

## mpa in a nutshell

Following the Canadian Mental Health Association Conference in November 1975 in which M.P.A. participated to a small degree, we received a lot of requests for information about how we got started as an organization. People in Winnipeg, Halifax, St. Johns, and Williams Lake have expressed interest in starting their own "M.P.A."

We decided to prepare a do-it-yourself kit for would-be organizers but the pressure of other work has prevented us from getting this done, so perhaps a bare outline via the Nutshell pages will suffice for now.

1. Way back when, Lanny Beckman, hospital day-care patient, realized the need for a grass roots mental patients organization. He contacted a Vancouver Sun columnist who wrote a column outlining the need and informing ex-patient readers of a place and time to meet. 85 people came to the first meeting.

2. We drew up a constitution and became incorporated in March, 1971. Lanny searched out funding sources by writing letters to private foundations, the city, provincial and federal governments, to request money for salaries. A member donated his house at a minimum rent. We used the house as a drop-in centre, crisis phone line and crash pad until we outgrew it and rented a bigger house.

3. We eventually received

salaries from O.F.Y., C.Y.C. and L.I.P.; opened two more houses as ex-patient residences and rented a farm. The farm experiment didn't work but the houses did - with 2 salaried coordinators per house.

4. We run the organization as a participatory democracy - as opposed to the representative democracy we're used to outside M.P.A. - with a 3 weekly General Meeting (for policy decisions) and a weekly Business Meeting (for day-to-day operation). All members paid or unpaid have an equal say in all matters and vote on all decisions.

5. We acquired 3 more houses, bought a new drop-in centre (all through Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation), got involved in citizen advocacy and mental patients rights, a publishing project, research into legislation, publication of a bi-monthly newsletter, participation in conferences, speaking before university and secondary school audiences, defending rights of other oppressed minorities.

We opened an information office in the provincial mental hospital where we help people find housing, make new friends and introduce people to M.P.A.'s resources.

6. Because our three year L.E.A.P. funding runs out next July we are presently working on new funding arrangements for 23 salaries and operating expenses. ★