

Statement by Janet Foner

I am very excited to be on the board of Mind Freedom International (MFI) at this point in time. David Oaks and I co-founded the Support-In (the original name for Mindfreedom International) with 13 psychiatric survivor affiliate groups at a conference we organized about alternatives to psychiatric oppression in New York city in May, 1990. The conference included a day of protest opposite the American Psychiatric Association convention. I remember David, Bill Nordahl, some others and I planning our founding conference during the NARPA conference that I believe was in Kansas City in 1989. We couldn't agree on a title for the conference, so David and I went for a walk and came up with the title "The Support-In", referring to the sit-ins of the 60's. We eventually had a longer title for the conference, but the name of the organization stuck for many years because it correctly defined our mission to have a supportive organization, with no internal attacks, of people working together well. This seemed to us a symbol of how our movement could be completely different from the way we had been mistreated in the mental health system. Bill Nordahl was there at our planning meeting because he was active in NARPA and he and I knew each other in another organization and had worked together closely there. Bill was in my first ever ex-psychiatric inmates' support group that had started around 1981.

At the time we planned our new organization, David and I decided to continue to support each other, to come back together after any disagreement, and to continue working together, no matter what. We have been able to do that, and have never stopped working together since then. We hoped to form an organization led by psychiatric survivors, but open to other people as well, that would eventually bring all the people in the survivors' movement together to fight for the ending of forced psychiatric "treatment" and to create and support alternatives to the standard mental health system. In other words, to win our freedom! While that hasn't happened yet completely, we have gained some ground over the years since 1990. One big important thing that the Support-In did was to bring more cooperation to the survivor's movement. At the time there were several groups of psychiatric survivors fighting with each other instead of working cooperatively together, and several of these organizations "self-destructed", partly due to attacking each other. That's one of the big changes since that time. I think MFI had something to do with that because we have shown how an organization, particularly the leaders of that organization, as exemplified in the board, can keep the group together through many difficulties by supporting each other and respectfully listening to each other. In this manner, we have been able to resolve conflicts amongst us and have grown to respect each other deeply, despite occasional differing opinions. Some of the board members of MFI have been together on the board a long time and have developed very good ways of working together.

David and I worked together to develop the board, seeking board members who could support and work well together toward our mission. Later, we went "on the road", driving to several survivor group locations to do 2-day workshops. David would teach a day on community organizing and I would teach one on crisis prevention, a system I had developed to assist people to make their lives go well and thus help them develop their leadership. The community organizing helped that effort also. For the first 10 years of what later became Support Coalition International (SCI) and then MFI, I co-directed SCI along with David, talking together every week to stay on track. In 2000, I had taken on another fulltime job so needed to just be active on the SCI board and no longer co-direct the organization. I left it in David's extremely capable hands.

When David had his accident, we weren't sure how we were going to keep the organization going without him. Celia Brown, our board President, and I had many long talks, listening to each other and supporting each other to think strategically about our next steps and also to support Celia to do what needed to be done to keep the organization going on a daily basis. Al Galves and Krista Erickson, our other two board members at the time, helped to keep us on track through many difficulties, including financial ones. Krista, unfortunately, needed to resign eventually, but Al asked Susan Musante, former director of Soteria Alaska, to join us on the board. Sarah Smith, a friend of David's, volunteered to run our office until she was able to help us get a grant for a new project that she and Jim Flannery have been developing, with the board as the steering committee. A series of videos developed by Jim, and a handbook, developed by Sarah, will help us provide resources and encouragement for activism, against forced treatment. We have recently been able to hire a director, Ron Bassman, and Ron has enthusiastically put both feet into revitalizing MFI's activities. We are talking about planning another conference on alternatives, hopefully not too

far into the future, among other things. It has been wonderful working with Ron so far, and he has been part of our new revitalized spirit. Meanwhile, David has still been working with us and has contributed a chapter on community organizing for our new handbook on activism. I can hardly wait to see what new projects we will be undertaking as things unfold.

Janet Foner, MFI board member