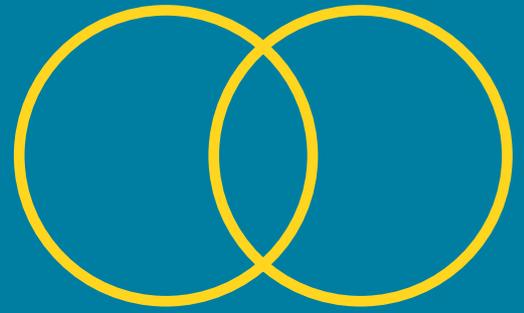


POETRY Express

A quarterly newsletter from survivors' poetry

july august september 2000

number 9



“So how did I
come to write
poetry ..?”

our vision,
our future ...

promoting poetry
by survivors
of mental distress

INSIDE

Personal Stories,
News, Articles,
Events, Readings,
Performances, Workshops,
lots of New Books
& your Letters

PLUS

Facilitator training in the
North East, Somers Town
Blues continues ..., The
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and more ...

who's who. at survivors' poetry

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... from the editor

Dear reader,

Once again it's newsletter time. The months pass too quickly for my liking. I really enjoyed putting this one together. It is wonderful to be able to publish such powerful personal stories from people whose voices have not reached you before. I am referring to the writing of Alex Jay Daniels and Suiee Nettle. I feel that this is the part of putting this newsletter together which I enjoy the most, the publication of your most precious stories - the building of a platform. I feel that this platform is at the very heart of what this publication must be about. A sharing space, but solid and safe, on paper, with many listeners and many writers too; a space to reach each other, through what Wordsworth called "A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought / And rolls through all things". So thanks to everyone out there who has had faith enough in our little "space" to contribute to this newsletter. Whether you are published here or not I have really appreciated hearing from you.

Now on to a few bits of news. I now have the results for our re-naming the London events competition. The new names and winners are as follows:

Survivors' Poetry at Somers Town Community Centre now becomes Somers Town Blues Night: poetry and songs by survivors. The winner is Alistair Brinkley, London (who also happens to run the event - but he did come up with the best idea!)

Open Readings at the Poetry Café now becomes Wired on Words: Survivor's Open Mic. every month at the Poetry Café. The winner is Heather Beveridge, London.

The Camden Workshops becomes Write on the edge: poetry workshops by survivors for survivors. The winner is Martin Thomas, Cardiff.

Thank you to everyone who sent in ideas.

I am sorry to say that we have still not completed the final report of our "the way forward" questionnaire research which we undertook at the end of last year so you won't find any of the results on these pages. Next time!

I hope you enjoy it and please keep writing to me ...

Yours, Lisa Boardman (Editor)

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Survivors' Poetry Newsletter is a quarterly publication. It's purpose is to publicise events and activities organised by Survivors' Poetry and by Survivor-led Poetry groups all over the country and to offer a forum for debate in which to share and discuss information and experiences. Please send us articles, small features, photographs, artwork and events listings about your group or about anything that you think may be of interest to our readers. Work should preferably be typed or on disc. We cannot guarantee publication and the editor reserves the right to edit any contributions. No more than 500 words. No poetry please. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily the views of Survivors' Poetry. Next copy deadline (for October/November/December issue) Mon. 4th September 2000. The Survivors' Poetry Newsletter is distributed free around the UK.

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Assistant Editors: Roy Holland and Emma Parish
Reviews Editor: Roy Holland
Design: Lisa Boardman
Printed by: Gargoyle Graphics and
East End Offset
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our vision our mission our future

Survivors' Poetry's Director, Clare Douglas, reports on our plans for the future

During autumn 1999 Survivors' Poetry entered a new stage in its developmental journey. It was time to re-evaluate our aims and objectives to more closely reflect the organisation we've become since we were founded in November 1991 and, more importantly, to clarify our vision of where we want to be in future.

In order to make informed decisions about how we should develop and respond to the needs of survivor poets we sent out questionnaires to everyone on our mailing list to find out more about who you are and what you think. The results were amazing! A huge thank you to so many of you for taking the time to return the Survivors' Poetry Rethink and London Events - The Way Forward questionnaires with such detailed information about what you value about Survivors' Poetry and what our main objectives for future activities should be.

The next step was for a diverse group of stakeholders, made up of staff, events and office volunteers, advisors and trustees - the people who regularly work for Survivors' Poetry, to meet for an Away Day in April. Using the information you had given us and our experiences of Survivors' Poetry, we were facilitated

to brainstorm and

create a vision statement which sums up these hopes and dreams and a set of mission statements describing the way in which we plan to achieve this. No easy task, but a challenge and a privilege for all involved.

The same group met again in May to refine these ideas and values and express them in a concrete way. The statements we finally agreed upon are printed here.

The process continues and a strategic planning sub-group of staff and stakeholder representatives will meet regularly to develop the Three Year Strategic Plan of artistic activity based on these aims.

I do hope that you will feel that we have been able to encapsulate in these very broad objectives many of the ideas and values which are important to you. As always, we welcome your feedback in writing to the Survivors' Poetry office. Looking forward to celebrating together more and more the creative expression of survivors through poetry ...!

Yours, with warmest wishes for a creative summer.

OUR VISION

A world which celebrates the creative expression of survivors through poetry.

OUR MISSION

mCo-ordinating artistic activity, publishing and promoting poetry by survivors.

mSupporting and developing survivor poets and establishing communication networks.

mChallenging and changing the social and cultural definitions of poets and poetry.

mMaking connections between creativity and mental health.

Clare Douglas, Director.

! WANTED !

Finance Worker/Administrator
Salary £19,484 (pro rata, 28
hour week) 6 month initial
contract. Charity no. 1040177

You will be responsible for all
aspects of financial management,
fundraising co-ordination and
general administration and
should have Windows 95 network
experience. Applicants should
preferably be survivors.
Closing date: 10th July 2000

For information and an
application pack send a 39p
A4 SAE to "F/A", Survivors'
Poetry, Diorama Arts Centre, 34
Osnaburgh Street, London NW1
3ND.
Supported by the National
Lottery through the Arts Council
of England and The London Arts
Board

news...news...news

Getting a new group going ..

by Phillip Buckley

On Tuesday 9th of May I was 1 of 5 members of Survivors' Poetry who met with Sharon Holder at the Diorama Arts Centre to discuss how to set up Survivors' Groups in South London, Kent and in other areas closer to local communities. We also talked about the possibility of setting up a day-time Survivors' Poetry Group, as some people prefer to travel during daylight hours. I was immediately struck by how enthusiastic and committed we all were, and by how much work everyone was already doing in terms of their own writing, with Survivors' Poetry, and also in other arts and writing groups ... at a mental health day centre in Kent, in a South London psychiatric hospital library... to name but a few.

