

ON OUR OWN

If you don't recognize the name ON OUR OWN, it may be because we just adopted the name last month--March 1980. You probably know us by one of our previous names.

We started out in 1977 as the Ontario Mental Patients' Association (OMPA). We didn't like the name much ourselves--the words "mental patient" have a lot of negative connotations--and planned to change it at some point.

We were pushed into changing it by the Government of Ontario when we applied for incorporation. The government was afraid we might be confused with the Mental Health Association, and wouldn't incorporate us as OMPA.

So we suggested the name Free Psychiatric Inmates. No, said the government. You're implying that people in psychiatric hospitals are *prisoners*, and that will never do.

To speed up incorporation we adopted a name almost *nobody* liked, but which was in-



nocuous enough to please the government: the Ontario Patients' Self-Help Association (OPSHA). And we've been OPSHA up until last month, when we voted to adopt a name that we felt said a lot more about who we are, what we've done, and where we're going.

So now, in name as well as in fact, we're ON OUR OWN, and we think we can promise not to confuse you by changing our name again.

Where we're coming from

Back in the spring of 1977, some of us ex-psychiatric inmates got together and rapped about starting our own group. It was just an idea, a crazy dream, but we decided to fight to make it real. As we talked and looked around Toronto, we soon discovered there were no drop-ins, no crisis centres and very few houses in the community run by and for ex-inmates. We were also aware of and inspired by the good work of another ex-inmate-controlled alternative--the Mental

Patients Association in Vancouver. (MPA is described elsewhere in this issue.)

So we felt we had to do a lot of things. We had to start reaching out to our brothers and sisters still imprisoned in psychiatric institutions ("mental hospitals" or "mental health centres") and people just released from these psychiatric warehouses--friendless, powerless, scared, with little or no money and nowhere to go for understanding, friendship and support. We felt we had to



ON OUR OWN members Alf Jackson, John Gallagher and John Craven (shown above) are among the people who've been running the ON OUR OWN Flea Market Booth for 2½ years and earned us about \$15,000. It's moved around a bit, but it's now in the Sheppard Flea Market at 31 King Street in Weston. Drop in for some good buys and a chat. It's easy to find our booth --you can hear Alf all over the market.

provide a real community alternative to psychiatric institutions, where people-in-crisis would not be stigmatized, humiliated or patronized by bullshit, identity-destroying diagnostic labels, where they wouldn't be involuntarily committed, abused and often permanently damaged by pseudo-scientific "treatments" like electric shock, forced massive drugging, behaviour modification, solitary confinement ("seclusion" or "quiet rooms"), and physical restraints. We wanted to start giving our brothers and sisters human support, recognition, self-respect and control over their lives, which are routinely denied or undermined in *all* psychiatric institutions.

Armed with these idealistic convictions, we approached an understanding *Toronto Star* reporter, Bob Pennington, in early August of 1977. He listened as we told him a little about ourselves and why we wanted to start a group totally controlled by ex-psychiatric inmates. He agreed to write a story for us; it was that story which was largely responsible for bringing out almost 150 people to our founding meeting on August 9th in All Saints Church--our first home, thanks to the Reverend Norman Ellis.

We've come a long way since that time; we now have over 90 members and many supporters, and we're still growing. In the last two and a half years, these are some of the things we've accomplished *ON OUR OWN*:

1. Held weekly social gatherings and monthly business meetings, and organized

successful dances and Open Houses.

2. Organized a public film discussion on psychiatric abuse, featuring the outstanding film *Hurry Tomorrow*.

3. Set up a democratic, self-governing structure including an elected board of directors; drafted and passed our Constitution and By-Laws; got ourselves incorporated as a non-profit group and registered as a charity. Membership is FREE, and all members can vote on any issue. Decisions are made by open majority vote.

4. Set up and run our own flea market booths (now located in the Sheppard Flea Market in Weston), voluntarily staffed by four or five members. During the past two years we've raised roughly \$15,000 from flea market sales.

5. Organized a successful rummage sale and raffle last fall, which raised \$500 in six hours.

6. Applied for and received a grant of \$1,200 in 1978 from the City of Toronto for our first drop-in. (It closed after five months for lack of further funding.)

7. Written a civil rights brief (*Civil Rights for 'Mental Patients'? Are You Crazy?*), which some members presented in 1978 at public hearings conducted by two committees of the Ontario government.

8. Recently established an Editorial Collective to publish this magazine; in 1979 we received a \$5,600 grant from Ontario PLURA to help us get it off the ground.

9. Just received a grant of roughly \$40,000 from the Ministry of Health to help us set up our own drop-in, store and office.

We're naturally very proud of what we've done on our own, and we'll do a helluva lot more to help people stay out of "mental hospitals", fight psychiatric abuse and injustice, and start controlling their own lives.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

The ON OUR OWN store and flea market operate largely on donations of used goods. If you have something to donate, call us at 362-3193. We'll pick it up anywhere in Metro Toronto.