

1. Introduction

In August 1971 a small group of people met together in a house in Moston, Manchester and after a series of meetings decided to produce and circulate this leaflet:

Manchester P.N.P.

People Not Psychiatry is neither an organisation not an institution but a SCATTERED COMMUNE of FRIENDS. Some of us are socially alienated, some isolated, depressed, suicidal etc., others escaping psychiatric labels. Those on the list below are for you to contact when you feel "in need" or just want to talk to someone. Occasionally you'll receive a surly, closed-up, unhelpful reaction from your call; other times the complete reverse - warm, compassionate, understanding and human. We've all got problems (and know it) so inconsistency abounds, but don't give in too easily - phone round a bit.

We meet each Tuesday in a different home and you are very welcome to come along. Anyone on the list below will be able to give you details of the next meeting.

So P.N.P. arrived in Manchester and, following a long, colourful history, it continues to meet on Tuesday evenings in 1984.

Indeed for the past 12 years Tuesday evenings have been "P.N.P. night" for a small group of people across Manchester. Of course during that time individual members have come and gone, but, almost without break, each week some 8 - 12 people have gathered at an agreed venue to sit together, to talk, to drink tea, to discuss, to support each other in this "scattered commune of friends". Sometimes - but not always - this support has extended outside the meeting. Phone numbers have been exchanged and networks established which have tried to respond to individual crises. There has always been an intense interest in the ideas behind the group. Several lengthy manifestos have been written placing P.N.P. at varying points on "the alternative to conventional psychiatry" scale. It is noticeable that at each significant stage in its development the group has produced a small number of "historian" figures to remind members of what are seen as central P.N.P. principles and ideas.

But it is not always sweetness and light! At times the group has been fragmentary and dissatisfying for individual members. Complaints are voiced about the negative atmosphere of some of the meetings - the comment is heard "meeting depressed people only makes you more depressed". And in a certain sense there is an underlying feeling of surprise that such a fragile structure has survived for so long. The concepts are so elusive, the people so different, there is so much to disagree about. Add to that the occasional outbursts of suspicion and mistrust on the part of the established mental health agencies and you might imagine you have a recipe for meteoric decline "Oh no! that group would never do at all", one social worker was heard to remark. "They try and persuade everyone to come off their medication".

And yet, and yet. After 12 years the group still refuses to disappear. Despite the fact that it has never had any direct financial aid, and despite several periods when it had no regular meeting room, the idea still surfaces and somehow captures the interest of new members. So we thought we would write about P.N.P. - before its history is forgotten, certainly, but not for that reason alone. There is, we believe, something about the ideas and principles that makes them important and potentially influential. They relate, after all, to concepts of "self-help" and "community care" which are currently vogue ideas in mental health debates. Perhaps through reading about the struggles and aspirations of P.N.P. to create "a scattered commune of friends" other people will be stimulated to learn from our mistakes and benefit from our successes, in their own attempts to create supportive community networks.

2. History (i) Origins - London 1969-71

First a brief history. The idea of P.N.P. came from an ex-lawyer, ex-businessman, ex-pilgrim to the East called Mike Barnett. Disillusioned by his own experience of psychiatry, he was influenced by the writings of R.D. Laing and his circle and decided to form an organisation in 1969 to explore alternative approaches to mental health. In its origins, the group was explicitly anti-psychiatry - People Not Psychiatry. - So he wrote in his book "People Not Psychiatry" (1973).

And so there I was in the late sixties, seeing these hospitals and undergoing some orthodox psychotherapy myself as part of my personal search, and discovering a whole process of surrender - people being encouraged to surrender their own capacity to live for themselves. And I had an idea that a lot could be done outside The System, not necessarily by experts because all the experts seemed to be in The System. So I wrote an article for one of the underground newspapers (International Times) saying let's help each other. The response was amazing - the phone didn't stop ringing - letters piled up - and the whole thing burgeoned. And a lot was done"

But, at the same time, the emphasis was on People, in terms of what the group was trying to achieve :

Now with P.N.P. we are saying O.K. lets you and I get together - and perhaps we really haven't a great deal of knowledge and understanding - perhaps we have only our instincts and feelings and intuitions. But we do have a certain kind of commitment to one another ; we have the human commitment that says I'm not going to dismiss you, I'm not going to reject you ...