We all swapped contact details (though we were under no pressure to do so) and information on the existing Survivors' Groups and other arts and writers' groups that are around. Personally speaking, the result for me is that I've been to a fab performance workshop at Springfield Hospital, an ace night at the Poetry Café listening to other people's work (I also performed five of my own pieces and was given a very warm hand indeed) and a very inspiring poetry/music group in Springfield Hospital Library.

One of the things Sharon emphasised is that from small acorns big oak trees grow ... i.e. it can take quite a while to establish a new group, but even with two or three core members who are committed, things can really develop eventually. Someone also very wisely stated that the quality of a group isn't necessarily dependent on the quantity of the people who use it. We made a point of making our own action plans ... things like where to look for potential venues, who would

contact whom from the meeting, and even looked at realistic time-goals for when we hoped to achieve things by. I'm sure I can speak for everyone who was present when I say that if YOU're interested in helping to start a Survivors' Poetry group in Kent, South London, or the city or town of Anywhere-Else-For-That-Matter, please contact Sharon at the Survivors' office and maybe she can put you in contact with other people who would also be interested.

Crisis centre workshops

Survivors' Poetry has recently worked in partnership with Drayton Park Crisis Centre Project for Women to run a course of creative writing and poetry workshops. The women who attended were so enthusiastic and feedback was so positive, that a further block of sessions will be run and facilitated, once again, by Isha and Leah Thorn.

Are you a budding radio playwright?

I have just completed a 30 min. radio-play, based on some of my experiences in hospital last year. I'd like to link up/ exchange ideas with other playwrights. Please ring Helen on 0207 272 0653.

Survivors' Workshop at The Ledbury Poetry Festival

The country town of Ledbury in Herefordshire - home of half-timbered houses, half-cut cider drinkers, hop fields and rolling hills. Former poet laureate John Masefield lived here, and for 10 days in July, the whole town becomes a street-wide stage for poetry and performance. Known names including Carol Ann Duffy, Ian MacMillan, Alistair McGowan

and Craig Raine jostle for attention alongside talented newcomers, one of which could be you! Thanks to local sponsorship, there's going to be a Survivors' Workshop on Thursday July 6th between 2pm and 4.30pm. The venue is the Burgage Hall on Ledbury's much photographed cobbled Church Lane, in the town centre. The workshop is for old hands and tentative beginners and is free to all mental health service users, their carers, plus anyone who supports the role of poetry as potent therapy. My name is Rachel Hannah, and I'll be hosting the workshop, although the main activist will be Razz plus Heather B. For more information ring me on 01684 541 291.

Trustees Wanted !

We are developing membership of our Board of Trustees and are seeking volunteers able to give the equivalent of four hours of their time per month. We are particularly targeting women and members of black and ethnic communities with marketing, legal or fund-raising skills. If you are interested in becoming a Trustee please send a CV to the Survivors' Poetry office for attention of John O'Donoghue.

Survivors' Theatre

Isha is launching a Survivors' Theatre, based in London. It will include workshops, and the aim is that it will be user-led. If the idea of a Survivors' Theatre excites you, and/or you want to get involved in any way whatsoever - whether as performer, workshop attendee or leader, stage-hand, production team member, observer or anything else at all - and if you want to receive further details when they are available - please send an SAE to Isha, c/o Survivors' Poetry (at the usual address).

So how did I come to write poetry?

by Alex Jay Daniels

I have been writing poetry for myself since I was a child, since before I can remember. Taught to write and read before I was four years old in an abusive fashion by my mother, being able to write and read the written word had no meaning to my infant mind, but poetry came naturally. I suppose poetry did/has not the rules and regulations of English grammar, comprehension and punctuation. At four year's old Rudyard Kipling was my saviour and I still abide by the content of his poem, If, to this day.

My consciousness as a young infant was never towards the learning and understanding of poetry. My childhood was obscure and traumatic and poetic words were the only written words I read that held any true meaning at all. I have spent my whole life being aware of my own consciousness, my reasons for writing poetry for myself and I am very thankful, as poetry has most definitely been my salvation.

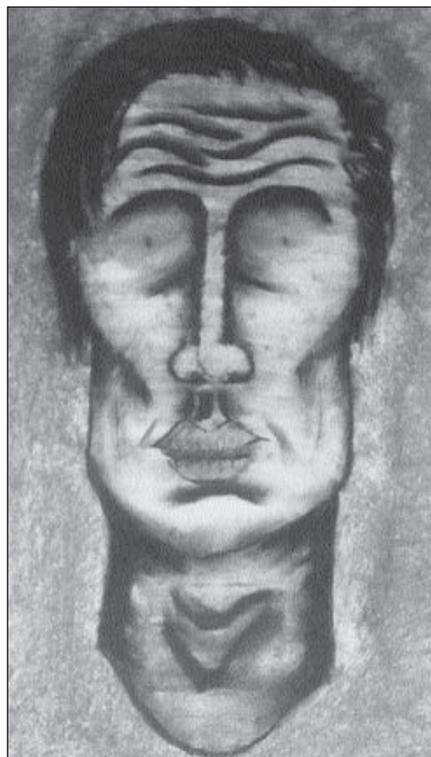
I grew up from birth isolated, like a neglected naked toy doll, spending long periods of time locked away in cupboards and wardrobes. When I was lucky enough to be allowed to play in my bedroom, the rules were made traumatically clear, that I had to play in silence, isolated still from the rest of the family home, but with the freedom to silently entertain myself. One of my mother's proud stories of me as a young infant, was not having the heart to punish me for writing with crayon on my bedroom wall, as I had written at the age of four, maybe three years old a little poem:

My cat is good
my cat is bad
That is why I like my cat.

My bedroom, growing up as a child, became more and more my cell, where I learnt to entertain myself in the solitude

of my confinement. Poetry became my imaginary friend, my imaginary confidant who I could safely share my words in my head with.

