The ‘Friends’ are looking for a new Chairperson

The ‘Friends of Fulbourn Hospital and the Community’ is a small, highly-regarded charity established in 1952. The current Chair has been in post for nine years and wishes to stand down at the AGM in October 2009.

The ‘Friends’ serve the southern end of the area covered by the local mental health Foundation Trust - Cambridge City, South and East Cambridgeshire. They support the care, welfare, rehabilitation and recovery of sufferers from mental illness – together with their carers – who are, or who have been associated with Fulbourn Hospital, or its related mental health services.

They also aim to increase the understanding of mental illness, and the needs and problems of patients and their carers, amongst people outside the Hospital. There are no paid staff; the charity being run entirely by a Management Committee of volunteers, several of whom are service users or carers of somebody with a mental health problem. A large number of other volunteers work for the ‘Friends’, including Committee members, and in any one year this usually totals around 70 people in all.

In the Hospital the ‘Friends’ provide extra facilities, befriend individuals, organise entertainment and parties. They also run the ‘Outlook Project’ which contributes to the Trust’s current emphasis on recovery. This uses trained volunteers to accompany patients nearing discharge into the city centre or elsewhere, for visits to museums and art galleries, the Botanic Garden, concerts etc. In the wider community the ‘Friends’ offer befriending, financial and other support, advise and help carers, and inform public debate on mental health issues.

The city-based, 14-year old Forum Lunch Club, meets monthly and provides for older people with a professional background who are living at home, and who have developed, or are in danger of developing, a mental health problem leading to social and intellectual isolation. Some carers also attend.

For the past nine years the ‘Friends’ have run the award-winning Millennium Arts Project (MAP) which places artists-in-residence on wards, in day-centres and related community settings. It offers mental health service-users of all ages, whatever their illness, a broad range of arts activities and opportunities, in a supportive and relaxed environment. The great success of this work has led to the establishment of a new charity, Arts and Minds, which is extending and expanding the work of MAP across the county. It is intended that MAP will merge with Arts and Minds, probably later this year.

The work is funded through subscribing ‘Friends’, charitable grants and donations, and organised through several Working Groups which report to quarterly meetings of the Management Committee. In the last financial year the total income was £17,270 and expenditure £22,341. The ‘Friends’ collaborate with mental health Foundation Trust managers, Social Services and mental health professionals, and work closely with other local mental health charities. The ‘Friends’ are affiliated members of Attend (the National Association of Hospital & Community Friends) which provides full insurance cover and legal advice. All Committee members and volunteers are required to have an enhanced level check through the Criminal Records Bureau, arranged and paid for by the Mental Health Trust. The ‘Friends’ operate Vulnerable Adults and Equal Opportunities policies, and they welcome mental health service users’ involvement in their work.
**Job Description**

A good understanding of mental illness, the impact it has on sufferers and their families and carers, and an appreciation of their needs, is vital. An ability to use a computer is essential.

The Chairperson is responsible for the general oversight, strategic direction and administration of the Friends’ work, and chairs the quarterly Management Committee meetings which take place in the Board room on the Fulbourn Hospital site. The Committee currently has 18 members and, apart from the Officers, these include a ‘shadow’ Treasurer, two Hospital representatives (adults and older people), a representative from an older people’s community team, and from the Diocese of Ely.

The Chair is supported by the Officers:- Vice-Chair, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary, Membership Secretary and the Development Officer. A Committee member edits the Friends’ quarterly Newsletter. Fund-raising is currently carried out by the Chair and Treasurer, with the Development Officer, but this could be re-organised.

Much of the Friends’ work is done through the Working Groups, which meet as required, each of which is co-ordinated by a Management Committee member. Currently these cover Forum, Social activities, and MAP, but the latter will merge with *Arts and Minds* in the autumn.

The recruitment, vetting, induction and appointment of the volunteers has until now been carried out by the Chair. The range and interest of the Friends’ work now attracts such large numbers of high-quality volunteers, particularly students, that it has become a time-consuming job. It is hoped that it will shortly become the responsibility of the Mental Health Trust to carry out all the initial work and refer possible volunteers to the Friends.

A new Working Group, or delegated persons, will then be needed to place these volunteers appropriately and oversee their work, and also to liaise with wards on the ‘Outlook Project’, which uses volunteer helpers.

The current Chair can be available if needed to offer initial support and guidance, and the new Chairperson will be welcome to ‘shadow’ during the months leading up to appointment.

**For more information please contact:**

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President of the Friends: Peter HIlken O.B.E.
Hon. Vice-President: Mrs Elisabeth Harland O.B.E.
Vice-Presidents: Dr Graham Petrie F.R.C.Psych. and Dr Monica Shutter M.B. B.Chir