AFINet: Chair of Trustees report

For consideration at the AGM to be held on Thursday, 14 September 2023.

***Who are the Trustees?***

Fourteen members have served as Trustees since 2022:

Gallus Bischof (Chair of Trustees; Germany), Richard Velleman (Treasurer; England), Gill Velleman (Secretary; England), Cassandra Borges Bortolon (Brazil), Eileen Farrar (USA), Candice Groenewald (South Africa), Jim Orford (England), Tuuli Pitkänen (Finland), Ed Sipler (Northern Ireland), Dorine van Namen (Netherlands), Alicia Ventura (USA), Anne Whittaker (Scotland). Since the last AGM in September 2022, Trustees have held four meetings, one hybrid at the Rotterdam Conference and the remaining online.

Several subgroups of Trustees had additional meetings focusing on various AFINet projects: planning and editing a forthcoming AFINet book, forming a research group aiming to promote research on the 5-Step Method, establishing a communication strategy, and planning of the 2023 Rotterdam face-to-face Conference.

***Who are AFINet Members?***

The last year again has been a successful one in terms of regularly increasing membership which now (as of 8th September 2023) stands at 684 members from 54 countries across all of the world regions, having increased by 201 members since the last AGM. Membership is open to everyone with a bona fide interest in promoting the wellbeing of family members affected by addiction. Our members include (but is not restricted to) researchers, clinicians, policy makers as well as experts by experience. Membership continues to be free. Networking and opportunities for collaboration are the main benefits of membership. In addition to these existing members, we also have 234 non-members who have asked to receive regular news items and updates related to AFINet.

***What is AFINet?***

AFINet is officially a ‘small charity’ (a small NGO) registered in the UK. This gives us some recognised status as an organisation without too much bureaucracy, that´s why we decided to remain in this status.

***Aims of AFINet***

The five core aims at the centre of the AFINet philosophy are:

* To disseminate internationally a non-pathological, family member-centred model of the circumstances and needs of family members affected by their relatives’ addictions.
* To promote research about the experiences of family members affected by their relatives’ addictions around the world.
* To promote good, evidence-based prevention and treatment practice relevant to the needs of affected family members.
* To advocate with policy makers, including international organisations and national governments, for greater awareness of the circumstances and needs of family members affected by their relatives’ addictions and for better services for them.
* To raise awareness at a global level of the needs of families affected by addiction

***How do we communicate with AFINet members?***

We have two main methods of communication, outlined below, augmented by ‘mailshots’ to all members as and when necessary.

**AFINet Website:** We have a website, developed and maintained by one of our Trustees, Gill Velleman, with the help of a professional web designer. The focus for the website is as a repository, a place where members can easily access materials such as recorded webinars, unpublished (and some published) papers, assessment tools, and latest versions of intervention manuals. In addition, the Website also contains the presentations of each years’ conferences, including this year´s conference. Some AFINet materials are already translated into languages other than English and we have considered whether to translate parts of the website and further materials but this has not been a priority. However, the website now has a ‘Select Language’ button (top right on the first page) which creates an automatic translation of all text on the website (but not of any downloadable documents). To further improve this facility, all AFINet members are encouraged to share research findings and materials for clinicians, researchers and family members in their language. Please send material to [administrator@afinetwork.info](mailto:administrator@afinetwork.info) (with some indication of what the material is about). Also, if any member or group of members wishes to translate any of the existing documents or intervention manuals into their languages, this would be welcomed.

**AFINet Newsletters:** Many thanks are due to Eileen Farrar (Supported by, Martha Canfield, Anne Whittaker, and Cassandra Borges Bortolon), for having edited and put together excellent AFINet Newsletters, approximately every six months, during the last year (and for the years prior to that). The last Newsletter was published in July 2023 and has been redesigned into an email clickable format. We are always welcoming input about ongoing AFINet-related work from our members, and we would love to see more contributions from all of you.

In addition, a communication strategy group has been set up in order to prioritize and optimize networking. One of the aims is to reach out to other influential people like e.g. policymakers or health economists who so far have not been the main recipients of AFINet. Since the group currently consists of only three members (Dorine van Namen who Chairs the group, supported by Eileen Farrar and Gill Velleman), and two of them are standing down at this AGM, more support from our members is needed.

***Promoting the 5-Step Method of helping affected family members (AFMs)***

Development of the 5-Step Method has played an important role in the history of AFINet and of the UK-based Addiction and the Family (ADF) group that preceded AFINet. Trustees are agreed that AFINet wishes to promote all effective forms of help for AFMs, not only the 5-Step Method, but Trustees also agree that AFINet provides ‘a home’ for the 5-Step Method. During the last year members of AFINet have been active in promoting the 5-Step Method by training practitioners and trainers and/or collaborating on incorporating the Method into services or research projects, sometimes on a national level. During the last year there have been 14 courses run by accredited 5-Step Method trainers in New Zealand, Ireland, Italy, England and Holland. C&F Training in Ireland now run regular zoom (as well as face-to-face) courses throughout the year, which facilitates those from other countries being able to access training. Additionally the AFINet website has a dedicated section devoted solely to the 5-Step Method [<http://afinetwork.info/5-step-method-resources-introduction>] which has continued to be added to over the last year, and which has over 40 videos on various aspects of the 5-Step Method, as well as a wealth of other information.

