



Mental Health Recovery in Europe:

**A sample of encouraging practice
in and outside the EPR network**

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Introduction

This report aims at providing a sample of good practice among mental health services in Europe tending to implement the recovery concept, notably targeting people with disabilities. It has been carried out upon request of two members of the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) from Ireland that run mental health services among others for persons with intellectual disabilities. Through desk research, a few programmes or services have been identified in several countries as particularly relevant for people with disabilities and mental health problems. As an important component of the recovery model, a specific focus has been put on community-based services.

This sample report aims at providing a few examples of services in and outside the EPR network. An important notice is that the development of recovery-oriented services is still at its early stage. Although a lot of studies have been written on the concept of recovery itself and the discussion on the concept is rich, much work is still to be done to convert the recovery philosophy into practice, especially in Europe. Reflection on the concept has been carried out at political level in the European Union through the launch of the European Pact for mental health and well-being, presented at the EU high level conference “Together for mental health and well-being” held in Brussels in June 2008. The components of the recovery philosophy are also to be found in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, although the concept is not mentioned as such. Because the systematic implementation of the recovery in practice by service providers is still in its embryonic stages in Europe, this synthetic report rather brings to light practices that do implement at least several components of the concept. At a further stage, it may be of interest to re-evaluate the state of development of systematic recovery-oriented services across Europe.

The recovery philosophy

The recovery concept emerged relatively recently in the United States, in the late 1980's as an alternative to traditional models of care. Recovery upholds that mental illness does not necessarily mean life long deterioration, but it does not state either return to pre-illness state. It is more about the individual's healing process itself than about the result; it is considered as a journey, not as a destination. The concept has been defined as "an individual's journey of healing and transformation to live a meaningful life in a community of his or her choice while striving to achieve maximum human potential."¹ The concept of recovery calls for a change in beliefs, services, and practices for most of clients and service providers.

Recovery is part of a personal process of the individual, and therefore there is no pre-conceived formula for recovery. It consists of principles that must underpin all services to the client. The components of recovery can be listed as follows²:

Hope: recovery-oriented services focus on strengths of the client and their future possibilities, and measure progress against small steps. The main obstacle to hope is to be found in the negative stereotypes which are destructive and discouraging for people recovering. It leads individuals to lose hope and motivation for their recovery, and lose their decision-making capacity including about their own treatment. Therefore, the involvement of significant others who believe in the person and bring constant trust and hope is essential.

Meaning, purpose and direction for one's life experience: inserting meaning and direction into one's life implies a re-orientation of self apart from illness, and to understand that the illness is only one part of the whole person. This contributes to the development of a positive self-image in the client's mind.

Equality and respect: people with mental illness often internalise the negative stereotypes circulating in the society, which leads them to ignoring opportunities, reducing their own inclusion in the community and their self-confidence. Recovery-oriented services must counteract this trend, acting with the client and their environment.

Empowerment: Empowerment of the individual is crucial to play an active role in the recovery process; the clients themselves being actively recovering, contrarily to the clients being "rehabilitated" in a more passive way – the concept of recovery upholds to go beyond the rehabilitation concept, considered as outdated in mental health. An empowered individual must set

¹ 2005, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

² Queensland Government, 2005

their own goals, and success should be measured against those goals, instead of any predetermined rule of “normal”.

Social inclusion and connectedness: people with a psychiatric disability generally have social networks around half the size of the general population, and these networks are more likely to include family members, which are less reciprocal. The absence of social support increases psychological distress, and, vice-versa, psychological distress increases social isolation. Therefore recovery-oriented services imply activities allowing the individual to connect with the community.³ Recovery considers the society as a whole based on the interdependency first with the family and the broader community. Therefore, the family plays a primary role in empowering the individual, and recovery-oriented services require an understanding of the individual’s family and cultural context.

