

## **Croydon Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health (APCMH)**

article by Father Andrew Wilson (Vice chair of Croydon APCMH)

### **30 and still counting!!!!**

Early in 1989 a small group of people from various churches and mental health charities in Croydon heard of the initiative by the newly founded APCMI, as it then was, to support people with mental health issues pastorally and spiritually. They decided to form a group locally to further its aims, and took part in a training course with Dennis Murray, the Development Worker from the Association.

Later in the year Andrew Wilson was appointed to a innovative post of 'Community Mental Health Chaplain' for Croydon Mental Health Services. The Community Care Bill of the previous year introduced the move from long-term institutionalised mental health care, to more locally based support for people living at home or residential units. (The 650 in-patient beds was finally replaced by provision for 70 beds for the Borough of Croydon, a number which is even lower now.)

The Community Chaplain was to work to encourage and inform local churches and faith groups as this radical change took place, and so the birth of a local APCMH group was 'heaven sent' as an effective way of making strong links between mental health services and the community, planning local projects, like Drop-Ins, training and supporting volunteers, and eventually getting local authority funding for a part time post of Development Worker.

The next year saw the opening of our first Drop-In, ( finally called the Rainbow) and still going strong on Monday evenings in the south of the Borough. Now 2 further Drop-Ins provide a warm welcome and safe space for our members on Friday evening and Sunday lunchtime. A Women's only lunchtime Drop-In on Tuesday answers another urgent need.

A significant change to our work came when we were left a substantial legacy, ( now all spent!!) by a grateful member, whose childhood as an evacuee during the War was marked with suffering and the end of any proper schooling. Her gift to us was to be used to encourage the independence, and well-being of our members, and so the Creative and Well-Being programme began, which still provides weekly groups for Art, Creative Writing, Meditation, and a Friday Eucharist and exploration of spiritual needs, complemented by various short term courses on well-being and self-care, and regular talks and conferences to spread the word on our work.. We are determined to maintain this work for as long as we can, despite our ever diminishing funds!

This November a visit by Christopher, Bishop of Southwark to meet us all, after a generous gift from his Diocesan Lent Appeal gives us the chance to celebrate all that we have achieved, and to think about ways in which this vital work can continue. Posh sandwiches and spectacular cakes will inspire us, no doubt!!!!