



THE 24 HOUR RESPONSE

Police training & the National Schizophrenia Fellowship

Pat Haysey

Ask NSF (National Schizophrenia Fellowship) members "Where do you get help outside of office hours" and police will undoubtedly be top of the list. This was borne out by an NSF survey for the Department of Health (1990) conducted amongst its membership of 6,200 at that time. A report by Superintendent John Walker of Leicestershire (Home Office 1992) suggests an almost sixfold increase in contact between the police and mentally disordered persons, according to records of Police Surgeons from 1983-1988 throughout the six forces surveyed. It is fair to assume that this figure has increased significantly since then, due mainly to the acceleration of the run-down of mental hospitals and the arrival of 'care in the community'.

The mentally disordered have been inherited by the police not because they are the best agency to deal with them but merely because they are unique. They provide a free, around the clock service, mobility, a legal obligation to respond and often an authority to detain.

Police Training

- Home Office Circular 66/90 called upon police to review training to ensure that mentally disordered offenders receive care and treatment from the health and social services, and to seek alternatives to prosecution where appropriate.
- The 'Review of Services for Mentally Disordered Offenders', jointly carried out by the Department of Health and the Home Office (Reed 1992), made a number of recommendations with direct implications for the police, recognising the crucial role they play as the first service to come into contact with any such suspects. It specifically called for better training to prepare police for these encounters.
- Research undertaken by the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice (Gudjonsson 1993) raised concern over the inability of police to identify

psychological vulnerabilities of suspects, and a failure to obtain appropriate safeguards for such suspects as required under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

- The Ritchie Report (February 1994) concerning the killing of Jonathan Zito by Christopher Clunis, recommended that police officers be given "proper training in mental illness and in the assessment of danger".
- A preliminary report on Homicides by Mentally Ill People (Boyd, August 1994) states that "the great majority of the victims were family members or already acquainted with the attacker. Only two cases involved complete strangers. Women among our cases were likely to have killed one of their own children while in a state of depression". (Dr William Boyd is to speak at an NSF conference in London on 26 October 1995 about his report on Homicides and Suicides by Mentally Ill People).
- 'Creating Community Care' - MHF Inquiry Report (Sept 1994) recommends that "the police should provide training jointly with other people working in the mental health field".



According to police sources there has been no overall strategy for developing mental health awareness training. Initiatives have been carried out locally in a piecemeal fashion and largely in isolation from one another. The NSF has been at the forefront, helping to meet this need in a more comprehensive way. A key feature of NSF training is input given by people with personal experience of mental illness and of having been detained by the police. This concentrated

dose of humanity illustrates the nature of coping with an illness like schizophrenia and has a major impact on the audience.

Training for others

The NSF has organised national training courses throughout the country on the theme of the 'Mentally Disordered Offender'. These events are multi-disciplinary with police and others concerned with the criminal justice system, health and social services attending. They look at how the police and other agencies should work together to provide appropriate care for the mentally ill and provide an excellent forum for networking and an exchange of views.

One of the most significant initiatives was in 1994 when a productive partnership between the police service and the NSF resulted in making a training video "A Meeting of Minds - A positive response to mental disorder" with an accompanying training pack which has been distributed to all police forces in the United Kingdom. Its aim is to help police identify mentally disordered offenders and dispel many of the myths surrounding mental illness. It forms a fundamental component in current police training.

There are a number of issues that need to be addressed to help the police and others in understanding and providing a better quality of service for those who are mentally ill. However, the NSF feels that the inroads made so far are very reassuring.

Pat Haysey is Training Consultant for the National Schizophrenia Fellowship.

Copies of the video can be obtained from NSF, 28 Castle Street, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 1SS. Tel: 0181 547 3937. Cost including postage and packing: £20.

Further information about police training initiatives may be obtained from the National Training Department at the same address.