Family Support for Schizophrenia
Strength through sharing

Chairperson's Report for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

Introduction

This report covers the work of Family Support for Schizophrenia (FSS) for the financial year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. Information pertaining to activities that took place between April 2026 and the AGM of 28 September 2026 can be found on the website and in the monthly newsletters.

Goals of the organisation

FSS is a registered non-profit organisation that seeks to support the families and carers of those living with schizophrenia. Run entirely by volunteers, its work is underpinned by the following goals:

- To give support to the families and carers of people living with schizophrenia
- To enlighten and educate families, carers 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.

In pursuit of these goals, the organisation engages in a variety of different activities throughout the year.

Key activities

The following provides a summary of the key activities of the organisation:

Support	Support group meetings
	Correspondence and advice

Educate and raise awareness	Website
	Facebook

	YouTube
	Newsletter
	Networking and advocacy
	Newspapers, radio

Management and operations	OpsCom
	Committee member tasks
	Membership
	Finance and fundraising
	Reporting and compliance

Details of the various activities are provided in the sections that follow.

Support group meetings

Support group meetings are held online on Zoom on the last Monday of the month, between February and October, with an end-of-year social gathering held in Cape Town in November. The meetings are advertised in community newspapers, on Facebook, on the FSS website and in the monthly newsletter and are open to anyone who is interested. Invited speakers share information on topics of interest, followed by questions and discussion. Dedicated Caring and Sharing meetings are held once or twice a year and provide the opportunity for participants to share their own concerns and learn from others in similar situations.

The online nature of the support group meetings means that they are accessible to people from all over the country. Attendance at the 9 support group meetings held during the reporting year ranged from 42 to 83 persons per session, with an average of 52 attendees per session. This number represents an increase of 18% over the average meeting attendance for the previous year.

Where speakers give permission, presentations are recorded and placed on our website. We are also working to make these recordings publicly available on YouTube, so that they can reach a wider audience.

We are grateful to the speakers who have given of their time so generously. Each session was well received by participants, with many appreciative comments being shared.

The following table outlines the speakers, the organisations they represent, and the topics presented for the reporting year.

Date	Speaker	Position	Organisation	Topic
28 April 2025	No meeting	-	-	No meeting, Public holiday
26 May 2025	Dr John Parker	Psychiatrist	Private practice	What is schizophrenia? Insights from a practising psychiatrist
30 June 2025	Dr Hilary Foster Sue Biault	Consultant psychiatrist Mental health carer support worker	ex NHS UK	Caregiving in schizophrenia
28 July 2025	Facilitated by Leigh Haselau & Wasima Fisher	Social workers	Private practice	Caring & Sharing meeting
25 August 2025	AGM Leigh Haselau	Social worker	Private practice	Annual General Meeting An introduction to the LEAP method: How to help your loved one accept treatment
29 September 2025	Sister Wendy Robinson Bruce Loumeau & Matthew Maycock	Psychiatric nurse practitioner Schizophrenia survivors	Phrenaid	Phrenaid - Providing accommodation and support for people affected by schizophrenia
27 October 2025	Courtney Coetzee	Psychosocial rehabilitation assistant	The Welcome Club, an initiative of Comcare	The Welcome Club as a model of a psychosocial rehabilitation programme
29 November 2025	Year-end gathering	-	-	Year-end get together Christ the King Catholic Church, Pinelands
23 February 2026	Sister Christelle Juries Sister Magdalene Gertse	Speciality psychiatric nurse Mental health practitioner	Stikland Psychiatric Hospital Durbanville Health Clinic	Life from the frontline: The experience of psychiatric nurses in the public healthcare system

Date	Speaker	Position	Organisation	Topic
30 March 2026	Dr Fadia Gamieldien	Senior Clinical Educator	Division of Occupational Therapy, University of Cape Town	Personal recovery is relational: Supporting your loved one without losing yourself

The year-end gathering was held in Pinelands on Saturday 29 November 2025 and was attended by 50 people, including family members and those living with schizophrenia. The new FSS banner was on show for the first time and those present were encouraged to join the Woolworths MyDifference programme as a key FSS fundraiser. The rest of the afternoon consisted of games with prizes, and informal small groups of people chatting and getting to know one another. Refreshments were available and attendees were able to browse the library books on display. The FSS publication, Coping Skills for Carers, was also available for purchase.