These dual perspectives - of People not Psychiatry - asserted from the very start of the group have remained pivotal influences in the development of the idea - certainly in Manchester. At various times during the next 12 years, emphases and interpretations will be seen to ebb and flow, but there is little doubt that the title chosen for the group has been vibrant and provocative in forcing successive members to acknowledge the potential power and assertiveness contained in the ideas that lead to the group's original self-description.

[ii] Moston, Manchester 1971 - 73

In 1971, two men in Manchester separately read about the idea of P.N.P. and volunteered to become contacts for the group. These - Dave Kay and Peter Cavanagh (who is still involved with the group) - were put in touch with each other by the Manchester Evening News' "Agony Aunt" Jane Dawson. Interestingly her role was influential in terms of publicity for the group, (as is the current Agony Aunt, Joan Seddon, today). So she wrote on August 3rd 1971.

I gave a brief mention to the possibility [of getting P.N.P. going in Manchester] in the Jane Dawson column last Friday, and, as a result, have had floods of enquiries which I want to pass on to the most suitable people ...

Quickly a core group of ten people formed around Dave and Peter, and a couple offered their house in Moston as a venue for the first meeting. A leaflet was duplicated - quoted about in the introduction - and the address and six phone numbers publicised. The date chosen for the first open meeting was Tuesday, August thus beginning P.N.P.'s unbroken association with Tuesday evenings ever since!

The first meetings were chaotic and overwhelming. As Joan Seddon had herself discovered, any mention of P.N.P. in the press led to a large number of enquiries and requests for help from all kinds of people. So early meetings were spent in sharing the job of answering the scores of letters and phone calls received since the previous meeting. Most of us felt that one of P.N.P. qualities should be its smallness and intimacy. This didn't accord with more than 40 people congregating in a tiny through lounge in a terraced house in Moston. The range of demand, too, was vast. Lonely housewives were calling in from just down the street, eager to leave their houses and husbands and talk about their feelings of isolation and depression; Large numbers of single young men and women in their early '20s, made up a majority, looking for friendship and support; some of these were eager to share their experiences of hospital treatments; a small number of elderly folk travelled quite long distances looking for the opportunity to talk; young people who had been recently homeless came along looking for companionship in a new setting - referred by MAGIC - an alternative information centre in Rusholme, South Manchester modelled on BIT in London. Clearly, such diverse, competing demands were going to impose intolerable demands on the new group. Yet, significantly, the core group refused to panic and instead waited fairly consciously for things to settle down. And this of course they quickly did. Inevitably a majority of people did not particularly like what they saw or heard

and numbers fairly rapidly fell until by the beginning of November a group of between 15 - 20 people were beginning to meet regularly. At this time ~~of~~ one of the core group - Bernard Jobson - received a request for advice about starting a P.N.P. group from people in Brighton. In a long, interesting reply (which we shall refer to again) he warns of the early experience of the Manchester group.

All this publicity attracted many people to P.N.P. but we were not settled enough or big enough to absorb this influx and again many fell away. So we now find it better to introduce newcomers in ones and twos to the group in order that they are not lost in the crowd and left bewildered and alone - as has happened. Therefore my first recommendation is that you establish P.N.P. from your initial 8 - 10 members and not to add to it until you've got a stable basis. Even then this group could be swamped, and its carefully established values dominated by an influx of 10 - 20 people, as could happen through advertising in the local paper. [November 29th '71].