Then at the age of ten, my abusive parents inflicted a major head injury to the right side of my head. After I recovered from the physical concussion and was sent back to school, the teachers called a meeting, as their once star pupil, academically advanced for her years, had suddenly become retarded. The school eye test showed that my 20/20 vision was completely lost in my right eye and from that day forward I only excelled academically in mathematics, art and the sciences. I could still write, but lost most of my ability to read. I was one of the last generation to take the eleven plus assessment, which I accomplished in 15 minutes, getting 98% right. My



teacher was concerned about my future as although I had university levels of intelligence at eleven years old I was someone disadvantaged in an autistic sense. His advice for me to be sent to a specialised grammar school was ignored by my parents and I had to live the consequences of their decision to send me to the local comprehensive school instead.

So I continued to struggle through my abused childhood until my brother was 16 years old, old enough to leave our parents home legally, I was then 17 years old.

I left home and went to Germany where I got caught sneaking into a British army camp. The officer in charge was angry but he took pity on me and allowed me to stay and live in the NAAFI quarters for two months until the next squaddy coach came along heading back to England.

Like clockwork I would awake every morning at 2am and make my way to the communal TV room. The TV programmes were all in German at that time of the night. So I got out some paper and a pen and wrote poetry to my life long imaginary friend. At times writing poetry was my salvation from the loneliness I felt, but sometimes my poetry would depress me and make me realise what a lonely and introverted person I had become. My peculiar personality fitted right in with the largely male company of the army

camp and to this day there will always be a special place in my heart for the hospitality all the squaddies and officers showed me. There was one particular regiment, one of the night watches, who came to hear about my 2am writing rituals and who relieved my loneliness by inviting me to their quarters so that I could spend those lonely night hours in the company of people. I have a very special place in my heart for them as they were all perfect gentlemen. I stopped writing poetry.

From Germany I went to Hereford, then at the age of 19 I went to Jersey for seasonal work. But my life took a sudden nose dive into physical and mental aftershocks of my tormented childhood and consequently my life begun as a mental health patient. My poetry returned, as in the mental asylums my time was spent mostly in solitary confinement in a cell, sometimes against my will, sometimes by choice. The ability to entertain my mind and pass the time by writing poetry became not just my salvation from the boredom of the situation, but in later years became my salvation from the schizophrenic diagnosis the Channel Island Mental Health Services had condemned my life to. A training forensic psychiatrist in Bristol took an interest in the suicide note that I had written before putting myself into a two week coma. My letter of farewell to this world was my pride and my apologies to all the kind people in my life, saying that my dignity could not carry on living the condemned institutionalised life of a schizophrenic any longer.

When I awoke from the coma and eventually transferred to Barrow Guernsey Mental Institution on Xmas eve 1992, the forensic psychiatrist paid me a special visit and told me that I was meant to live and all about his suspicions through my suicide letter, that the schizophrenic diagnosis was wrong. So I showed him my private collection of poetry I had written in various asylums since I was nineteen, which proved his suspicions to be right. He told me that my poetry revealed I had had a very traumatic past, that there were others like me, with poetic creativeness such as Kate Bush, Tina Turner, Hazel O'Connor, Virginia Woolf, Mary Shelley ...

So I was released from the institution with a different diagnosis, of acute post traumatic stress and one year later, after another mental breakdown, an additional diagnosis of manic depression. But my poetry has excelled beyond my belief, as written in my states of mania and psychosis. My poems portray the torment

of the tormented intelligent mind, which only the experienced survivor or the intelligent lunatic can truly understand. My soul has travelled far beyond the obscurities of reality and my mind has united with the quantum physics of the world's spiritual existence, through the insanity of the sane onlookers eye. My poetry has become a cryptic story of the craziness of my obscure and bizarre life and existence, being accepted by my intelligent mind on a struggling journey.

Disassociated from the frame of mind

I was in when I wrote some of my poetry, at later dates, like looking back in a scrapbook, I read my poetry in amazement as it appears to have been written by someone else: the subconscious child who began writing poetry before she became aware of what exactly poetry is, where her life of being a closet poet began. Maybe one day my dream will come true, to be as screwed up as Rudyard Kipling and have my poetry on the bookshelves next to his own lf.

(Artwork by Alex Jay Daniels)

NB. PLEASE DO NOT APPLY IF YOU ARE NOT AGED BETWEEN 18-30, DO NOT LIVE IN THE NORTHERN REGION AND YOU ARE NOT A SURVIVOR.

Newsflash...Newsflash...Newsflash...

Regional Facilitator Training for Young Survivors (18-30) with Survivors' Poetry 24th-27th August 2000

Following on from our previous courses, Survivors' Poetry (through our Surviving the Millennium programme) is continuing to offer Facilitator Training Courses supported by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of England.

The course is open to young people (18-30) who are Survivors, living in the Northern Arts region (Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear) and aims to provide a solid introduction to skills in facilitation, covering the following:-

- m**SURVIVOR ISSUES**
- m**CREATIVE WRITING/STORYTELLING SKILLS**
- m**PERFORMANCE SKILLS**
- m**SUPPORT SYSTEMS/SURVIVORS' POETRY GUIDELINES**
- m**SPACE FOR INFORMAL DISCUSSION**
- m**WORKSHOP SKILLS**

The course will take place in the Northern Arts region, at the Riverside Centre, North Shields, arrival by 16.00 on Thursday 24th August and departing Sunday 27th August, after lunch.

For £15 - Survivors' Poetry will provide:

m**Overnight accommodation on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.**

m**Refreshments, lunch and evening meals.**

m**Facilitation of the course. (Social evenings to be organised as a group!)**

Interested?

There will be a maximum of 20 places. If you want to participate or require more details, please request an application form in the first instance from Sharon Holder or Emma Parish.

News of our ev



The Arlenes

Somers Town Blues Night

Poetry and songs by survivors



Ann Dalton

To Programme or not to Programme ...That is the dilemma ...

by Alistair Brinkley Somers Town Co-ordinator

Flaming June is upon us already! Your Somerstown Co-ordinator continues to be bewildered by the speed of events in the twenty first century. Six shows successfully produced. How many more before 2001? I ask you this, dear reader and Survivor supporter, because the last Saturday in December is the 30th. Should we host a Somerstown event on the eve of New Years Eve itself? Feedback from yourselves will help me to decide whether to skip a session or go for a Grand Finale for 2000. Please send me your views on the subject.

