

MOODS

Serving People with Unipolar and Bipolar Illness, Their Families and Friends, since 1981

March 2021

MDSG Celebrates 40 Years of Service

The Early Days

This article is reprinted from the November 2011 issue that celebrated the 30th anniversary of MDSG.

In honor of MDSG's 30th anniversary, Li Faustino sat down with Ngaere Baxter, PhD, one of the founders of the organization. Ngaere is currently a clinical psychologist in private practice and an Instructor in Psychology at Weill Cornell Medical College.

Q. Back in 1981 you were the director of the Foundation for Depression and Manic-Depression. How did you end up as one of the founders of MDSG? A. I received about 20 letters for proposed projects, one of which was from Rich Satkin and his wife Betty Mackintosh. They said they felt there was a need for a support group for people with mood disorders. I threw out the other 19 letters, and called Rich and Betty and invited them in to talk about the idea. So from the very be-

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A Remarkable 40th Anniversary Year

By Li Faustino, PhD

The year 2021 marks MDSG's 40th anniversary, representing 40 years of weekly support groups, even during most holidays, through blizzards, site relocations, September 11th, and numerous internal challenges such as volunteer shortages. So perhaps it is no surprise that MDSG continued to operate during the pandemic, which really was a surprise to all. On the eve of our 40th year anniversary, MDSG was faced with its most daunting challenge ever. The world went through a shared trauma of a rampant and unpredictable virus, wide spread isolation, and a thousand other losses and changes that none of us could have ever imagined.

As in the past MDSG volunteers sprang into action. Some parked themselves at our in-person sites to break the news to incoming participants that our groups would not be meeting. Another extraordinary volunteer speedily set up our virtual groups in one week; we barely missed a beat! As we look back to that first couple of weeks, I will share with you a paragraph that one of our volunteers wrote, which I believe captures it well:

MDSG didn't miss a beat. As I recall it, Henry sprang into action from his command post at MDSG South, with assistance from Carolyn and others, and within a week, after much trial and error on calls with all of us dedicated, loyal, flexible, congenial volunteers-with-a-purpose—broken links, chronic interrupters, jenky audio, muted depressives, invisible participants—we were back in action as the owners of one of Zoom's most active accounts worldwide. And, as we got our bearings, several times a week we offered refuge and support—and sometimes just the simplicity of

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MDSG Celebrates 40 Years of Service: A Remarkable 40th Anniversary Year

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conversation—to people feeling the bleak loneliness of isolation, and other disorienting circumstances, on more than one continent.

Beyond this effort we have forged past our usual operations. We trained new facilitators, are forming specialized groups, acquired more focused trainings on suicide and cultural impacts on mood disorder treatment, and even offered a new fundraising approach that was entertaining, inspiring and destigmatizing. I believe that upon entering our 41st year, we have shattered records that even our founders could not have predicted. Currently we serve people in multiple time zones and on multiple continents. We have broken through challenges within our organization that have existed for decades, such as rejuvenating the Family & Friends group.

All of this we owe to our amazing volunteer base and to the masses of people who reached out for help during this harrowing year. Personal-

ly, I feel that fighting debilitating episodes and figuring out how to continue one's own treatment during a pandemic was downright heroic. Likewise, our volunteers rose to the occasion and offered a place of continuity and solace in a new medium. It is a shared pandemic experience so they did so while grappling with the tribulations of their own lives. This, too, is heroic.

I think back to some of the heroes who made this possible. They are names that many of you know: Howard Smith, Betsy Naylor, David Chowes, and Ivan Goldberg in memoriam as well as Ngaere Baxter, Marylou Selo and Richard Satkin. Some of our heroes from the past are still with MDSG today. This is a true testament to the family that MDSG has become as well as to the lasting effect of what we do as an organization. If MDSG has helped us find ourselves or saved our lives, we tend to stay and save back. It is a formula that has worked for us since 1981 and will continue as we look to the future of MDSG

*Dr. Li Faustino is Chair
of the MDSG Board*

Items of Interest

HealthyPlace: “Quotes on Mental Health and Mental Illness”
<https://www.healthyplace.com/insight/quotes/quotes-on-mental-health-and-mental-illness>

HealthyPlace: “Implement Extreme Self-Care for Depression” <https://www.healthyplace.com/blogs/copingwithdepression/2016/01/implementing-extreme-self-care-for-depression>

Mood Disorders Support Group
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MDSG Celebrates 40 Years of Service: The Early Years

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ginning MDSG had plenty of family involvement. In August of 1981 I opened the conference room at the Foundation and put out cookies, and we had our first meeting. Since then MDSG has survived several relocations and moves, and continued to grow.

Q. Over your years at MDSG, what have been some of the biggest challenges? A. Sustaining the mission. It's always been worthwhile work, but there aren't always enough volunteers and facilities to keep things running smoothly.

Q. What has been the best improvement over the years? A. We've reached critical mass, and we are an established presence. When I listen to the introductions at lectures it's clear we're a solid resource for people who need us, and that the professional community respects us. After all the years spent building up the group, that's a relief and very pleasing.

Q. What was the best piece of advice anyone ever gave you

about MDSG? A. I like that question. Someone once told me that in the end it's about the people. You have to listen to what people need, and then do what it takes to meet those needs. If you do that, the organization is going to succeed.

Q. What was your worst fear about what would happen with MDSG? A. Oh, I never had fears. I had a lot of hope.

Q. If you could invite one person, real or historical or imaginary, to speak at an MDSG meeting, who would it be? A. Abraham Lincoln. He's been described as being bipolar and more recently, of having Marfan's syndrome. We've always heard he was depressed, and we don't really know what caused that. Seems he was able to turn it to good advantage. What we do know is that he was a fabulous speaker!

Q. If you could give only one piece of encouragement to someone newly diagnosed, what would it be? A. Hang in there. Just hang in there.

MDSG's Initial Directors

*Those we thank for their
vision and action*

David Chowes
Gary Goldsmith
Carole Kahn
Betty Mackintosh
Jean Morrow
Nanette Nass
Richard Satikin
Marylou Selo
Jane Schonfeld
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