But no sooner had some kind of tentative P.N.P. identity begun to emerge than a far greater threat almost overtook the group, this time from within. Regular weekly meetings were now being held in the Moston house, and plans were being made to alternate meetings in the homes of other members. But the crisis that was to follow undermined any such plans and exposed a vulnerability at the very heart of P.N.P.'s thinking and practise; a vulnerability which is an essential element of its existence as a living structure. Again Bernard Jobson describes what happened;

P.N.P. by its very nature will attract all kinds of people and we in the initial stages were almost taken over, certainly dominated by, a group of individuals infatuated with 'Acid Therapy' and determined to spread their vision to as many people as possible. What to do? One of the basic ideas of P.N.P. is that it accepts everybody, so banning them would have been dangerous on two grounds - creating a precedent and establishing those who banned them as the elite of P.N.P. ie people who directed policy, which would perhaps differentiate them from the others who came for help, thus breaking another P.N.P. ethic. A lot of weaker members were completely under the spell of this group and meetings were almost warlike.

Eventually the "acid group" felt the effect of so much arguing and left to form their own group. But during this time lots of newcomers were put off by the drug centred conversation".

The question of where power and authority lies in a group like P.N.P. is clearly a crucial one, and it is one that is posed frequently [though usually less dramatically] throughout the life of the group. We will, therefore, return to it when discussing ideas and principles in a later section. However, although somewhat shell-shocked and fragile, the P.N.P. members who remained were strengthened by the fight they had had, and all the more determined to ensure the survival of their group. A meeting rota was established and P.N.P. settled during the next 12 months into a routine of house meetings. The idea of meeting in people's homes was an attractive one. Members enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere usually encountered; for some it was a rare opportunity to be invited into someone else's house; it did stress the personal nature of the group and strengthened personal ties between individuals. The hosts, too, usually enjoyed the chance to 'entertain' in a somewhat structured way. The meetings, therefore, were usually well attended and during this time P.N.P. was seen to be providing an attractive social setting for up to 20 people.

(iii) Basement Days 1973-76

But there were some practical problems. In particular those of communication and accessibility. It was proving difficult to ensure that everyone knew, for instance, where the next meeting was to be held and some members were put off by the travelling involved [particularly when this involved catching two buses to cross the city]. Occasionally hosts were disconcerted by the idiosyncracies of some of their guests, and the disruption to their homes inevitably caused by the arrival of 20 people in their front room!

The possibility, therefore, of a meeting room in the centre of Manchester outweighed the recognised loss of more personal surroundings, and in 1973 P.N.P. moved its meetings to the Basement. Thus began an apocryphal phase in its history, around which all manner of stories are told. The Basement was the offices in central Manchester of a small youth work project offering support to a small number of homeless young people. The workers on that project had some involvement with helping to get P.N.P. started (Bernard Jobson, Kathy Jones and Alistair Cox) and often referred young people from their project to the group. The premises comprised the basement area under the revered Gaddum Centre in Queen Street - the centre provided accommodation for a variety of charitable groups under the terms of an edowment of an eminent Victorian worthy, - Henry Gaddum. So P.N.P. had access to a large meeting room, a small office and a kitchen - all in a warm, informal, subterranean environment. It proved immediately attractive. People could find it easily - from both the north and south of the city; the atmosphere was relaxed and welcoming; tea could be brewed; meetings could go on until the early hours (and frequently did!); the Rising Sun pub was directly adjacent. [indeed few will ever forget the Rising Sun - and particularly the night when one of the girls dared drink the awesome landlady's pint as it rested on the bar. Now that really was almost the end of the group!].

In many ways, therefore, this was to be a crucial three years in the life of the P.N.P. group. Not the least of these was the arrival of a new member - Jack Housden. He was particularly interested in the ideas and philosophy behind the group and was influential in their articulation and development. He suggested a symbol which the group adopted [see illustration plus explanation] and produced a 28 page 'manifesto'. In this, after producing a measured critique of orthodox psychiatry, he concludes with an important section entitled "Towards an outline of P.N.P." In this he writes :

Primarily I see P.N.P. as an unstructured network of people who for one reason or other feel undeveloped and unfulfilled in the macro society that prevails under advanced industrialisation. The network is unstructured and I feel very strongly that it should and must remain so. We are not a society, with officers and committees, and no one has to "join" to become a "member", anymore than one has to "join" the human race to become a member of it ...