***The fourth AFINet Conference and further Conferences***

After the Conference in Newcastle held in 2018, we had two virtual conferences (held on-line instead of face-to-face due to the pandemic) in 2021 and 2022 that both were a huge success. The fourth conference took place in June 2023 face-to-face in Rotterdam, and not only did we manage to gather more participants than in the previous conferences, we also had a huge number of presentations. With 53 presentations, 2 roundtable discussions and two plenary talks, and 89 participants from 22 countries representing six continents, the conference was a huge success and showed that the impact of AFINet has grown. In fact, there were so many submissions that for the first time we had to organize parallel sessions. Thanks to Dorine van Namen, who organized the conference on-site and who was able to obtain generous funding, we were able to offer 12 bursaries for participants who otherwise wouldn´t have been able to come; and at the same time the conference could generate money for AFINet that can be used to organize future conferences. At the moment, we are aiming to have a virtual and a face-to-face conference interchangeable, i.e., in the next year we will have a virtual conference, and in 2025 we are aiming to have the next face-to-face conference, for the first time outside of Europe, in Quebec, Canada. This conference will be hosted by Professor Joel Tremblay, University of Quebec.

For this Fourth AFINet Conference in June 2023 we had a Conference Organising Committee with sub groups:

* Project Lead: Gill Velleman
* Rotterdam Lead, Registration & Administration Finance: Dorine Van Namen, supported by Hanneka
* Programme & Bursary Group: Richard Velleman, supported by Gallus Bischof and Anne Whittaker
* Marketing & Website & Communication Lead: Eileen Farrar

The conference pack, pens and notepads were kindly donated by our Trustee Alicia Ventura.

***AFINet Webinars***

Given the huge impact of the Covid pandemic on AFINet, we decided to start a monthly series of Webinars on AFINet-related topics (organised by Richard Velleman), available for everyone in- and outside of AFINet, which started in October 2020. The Webinars have been promoted not only within AFINet, but also through other organisations dealing with topics relevant to AFINet. It was decided that from January 2023 we would move to a bi-monthly mode, and the day of the Webinar (which always used to be Tuesday) would be more flexible in order to enable members with commitments on Tuesday afternoons to participate. Hence in the last 12 months, 6 Webinars have been successfully realized and further Webinars are planned on alternate months (with the next one being held a week after the AGM, on Wednesday 20th September 2023: Dr Stephanie Merkouris from Deakin University, Australia will talk on ‘Family member and friend treatment for gambling harm: Development of a self-directed intervention’. Bi-monthly Webinars for the following months are already scheduled [<https://www.afinetwork.info/webinar-series/upcoming-webinars>]. The Webinars are always recorded and made available on the AFINet Website within a few days following each Webinar. Due to the large number of participants from all over the world who have participated in the Webinars so far (167 people have attended one or more of Webinars over the past 12 months, some attending every one), the Trustees have agreed that AFINet will aim to continue to organize regular webinars in the future, even after the pandemic is over. AFINet members interested in presenting a Webinar on an AFINet-related topic should contact Richard Velleman (hssrdbv@bath.ac.uk).

***AFINet book***

The edited International Handbook on Addiction and the Family has been approved by Springer, and we were able to recruit international experts in- and outside of AFINet for contributions. The book will contain 26 chapters and will include three chapters on fundamentals, 9 chapters outlining the experiences of family members in relation to various aspects, 9 chapters on different approaches aiming to promote the wellbeing of family members, and will end with a concluding chapter covering the implications for policy, practice and research written by the editors (Abhijit Nadkarni, Marcela Tiburcio, Jim Orford, Richard Velleman, Gill Velleman and Gallus Bischof). Most chapters already have been sent to the editors and are currently being revised. We hopefully will be able to send the finalized chapters to Springer by December. We have the opportunity to make the book ‘open access’ but in order to do so, we would need to receive funding from outside AFINet. If anyone is aware of funding opportunities for this project that would not be considered to pose a conflict of interest, please let us know.

***My thanks to other Trustees***

As Chair of the Trustee group for the last five years, I would like to express my thanks to the other members of the Trustee group, especially to Richard Velleman who organises the webinars, to both Richard and Gill Velleman who serve as Treasurer, and who organised a lot of the 2023 conference as well, and to Eileen Farrar, who produced so much of the communications material (Newsletter, Conference, etc) that we saw this year. I would also like to say thank you to Emmi Kauppila and Sari Jurvansuu who provided technical assistance for the Webinars, and to Dorine van Namen who did an excellent job in organizing this year´s conference.

Finally, I would also like to especially thank those Trustees who are standing down this year: Jim Orford (AFINet’s Founding Chair of the Trustee Group, 2014-2018), Dorine van Namen, and Gill Velleman.

**Gallus Bischof, Chair AFINet Trustees September 2023**