

**I usually spend the first part of my speech to you at the AGM talking about the work of YM over the past 12 months, listing our major achievements, and developments. However, I feel that my thunder has been stolen somewhat tonight by the excellent presentations and performances by service users, volunteers, staff and partners - so no matter how many strategies I tell you we've contributed to or condoms given out or training delivered, or counselling sessions undertaken, or groups established or resources developed and distributed, they pale into insignificance when we are faced with the real life experiences of people who have used YM and who have worked with us to achieve concrete and lasting results.**

**So I would like to thank everyone who spoke tonight for their clarity, creativity and above all their courage, it is truly humbling. And a salient reminder, if one was needed that when all said and done YM is about people and communities first, foremost and last.**

**I would also like to thank Mark Thomson our Operations Manger and the rest of the team for putting together such a great number of high quality presentations on this, which is, after all, the one night of the year that I get to shine. Thanks a million. Seriously I would like to formally welcome Mark to the Team and thank him for all his work over the past 11 and a bit months. It really does mean a lot to me, and I have been very lucky to have an Operations Manager who I trust and respect, it makes my job that much easier. My thanks to the rest of the team goes without saying I am always delighted about the scope, and quality of their work often over above and beyond the call of duty and I know I don't tell them than often enough.**

**This time last year, I made two personal commitments to you, firstly that BLAGY, even though it was facing a funding crisis would not demise or diminish during my watch.**

**I am delighted to say that not only is BLAGY still here but is as you have seen going from strength to strength and like our other youth projects in West and North Yorkshire, Fruitbowl and Blast, is offering an invaluable service to our young**

people. I am particularly pleased to be able to announce to you all tonight that we have been successful in securing money for a second BLAST worker and I look forward to even more ground breaking work from this essential part of Yorkshire MESMAC.

My second commitment or rather challenge to the organisation was to increase the opportunities for local people to volunteer with Yorkshire MESMAC and to harness their commitment and energy with structures and systems that support and value them. As you have heard tonight the volunteers and staff of Yorkshire MESMAC have risen to the challenge - and building on their success I can announce that we have been short-listed to the last 40 from 400 for a 3 year grant from Volunteering England to employ a volunteer coordinator. Their final decision is expected in January.

Brendan described the decision to focus on volunteers as bold, others foolhardy! But the point is it was the right decision; for our organisation, for our services users, for our staff, for our volunteers, for our people and the right decision for our communities. I want to take this opportunity to underline and reiterate my and the organisation's

**commitment to the process of widening participation in the organisation. We are about to be assessed for an Investors in People award and I want to set as a concrete target a commitment to achieving an Investors in Volunteers award by this time next year. I do want to say a massive thank you to all our volunteers in all our services in particular Leeds LGB Switchboard, Fruitbowl, Blagy and of course last but not least our Board of Trustees.**

**As you have heard a great success this year has been MESVAC our community-based Hepatitis A and B vaccination scheme. Lets look at some of the bare facts about MESVAC, in the first 12 weeks of the service running we immunised more Gay men than all the GUM clinics in the whole of Yorkshire and Humber in the same period – not only that but our record on completion is well over 80%. Our aim should be no less than to ensure that we have the highest level of Hepatitis B vaccination take-up amongst HAM in the country. To this end I will be asking Sigma research to include Hepatitis B take up in next year's sex survey in order for us to have some baseline comparative data.**

**We will look at rolling the MESVAC service out to our other sites across West and North Yorkshire and increasing the number of STI tests we can deliver in the community. Now when we say community let us be clear what we mean, its not merely a matter of a building that isn't a traditional clinical setting but its about taking services to where people are, at a time that is convenient in a way that's acceptable – Put simply we are not interested in merely re-branding services or putting our logo on them we want to offer an alternative and enhanced experience for our service users and greater ownership by our communities.**

**An example of this is a new service, we will soon be launching called Testing Times, where we will be offering rapid community based HIV testing, in conjunction with our partners the Black Health Initiative, Genesis, Barnardo's Community African Services and The Leeds PCT.**

**Testing Times is a radical approach to community testing pulling together and building on the strengths of local community agencies that have their roots in the communities we are targeting. By investing in local agencies, we are able to**

**offer a choice of times and venues up to five evenings a week, in a variety of sites across the city and by integrating into other health testing services. Service users are better able to manage their own details and information for example a person using the service might well be using it as much for a Hep B vaccination as a HIV test.**

**Now we don't we see our services as in anyway a replacement to clinical services, we reject the bogus and simplistic, financial comparison employed by some other agencies, that in and of themselves, community sector agencies are cheaper than the NHS.**

**Of course we can do testing cheaper than an NHS GUM department we don't have the overheads, for example a full-time lab, we have never had to train a nurse or a consultant, from scratch - but if the NHS didn't we would have to do it.**

**The NHS is our common wealth, our job is not to cherry-pick profitable services but to lend our skills and expertise so that our collective capacity to deliver appropriate services is increased. The reality is that the NHS is not our competitor but our partner.**

**We were involved to a greater or lesser degree in Prides across Yorkshire. Not only do we see Prides as a central plank to building strong communities they also act as important mechanisms for health promotion activities in particular the Gay Men's Sex Survey, this year Yorkshire MESMAC elicited 633 completed surveys much of this down to our newly designed website which saw a jump from 22 last year to 203 this year, a nine fold increase.**

**I also want to mention the Gay scene, which for all its problems has been a great supporter of YM. I know some people knock it and have a problem with it but let me tell you that in the 16 years of working for YM and the 20+ years working in HIV and sexual health I have yet to get more people to one of my meetings than the New Penny, The Sun, Zeus gets on a Saturday night, - They must be doing something right. The scene venues have supported MESVAC. The reality is that scene venues are not an enemy of health promotion but can be important allies.**

**I've talked a lot tonight about partnerships and if we were not such an non- judgmental organisation we could be described**

**as a bit of a slag where partnerships are concerned. Even though we are prepared to work with anyone that seeks to improve the lot of our people and service users, we are not and never have been afraid of taking the lead and in some cases going against the grain and prevailing wind.**

**One of the things I have been most proud about Yorkshire MESMAC group of services has been our steadfast defence of people living with HIV and in particular our stance against the criminalisation of HIV Transmission. We have developed a policy that is clear and is congruent with our approach and our values. A policy that puts the rights and responsibilities of individuals where they belong - with the individual. We have rejected the path followed by others of plea bargaining the rights of people living with HIV. We cannot, and will not fall into the trap of sacrificing our peoples rights on the tabloid alter of blame and stigma, nor in the naïve attempt of gaining a veneer of respectability,**

**So our real challenge is not to get bigger but to get better. Not merely to raise our profile, but to enhance the experience of each and everyone of our service users.**