of booklets is dedicated to all people whose lives have been cut short by ‘mental illness’, and/or their experience of community prejudice and trauma.

Booklet One, *So You Have a ‘Mental Illness’ ... What Now?*, is dedicated to the life and work of Rhonda Black, who contributed in so many ways to its production. Her writing was crisp and witty, her intellect exceptional, and her life filled by an everyday, practical commitment to those in the community who had less than her. Unfortunately Rhonda died before this booklet was published.



We also owe a debt of gratitude to the Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network (Australia), members of *The Maine Connection*, William Moon, Kenneth Holt, former Our Consumer Place staff members Cath Roper and Jon Kroschel, and all those who contributed information for this booklet. It has been a truly collaborative process. We thank all of you for your wisdom and insights.

Thanks also to the Department of Health (Government of Victoria) and Our Community for providing the funding and the support that allows Our Consumer Place to exist.

Merinda Epstein & Flick Grey