

Please leave this form at Reception or with your Case Manager

- I am interested in coming along to a Friends of Alfred CAMHS meeting
- I am interested in joining Friends of Alfred CAMHS but would like someone to call me to talk about it
- I am not able to join Friends of Alfred CAMHS but would be happy to participate from time to time in surveys.
[NB: When we contact you we will endeavour to check whether you are still happy to participate in this way]

Name: _____

Address [optional] _____

Contact phone number _____

This information is considered confidential, will only be used for the above purposes, and will be kept by Alfred CAMHS staff.

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“The Good, the Bad and the Ugly”

For those of us who have been involved with the mental health system as carers of a family member with a mental illness, our experiences of what we have encountered might be summed up with the phrase “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly”.

For some of us, our experience with CAMHS has provided tremendous support, information and hope. Unfortunately, for others the experience has been quite different, frequently leading to feelings of frustration, hopelessness and despair.



Welcome to *Friends of Alfred CAMHS*

We are a group of carers (parents) that meets six times a year with senior staff of Alfred CAMHS. Our objective is to let the clinicians know about **OUR** experience with the service: *the Good* (and there is a lot); *the Bad* (which can be easily corrected) and *the Ugly* (entrenched practices and attitudes which need to be acknowledged and changed).

Over recent years, the attitude within the mental health system has gradually been shifting to provide a real role for carers that acknowledges their expertise and perspective. The reality is that as carers we live with our children 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We know a lot and if asked in a positive way can provide a wealth of information about the “lived” experience of mental illness.

The consumer (professional speak for the patient/client) who comes to Alfred CAMHS is our precious child. Our precious child who has been plunged into a difficult and puzzling world and we as their carers are deposited there too. Mental illness is a family illness. It affects everyone in the family and ultimately everyone in our community.

If you have wondered "Can I make a difference? Will anyone pay attention to me?" Friends of Alfred CAMHS can and will if you show up and just share your experience, perspective and vision.

A sitting fee of \$20 is paid to attendees to acknowledge the time you spend. There are no minutes to take; people to hassle for money or cookies to bake. Your opinions and experience are the price of admission. We can make things better... you just need to show up.

Here are some of things that we've achieved

- ☺ You should have a copy of a pink booklet called *About Alfred CAMHS: A guide for parents and carers*. We had a hand in making sure the info was parent friendly, relevant to parents and that parents got a copy BEFORE their first appointment.
- ☺ We also thought parents should receive an appointment letter before the first appointment outlining who they would see and when, and what would be involved. This is now standard practice.
- ☺ We helped develop the pamphlet for teenagers by doing some 'market research' with teenagers we knew. There should be copies in the waiting room
- ☺ Sometimes it can be hard to figure out where to turn for support. The flyer 'Help for parents and carers' was developed by us.
- ☺ Alfred CAMHS covers young people up to 18. The children of some of us 'Friends' are now young adults who are still in need of help. By sharing the 'picture' of our lives the staff at Alfred CAMHS have a better understanding of how to prepare a family for transition to adult services.
- ☺ We've spoken at staff meetings and at mental health worker training days on what it is like to be parents of a child with mental health problems.
- ☺ Whilst our meetings mainly deal with Alfred CAMHS issues, we have given input to statewide groups. This has shaped the development of written materials and how consumers can be involved in mental health services.

We suggested the Alfred CAMHS *values and vision* poster that's near the reception desk.

- ☺ We have been able to give a parent perspective on some of the suggestions and complaints received. There's a folder with the outcomes of our discussions near the water cooler called *Feedback about your feedback*.
- ☺ One of our members is now a key member of the Alfred CAMHS committee which approves applications for the *Mental Health Carer Support Program Brokerage Fund*.
- ☺ Being such a small group, we weren't sure whether our views represented the broad range of views of parents so we did some 'research'. One of our members volunteered time to meet with parents in the waiting room and gave feedback to the group which we passed on to the staff.
- ☺ We had some ideas for how to improve the waiting room: including up-to-date reading material and headings on the noticeboards. We also suggested a 'Parents / Carer' section on the noticeboard.
- ☺ We have some exciting things planned for 2006: developing an adolescent version of our group, so they too can have a voice in shaping Alfred CAMHS

Meeting dates for 2006

- February 13th
- April 10th
- June 5th
- July 31st
- October 16th
- December 11th

All meetings are on a Monday from 11.00 to 12.30
A sitting fee of \$20 is paid to each attendee