Meanwhile, already booked for a delicious show on July 29th are the Celtic flower, Ann Dalton, and fretboard wizard, Dave Russell. August 26th is not to be missed either: not only will we be treated to the performance poetry of John O'Donoghue himself, but we feature a set from Big Steve and the Arlenes. Big Steve will be familiar to many in the mental health field as Music Co-ordinator at Core Arts in Homerton. From July 9th on Sundays BBC1 will screen Border Café, which showcases a number of Big Steve's songs. An album of this material is soon to be released, including the Arlenes, Blur, Travis, P.J. Harvey and Johnny Cash. Only the Arlenes get the chance to play Somerstown however. On September 30th I am honoured to announce we present the wonderful Caroline Kendall, just back from having toured the West Coast of Scotland. Caroline will be gracing several of this summer's festivals and we will hear from her album, Rebekah's Song, and new material too ... I'd better finish now before I get too excited To programme or not to programme: so much talent, so few gigs. Hope to see you at Somerstown.

Saturday 29th July 2000

**Ann Dalton
and Dave Russell**

Saturday 26th Aug. 2000

**John O'Donoghue,
Big Steve and The Arlenes**

Saturday 30th Sep. 2000

Caroline Kendall

Somers Town Community Centre, 150 Ossulston Street, (off Euston Road), London, NW1.

7.30pm - 10pm with interval. Doors: 7.00 pm. (If you wish to do a floor spot on the night please aim to arrive by 7pm). Admission: £3.50, concessions: £1.50, floor spots and current inpatients: £1.00

Tube: Euston/Kings Cross. Buses: 10,30,68,73,168,188 and 253. Wheelchair Access. Accessible Toilet. Induction Loop.

NB. If you wish to walk with somebody else from Kings Cross BR station to Somers town you can meet with



Dave Russell

Write on the edge - Poetry workshops by survivors for survivors

The Garden Studio, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 3ND. 7.30pm: FREE

Survivors' Poetry holds fortnightly workshops for survivors. These provide participants with an opportunity to have work reviewed and discussed in a friendly, supportive environment. Participants of feedback workshops should bring along a poem typed (or clearly hand written) from which we can take photocopies.

Tuesday 11th July 2000 Feedback Workshop with Hilary Porter and Mala Mason

Tuesday 25th July 2000 Creative Writing with Amita Patel and Hajra Qureshi

Tuesday 8th August 2000 Participants Party - all welcome

ents in London

“WIRED ON WORDS”

Survivors Open Mic. at The Poetry Cafe

Poetry Cafe Society

by Xochitl Tuck Poetry Cafe Coordinator

Only three of the eight performers had ever read their poems in public before that night in May at the Poetry Café. Such an indication of the warm and safe atmosphere of the venue and the event had also been provided in the preceding monthly gigs, with “virgin” poets and musicians attending in significant numbers alongside many more experienced ones who wanted the practice and feedback for their latest works.

“I’ve never
done this
before”

Since performing at the Poetry Café has oft led to the offer of a spot at a monthly Somers Town event it is hard to overstate the value of a first, second or fifth airing of your material here. Audiences, many of whom are poets, performers or both, enjoy and benefit from an item from the first half being repeated in the second; asking for feedback during the break can sometimes help a second presentation of the material.

John broke the poetic ice with news from “Another Country” and warning of “Safety First”. Gratitude and many thanks to the five women: Georgina, Patricia, Liz, Linda and Sarah who had “never done this before” and proceeded to stun us with their moving and/or humorous renderings of what they have found to be significant in their lives; and as we listening discovered, in ours, too. And not least to Phil for his celebration of the beauty of Waterlow Park and the hilarious description, in verse, of the frustrations of finding a given street in an unfamiliar part of London; and to Phillip, for his insightful poems about sexuality and

Thursday 13th July 2000

Thursday 17th August 2000

Thursday 14th Sept. 2000

Poetry Café,

22 Betterton Street,

WC2 9BU

(nearest tube

Covent Garden)

8pm - 11pm

Admission £2, £1 conc.

A wonderful opportunity for new and more experienced poets to have their work heard in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. There is a lift to the lower floor and a wheelchair accessible toilet. Smoking upstairs, non smoking downstairs.

In you want to read or perform your work you need to arrive between 7pm and 7.30pm in order to book your floor spot.

The doors will open to other audience members from 7.30pm and the performance will start at 8pm sharp. We do not have a finish time for the event and this very much depends on the amount of people who want to do floor spots.

There will be a break half way through the evening. See you there

You'll never work with children again ...

a personal story *by Suiee Nettle*

These were the first words that I had heard - understood - clearly. "You'll never work with children again". I think it's called putting all your eggs in one basket, but there had never been anything else I wanted to do with my life. I'd not considered anything else when taking my options at school, "A" level choices and NVQ. I knew where I was going and I was going to get there.

I was fourteen when the doctor tried antidepressants as treatment for my headaches. I'd taken my first overdose at twelve. Another at thirteen. Another. Another. By the time I started sixth form at school I was addicted to many things: Smoking - usual - bulimia - teenage angst - speed - teenage dabbling (maybe at first....) - and, the thing people found most disturbing, cutting myself. What brought me back from the edge so many times? Children. I magnetised them, drew them towards me; what could I do when my arms hurt so much (cigarette burns, slashes, pin holes - you name it) that I couldn't pick up a two year old child? This shocked me. I wanted to stop - but how? Like I say, I was addicted. I had had a social worker since about age fifteen, but I couldn't talk to her - I couldn't talk to anyone. Don't get me wrong - there were loads of people to listen to me. Lovely, supportive people. It was me, I... couldn't.... talk. I couldn't portray my feelings in words. This is where my poetry came into it. I'd been dabbling since the age of twelve and so now, I poured out my heart on paper, creating visual images of the confusion, pain and anger inside me. It helped me. But it didn't help people to understand me, and without their understanding I couldn't get better. They said that the slashes on my body were for attention. I couldn't tell them that they were an addiction - a way of focusing the pain I felt inside. They thought I was a moody teenager - I knew that it was so much more than that. So I put on a face. The moody, withdrawn teenager became a sickeningly cheerful, bubbly, bouncy extrovert. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. They didn't know that on

my own I cried. They didn't notice that I was attending fewer and fewer lessons at school or fighting or sleeping with strangers for a bit of speed or cutting, cutting, cutting. I dropped out of school and spent all day in bed (but hating to go to sleep because I knew - knew I'd wake up again the next morning). Flicking through the local paper one day I saw an advertisement for my dream job - "Ancillary teacher for children 4 - 7 years with training for NVQ III". I applied, was interviewed and moved to Lincoln for the beginning of the next school term. It was heaven! I had my own flat, new friends and was surrounded by thirty children. I was in my element! Wednesdays were spent at college and this was also enjoyable; the work was interesting and came easily to me. I didn't think that I had ever been that happy - tired, but happy.