Although P.N.P. originated out of the need felt by some people for an alternative to orthodox psychiatry I for one wouldn't like it to be limited or confined to those who are looking for that sort of thing. I see P.N.P. as a milieu wherein people can meet people in a way that is becoming more difficult in modern urban conurbations ...

Much space has been taken up in this document with a discussion of the limitations of orthodox psychiatry. However, many people who come to P.N.P. may be currently undergoing psychiatric treatment and benefitting from it. They may simply come to P.N.P. because they want to meet people, people who they know will accept them, and the last thing they want to hear in the Basement, or anywhere else, is an endless discussion of "mental illness". I think some of us need to be reminded of this from time to time.

Finally, much has also been said about the acceptance of the other persons lifestyle as valid for him ... If we are to develop fully, and if P.N.P. is to provide a micro-society wherein that is possible, the implication is that we shall develop as free beings. Part of our freedom consists in our freedom to relate to whom we choose. This carries with it the right to say "No, I don't want to relate to you ... I can accept you as a valid person with a valid lifestyle, without necessarily wanting to form a particular friendship with you". This idea may be difficult to put over sometimes without the other feeling it as a rejection. Nevertheless, I feel that we must retain the right to say "No".

It was at this time, too, that, the group adopted the dual title - People NOT psychiatry/People Need People]. (If liked - but rejected - Jack's more mischievous suggestion, Psychiatrists Need Patients!).

Outside the Tuesday evening meeting the idea of a more fluid network of support was also more evident. Most noticeably, individual members volunteered to be called out when somebody was going through a crisis. Thus, for example, people sat for several days and nights with a girl going through a particularly bad time in her depressing bedsitter. Other small groups met to pursue shared interests. One member, M. P., a postgraduate psychology student suggested this should be regarded as an important development:

Perhaps one could make provision for different networks to evolve. Networks which are situated in different areas and also networks which consist of different types of people. There may be a need to avoid becoming too exclusive. Potentially these networks could expand indefinitely, however, not without some input of time and thought. Perhaps one should define which area one has primarily in mind and what sort of people perhaps the younger age group and the South Manchester area? ... How realistic is it to think that, once initiated, the network system rolls on its own. ie expsychiatric patients soon take over supporting the network, visit newly discharged patients, invite each other?" (September 1973)

Eventually half a dozen people decided to get together in Marlis' house and set up a more formal explicitly therapeutic, self help group for young men within the P.N.P. network. There was also discussion of the desirability of establishing a P.N.P. house:

for most people it will be P.N.P.'s home, incorporating the main features of our group; warm, sympathy and acceptance. The house will be a focal point for all the sundry activities I'm sure will emerge from the spring-like thinking currently running amok among our members. (Christine in "P.N.P.'s Non-Manifesto).

Indeed, these were days of heady optimism! The house never materialised, but the group did succeed in publishing its "Non-Manifesto", thanks to the generosity of a local second-hand washing machine salesman who was a member of P.N.P. and who offered to pay to get it (rather grandly) printed. This comprised of eight short impressionistic pieces "in which various individuals describe P.N.P. as they see it and tell us what it means to them". One of them, Terry, describes P.N.P. as a "Breakthrough in Communication" : She writes :

I felt that I did not fit in with society. I felt odd, alone and unaccepted. At P.N.P. I found a group of people willing to understand you if you had any problems, and talk to you. They will talk to you not because you own a big car, have lots of money and good clothes, but for your own person. I found people who accepted me for what I am.

