



Family Support for Schizophrenia

Strength through sharing

Chairperson's Report for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

NPO 040-491

This report is presented at the AGM in September 2024. It describes the work of Family Support for Schizophrenia for the period April 2023 to March 2024, geared towards meeting the goals of the organisation.

- 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

Monthly support group meetings

Our regular support group meetings are held on the last Monday of the month between February and October and are open to any member of the public. During Covid these meetings moved to the Zoom platform and we have kept this arrangement post-Covid. While this has meant some loss of personal contact, it has enabled speakers and participants to join from all over the country and even internationally. This has extended our network and encouraged us to become familiar with facilities and organisations outside of the Western Cape.

Attendance at the support group meetings for the reporting year ranged between 27 and 41 people per session, with an average of 34 attendees and a total of 304 attendees over all the sessions, including the year-end gathering. This is a most encouraging number, particularly as attendees express great appreciation for the professionalism of the speakers and the valuable information shared.

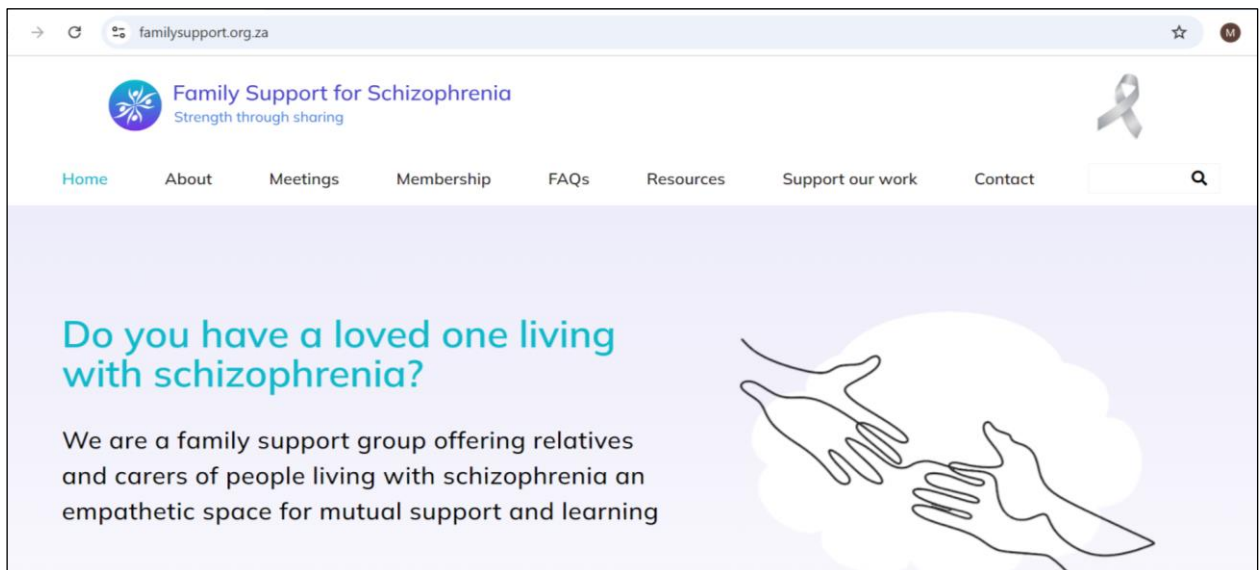
We are grateful to the speakers at the sessions, all of whom gave generously of their time and expertise. Recordings of presentations are made available on the website and on YouTube; these recordings exclude the question and answer sessions and any confidential information that the speakers might have shared.

This table summarises the speakers, the organisations they represent, and the topics presented for the financial year April 2023 to March 2024. Details of presentations between April and September this year can be found on the website under Past Meetings, and in recent newsletters.

| Date | Speaker | Position | Organisation | Topic |
|-------------------|--------------------|---|--|--|
| 24 April 2023 | Dr Kate Mawson | Psychiatrist | Stellenbosch University & Tygerberg Hospital | An evening of Caring and Sharing |
| 29 May 2023 | Waseem Hawa | Support Principal Clinical Psychologist | Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital | How to access public sector mental health care for people living with schizophrenia |
| 26 June 2023 | Shayni Geffen | Project Leader: Advocacy & Awareness | SAFMH | Mental health advocacy, awareness & community care: The work of the South African Federation for Mental Health |
| 31 July 2023 | Razaan Galiel | Manager: Innovation & Training | Cape Mental Health | The employment of persons with psychosocial disability and the Employment Equity Act |
| 28 August 2023 | AGM | - | - | Annual General Meeting and launch of FSS website |
| 25 September 2023 | No meeting | - | - | Public holiday |
| 30 October 2023 | Dr Robert Laitman | Physician & Cofounder Team Daniel | Team Daniel, USA | Optimal treatment of psychotic disorders: Clozapine / Engagement / Community |
| 25 November 2023 | Year-end gathering | - | - | Year-end get together and FSS website presentation |
| 26 February 2024 | Megan Gonsalves | Crisis Line & Marketing Manager | Netcare Akeso | The Akeso mental health clinics: What do we offer and how can we assist? |
| 25 March 2024 | Eric Smith | Mental Health Advocate & Consultant | Eric Smith Consulting LLC, USA | My journey through anosognosia to recovery |

Website and media

We are very proud of our website, www.familysupport.org.za, which was launched at the AGM of 2023. This website has proven to be an excellent resource as it provides extensive and valuable information essential to a better understanding of how to care for those living with schizophrenia. By far the most visited topic is Accommodation options, on the Resources page, and it has become clear that this is the issue that concerns families most urgently. The website is updated regularly in response to queries for specific information.



Home page of the FSS website

Posters, brochures and copies of our publication *Coping Skills for Carers* were distributed at venues across Cape Town and at the networking events we attended.