I worked at the school for a full year before things started to change. My college work was the first to suffer. It slowed down almost to a complete halt. I found myself becoming withdrawn again - not from the children, that was never a problem - but from my colleagues, my tutors, my friends. The cutting had abated a lot, but it returned with a vengeance and now they needed stitches. I started each day with a drink (not water!) or three and ended it with a tearful phone call to friends at home, saying how much I missed them and please, please, please, could they come and get me - take me home. The school felt like a prison and when I got within its walls each morning I couldn't breathe, wanted to get straight back out again. I started to call in sick. I knew that people cared for me and were worried about me but once again I couldn't articulate just how I felt.

On the 10th May 1998, I had an appointment with the local CPN. I attended but, as usual, could not speak to her about my feelings. She said she was worried about me and wanted to take me to see another doctor at the local hospital. I went with her, was led down hospital corridors and told to take seat

whilst she tried to find the doctor. Four hours later, I realised that she had left me as I was shown my bed. I was devastated. I begged the staff to call me a taxi but they couldn't, wouldn't help me. Eventually they relented and at midnight I signed my release papers and was taken home. The next morning I went up to the phone box to call in sick but instead, I just blurted out to my tutor that I was "p****ed as a fart". Needless to say, she didn't take very long to get round to my house and she took me straight to the doctor's surgery where the doctor agreed that "an eighteen year old should most definitely not be drunk at nine o' the clock in the morning". They also noted that I had lost almost six stone in the year I had been there. I was admitted to the psychiatric unit again and I agreed to stay. I endured it for two months before deciding that enough was enough. Even in the state I was in I could see that their treatment wasn't going to help me. I was asleep for twenty hours a day and walked around like a zombie for the other four. They diagnosed me as schizophrenic and I couldn't seem to make them understand that I was laughing and talking to myself when I came in because I was DRUNK! Whilst I was in hospital, frustrated by my treatment (or lack of it) and still having all the old feelings on top of this, I took an overdose of the anti-psychotic tablets I was given. I remember I took twenty four tablets and was taken to an observation ward in the main hospital overnight. I tell you how many tablets I remember taking because by 2am the doctors had stopped monitoring me and my parents had been called to say that I was fine and had lied to them. I hadn't. I knew - I know that I took them. I wanted out and no one was listening to me. Even if I hadn't taken them, the fact that I'd said I had surely should have made someone sit up and take notice. They made it clear that they were not pleased with me. I discharged myself soon after and was given a date to see the psychiatrist the following week. I went, but as soon as I walked through that door I knew they were going to keep me again. I slept through the next few months before they decided that I could

sleep just as well at home. As soon as I was out, I stopped taking the tablets and began living again.

That summer was okay. I felt normal. But every night I had dreams - sometimes nightmares, sometimes not - about the hospital and it was always in the forefront of my mind. I began seeing a lovely man called Andrew. He was quite a bit older than me and I always felt I was safe with him - and the best thing was, he had a four year old son! I spent as much time as I could with them but he had another life. He was living with his long term girlfriend. I knew that that was putting a strain on me but by the time I realised how hard it was going to be I was in love with him. I don't mean teenage infatuation. I don't mean love. I mean love. He never lied to me. I knew the situation right from the start and for a long time he didn't say he loved me but eventually, he took me aside and told me he'd been thinking long and hard; he loved me. He'd leave and we could be together. We would get married too. The morning I told my mum that I was going to marry him was the morning he decided that he was not so sure. It was also the morning that I died. I lay on my bed upstairs and there was a funny, panicky feeling slowly bubbling up inside of me. It was like laughter. It was like sobbing, like music and like chewing woollen mittens. I knew that I had cut myself. My whole body had been screaming with pain but with this new sound stopped even that. I let myself drift into the sound and didn't feel anything for a long time. Then I heard Andy calling my name and he was slapping my face. I went to move away from him, tell him to leave me alone, but I could not move. I heard more voices. I heard my sister. Her boyfriend. The ambulance paramedics. I felt them open my eyes, but I could not see. I heard them mutter "she's faking it". I wanted to shout NO but I couldn't react. They took me to hospital. They were angry with me for wasting their time. I couldn't tell them that I was dead. The hospital patched me up and sent me home. The next day Andy decided to stay with his girlfriend. I'm not saying that what happened next was his fault because I know that depression is an illness like flu or cancer but it is a fact. He wasn't going to come with me. I went upstairs and began packing my things to leave - all the while he was asking, begging, "just stay another week, please. Stay a bit longer". I cried and cried until I just wasn't in control any more. I left my stuff and walked out. I asked a friend to use their car. I had the idea that I was going to Dover. I wanted to jump from the cliffs. Final. Not like taking an overdose, not like cutting myself. They

wouldn't be able to fix me this time.

