



A Christmas message from Sigrid Steffen, outgoing President of EUFAMI ...



I am starting by setting out a summary of my 7 years of membership in the executive committee. The time has just flown by, largely because of the exciting and demanding challenges. Let us forget the difficult phases and remember instead the special, moving moments. Since my involvement with EUFAMI was prompted by personal reasons concerning my family, it was a matter dear to my heart.

There were many highlights during my term of office: Events that brought family members into the lime-light and gave them a public voice, such as the world congress of Psychiatry 2008 in Prague, where EUFAMI hosted 2 major symposia and a well frequented exhibition stand, the World congress for Mental Health in Athens 2009, the World congress for Social Psychiatry in Marrakech 2010 and my repeated participation in the International network of Person centred Psychiatry in Geneva, to mention only a few. Furthermore EUFAMI's conference in Lithuania - "The Forgotten Children" - was an overwhelming success due to excellent speakers and remarkable workshops.

I was able to represent EUFAMI as a speaker at many international events and put forward the requests and concerns of families and draw the attention to the aims and their needs, for example as a member of the Task force "on best practice in working in partnership with service users, carers and professionals". It was a huge step forward in psychiatry when the WPA implemented the recommendations of the Task force and an important sign of the high regard taken of the experiences of the family members. Furthermore I was able to visit the member organisations In the UK, Czech Republic, Malta, Finland, Slovenia, Italy and Switzerland.

The culmination of my period as President was the 5th EUFAMI Congress with the theme "Community care – a blessing or a curse, which took place very successfully in Basel, Switzerland at the end of September. Many distinguished speakers and presenters were involved; it was a further milestone in the history of EUFAMI, which is today recognised as a respected partner and fellow campaigner for mental health on the European and International level.

Reflecting on this, the incoming President will put emphasis on new ideas and will pursue EUFAMI's aims and visions, following the motto of supporting the family members in order to reduce their burden and of gaining more political power. We must continue advocating the improvement of Mental Health policy and services. There are still big differences in the way mental illness is handled across Europe.

To overcome the obstacle of the financial situation is one of the greatest challenges for the future. Above all EUFAMI has to keep on strengthening the contact to our member organisations, building bridges which are crucial for the well-being of people with mental illness and their families. The new President needs all of our commitment and support for these difficult tasks.

I heartily greet all friends who have accompanied me through these years, the members of EUFAMI, all the associated Organisations and our sponsors.

Finally I want to emphasise that all the great work during the past years would not have been possible without the wonderful team of the Executive committee, of the Board

A Christmas message

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and the supportive staff, especially our secretary general Kevin Jones and Rita Geerts, the administrative assistant. Every one of us can be proud of EUFAMI's success and of what it has achieved. I wish the new President all the very best and you and your families a festive season and a happy New Year, full of good cheer, empowerment and inspiration.

... and from Bert Johnson, the new incoming President of EUFAMI



May I first record our warmest thanks to Sigrid for her splendid Presidency over the past three years. It is a special honour for me to succeed her as the new President of EUFAMI and I am very glad to have this early opportunity to introduce myself to everyone connected with us. I feel privileged to have this chance to help develop our work further for the benefit of all our member associations and families affected by mental illness.

We are all only too aware of the difficult economic environment within which we shall be working over the coming year and beyond. The uncertain future makes it all the more necessary for us to make the best possible use of our strengths and our commitment to each other and those we aim to serve.

A good basis for that is the Basel Declaration and Call for Action on community care, released at our recent successful Congress, which set out a broad ranging prospectus to guide our specific activities.

My hope and intention is that, working through its membership associations, EUFAMI will continue to gain credibility as the authoritative advocate for everyone concerned with mental illness. That is a fundamental aim. It involves particularly giving strong voice to the interests of the families and carers whose essential role and whose own needs are otherwise likely to be overlooked.

An important example in 2012 will be to continue our representation with a number of international authorities. One of these is the World Health Organisation's Europe office which earlier in 2011 launched a project to prepare a European Mental Health Strategy for submission and consideration next September. I am glad to report that EUFAMI is participating actively and will contribute continuously throughout the whole process of drafting the strategy document.

We also have a continuing ambition to maintain and develop closer links with our individual associations themselves both professionally and personally. Understanding their different situations, goals and expectations and reaching out to others, notably in Eastern Europe, will help strengthen relationships and our effectiveness.

The key I believe is communication. Building on our existing methods plus personal contacts wherever these can be arranged I am confident will enable us to support and learn from each other to the benefit of us all.

That is my personal aim. In that spirit may I on behalf of EUFAMI colleagues offer our warmest good wishes for Christmas and the coming year to all who look to us to represent and support them in their own efforts. I look forward to meeting and hearing from many of you as we go along.

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