We are looking forward to the 2026 gathering on Saturday 28 November.

Correspondence and advice

FSS receives regular queries and requests via email as well as via the contact form of the website. Between March 2025 and February 2026, we received correspondence from 63 people.

The following represented some of the key queries:

- how to deal with anosognosia
- how and when to proceed with involuntary admission
- the challenges of active psychosis
- avenues for gainful employment for their recovering loved one.

The most common query was around accommodation, with 56 separate inquiries from people seeking assisted accommodation for family members. Some were received from parents who were growing older and wanted to plan for the future of their loved ones. There were also several urgent appeals from siblings whose parents could no longer cope or had passed away.

FSS has over time built up a database of accommodation options, and in most cases, we refer the correspondent to our lists of reputable facilities. However, as much as we try to assist, it is well known that there continues to be an acute shortage of affordable assisted living facilities.

We also received inquiries from families who seek to partner with other families in a similar situation. They propose to buy or rent shared accommodation for their loved ones and to share the cost of a caregiver.

It was gratifying to note that there were also expressions of support and encouragement for the work of FSS.

Website and social media

The FSS website contains an extensive set of valuable resources which are continually updated. The past year has seen our user base on the website grow to 1287, with Gauteng and the Western Cape together accounting for 78%. The most popular search queries continue to be about accommodation options and announcements about our monthly meetings.

An FSS Facebook page was launched in February 2026. We hope to see continued growth in the Facebook user base, as this forms an important avenue to raise awareness about schizophrenia. By the end of March 2026, a total of 2,4k views had been registered by 195 users, with 51 followers of the Facebook page.

FSS media, such as posters, brochures and copies of Coping Skills for Carers, are distributed at libraries, hospitals and doctors' rooms, and at networking events.

Newsletter

The monthly newsletter is circulated to about 490 people. It provides information about the upcoming and previous support group meetings, photographs of key events, contributions from members, recommendations for resources, invitations to support our work, and key links to the FSS website.

February 2026 saw a major shift in the design and distribution of the newsletter, as we moved the newsletter from Mailchimp to the Zoho platform. This platform has allowed us to expand our distribution and, most importantly, has improved the accessibility and readability of the newsletter. The platform also allows us to see how many people open the newsletter, what the popular times are for opening it, the location of our readers, and how many people click on the links that take them to recommended sites. Overall, this improves our ability to analyse the direction of the newsletter and to make changes where needed.

Networking and advocacy

Advocacy efforts were intensified around the time of 24 May, World Schizophrenia Awareness Day. This international event aims to debunk harmful myths, address social stigma, and highlight the realities of living with schizophrenia for the estimated 24 million people affected globally. The following activities took place during May 2025:

14 May: Martelize Brink spoke to Tina James and Wilma Steenkamp on the programme *Driesestig* on Radio Sonder Grense (RSG).
19 May: Michel'le Donnelly of SAFMH spoke to Maureen Robinson about the work of FSS and the importance of family support.
22 May: Tina James was interviewed on two community radio stations, Africa Online Radio and Radio Al Ansaar, to raise awareness about schizophrenia.
23 May: Tina James and Cindy van Wyk, clinical neuropsychologist, participated in the SADAG Ask the Expert Panel, which reached more than 120 000 views. They discussed the topic *Schizophrenia: how to talk so your doctor will listen*.
26 May: Ladovica Gordon of Afrikaap spoke to Tina James on several topics related to schizophrenia
1 June: Millicent Ndiweni from Adventist World Radio spoke to Susie Newton-King about the causes and prognosis of schizophrenia.
The **SAFMH newsletter** *Empowered Minds* provided extensive and well-presented coverage on schizophrenia.
The **SADAG newsletter** covered various aspects of schizophrenia and included a useful brochure.

Several other networking and advocacy events took place during the reporting period:

- 28-29 May: Attendance at the National Mental Health Review Board meeting in Johannesburg. This meeting focused on an awareness of the rights laid down in the Mental Health Care Act

- 27 June: Participation at the Durbanville Community Health Centre Youth Celebration

- 25 July: A stand with resources at the Valkenberg Hospital Family Day, held under the theme, Caring for the Carers

- 18 October: Participation in the 11th Annual Cape Town Recovery Walk. The walk was aimed at advocacy around mental health; organisers presented a petition to a City of Cape Town representative.