My friend, Steve, wouldn't let me use the car but he said of course he'd take me for a ride. We drove towards the coast and he asked me where I wanted to go. I said Dover. I didn't say why. He said fine. What was the matter with me? I couldn't stop crying and he kept asking questions I didn't have the words to answer. We were in Boston when I snapped. I took the strapping knife I knew was in the car (he was a lorry driver) and began cutting and tearing out my hair and slashing at my wrists. Steve tried to stop me but he also had to negotiate the roundabouts in the town centre. What could he have done if I didn't want to be stopped. He pulled into a side road and stopped the car. He took the knife from me and got out. He called Andy and Andy told him what had happened at home and he came back and I stupidly thought that we would carry on to Dover. He took me to the Hospital and the police were waiting for me and the staff were waiting for me. He'd called them too. They dragged me out of the car and took me inside and I was crying and crying. I ran out of the hospital but Steve followed me so I was searching for somewhere to hide until everybody had gone away so I climbed on the roof and hid behind a big ventilator. A man came and talked to me, took me down. They fixed me up and took me to the psychiatric unit. They didn't drug me this time, but I was a state anyway. They gave me a bed but I couldn't sleep on it because someone had slept there before. No one could touch me or breath on me and I was counting everything - the cornflakes in my bowl even. (I've always counted, ever since I can remember. I recall my sister telling me at about age 10 that if I counted everything like I did I'd go mad - Ha!) Hospital was a blur really. I remember feeling really happy and jumping on tables in the dining room. I remember stealing a screwdriver to break out of my window. I remember running away and being brought back by the police, having a strip search, sleeping in the music room because people breathed in my room. Eventually I was sectioned and spent a lot of time after that in The Green Room - a calming down room (padded cell), Even when I was not sedated and was allowed out, I often insisted that they lock me in so the shadows couldn't get me. I remember being the Queen of the Green and making myself a throne out of padded furniture, wrapping a sheet around me and making the staff kneel before me (I can't remember if any did or not - probably not). I spent a lot of time crying and a lot of time bleeding.

I had short sessions with the psychiatrist but I can't remember any of them until that heartless bastard said the magic words: "You'll never work with children again". He did me a favour really because I've been out of hospital ages now (they said they wouldn't take me back anyway) and although I haven't worked (I get panic attacks, social anxiety disorder etc.) I will, and I know it will be with children. They're still drawn to me in the street and I baby-sit regularly for family and friends. Children trust me and I will never betray that. I know that I can be trusted with children and that is what matters - Who gives a toss about diagnosis and prejudice; it makes me happy and it feels right.

THE GREEN ROOM

They gave me drugs
To make my wings grow
I showed them that I could fly;
But they didn't like me flying
So they nailed me to the ground.
They boxed me in;
They clipped my wings
And shut out the sky.
I didn't tell them
That I knew of a sky
A secret sky inside my head;
So still I flew in golden mists
Over fields, over oceans
Whilst they sat back to wait.
To wait.
To watch.
To watch and wait.
The voice of a god
Forced me to land
Forced me to face my fears.
A secret god with a smiling
face.
He knew of my sky.
He knew my wings were strong
So he gave me drugs
To break those wings
He watched them wither and fade
And when he knew
I couldn't fly,
Couldn't access my secret sky;
He left me there
to die.

Suiee Nettle

letters page

We would love to hear from you. Please send us your letters on any subject which you think might be of interest to our readers. You may wish to respond to what you have read in this newsletter. Send to

“Letters” Survivors’ Poetry, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 3ND

Dear Survivors’ Poetry,

I was interested to read Kathryn Harris’s letter in the last edition of Survivors’ Poetry Newsletter, inquiring about daytime poetry groups.

I am a mental health worker with Wandsworth Mind, currently working on our newest venture, the Wiseton Road Community Project. I am very keen to set up a daytime poetry group at our premises here and would love to hear from anyone who might be interested in joining us. I envisage setting up our group over the next two/three months, perhaps starting up in September, with the aim of providing a supportive environment for creative writing.

Perhaps if anyone is interested they could contact me at:
Wiseton Road Community Project,
10a Wiseton Road, London, SW17 7EE.
Tel. 020 6872 5108.

I look forward to hearing from some of you.

Sarah Fielding,
Wandsworth MIND, London

Dear Survivors’ Poetry,

I couldn’t resist adding my voice to the ongoing debate about astrology - a subject very close to my heart. Whilst I share Demet’s interest and beliefs, I must admit that I first encountered astrology with equal measures of curiosity

and scepticism. When I learned the principals of astrology, I expected to disprove it, at least to my own satisfaction. What actually happened was that when faced with my long-suffering friends’ charts, I was amazed at the accuracy, and while I’m still not convinced about all aspects of astrology, I do believe that it is a useful tool for understanding each other, and the dynamics of relationships.

Anything can be misused or misunderstood and even competent astrologers don’t claim to be infallible; however, in my opinion, if astrology encourages us to understand each other better, or makes us more honest about our selves, it can’t be all bad! Having said that, it should never become an intrusion. Personally, I would be as reluctant to ask someone’s birth sign as their age, or the state of their bank balance, unless in a situation where the subject was up for discussion. If I do ask, it shows more than a superficial interest in what makes a person tick.

Taking someone at face value can sometimes do that person a great injustice, and astrology can provide a focal point when getting to know people. I believe that we are complex beings, and rather like poetry, astrology can give insights not found in everyday conversations. I personally don’t feel that my future is controlled by

the stars and planets, rather that it is reflected in them (“as above, so below”) and that we all have choices. It also gives a sense of order to what I have often felt was a chaotic existence.

Hilary Porter,
London.

Dear Survivors’ Poetry,

I am 56. I’ve been ill since 1970 - over half my life. During that time I’ve been employed, unemployed, on drugs, off drugs, in hospital, out of hospital, and tried alternative medicine.

I am settled in a council flat where I do creative writing, when not attending the local day centre. For years I was either a zombie, or high as a kite. But it was worth the wait. I’m happy on a drug that suits, and there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Research up here in Inverness is moving fast, and I hope to go onto fish-oils, if only as a supplement. Having many interests is half the battle, and I have analysed myself.

Good luck to all your readers.

Keith Murdoch,
Inverness.

Dear Survivors’ Poetry,

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

I was looking at a pile of post this morning, all suspiciously resembling bills, and threw them

on one side, before looking at yours.

"Huh, it's about time I wrote to this lot and told them that the Sheila Project is non-existent now, and I'm still getting stuff addressed to me, Co-ordinator, ha." Anyway, thought I'd open it first. Standing there at the swing top bin, in readiness. (Sorry). Flipping to the contents page, I was startled to see my name.

I was so pleased to see the piece you've done, and I have just sat here, reading it over and over. I hope others find it as interesting as I found it! It was a real lift for me, as I've been a bit low since Christmas, and must get out among people again. Thanks for pulling me out of a very hermytty frame of mind. Thanks for printing the drawing too. I didn't notice it at first. There may be people who would like to write to me. If so, please forward any mail here, and I shall be delighted to encourage in any way possible by letter or phone.