There were other people who felt odd and lonely too and we could communicate more easily than if we had met in other places such as bars, clubs, dance halls and so on. At P.N.P. barriers between people from all classes and all walks of life are broken down. Everyone is welcome and you can talk out any grievances you might have, or listen to various conversations and remain silent yourself should you feel unable to talk. People with nervous trouble and so called personality disorders in society can meet others with similar troubles and find empathy, maybe lasting friendships, and possible help with their problems.

It is a breakthrough in communication in a friendly atmosphere.

{IV} 1977-79 Wanderlings/Upheavals

But the Basement days were numbered. The Gaddum Centre was due for demolition and although the youth project was the last to leave P.N.P. clearly had to move too. Indeed at one stage the youth work group was threatened with legal action for holding up the whole planned development of the Queen Street area. [Ironically, the Gaddum Centre itself was only finally demolished years later in 198]. This upheaval provoked in P.N.P. - the least complacent of groups - a high degree of self criticism. Despite the popularity of the meetings, some members felt very dissatisfied with their content. On some occasions the predominant mood was one of depression and inertia - that old complaint about the dangers of bringing together people who had only their depression in common was never finally answered. So in a paper headed "Progress Now - Perhaps" Jack aired his own misgivings :

I came to P.N.P. something like a year and a half ago in the belief that it had something to offer to those who were seeking an alternative to what orthodox psychiatry had to offer. P.N.P. in Manchester has not always fulfilled that promise, but nevertheless it has given me something that I value very much, namely many new friends. However my recent reading of Mike Barnett's book and the original IT manifesto of July 1969 has confirmed me in my belief that P.N.P. was always intended to be part of the Human Potential Movement, playing its part alongside the Encounter Movement, Primal Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, Co-Counselling and the rest. I would like to see the end of the Basement era as the start of a new era more in keeping with P.N.P.'s original intentions.

However this was not to be, and in many ways the group began to fall apart. A new meeting room was located in Fairfield Street - the top floor office of another voluntary organisation, Lance, a NACRO sponsored housing agency. But the group never really felt at home there it somehow lacked intimacy of the Basement. Attendance became erratic and, for a while, dominated by a small group of Hells Angels who frightened off a lot of other people (a reminder of those acid head problems!) As numbers fell (to five or six people each week) so the momentum of the group declined. Publicity was abandoned, core members' commitment diminished and the group was seen to succumb to apathy and depression. Manifestos were forgotten, principles and ideals rarely discussed. Was this to be the sad end of what, for many people, had been such an important idea?

The small core of people who remained decided that the group should revert to meeting in houses - this, it was hoped, would revive the personal atmosphere lacking in the Fairfield Street room. But few were in a position to offer such hospitality - several lived in hostels or small bed-sits - so in 1979 the group decided to meet on a regular basis in the house of a long standing member in Moss Side. Gone now, however, were the days of debate and lofty idealism. Rather, P.N.P. now tended to provide a once weekly drop-in point in the community for a small group of mainly young, isolated men - several of whom had come to P.N.P. through the youth work project. This is not to undervalue the importance of the contact for those concerned, but neither could it be seen as developing a vision of P.N.P. as seemed possible at the height of the Basement days. There seemed little possibility of hope for the future, but rather a depressing prospect of slow decline.

[V] A Room with a View. 1980 -

Interest in the ideas behind P.N.P. was revived in 1980 with the opening of a small community mental health project called 42nd Street. Sponsored by the Youth Development Trust - a charity which had also sponsored the Basement youth project - the service was set up in response to the demonstrated lack of facilities and alternatives for young people with mental health problems. One of its interests was in the potential of informal networks to provide support and friendship for isolated young people. Its work, therefore, was not restricted to its office base - part of the workers' role was to support individuals and groups in the community. Young people, for instance, were visited in their homes or bedsits, and a group was established which met regularly in a local pub (transferring later to a more friendly cafe). One of the workers employed on the project, Alistair Cox, had been involved in the early days of P.N.P., and it was agreed by the team that it would be useful for him to spend a small proportion of his time in exploring whether there was sufficient interest and energy around to revitalise the P.N.P. group and network.

