



Annual Report of the Branch Liaison Officer

Annual General Meeting, 8 June 2007

As another successful year draws to a close, I am pleased to report on the continuing development amongst our branches branches which were just re-surfacing twelve months ago are now looking more stable, active branches have maintained their strong performance and more remote branches have consolidated their reputation locally as important sources of continuing professional development.

This level of activity is a significant achievement in today's pressurized environment. Many years ago, when branches were fewer in number and professional commitments were, if not easier then certainly lighter, one of the privileges of serving on a branch committee was making new contacts and liaising with honorary officers on a national level. Over the years, particularly the last few, however, there has been a tremendous increase in the workload of those working within the disciplines, making it more difficult to recruit onto branch committees, maintain regular communication with the national board and sustain interaction within our growing network of branches. The Branches Committee, established some years ago as a channel for communication and forum for the exchange of information, struggled over this period to fulfill this important function. However, following recent changes to the focus and frequency of the Branches Committee, I am pleased to report significant improvement on all sides: attendance has picked up again, there is a healthy exchange of information, a great deal of knowledge-collaboration and mutual learning, improved interaction and commitment to share speakers. Similarly effective are the improved relations between the Board and branches with the circulation of minutes, a free place to attend the Association's national conference and more consultation between the Board and branches on developments and opportunities within the Association.

I have also been delighted to witness the increasingly fruitful collaboration between branches and office-based staff. When I first joined the Association, only a couple of branches were fortunate enough to have dedicated admin support. This has, however, changed dramatically over the last few years and, today, committed resources are available within both the London and Glasgow offices. This has heralded a tremendous improvement in the level of branch activity as it has allowed committees to focus on what they do best – putting together programmes of events – and given them the confidence to become more adventurous in what they offer. I am thinking particularly of Devon and Cornwall, Ireland, Leicester, Midlands and Yorkshire, all of which are galloping along with renewed enthusiasm. However, these success stories are not just down to the additional admin support; they are also the result of new officers, expanding committees, closer ties with other branches and the increasing “mentoring” function of the Branches Committee. There is also increased confidence across the branches to host joint events with other complementary organizations, with the aim of bringing together the specialisms and skills of both organizations and so increase the learning experience of the delegates.

The role of the branches in terms of the Association's financial performance and annual programme of activities remains significant, as they continue to target the needs of child and adolescent mental health practitioners at the local level. Whilst not intended as profit-making, many of the branch events are extremely popular and attract large audiences, particularly in Scotland where there are very few other providers of such information. Topics which have been especially attractive have been the more traditional areas of Attachment, ADHD, ASD and Psychosis, but branches have continued to offer a balance of subjects designed to appeal to different disciplines and, where these attract fewer delegates, they are always very much appreciated. Over the last twelve months, the role of branches has extended to take in membership recruitment and retention. While still early days, this strategy has already reaped rewards with membership numbers increasing over the first six months of this year compared to last year. This new responsibility has, in turn, given branches a new challenge and encouraged them as a group to come up with ideas, not least waging friendly competitions against each other – first to reach 10 new members, first to reach 20 wonderful camaraderie!

I would like to conclude this report by thanking all officers engaged at branch level for their hard work and commitment over the year. Also, a big thank you to our admin staff, in particular Rosemary Mackenzie, Marie-Christine Rieder and Valerie Naddeo, for their support, patience and advice – much appreciated by us all.

Maureen Smillie