



# Family Support for Schizophrenia

Family Support for Schizophrenia, founded in 1981 as Cape Support for Mental Health, is a support group for the families and carers of people living with schizophrenia

## Chairperson's Report for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

### **Name change and new Constitution**

In its 40<sup>th</sup> year of existence, members of Cape Support for Mental Health voted at the AGM in September 2021 to change the name of the organisation to Family Support for Schizophrenia. This process was preceded by extensive consultation with members. The reason for the change was to distinguish ourselves from other organisations with a similar name, and to indicate more clearly the focus of our organisation.

The Constitution of the organisation was also substantially revised and was adopted at the September 2021 AGM. The goals as contained in the Constitution are as follows:

- To give support to the families and carers of people living with schizophrenia
- To enlighten and educate families and the public about schizophrenia and mental illness
- To raise awareness aimed at fostering community support and involvement
- To reduce the stigma associated with schizophrenia and mental illness
- To advocate for the rights of persons with mental illness

The adoption of the new name has required a slow but steady transition period to consolidate the new identity as well as update several administrative documents. .

The changes have been formally registered by the NPO Directorate of the Department of Social Development. The registration number NPO 040-491 is the same as before.

### **Membership**

At the September 2021 AGM we recorded 54 paid-up members. While the newsletter and monthly support group meetings are available to anyone who is interested, we offer certain benefits only to paid-up members. These are the right to vote at the AGM, and access to the *Members connecting* service and the library.

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#### Family Support for Schizophrenia

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#### Management Committee

*Chairperson* Maureen Robinson | *Treasurer* Mark van Wyk | *Secretary* Sue Custers  
*Members* Marijke Littlefield, Lydia Franciscus, Wayne Schonegevel, Leigh Haselau

## **Monthly support group meetings**

Our monthly support group meetings are advertised in the Cape Town community newspapers, and on our website, as well as in our monthly newsletter. The Covid period saw support group meetings being presented on Zoom, and this has continued even post-Covid. This has allowed us a wider geographical reach and we now have participants from different parts of South Africa.

Each month sees a mix of attendance between existing members and newsletter recipients and people attending for the first time. About 25 - 40 people attend the support group meetings each month.

While Zoom offers an effective mode to impart information, when it comes to the offering of support and the sharing of experiences, it is not the ideal substitute for having face-to-face contact. To address this gap in a small way, online *Caring and Sharing* meetings are held once or twice a year. These have proven to be valuable spaces for participants to ask their own questions and share their own experiences.

Speakers at the support group meetings include professionals, practitioners and representatives of fellow mental health organisations, who speak on topics related to schizophrenia and serious mental illness. The following were the speakers and topics between April 2021 and March 2022:

April	No meeting (27 Apr public holiday)	-
May	Introduced by Siviwe Mduyvelwa, Social Work Supervisor, Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital	Members questions and sharing meeting
June	Kim Hoffman, dietician	Healthy balanced nutrition in schizophrenia
July	Dr John Vermaak, psychiatrist in private practice	Dual diagnosis: Substance use in serious mental health conditions
August	Zerina Hajwani, Co-director, Altitude Supported Employment	Supporting work seekers and employees who have psychiatric disabilities
September	AGM & Gail Hunter, social work student, UCT	The effects of schizophrenia on the caregiver - ideas for self-care and an introduction to compassion fatigue
October	Prof Bonga Chiliza, Department of Psychiatry, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal	The role of childhood and adolescent trauma in people with schizophrenia

November	Kim Windell & Dylan Rademeyer, Peer Support Programme, Cape Mental Health	Peer support for persons with psychosocial disability
February	Soraya Solomon, Director	Friends of Valkenberg
March	Dr Lebogang Phahladira, Department of Psychiatry, University of Stellenbosch	Can we improve treatment outcomes in patients with schizophrenia?

### **Newsletter**

The newsletter is sent to whoever expresses an interest in receiving it, as it serves to make the work that we do more widely known, as well as to reach out and benefit more people through its content. This serves the educational objective of the organisation. At the end of the reporting period we had about 200 recipients on our circulation list, including representatives of various mental health organisations. The newsletter contains the following sections:

- Information about the upcoming support group meeting, with details of speaker and topic
- Report-back of the previous meeting
- Theme of the month
- Members' corner, which includes contributions from members
- Useful resources and links
- Membership matters.

### **Personal communication and support**

A small but very significant activity is our telephone line and communication via email, where we handle queries from the general public as well as from our own members. On request, we help people find the services they need, and which are offered by other organisations or resource agencies, and we listen, counsel, and support.

### **Members connecting service**

In a further attempt to enable face-to-face interaction, and at the request of a member, the *Members connecting* service was introduced in June 2021. Through this service, members are able to share contact details and connect as individuals or in small groups with others who have similar experiences and concerns and who live in the same geographical area.

### **Library**

FSS has a collection of 44 books on schizophrenia and mental health. This is housed at the residence of one of our committee members and is open to all members.

## **Management committee**

The 2021 AGM saw the resignation of Hanneke Hawkes as chairperson of the organisation. Hanneke's contribution was extensive; under her leadership the name and constitution change were successfully completed, a major achievement. Vionne Tregurtha resigned as treasurer at the end of the financial year. Her dedicated and meticulous service is also acknowledged. Maureen Robinson took over as chairperson and Beulah Marks and Wayne Schonegevel joined the committee. For personal reasons, Beulah left the committee during the year. The other members of the committee elected at the AGM were Lydia Franciscus, Marijke Littlefield and Sue Custers.

## **Closing**

In closing, I would like to thank everyone involved for their hard work in support of the goals of the organisation. FSS is run entirely by volunteers, and one is therefore grateful to the committee for their time and input, as well as to the speakers who share their knowledge so generously, and to the members who participate with such interest. We are also cognisant of excellent relationships with like-minded organisations such as Cape Mental Health, Friends of Valkenberg, and SADAG.

We look forward to another year of sharing and providing support and information for families and carers of people living with schizophrenia.

Maureen Robinson

Chairperson

Presented to AGM, 26 September 2022