Alistair contacted a number of former members and in May 1980 a core group of 5 or 6 people met on four occasions. This group - consisting of three "old" members and three "new" - decided to relaunch the group and began the search for a suitable room. They were agreed that it would not be a good idea to use 42nd Street premises. There were difficulties here anyway about regular weekly access, but more important was felt to be the need for P.N.P. to develop its own identity and style, distinct from 42nd Street, from the very outset. Eventually a room was located in the offices of a local authority youth work training building (the youth officer being interested in the work of 42nd Street).

So in June, 1980 the first public meeting of the new P.N.P. group was held. At the planning meetings a lot of time had been spent in preparing a leaflet to describe the group. This maintained the dual title (though with a new logo (see illustration) and was quite forthright about P.N.P. principles and ideas. So it began :

We are a network of people who care about people, and who know they can call on one another for help in times of crisis and emotional distress.

We have a weekly meeting place where people can drop in - to meet friends, to share experiences, to discuss the ideas of P.N.P. Or simply to be with others.

We call ourselves a network - Because we do not want to be another institution, with people divided into leaders and led, helpers and helped, sane and insane. We hope that everyone will have the chance to develop and express themselves, and, in turn, will allow others to do the same.

We recognise everything that anyone experiences as real for them : labelling a person as sick avoids the real problem.

We believe that people are often sent for mental health treatment because of a real conflict of interests.

We recognise the role that social conditions play in treating mental illness.

We believe that medical treatment should not be used as a substitute for social change.

We believe that all ideas of mental health are fundamentally political.

We have clear ideas of mental health which reside in people's capacity for self regulation.

We do not entirely reject the use of drugs - we believe that they are used too often and too readily. Nor do we wish to belittle the humane work done by some mental health professionals.

We believe that most people have the capacity to develop helping skills.

We call ourselves a network because we don't want to set up yet another institution.

Eleven people attended the first meeting - a mixture of old and new members - and they very quickly established a style of meeting which carried over into the meeting that followed. In this it was generally envisaged that the first half hour or so would be spent in drinking tea or coffee and chatting generally; then an hour in which people could talk more personally about themselves and what they hoped to get from P.N.P.; and the last half hour sitting around drinking coffee and chatting again. This followed by some social time in the pub. Again - as so often in the past - the group had succeeded in attracting a striking mixture of people. Typically a couple of people's openness about their own experience, and fears, encouraged other folk to voice some of their feelings. After six weeks one of the regular members wrote :

I am reasonably happy with the progress made by P.N.P. We have attracted on average about 12 people to each meeting and although there hasn't been a very high level of consistency I think a group feeling is beginning to emerge which people find helpful. The meetings we had so far emphasise the need for people to be around who are prepared to take some responsibility for the group and we are now clear as to who is definitely going to be there on any particular evening ... What I fear happening is what tended to happen in the old P.N.P. - that is, that new people would drift along to meetings and not receive enough attention from people in the group, and thus decide not to come again. If we are serious about our intention to develop a supportive group we are going to have to tackle this fairly squarely. But I do feel that there are people around who are committed enough to the idea of P.N.P. to make an effort and respond.

However, the accommodation was not totally satisfactory. Sometimes the large room was not available and instead the group had to use a very cramped room with only limited access for coffee and tea-making. People felt cramped and uncomfortable and unable to move around the room. "Sometimes", one member remarked, "it feels like sitting in a doctor's surgery, with no one feeling quite sure how to react". Significantly, this comment became a stock P.N.P. joke at moments of embarrassing uncertainty - "Oh, no, we're at the doctor's surgery" - and everyone would know what is meant.

