

People Against Coercive Treatment

REGIONAL CONFERENCE – THINGS TO BE THINKING ABOUT

- **Location/venues** - Which city/community will serve as host? Will we use indoor or outdoor venues/facilities, or perhaps a combination of both?
- **Funding** – Possible source(s) of monies? How much will be required? (will need budget). Whether or not to ask for registration \$\$ from participants?
- **Participants/Guest list** – How will this be decided upon? How open do we want this to be? How many participants? Limit to Survivor community, or invite allies as well?
- **Agenda** – Workshops, networking, development of 'activist toolkit', local strategizing, specific campaigns/action plans, space for recreational/social activities and 'down-time'. Will need facilitators. Structure/format for meetings and workshops – what form will this take? How many days will we meet for?
- **Transportation** – Do we wish to try to arrange this? If so, for how many people, from where, and how much will it cost? (see **Funding**). Do we arrange for peoples' travel by the usual means (bus, train, air) or encourage self-reliance through approaches such as promoting carpooling and (if possible) offering a partial subsidy for gas? Can people obtain travel subsidies on their own from other sources (i.e. their workplaces, or sympathetic social agencies)?
- **Accommodation/Meals** – Do we wish to try to provide these things? If so, for how many, what form will these resources take and how much will it cost? (see **Funding**). How best to ensure persons with special needs are properly accommodated in terms of both meals and billeting?
- **Peer support/crisis resolution** – Always something to keep in mind at such events. Conferences at the best of times can be tremendously stressful and people can be easily affected by fatigue, stress, personal issues, etc. As well, conflicts are bound to arise. We are most likely to succeed both in this event and our ongoing struggles if we can 'be there' in a strong, supportive, but non-invasive way for each other.
- **Followup** – maintain ongoing contact with participating individuals and groups over the long term.

SUMMARY

The Psychiatric Survivor community in Ontario has over the past few years become increasingly the target of vicious right-wing assaults on our fundamental rights. Our community has been especially hard hit by (among other things) the near-total destruction of the social safety net, lack of secure affordable housing and de-stabilization of the employment market.

As well, Draconian new laws are being passed which sharply limit our basic right to freedom, or to control our own bodies, minds and spirits. The clear (but unfounded) public bias against persons with a psychiatric label has been a key contributor to this, and to the marginalization of our community.

Unfortunately, the activists in our community are relatively few in number. The system has disempowered so many of us to the point where the very thought of challenging our abusers gives rise to abject terror. As well, the marginalization and public bias we experience has also affected our relationship to other activists and 'progressives', thus making efforts to seek solidarity largely unfruitful to date. The geographical reality of living in a huge but sparsely populated jurisdiction also hampers the kind of larger-scale organizing we need to be doing.

At this point it is vital that we rise to the challenge of fighting the escalating attacks on our sisters and brothers. Such a struggle must be carried forth into all Ontario communities, and not restricted to larger centres. It is necessary to this end that as many of us as possible assemble to learn, strategize, make specific plans, and to develop together an 'activist toolkit' which participants can bring back to their own communities; in order to organize effectively at the local level.

This should be viewed as being a focused, working meeting rather than merely a social gathering. However, in order to avoid burnout and foster a sense of community and closeness, adequate time for social and cultural activities should be set aside. As well, participants will need to feel that they can claim needed personal space at any point in the proceedings, and be accommodated in doing so.

The task we are facing appears enormous. But together, we can pull this off.

Graeme Bacque
January 16, 2001