

1997

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Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health  
2415 W. Sixth St.  
Los Angeles, CA 90057

Dear Dr. Crowell,

As the fiscal year comes to a close, I would like to give you an update on Project Return: The Next Step's progress and tell you about some of our plans.

We've had an active 18 months since my last letter to you. Overall, PR:TNS keeps broadening consumers' opportunities for involvement and independence. Much of our growth has had an external focus, as we expanded our emphasis on consumer empowerment in the community. We have grown in our internal structure, too. Our clubs will always be our core, because they're the entryway to empowerment. I'd like to tell you about our external and internal accomplishments.

I've put together materials that detail our work, but there are two clippings I especially want to bring to your attention. There is great interest in PR:TNS and how we operate. The story of our transition from a staff-run to a client-run program is included in "Consumers as Providers," a book just published by IAPSRs. I have enclosed our chapter for you. The current issue of "Living with Schizophrenia," an international newsletter of the Eli Lilly Company, features PR:TNS' trip to Japan last fall and my own story.

### **Consumer Empowerment**

PR:TNS is a leader in consumer empowerment. We have had a number of projects that have made the consumer viewpoint known and our voices heard.

Our biggest project was the CASIG (Client Assessment of Skills, Interests and Goals) pilot. We were selected to administer the only community-based part of the pilot. The UCLA Psychiatric Consortium hired 17 PR:TNS members for the project. Fifteen interviewers administered the survey to 250 clients, with the taped interviews lasting anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours. Two other PR:TNS members, hired as reviewer and supervisor, listened to every tape to check the validity of the interview. They made sure the questions were asked in the right way to keep the research pure. As we talked about, I will see that you get the final report when it is ready.

Another way we helped consumers make their voices count was with our Voters Education Project, funded by a grant from the Department of Rehabilitation. Our project was open to

clients at county and community mental health programs and residents of board and care homes, along with our club members. We registered 400 people to vote in last year's presidential election. On election night, we held two parties, at the Village and Step Up on Second Street, that were attended by 150 people. The project employed eight consumers as voter trainers.

Through our consumer exchange with mental health programs in Japan, we showed others how consumers can be in charge of their own lives. In April 1996, we hosted six Japanese consumers. We took them houseboating on the Sacramento Delta and to the Empowerment Now conference. In October, six of us traveled to Japan, where we spoke to 700 consumers, professionals and families. We received an overwhelming response, and they were particularly impressed by the number of PR:TNS members who have jobs. The trip meant a lot to our members, because they were respected as ambassadors for self-help and admired for the successes in their lives.

We've already started work on our big project for next year. PR:TNS is the local sponsor for Alternatives '98, which will be held in Long Beach next February. The conference planning committee includes nine PR:TNS members, and we have already done a lot of the preliminary footwork, such as selecting the hotel. We've held our first two fund-raisers for consumer scholarships: a night at Penguin's yogurt shop and a yard sale.

We work with other consumer groups. On Saturday, we organized the southern regional meeting of the California Network of Mental Health Clients. It was the third Network meeting we've hosted, and more than 80 people attended; I've enclosed a letter we received today congratulating us on the meeting. Some PR:TNS members serve on the Client Coalition.

## **Clubs**

I am pleased to report that we really are a countywide network and have at least one club in every part of the county. We have 850 active members; we consider someone active if they attend two club meetings a month. We've grown to 58 clubs, an increase of 10 since my last letter. In all, we have started 13 new clubs and had to close only three. Our current club roster is attached.

In starting clubs, one of the areas we concentrated on was Whittier/Norwalk because there were no clubs in that part of the county. We have started four: "Club Telecare;" "Metro Club," our first at Metropolitan State Hospital; "Royal Knights;" and "Villa Lauren." The Antelope Valley, another area previously without a club, has its second one opening next month. We strengthened our presence in San Gabriel Valley with three new clubs in different parts of the valley: "Good Friends" in La Puente, "Wanderers" in South El Monte and "Old Town" in Pasadena.

One of our oldest clubs, the Compton Rainbows, was among the clubs we closed. Its attendance had been low for awhile, but we kept it going because there wasn't another club nearby. We have a strong new club in Lynwood, which the Compton Rainbows members now attend. We had to close the club at Santa Monica West because of lack of interest; we still have three other clubs in Santa Monica. We are determined that any area where we've had a club remains served.

We are wisely spending the \$40,000 augmentation you gave us. We used the funds to add club

aide positions, at 10 hours a month for \$50, and to increase regional aides' hours as we added clubs in their areas. I am proud to share our organizational chart with you. We now have a staff of 56 consumers, including 43 club aides (serving 46 clubs), an events coordinator, the "Next Step News" editor and a legislative aide. There are eight regional aides, who work part-time ranging from 10 to 20 hours a week. The office manager and I are full-time employees.

I have two exciting developments to tell you about. We have a Policy Committee, made up of our advisory board members, that sets ethical and operational guidelines. It has made decisions on how fund-raising dollars are allocated to clubs, how to deal with disruptive members and what the fraternization rules are for regional aides. We want to help members gain their power back. Because mental illness takes away members' self-confidence, they tend to give power away to authority figures, instead of accepting it themselves.

This month, we opened our first "Discovery Center," funded by a \$40,000 contract with the Village. We're in the start-up phase, but we see access and action as keys to the center. It will be a place where members can make a lot of discoveries: new friends, new interests and new skills. It will help them find out about resources in the local community, as well as learn about the world-wide community through the Internet. Gail Green staffs the center as a full-time self-help coordinator. We'll keep you updated on the center's progress as it gets going.

### **Community Activities**

Our activities, open to all clubs, help members be more involved in the community. Over the past 18 months, our range of activities included plays, concerts, sporting events, trips to amusement parks and camping. We solicit free or low cost tickets so many members can participate. Attached are the lists of our activities for 1996 and 1997.

We expanded the number of camping trips we offer. For many years, the annual Big Bear excursion was our only trip, and members asked us for more. In the past year and a half, we had four camp-outs. Our most recent trip was three days on Catalina, and the \$80 cost included the boat ride over and back, campsite, meals and a tour of the island. For all the camping trips, members may pay in installments so more can save up and afford to go.

Other highlights included the Awards Picnic, and I want to thank you and Cora for joining us and presenting awards. PR:TNS sponsored "Hope Day," an empowerment retreat that had Courtenay Harding as its guest speaker. The retreat was attended by 82 consumers and included small work groups facilitated by PR:TNS members. MHA's human resources director held a special facilitator training for the eight members chosen as facilitators. Another important activity was the series of HIV presentations made by Jackie Cox to our clubs.

In recent months, we have not had as many sporting events as in the past. The main reason for this is that the Lakers, who gave us tickets to as many as four games a month, have greatly limited their ticket donations. We plan to request tickets from new teams such as the Sparks women's basketball team, Ice Dogs ice hockey team and Galaxy soccer team.