So few tears were shed when it was announced that the building was to close in August, leaving P.N.P. again homeless. On this occasion however the resources of the group were much greater, and there was a lot of energy around to look for alternatives. For a few weeks meetings were held at 42nd Street but the group was keen to move on from there and was offered a very attractive room (with use of kitchen) in a recently opened Health Education Centre in Hardman Street in the centre of Manchester. (Again this reflects the good will towards the group shown by a number of agencies throughout its life - no charge has ever been made for accommodation or services. Without this support P.N.P. would never have been able to develop in the way it has). Hardman Street indeed now became the 'room with a view' so essential to P.N.P.'s stability and development during the past three years to the present day.

The move to Hardman Street coincided with yet a further refinement of the structure of the group. This time the group more closely examined the opposing concerns about (i) retaining the informality of P.N.P.; of allowing people just to sit around and drink their tea; of it being simply a place to meet and get to know each other, and (ii) the wish to see the group becoming more positive, a little more structured, with members having a clearer idea about the kind of group they were joining. To overcome a perceived lack of direction and positiveness in the past, it was suggested that there should be a more organised programme of activities and discussion drawn up. This suggestion was met with both some enthusiasm and some caution. Most members were interested in the idea of having some kind of programme, but several made comments about the dangers of P.N.P. becoming like another day centre social club with "formal" sessions proved attractive. The main conflicts in the group have been in terms of the balance between the "formal" and the "informal" being perceived as over-rigid programme and structure. There was a danger some argued, that people neglected and underestimated what P.N.P. was already providing - namely, a place where people could meet and talk to each other, and share their experiences - and that this might be crowded out by a too demanding programme. It was eventually agreed that the group would try and combine both the informality of the earlier P.N.P., with a minimal programme. In practical terms this meant that one P.N.P. in two would remain unstructured, while the second meeting would have a planned event or speaker.

P.N.P. contd.

During 1981 the group thrived, with a strongly committed core group of seven people who could be relied upon to be present and welcoming to any new members (J., G., P., A., B., D. and Alistair). As so often in the past, the emergence of such a group proved essential for the functioning of P.N.P. as a whole. The content of the meetings, too, proved more attractive. "Formal" meetings included "Desert Island Discs", "My favourite books or paintings", a discussion of P.N.P. principles, and a long remembered day trip to Buxton. The alternating "informal" sessions too were generally friendly and lively, continuing over into what became a regular extension of P.N.P. in the Rising Sun Pub for the final hour (fortunately by now under new landlords!).

Most significantly, the group was at this time used by a small number of people with particularly extreme experiences of mental distress. One of these was a young man who had six months earlier been committed to a local psychiatric hospital on a long term order with little hope of being discharged. Inevitably his hospitalization had largely cut him off from all his contacts with the community and he was clearly very isolated within the hospital mixing only with elderly, long term patients. He had in previous years regularly attended PNP in its Basement days, and was now able to reestablish contact with people who remembered him as an attractive iconoclast rather than as the "difficult patient under heavy medication" which the hospital inevitably sees. Alistair in his capacity as a worker at 42nd Street, knew the lad well and commented :

It's nice to see the way in which people are genuinely glad to see him. Where else would he really be welcomed? People in their own very straightforward, down to earth way make him feel very much at home. And this is surely a lot of what P.N.P. is about. What is also nice is the way in which it's done so naturally and spontaneously. Although we talk a lot at 42nd Street about the need for training courses to increase people's skills in welcoming people to groups etc. when it comes down to it so many folk around P.N.P. are just such nice people who are open to people like him and prepared to spend the time being friendly.

NOTES FOR P.N.P. BOOKLET

Section 3 - Ideas and Issues

What is it about this particular group that has allowed it to continue despite all kinds of ups and downs flourish when so many other self-help groups are seen to quickly lose their energy and die? I think that part of the reason for this relative degree of success must lie in the clear identification at various times in the group's history of fundamental underlying principles and commitments. This is not to say that the group is fundamentally introspective. Far from it. For long periods of its history it has been more interested in 'being a group' rather than analysing its *raison d'être*. But I don't think that a self-help group can run indefinitely - or rather provide a continuing service (as P.N.P. has done) - without some kind of philosophical base which is reaffirmed by successive groups of members. And I think it is true to say that at regular intervals the ideas on which P.N.P. were started have been re-discussed, often re-defined and have provoked a continuing lively debate which is needed if a group such as this is to avoid stagnation and decline.

