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Date: 20 June 2007

To: Mental Health Crisis Response Committee

From: David Oaks, Director

Re: Consumer/Survivor Panel Presentation

Thank you for this opportunity for MindFreedom International, and our local affiliate MindFreedom Lane County, to have input with you about "Mental Health Crisis Response." MFI is an independent nonprofit that unites 100 grassroots groups internationally working for human rights and humane alternatives in mental health. MFI's main office is here in Eugene.

On 7 November 2006 *The Register-Guard* published a letter to the editor by me. I would like to read brief excerpts of the letter I submitted:

"In October the City of Eugene held an all-day conference at the University of Oregon on the theme of 'Choice in Mental Health Care as a Human Right: A Vision of Recovery and Success.' Several hundred community members heard excellent out-of-town speakers and attended two dozen workshops. For two years the City of Eugene has made human rights in mental health a priority in its human rights program.

"Mayor Kitty Piercy helped name the conference, and kicked it off with a memorable and moving keynote. A goal has been to create a City-wide community dialogue. If someone with a psychiatric label is arrested for a violent act, we'll probably see a screaming headline about it in this newspaper. If so, remember this: When many people with psychiatric diagnoses worked hard with other community members for two years to accomplish something positive, there has so far been no substantive news coverage in the mainstream media about this effort. Why?"

www.MindFreedom.org
Win Human Rights in Mental Health

As you may know, exactly one week -- seven days -- after *The Register-Guard* published my letter, the police shot and killed 19-year-old Ryan Salisbury on 14 November 2006. This incident was only a few blocks from my home in Churchill. And yes, there have been headlines ever since.

So where is the community dialogue, especially one that truly includes the voice of mental health consumers and psychiatric survivors?

If a new major controversy were to emerge with how the City of Eugene ought to interact with people with physical disabilities... or with people of color... or with gays or lesbians... or immigrants... then representatives from those communities would at least be consulted, included and listened to from day one. We as a City may not follow the recommendations of these advocacy groups, but these groups would be part of the dialogue.

This was not always true. In the mid-1940's, there was a neighborhood of African Americans near Ferry Street Bridge mistakenly called "Tent City" even though eye-witnesses saw no tents. In July 1949 the City of Eugene bulldozed that entire village. And of course, the City of Eugene did not adequately consult with groups of people of color in this decision.

Here in 2007, those of us diagnosed with major psychiatric disabilities live in our own kind of "Tent City." For a few who are homeless this means actual tents. For others it's a metaphorical tent with a lack of empathy, understanding or community dialogue. We are also bulldozed. Bulldozed by a lack of alternatives. Lack of advocacy. Lack of voice. Lack of choice.

Support for Voice of Mental Health Consumers/Psychiatric Survivors

Before I give a bulleted list of a few points, I make one major point:

There is an emergency, urgent, critical need to include, nurture, support and listen to the voice of mental health consumers and psychiatric survivors, and especially their groups, in this process. That voice has not been adequately heard so far. Today's testimony is not enough.

We need a collaborative, united, effort to support and hear from the voice of mental health consumers and psychiatric survivors. I see signs that this is starting to happen. On 29 May 2007, quite a number of community

- Many techniques taught by CIT can and ought to be applied to many interactions with all citizens, whatever their psychiatric label. For instance, a police car siren and lights can be frightening and traumatizing to all citizens, and ought to only be used when really needed. Handcuffs can hurt and frighten all people, and ought only be used when really needed. De-escalation techniques to help calm down and relate to people can assist all people.

- Criminal justice system reform is a crucial and daunting part of this story. That is because it is important that our liberty only be denied because we have actually violated a law. Taking our liberty away only because of a psychiatric label or any disability later is wrong. In fact, the United Nations has recently come out with a statement about disability rights that says something similar. But there ought to be more for all citizens in the criminal justice system other than walls, bars and psychiatric drugs. I would rather be in a jail or prison than a psychiatric institution where I am drugged.

- Today, there is a move from jails and prisons made of concrete and prison, to chemical prisons. That is more and more people are coerced, pressured and forced to take super-powerful psychiatric drugs such as neuroleptics on an outpatient basis. If the Commission is not familiar with neuroleptic drugs, the debate about their efficacy, controversy about brain damage related to neuroleptics, and the importance of alternatives... then this is a prime example of why our voice ought to be included.

- We need to be creative in our approaches. For example, during 9/11 some brave police officers ran up the stairs, rather than down. Surely there are now some brave police who would like to be trained in non-lethal approaches, even if it means some additional risk to themselves.

It is time for the public, and for the City, to get hands on with issues involving mental and emotional well being of our citizens, including during crisis. This can be a start here. However, if we do not speak out, then the police can in fact become misused to enforce this chemical prison, where more and more citizens are pressured to be on psychiatric drugs. For more information feel free to contact me at our office near the train station, phone number 345-9106, e-mail oaks@mindfreedom.org, or our web site www.mindfreedom.org. My main point is that we are working with a number of organizations to strengthen the voice of mental health consumers and psychiatric survivors. Please join us in that effort.