

## **A History of New View Society From the Dalkey Building to the Clubhouse on Mary Hill Road**

In the late sixties and early seventies, Riverview went through a period of downsizing. Patients, some of whom had been there for twenty, thirty, or in some cases up to forty years, were placed in Boarding Homes. These were generally privately run and in some cases offered nothing more than a place to sleep and eat.



Rationalization for downsizing sprang from a new approach to the treatment of the chronically ill mental patient. This was based on the idea that it was more enlightened to have them living in the community than in an institution. According to Sharon Disanto, who eventually became New View's first Executive Director, there were problems right from the start, for "although they [boarding house residents] were living in the community, social isolation was a major issue." Many of these ex-patients wanted to go back to the hospital where they had been involved in social, recreational and work programs. There was almost nothing in the Tri-cities area to replace these. New View Society was established to fill this void.

In 1971, psychiatrist Dr. Shauna Little became the first employee of the Port Coquitlam Mental Health Centre. If anyone can be said to be a driving force behind New View Society, it is her. She has continued to remain closely involved in New View Society and remains on New View Society's Board of Directors to this day.

Although Dr. Little's specialty was children and families, as part of her job she saw many of the recently discharged patients from Riverview. She and the other staff of the Mental Health Centre "listened... and agreed... that indeed something was missing in this new vision of treatment [of putting patients back into the community] for those suffering from mental illness." Unfortunately there were no funds in the mental health budget for any new programs to remedy the situation. Eventually the occupational therapist and treatment staff were able to set up an activities program in the Dalkey Building, which was owned by the City of Port Coquitlam. The City of Port Coquitlam not only donated the space to New View Society, but paid for the heat as well! According to Dr. Little, the program "was bolstered by grass-roots volunteers from the community." In 1973, it was decided to form a non-profit society in order to raise funds to expand the program. According to Sharon Disanto "committed individuals from Port Coquitlam Public Health, the Port Coquitlam Mental Health Centre and the Mental Health Boarding Home Program formalized the society." And on August the thirteenth of that year,

the New View Society was incorporated. The Mayor of Port Coquitlam became the first Chairperson on the Board of Directors.

Legend has it that the original funds for the society were forty-eight cents collected in a coffee mug (although there is a certain discrepancy as to exactly how much it was). With a Local Initiative Program Grant from the Federal Government, the first staff person was hired. New View was able to grow when they got client hour funding from the Provincial Government under the Achievement Centre's program. Other funding was found through L.E.A.P. and Canada Works Grants and other sources including The United Way beginning in 1978.

Before incorporation, the program at the Dalkey Building was a drop-in centre with an emphasis on crafts, and was set up to meet the social and recreational needs of those in boarding homes. However individuals with mental illnesses and other disabilities living on their own in the community soon became involved. New View began to branch out to meet their needs by developing or partnering in vocational and educational programs. During this time New View operated in partnership with the "Handicapped Workshop Guild", a business in Port Moody that involved the construction of furniture, and thrift store which continued to operate until the mid-1990s. With Douglas College, New View Society became involved in cafeteria and woodworking programs at the old campus in Coquitlam. The cafeteria program continues to this day at the New Westminster campus, although New View Society is no longer involved.

Beginning in 1969, Kay Swalwell worked for an informal social program for Boarding Home residents in Coquitlam. As soon as good bus service was established between Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam, the program was deemed redundant and she transferred to New View Society.

Kay Swalwell remembers the ten years at the Dalkey Building as "a glowing example of 'grass roots' organization". Activities included ceramics and other crafts and a lunch program. Participants also occasionally went camping and bowled, and according to Kay did "anything free!" In 1978, Kay's neighbour Rita Punchak came to work at New View and became Clubhouse Manager in the 1980s.

In 1983, New View was given notice at the Dalkey Building as it had been sold to the Legion. A very small bungalow was rented on Whyte Avenue to replace it. It was at this point that Sharon DiSanto left New View after ten years of service and was replaced by Kay Swalwell who kept the job for 18 years. Tenth Anniversary Celebrations were held with the Minister of Social Services in attendance during New View's time in the bungalow.

It was at Whyte House that the Clubhouse Model was instituted, as much as it could be. At this time an experiment funded by the Vancouver Foundation was undertaken where clients from all around the province moved into a group living situation with an intensive therapy component. The funding lasted for a year with the understanding that if it were successful then the Ministry would take it over. Successful or not, no further funding was forthcoming and the program ended. It

was also during this time that New View expanded into supported housing when Patricia House was purchased.

The next year a great opportunity presented itself. The current clubhouse came up for sale at a time when New View had \$60,000 of Lottery funds to put down as a down payment. The Clubhouse is a heritage house built for one of the original alderman. It was later converted into a hospital that operated into the nineteen eighties. It fell into disrepair once it was converted back into residential use and rented out before New View bought it. Although it was much better suited to the needs of a clubhouse than the tiny bungalow, an awful lot of work had to be done to make it shipshape.

In the same year New View purchased McRae House to provide six more housing units for members. At this point the clubhouse staff also supplied housing support. Over the next few years the clubhouse program matured and by 1988 (the fifteenth anniversary) supported work programs had been developed, including individualized community placement and a janitorial contract in the community called "Clear View". At this time part of "The Cottage", a second building on the property that had been used for housing was partially converted into a workshop and contracts were sought. One of these was with Rogers Cable producing patch cords. When Shaw replaced Rogers they took over the contract until restructuring forced them to end their association with New View. Although other contracts have been found since, this came as a major blow.

Around the time of the fifteenth anniversary, an ambitious plan was undertaken, eventually coming to fruition in 1990 with the opening of Maplewood Manor. This provided twenty more housing units for members. Around this time a semi-independent living program was started and the Community Living support program, which was by this time a separate entity under the New View umbrella, was growing rapidly.

From its inception there had always been a recreational component, but in the work ordered day of the clubhouse model these kinds of activities often had to play second fiddle. Because of New View's broad mandate to minister to the needs of the "consumer" community, not everyone's needs could be met within the confines of the clubhouse model. In order to remedy this, The Place opened in the late nineties. The Place is a drop-in centre located in the commercial heart of Port Coquitlam.

By Terry Boal.