So what are these issues:

1. Mutuality reciprocity This really is the heart of the P.N.P. ideal. It assumes a willingness on the part of members to be prepared to be open about themselves as people and to assume that relationships in the group should be reciprocal and based on an assumed equality between members. This obviously has implications for leadership which I want to talk about in Section 4.

2. Helping and being helped In this respect (as in point 1) I think the group has been heavily influenced by some of the ideas within co-counselling. It has always been important at P.N.P. that there are not those who help and those who are helped. It is always assumed that those roles can change within the group and that the same person, maybe on the same night can both receive help and provide help. This assumption does fundamentally alter the interaction that takes place within the group between the various members. This is not to deny that at various times there are and have been particularly important, influential people who are part of the group. You could look back and identify say, J., the older man, myself, G., K. (for a while), the woman who to Buxton, R., C., P., K. But the effectiveness and importance of these individuals has only been maintained to the extent that they have acknowledged and held important the principle of mutuality /reciprocity, helping and being helped within the same framework.

3. Supportive networks/ a scattered commune of friends This very early description of the group remains a very attractive one. It doesn't make undue claims, it doesn't rely solely on the weekly meeting. It gets over the sense of people coming and going and being able to come back again. And after all

it is probably what people coming to 42nd Street for instance say they most want. And it is clear I think that friendships have been made within the group over the years. Some of these friendships have been very influential. There is a quote from Jack in I think his letter in which he highlights this as what he got from F.N.P. at that time. And it remains true of my current involvement that I feel I have experienced some very fundamentally important relationships through the life of the group. It would be easy to look back and pick out some of those and maybe at some stage I'd want to do that.

4. Crisis Network This is obviously linked to point 3 but maybe hasn't been the crucial element which it might have been. Again Jack I know argued in his letter of whenever that F.N.P. should re-state its commitment to a crisis network which would involve people turning out to provide support for members going through a bad time. (Like the time described above and the support of Sue). But maybe something has taken its place and maybe that's linked more to the idea of a commune of friends. It is less dramatic and it makes less claims for the impact. But the kind of contact that goes on between members outside the group is very important and so difficult to capture. It is interesting that over the years the group has largely resisted the attempt to increase the number of evenings on which it meets (see B's latest abortive attempt) and I think it has something to do with not seeing F.N.P. purely as a number of meetings but still seeing a central meeting as important yet allowing other kinds of contact to take place outside that meeting.

5. Continuity / Consistency This must have been a factor in the survival and development of Manchester F.N.P. The willingness of a small number of individuals to commit considerable parts of their time to the group at particular stages in its history. Peter Kavanagh and myself have I suppose provided an underlying consistency and commitment throughout the whole of its history. But a lot of folk have contributed to the sense of history that surrounds F.N.P. So I think one needs to recognise M's erratic attendances and her constant awareness of the past of F.N.P. which she brings to people's attention; G. (who was there last night) who says very little but has attended the group off and on over the years. Other people have provided a continuity and consistency for significant periods. Again you'd want to think more carefully about this but off the top of my head obviously Jack, M., B., the guy who died and several of the current membership. And I think it is this combination of kinds of commitment which has led to the fairly satisfactory state of health of F.N.P. today. Part of the role of the first group of people specified must be to do with acting as historians of the group of reminding the group of its past and of I suppose being prepared to re-state the principles and ideas which have always permeated throughout the group. So I suppose I played this role last night at F.N.P. where I put forward the proposal of a piece of writing about it. And it was interesting to see the degree of interest shown to the early manifestos and booklets and the willingness of people to participate in this new exercise.