Strong relations have been built with the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), particularly as one of our committee members is the facilitator of a dedicated support group for family members of those living with schizophrenia.

A new initiative for FSS was participation in the conceptualisation and scripting of a short, animated movie about a mother caring for her son with schizophrenia. The content was based on interviews that had been done with family members of people living with schizophrenia, including several FSS members. Entitled “One day at a time” the movie was directed and managed by Profs Laila Asmal and Mehita Iqani of Stellenbosch University. The movie has already been shown in different venues and has been well received.

Library

The FSS library consists of over forty well-chosen books on schizophrenia and mental health. The books are available for lending; however, since we do not meet in person the library is not as accessible as we would like it to be. At our year-end function a dedicated library table displays the collection; this provides an opportunity to browse and borrow books.

Membership

Membership is recorded per calendar year, i.e. from January to December of a specific year. At the AGM on 25 August 2025 there were 71 paid-up members; by the end of 2025, this number stood at 91.

These numbers compare favourably with the previous year, where there were 60 paid-up members at the time of the AGM and 68 at year-end. This represents an increase of 33% over year-end membership for the prior year, which speaks to the growing reach of FSS.

Members come from all over the country, with the majority being based in the Western Cape. Membership fees are currently R175 per family per year. We encourage everyone to formally join the organisation; however, our resources, newsletter and support group meetings are free and available to all.

Finance and fundraising

We are pleased to report an increase in revenue due to larger membership and to a significant increase in donations from members during the year, for which we are very grateful. This, together with tight control of expenditure, enabled us to return a small operating surplus for the year.

Website expenses and the Zoom meeting platform constitute almost 60% of our operating expenditure. However, these expenses are justified in that they form the backbone of our communication strategy.

One of our key fundraising activities for some time has been the Woolworths MySchool card. During 2025 Woolworths moved from the MySchool card to a new initiative called MyDifference. This change has had a negative impact on our fundraising, as many people seem to have found it challenging to make the change. However, we are hopeful that this will improve as the new system becomes better known.

In 2025 we began the process of applying for Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) status, to allow our donors to apply for tax exemption. We are hopeful that this will enhance our fundraising efforts into the future.

The Annual Financial Statements and the treasurer's report provide full details of income and expenditure.

Management and operations

FSS is run by a small management committee, all of whom are volunteers. Two subcommittees deal with specific tasks: the media committee is responsible for the website, Facebook, newsletter and other media, while the operations committee oversees membership and finance. Tasks are shared according to skills and interests, and strong commitment is shown by all the committee members.

The management committee saw some changes during the reporting year, as well as shortly afterwards. Sue Custers resigned from the committee at the end of March 2026 and Marijke Littlefield resigned in June 2026, both for personal reasons; we thank them sincerely for their valuable contributions and wish them well. Two additional members were coopted during the year - Fuzlyn Riffel in March, and Charlotte Lombard in May.

The outgoing management committee for 2026 consists of:

- Maureen Robinson (Chairperson)
- Wayne Schonegevel (Vice-Chairperson)
- Susie Newton-King (Secretary)
- Wilma Steenkamp (Treasurer)
- Tonia Moller
- Tina James
- Fuzlyn Riffel (coopted)
- Charlotte Lombard (coopted).

The management committee held a strategic planning meeting in November 2025, to evaluate past activities and to plan for the coming year. Strategic actions discussed included improving accessibility to our resources; connecting people with one another; expanding key resources on our website; expanding our networks; and developing more meaningful collaboration with partners.

Closing

Many people play a role in FSS, whether as a committee member, an FSS member, an attendee at support group meetings, a guest speaker, a donor or as a friend. Each one of these roles is valued, as each contributes to providing support for families and carers of people living with schizophrenia.

We would like to thank those organisations and individuals with whom we work closely, for their ongoing enthusiasm and cooperation. Together with our partners, we remain committed to working to improve conditions for mental health in South Africa.

Maureen Robinson
Chairperson, Family Support for Schizophrenia
Presented to AGM, 28 September 2026