Year-end gathering

For the second year in a row, we hosted an in-person gathering in Cape Town on Saturday 25 November 2023. Refreshments were provided, and we enjoyed the opportunity to get to know one another, and to borrow library books. A highlight was the presentation of the website, where we shared the different categories of information available. 34 people attended the function, making it a very pleasant afternoon. We are very grateful to Edu-Excellence School for allowing us the use of their facilities. This year we will hold the year-end gathering in Pinelands, on the afternoon of 23 November; we hope to see as many people as possible there!

Newsletter

Our monthly newsletter has a circulation of just over 350. It includes information about the upcoming and most recent meetings, a report back on networking activities, comments and suggestions provided by members for Members' Corner,

topical articles on schizophrenia and mental health, committee news, and where to find specific topics on the website.

Personal communication and support

As FSS becomes more well-known, we find we are receiving increased communication via email, asking for advice, information or referrals. It is clear that there is a great need for support and assistance among families of those living with schizophrenia, and people often struggle to know where to find information. 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 available to all paid-up members. Since we have moved to online meetings, we find that the books are not as easily accessible as in the past. We are looking at ways to address this challenge.

Networking and advocacy

In order to extend our reach and to learn from others, we seek out every opportunity to engage with like-minded organisations. Cooperation with sister organisations also helps us promote advocacy on the topic of mental health in general, and schizophrenia in particular.

During the reporting year, members of the management committee attended several networking events, as follows:

| Date | Venue | Event | Comments |
|----------------|---------------------------------|--|--|
| 23 June 2023 | Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital | Information sharing meeting with a group of Mental Health Nurses (MHNs), psychologists and psychiatrists from the Western Cape Department of Health. | Exchanged notes on family support and psychoeducation in the context of mental health services provided at Community Health Centres (Clinics). |
| 6 October 2023 | Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital | "Let's Connect - Stakeholder & Family Engagement". A Mental Health Awareness month event | More than 100 family members attended. FSS was one of about 15 service providers represented. |

| Date | Venue | Event | Comments |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| | | organised by the Social Work Department of Valkenberg Hospital. | Good engagement with family members and the hospital social work staff |
| 20-21 October 2023 | King of Kings Baptist Centre, Sun Valley | Community & Mental Health Convention, organised by The Family Counselling Centre, South Peninsula, Cape Town. | Distributed brochures. Displayed and sold <i>Coping Skills for Carers</i> . Networking with South Peninsula mental health service providers. |
| 2 December 2023 | Hope House | Hope House Open Day | Support provided to sister organisation. |
| 15 January 2024 | UCT Summer School | “Schizophrenia: The Journey and Care”. Lecture by Dr Lebogang Phahladira, Psychiatrist at Lentegeur Hospital and Stellenbosch University. | Put up posters, distributed brochures, displayed <i>Coping Skills for Carers</i> . Engaged with lecturer and audience members after lecture. |



Mental Health Nurses from clinics in two of the Cape Town Metro substructures, psychologists and psychiatrists welcome FSS to their meeting at Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital and display their copies of Coping Skills for Carers

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 needs 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 and make recommendations as to how they could be addressed.

Membership

Membership fees are currently R130 per family per year. At the AGM on 28 August 2023 there were 56 paid-up members; by the end of 2023, this number stood at 64. As membership is per family, the number of individual members is somewhat higher. Most of our members are based in the Western Cape, but we also have members from the Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

Membership fees are a valuable source of income and we therefore encourage everyone to formally join the organisation. However, at the same time, we do not want to exclude anyone who may benefit from the organisation; and our resources, newsletter and support group meetings remain free and available to all.

Finances

As a small non-profit organisation of volunteers, FSS is entirely reliant on membership fees, donations and fundraising to fund its activities. Together these bring in just enough to cover our basic operating expenses each year. Over the past two years we decided to draw on historical reserves to achieve the goals of completing our website and updating our publications. Consequently, the financial statements for the year reflect an operating deficit and a decrease in surplus funds at year end.

Going forward, to achieve sustainability and fund future expenditure, we will need to look at ways of increasing our level of ongoing income. Several of our members have linked their MySchool cards to FSS. This generates a regular income each month, and we therefore encourage everyone to do the same, as well as to promote this form of fundraising with family and friends.

Management committee

The management committee has worked hard this year to consolidate and develop our various activities. Over and above the co-ordination, financial and secretarial roles of the office-bearer positions; portfolios and responsibilities include the website, newsletter, membership records, publications and publicity, communication, library, videos, thanking guests, catering, advertising, and legal compliance.

We acknowledge our outgoing treasurer Mark Van Wyk who resigned from the committee in December 2023 due to work commitments. He was replaced by Wilma Steenkamp, who was co-opted as treasurer in February 2024.

The outgoing management committee for 2024 consists of:

- Maureen Robinson (Chairperson)
- Wayne Schonegevel (Vice-Chairperson)
- Susie Newton-King (Secretary)
- Wilma Steenkamp (Treasurer)
- Leigh Haselau
- Lydia Franciscus
- Marijke Littlefield
- Sue Custers
- Tonia Moller.

All these members have indicated that they are willing to stay on for the coming year; we thank each one for volunteering their time and making a contribution.

Closing

In closing, I would like to thank everyone who has been part of the work of the organisation, as an FSS member, a committee member, a speaker, an attendee at our meetings, or a donor. We are also grateful to those organisations and individuals with whom we work closely, for their ongoing cooperation.

We look forward to another year of providing support and information for families and carers of people living with schizophrenia, as well as working to improve conditions for mental health in South Africa.

Maureen Robinson
Chairperson, Family Support for Schizophrenia
Presented to AGM, 30 September 2024



| www.familysupport.org.za | mail@familysupport.org.za