



Family Support for Schizophrenia

Strength through sharing

Chairperson's Report for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

NPO 040-491

This last year has shown sustained work within the organisation, as we consolidated our identity as Family Support for Schizophrenia and continued our activities as listed below.

Identity, branding and media

October 2022 was an important milestone as it marked our first full year as Family Support for Schizophrenia (FSS), after the 2021 AGM approved the name change from Cape Support for Mental Health (CSMH).

The new name went hand in hand with new branding, which included developing a new logo. The design and colours of the logo were specifically selected to provide continuity with the old CSMH logo, while introducing a fresh, simple and serene feeling suitable for electronic media. The newsletter layout was refreshed and we navigated onto an automated email platform.

We also moved to a new email address - mail@familysupport.org.za - and developed an entirely new website - www.familysupport.org.za - which will be launched at the 2023 AGM.

During the year we developed attractive brochures and posters which were distributed to various organisations. Our flagship publication, *Coping Skills for Carers*, was revised and updated, and is proving to be an excellent resource for families and carers of people living with schizophrenia.

Monthly support group meetings

Our support group meetings were held on Zoom on the last Monday of the month between February and October. The meetings are advertised in the Cape Town community newspapers and on our website, as well as in our monthly newsletter. In November 2022 we were able to hold our first face-for-face meeting since Covid, something we all enjoyed tremendously.

During the year, speakers gave willingly of their time and expertise, and all received complimentary feedback from those who attended the meetings. With one exception, due to a problem with Zoom, attendance ranged between 31 and 36 people per session, and included people from Cape Town and beyond.

This table summarises the speakers, the organisations they represent, and the topics presented for the months April 2022 to March 2023.

Date	Speaker	Organisation	Topic
Apr 2022	Charlene Sunkel	Global Mental Health Peer Network	Living successfully with schizophrenia: How I became a global mental health advocate
May 2022	Caring & Sharing		A space for participants to ask their own questions and share their own experiences.
Jun 2022	Anél Pienaar	Community Mental Health and Psychiatry Foundation	Community Mental Health & Psychiatry Foundation: Supportive services and care for people with long-term mental illness
Jul 2022	Krystle Kemp	SA Depression and Anxiety Group	An introduction to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group and its support groups
Aug 2022	Elsa vd Watt	Western Cape Mental Health Review Board	Understanding the Mental Health Care Act and the functions of the Mental Health Review Board
Sep 2022	AGM		Annual General Meeting
Oct 2022	Schalk de Wet	Basson Blackburn Inc	Wills, trusts and curatorship
Nov 2022	Year-end gathering		
Feb 2023	Dr John Parker	In private practice	Strategies for recovery in schizophrenia
March 2023	Prof Laila Asmal	Stellenbosch University	The benefits of working with the family in schizophrenia

Membership

At the AGM in September 2022 there were 53 paid-up members; this number rose to 57 by the end of that year. Membership fees are a valuable source of income and we therefore encourage everyone to formally join the organisation. However, at the same time, we wish our resources to be freely available, and the newsletter and support group meetings are therefore advertised widely and are open to all.

Several of our members have linked their MySchool card to FSS. This generates a regular income each month, for which we are very grateful.

Year-end gathering

Our members often express the wish to meet on a face-to-face basis with others. We were therefore very pleased to be able to host an in-person gathering in Cape Town on Saturday 26 November 2022, with tea and eats, guest speakers, and an opportunity to borrow library books. The new FSS brochures and posters were available and the revised edition of *Coping Skills for Carers* was successfully launched. 55 people attended the function, making it a very pleasant afternoon. An article about the event appeared in community newspapers. We are grateful to Edu-Excellence School for so graciously allowing us the use of their facilities.

Newsletter

Our monthly newsletter has a circulation of over 250 and contains the following sections:

- Information about the upcoming support group meeting, with details of the speaker and topic
- Report-back on the previous meeting
- Guest column (this replaced Theme of the month in February 2023)
- Members' corner, which includes contributions from members
- Useful resources and links
- Membership matters.

Topics under Theme of the Month and Guest Column during the year included: the value of support groups, the launch of the WHO World Mental Health report, medication for schizophrenia, anosognosia (lack of illness awareness), suicide prevention, World Mental Health Day, the Mental Health Information Centre based at Stellenbosch University, and the Spring Foundation at Lentegeur Hospital.

Personal communication and support

We regularly receive communication via email, asking for advice, information or referrals. Although we are not professional counsellors, we do our best to help people find the services they need, or we refer them to relevant organisations.

Library

FSS has a collection of over forty excellent books on schizophrenia and mental health. This is housed at the residence of one of our committee members and is open to all paid-up members.

Research

FSS embarked in March 2023 on a joint research project with the Department of Psychiatry at Stellenbosch University. The aim of this research is to explore the concerns and challenges that family members have around long-term care of people living with schizophrenia. This study is the first of its kind in South Africa and will

allow researchers and clinicians to better identify locally relevant unmet needs for family members of people with schizophrenia.

Networking

Networking forms an important part of our work, as we liaise with and learn from other organisations. A highlight during this period was a visit to the Friends of Valkenberg. We were introduced to their Friendly Shop, with its array of clothing for sale, and enjoyed their delicious coffee and muffins. We also took the opportunity to visit the Welcome Club, which is located next door to the Friendly Shop.

Management committee

Mark van Wyk and Leigh Haselau were coopted on to the management committee in April 2022, and were formally elected at the AGM in September 2022 together with the other existing committee members. This has ensured sustainability of the organisation. At the time of the 2023 AGM, the outgoing management committee consists of:

- Maureen Robinson (Chairperson)
- Wayne Schonegevel (Vice-chairperson)
- Sue Custers (Secretary)
- Mark van Wyk (Treasurer)
- Lydia Franciscus
- Leigh Haselau
- Marijke Littlefield
- Tonia Moller (coopted April 2023).

The work on the committee is entirely voluntary, and so we are grateful that all the above members have indicated their willingness to remain on the management committee for another year.

Closing

In closing, I would like to thank everyone who has supported the work of the organisation, as an FSS member, a committee member, a speaker, an attendee at one of our meetings, or has provided financial resources to help us fund our new identity and media. We would also like to thank those organisations with whom we work closely, such as as Cape Mental Health, Friends of Valkenberg, and SADAG, for their ongoing cooperation.

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

Maureen Robinson
Chairperson, Family Support for Schizophrenia
Presented to AGM, 28 August 2023