Who Knows? As a result of your article, the Sheila Project may take wings again. Also I have just applied to train to be a drugs counsellor (the Government's new drive, big adverts in local papers, etc.) and if I get as far as an interview, it will be great to take your article along. In the meantime I'm going to photocopy it and send it to many contacts.

Again many thanks.

Maggie Camps,
Northants.

Dear Survivors' Poetry,

I started writing when I was about seven years old. I wrote about my mother and father and how they were hurting me and how much pain it caused. My writing was a medium that gave me peace and

relief. I couldn't tell my parents that I didn't like what they were doing to me. Partly because I thought it was normal. I had no contact with other children except at school, and I was a loner. I felt awkward. I was sure that I was somehow different, even though I didn't quite know how or why. But I found inner sanctuary within my paper and pen.

I wrote about what my father did and how he made me feel. I wanted to go and laugh like other girls did, but I found no laughter within my house, only cold bare walls. I first started my encounter with the psychiatric services when I was eleven years old. I took an overdose of paracetamol.

I wanted to die. Life for me had no meaning. I couldn't take any more; the abuse - sexual, physical and emotional - had turned me into a very distressed teenager. I started running away from home, drinking and, at sixteen, started taking drugs.

My writing has always been a crutch for me. I found instant relief and when I've written it I place it to one side and read it later on. I hope my poems and prose help at least one person. I have been in hospital nearly seven years now, and I want a life without a wall. I'm tired of being labelled. I am a person, not an illness.

Maureen Tyldesley,
Liverpool.

FREELANCE JOB OPPORTUNITY

**Survivors' Poetry: Camden Workshops Co-ordinator
(initially funded until March 2001)**

Survivors' Poetry is seeking someone who is dedicated and organised, and who can understand the sensitive and powerful nature of the work that can arise from the workshops.

The workshops are held fortnightly on Tuesdays, from 7.30pm to 10pm, at the Diorama Arts Centre in London. They provide participants, who are Survivors, with an opportunity to have their work reviewed and discussed in a friendly, supportive environment. Two facilitators are present at each session.

Approximately 11 hours a month, £55 per month.

A job share will be considered.

Applications from Survivors and those with disabilities welcomed, although there will be some light lifting required.

MAIN DUTIES OF THE POST:

- **Arrival by 6.30pm, room arranged by 7.15pm, departure by 10.15pm**
- **To arrange the chairs and tables in the room and ensure access to the room.**
- **To photocopy poems and handouts for the workshops.**
- **To maintain a supply of Survivors' Poetry literature, guidelines and other materials for distribution.**
- **To organise refreshments.**
- **To attend various meetings with the Outreach Co-ordinator, facilitators and the Workers' Forum.**
- **To produce a written report on the workshops at the end of the season.**

If you are interested in the post, please request an application pack from Survivors' Poetry, which will provide you with more detailed information about the duties of the post, about Survivors' Poetry and the workshops.

Tel: 020 7916 5317 Fax: 020 7916 0830

NEW POETRY &

Kettering Mindbenders Poetry, Pictures and Prose edited by **Barbara M. Hawthorne** Reviewed by **Rachel Fitzsimmons**.

The most distracting thing about this collection is the number of different fonts and styles of print used. I am not sure why it was felt necessary to do this when the poems themselves are interesting and varied, and obviously reflect the diverse group of people writing of their experiences and feelings. I noted poignantly that one of the contributors, Rachel Foster, was listed as having lived between 1973 and 1999. Her poem, 'A Desperate Thing', spoke to me, especially the last two lines: *"I don't know whether I want to explain, of how I find things hard when I'm feeling insane"*. Another poem that I particularly liked was Barbara Hawthorne's 'Everything Has A Name', which to me voiced the frustration of being "labelled". The next two poems also struck a chord with me. *"Some say I am strange, but why read with your eyes closed; there's so much to understand"* ('My Own Invention', by Andrea Linnell), and 'Nothing Rhymes', by Tony Edmunds.

Whereas these poems seemed to be about distress, 'Inner Peace' by Andrea was about finding and welcoming moments of calm and tranquillity. There were other poems too about more everyday things - in 'Toboggan', by Harry Beattie, which took me back to my childhood, and Tracey Ward's reminder of nature in 'Birds'. I was amused by the humour of 'The Shed' by Neville Glanmore, which describes how someone is startled to find the subject of the poem suddenly replaced by a waste disposal unit at the bottom of her garden one morning.

The illustrations were good, although I would have been happy to read this collection without them, simply because I tend to create my own images when reading poetry. I liked this collection because it describes ordinary events as well as giving an insight into mental distress. **Minimum donation £1 to Kettering Mind, 49-51 Russell Street, Kettering, Northants, NN16 0EN. ISBN 0-9537-196-0-X.**

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow by **William Bough:** **A book of poetry, jokes, witty philosophy and things.** Reviewed by **Jean Wearn Wallace**.

A magical miscellany of thought provoking poetry and all the other "things". I was a little worried about what book I would get to review for Survivors' Poetry, but this book is a gem. A 60-page ramble to relish. I have really enjoyed reading it and keep going back to it. I wanted to select my favourite poem, but each time I pick up the book, I change my mind.

It seems to me that being a survivor poet makes you look at the world in a different way. Some of the topics Bill has used for his poems are subjects I have also tackled, with much the same answers to the questions. Keep up the good work. This is the sort of book I would like to give as a present.

**William Bough, 39 Bridle Close,
Prenton, Merseyside, CH43 9UU.
All the profits go to TACT (Trauma
After Care Trust), Reg. Charity no
1022394.**

Jarred Memories by **Lyn Barlow** Reviewed by **Sarah Richards**

Take the title to heart when picking up this work. Whilst there are some poems describing people and places beautifully, many of the poems are drawn from painful experiences, and are as a consequence stark and disquieting to read.

The stark style is appropriate, for the experiences described include family incest, life in care, prison and being on a psychiatric ward. Her poems about the latter will strike a chord with anyone connected to such an experience.

The last work in the book, 'Dis-articulate', eloquently expresses the frustrations of trying to express what the author calls "grief". The piece could it seems apply to the inadequacies many of us experience in attempting to express any sort of emotion. This brick wall of expression is accurately summed up in the line:- *"I can't find the words that mean what I mean."*

Fortunately for us Lyn Barlow kept trying to find those words.

