

Letter from Rick Doblin

MAPS president

Ten postage stamps for general operating expenses and \$250,000 for MDMA research—these were the endpoints in the range of donations that MAPS has received within the last several months. Despite the vast disparity in amount, each donation represents a similarly profound investment of hopes in MAPS and its mission.

The stamps were donated by Harry Eldridge, a federal prisoner who gave generously of what very little he has to help MAPS in “lifting the veil of fear” surrounding illegal drugs. Though small in financial terms, this gift brought huge inspiration to MAPS staff. The \$250,000 was donated by Peter Lewis, a philanthropist whose vision of a better world includes legal access to the healing potential, and freedom of thought and experience, provided by the wise use of marijuana and psychedelics. Peter’s donation brings us halfway to our goal of \$500,000 for our MDMA research agenda for the next two years.

It’s a new world for MAPS, in that our castles in the air now have more solid foundations underneath. Peter’s donation was in response to MAPS’ success in obtaining, after 18 years of struggle, all the necessary approvals for our first U.S. study of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy, in this case for the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (see page 3). My request to Peter also mentioned MAPS’ growing ability to counteract anti-drug propaganda by replacing fear with facts. By way of example, we hope you saw Peter Jennings’ remarkably balanced April 1, 2004, ABC prime-time documentary on Ecstasy for which MAPS provided information and contacts throughout the production process (see page 34).

MAPS stands on the verge of a series of additional historic accomplishments. In Israel, the Ministry of Health is seriously considering MAPS’ proposed pilot study of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy in subjects with war- and terrorism-related PTSD (see page 5). MAPS is making progress in designing a study to investigate the use of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy in advanced cancer patients with anxiety, and has received a \$50,000 donation from David and Marsha Weil for a study of the use of LSD and psilocybin in treating cluster headaches (see page 6). We are seeking approval to conduct these last two studies at Harvard, where many people think psychedelic research went off the track with Timothy Leary. There has been no psychedelic research at Harvard since 1965 and virtually no clinical research with LSD anywhere in the world since the 1970s.

MAPS is still seeking to start the first privately funded facility to produce marijuana for government-approved clinical research in over fifty years, and to continue research with marijuana vaporizers. At present, both efforts are being obstructed by NIDA and the DEA (see page 12).

MAPS is benefiting from, and contributing to, a seismic cultural shift away from the simplistic, fundamentalist policies of “Just Say No” toward a more nuanced view of drugs. In this view, the relationship between the person and the drug is the key factor in determining the mix of costs and benefits. Drugs are not inherently good or evil, neither magic bullets nor a one-way ticket to depravity.

In order for MAPS to navigate successfully through these turbulent times, we must become the trusted experts on both the risks and benefits of the drugs we research. We must not fall prey to the temptation to be as willfully blind about the risks as the drug warriors are about the benefits. MAPS’ support of Dr. Halpern’s methodologically rigorous study of the neurocognitive consequences of Ecstasy use is an example of research MAPS is proud to have helped start. Similarly, MAPS’ outcome study of the use of ibogaine in the treatment of substance abuse acknowledges the reality of drug abuse while investigating the therapeutic potential of a psychedelic drug (see page 7).

There are many struggles ahead. FDA’s disturbing refusal to approve over-the-counter sales of the morning after pill/contraceptive (Plan B) is a rare example of FDA seemingly placing politics over scientific analysis. We are prepared for the path before us to include the mires of bureaucratic delay and the thorns and brambles of political opposition. Nevertheless, with the ongoing support of a growing MAPS community, we can successfully work together to blaze a trail towards a healthier world.

—  **Rick Doblin, MAPS President**