The poems certainly expose the author's life. In a short poem, 'Open Book', Lyn states that:- *"To be open as a book is both courageous and foolhardy."*

In the same piece we the readers are told we have:-

"the ultimate power to dip into your life at any stage." In allowing us to dip into work, Lyn Barlow has indeed been courageous. **Available from Mind in Taunton and West Somerset, 32a North Street, Taunton, Somerset, TAI 1LW. £5 incl. p&p. ISBN 0-9538-090-0-5.**

NEW BOOKS

Nibbles

a cookbook of ideas for writers compiled by Larry Butler, Anne Hay and Janet Paisley Reviewed by Isha

The 84 loose-leaf pages in a large ring-binder include 31 pages of "Starters"; including guidelines and useful handouts and tips for facilitating groups and warming-up writing exercises. There are 21 pages of "Writing Recipes", 17 pages of "Chef's Specialties" (how to type pieces written by established professional writers), a comprehensive book list and useful addresses.

People starting new groups may find the sections on guidelines and organising workshops useful. For example, "The Role of a Group Leader", "Disability Awareness", "Components of Workshops" and "Troubleshooting".

The "Writing Recipes" range from items and exercises on poetry and short story writing, aspects such as "Developing Character" and "Dialogue" and editing and evaluating work.

"Chef's Specialties" include Iain Crichton Smith on poetry-writing, Ewan McVicar on song-writing and Kay Carmichael on writing newspaper articles, all of which I found particularly interesting. *Nibbles* also addresses stage performance.

I'd personally like to see this book sold without the binder, reducing the price which seems steep for what is effectively 76 pages of writing. £10. £4.40 for two 20-page supplements. ISBN 0-9529140-5-0 Survivors' Poetry Scotland, 30 Cranworth Street, Glasgow, G12 8AG.

The Art of Dis/ appearing: Jewish Women on Mental Health, Compiled and edited by Leah Thorn. Reviewed by Carolyn O'Connell

With its romantic cover I wondered how these women's experiences, so defined in the sub-title "Jewish Women on Mental Health" with its inevitable historical references, would relate. The cover picture of a woman in soft focus her arms crossed head looking down towards her right, perfectly balanced, comes to you from a parquet haze.

Leah Thorn's excellent introduction set the stage explaining how it feels to be a woman, Jewish and a Survivor. It gives insight to her own history, culture, the contributors' and the pressures of being caught within two cultures with lightness and clarity. There is an excellent glossary that makes every word accessible.

Every contributor provides an enthralling personal synopsis opposite a poem and these took me into the realms of being silenced by tradition - Suzanne Levy's account 'Shh you're too loud' sums this up, of being an "outsider" both in your ethnic and adopted communities and living with parental fear and/or expectation. Shoshi Rosehill's account is especially moving. Her poem 'Identity Crisis' and Jo Silver-Hannah's 'Myself' among others encapsulate all the title means, the tensions and consequences. Inspire Productions, March 2000. ISBN 0-9537950-0-4. £3 from selected bookshops or £3.50 including p&p from Inspire Productions at PO Box 14959, London SE8 4WZ.

Diary of a Schizophrenic by Angie Hart Reviewed by Clare Faulkner

Angie Hart's collection of twenty seven poems is fronted by the brilliant cover picture of the plaque at High Royds Hospital. "This site is the last resting place of 2,858 patients from High Royds Hospital between 1905 - 1969". The tone of Angie's poetry is both direct and poignant:-

"Dear Colin, Are you disillusioned with life, with people, with this poem? I am and it doesn't matter

if you're sitting in a / mental asylum, and it's 2.25 am.

These poems in particular raise social issues: 'Yan ...', 'Untitled', 'The man who's got nothing....' Amongst these nestles the gem of 'Mass Grave at Menston', which is a poem that starkly addresses the people that never came home and a society's apparent disregard of them. The work offers a direct look at some of the experiences of a survivor in today's world.

Leeds Survivors' Poetry Press. Price: £3.50 from LSP Press, Flat B, 54 Sholebroke Avenue, Leeds, LS7 3HB, West Yorks. ISBN 1901045048.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN WRITING REVIEWS FOR SURVIVORS' POETRY PLEASE WRITE TO ROY HOLLAND, REVIEWS EDITOR AT OUR USUAL ADDRESS.

IF YOU HAVE PUBLISHED A BOOK OF POEMS OR ARE PART OF A GROUP WHO HAS PUBLISHED A COLLECTION IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS THEN PLEASE SEND A COPY TO THE SURVIVORS' POETRY OFFICE AND WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO REVIEW IT ON THESE PAGES.

Survivors' Poetry is a national literature and performance organisation dedicated to promoting poetry by survivors of mental distress through workshops, performances, readings and publications to audiences all over the UK. It was founded in 1991 by four poets with first hand experience of the mental health system.

Our community outreach work provides survivors with opportunities to actively participate in writing or performance training workshops, poetry performances and publishing projects throughout the UK. We support the formation of a nationwide network of survivors' writing groups and work in partnership with local and national arts, mental health, community and disability organisations.

workshops

We hold regular workshops in London at the Diorama Arts Centre, NW1 and organise many one-off projects in London and throughout the UK.

performances

We have regular performances twice a month at two separate venues in central London. These give space for new and established survivor poets to read or perform their work in relaxed surroundings. Survivor Poets regularly take part in literary and poetry festivals throughout the country.

publications

We have published a variety of poetry anthologies and are currently undertaking a number of translation projects within our *Surviving the Millennium* project funded by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of England. Please do not send us poetry for publication. We regret that we do not have the resources to give feedback or criticism regarding your work. We will ask for submissions through this newsletter when we publish our next anthology.

support to writers' groups

If you are involved in a writing or poetry group you may find that there are benefits in your group becoming an affiliated member of the Survivors' Poetry national network of writing groups. We offer workshop facilitator training and other training opportunities for members of your group. There are opportunities to visit or take part in literary festivals and the chance to share skills and information with other writers and writing groups throughout the UK. Contact us for further details.

free mailings

We publish and distribute our *sixteen* page, *Survivors' Poetry newsletter* four times a year. It's purpose is to publicise events and activities organised by Survivors' Poetry and by Survivor-led Poetry groups all over the country. We publish articles, features, personal stories, news, letters, events listings and book reviews. Through joining our mailing list you will receive this newsletter, quarterly - completely free of charge!

survivor@survivorspoetry.org.uk