³ Wilson, Flanagan and Rynders, 1999

Kašna workshop - Czech Republic ⁴

Type of service

Kašna is a sheltered workshop, providing people with disabilities and mental health problems with employment opportunities without pressure of productivity.

Target groups

Kašna is targeted at people with physical and intellectual disabilities experiencing mental health difficulties.

Description

Through this sheltered activity, emphasis is put on the feeling of being needed and useful for the benefit of others. Clients develop their own abilities at their rhythm, gain self-confidence and self-respect knowing that their work is acknowledged and awarded beyond the institution. Indeed, the products created in the workshop (candles and brushes) are regularly sold at markets and special occasions. Kašna also counts permanent customers for its products, notably large and famous firms (for example Czech Airlines and several national breweries).

The specificity of the workshop remains the recognition of the value of the work of people with mental illness and the internal integration of persons of persons with different types of disabilities through co-working. Clients recover better when they see that others are also confronted with difficulties, and co-workers relations open the way to mutual support. Kašna is run by non-professional staff (volunteers) and therefore it is substantially based on this type of natural support mechanisms.

Moreover, most of the individuals with disabilities and mental health problems in Kašna workshop receive full or partial disability pension, which completes the financial benefit from their work, helping them achieve economic independence.

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⁴ Good Practices for Combating Social Exclusion of People with Mental Health Problems, A collection from Ten EU Member States resulting from Mental Health Europe's Transnational Exchange Project 2005-2007, Mental Health Europe, 2007

Meeting at Half-Way - Green Doors, Czech Republic⁵

Type of service

Meeting at Half-Way is a project aiming at connecting vocational service to people with mental health problems and services to the community, in the form of a café.

Target groups

The individuals targeted by this initiative are people with mental health problems, especially people in the first stage of psychotic illness. The project was replicated in the country for different target groups such as people with intellectual disabilities.

Description

The initiative is run by a recognized Czech organization called Green Doors, and aims at providing clients with individual training and support to reintegrate the open labour market after exclusion due to mental illness.

Meeting at half-way supports the integration of clients into the community through working in an open place in direct contact with clients and public. Indeed, part of the activities consists in running the café itself, and another part consists in organizing cultural and convivial events on the premises. It offers ideal opportunities for social inclusion. The café connects social services with life in community through organization of cultural activities for the public and offering work training in non-protected conditions. The programme also informs the public about mental illness and aims at reducing stigma and taboo around mental illness and disability, by help of the convivial atmosphere. The events held in the café are chosen to be integrative and to facilitate common thinking, laughing and acting.

The programme organized by Green Doors counted 138 clients in 2005, among which the large majority consists of people between 23 and 35 years old. The success of the programme can be measured by high employment rate in the open labour market at the exit of the service (approximately 60%), and also by the popularity of the café, with a high number of clients and a high amount of cultural activities organized there.

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⁵ Good Practices for Combating Social Exclusion of People with Mental Health Problems, A collection from Ten EU Member States resulting from Mental Health Europe's Transnational Exchange Project 2005-2007, Mental Health Europe, 2007

Penumbra Youth Project Fife⁶ - Scotland, United Kingdom

Type of service

The Penumbra project offers a holistic approach to supporting the mental health and well being of young people.

Target groups

Penumbra youth project supports young people aged 12-21 experiencing mental health difficulties, notably young people with disabilities.

Description

The project aims to provide alternative support to young people in the community through the establishment of services that are community based and voluntary sector led, but which link with mainstream services. It notably provides advice and support on a range of issues including such as stress, isolation, suicidal and self-harming feelings and actions, anxiety and abuse. The programme emphasizes empowerment of the client, independent decision – making and independent living, and continued awareness raising actions and promotion of mental health, notably through informal support or advice to carers and professionals from various services.

Penumbra services follow a very recovery focused approach to early/crisis intervention. Recovery is based on the identification of social supports, including friends and family, to help developing develop the young person's own resourcefulness and decrease the focus on mental illness, through working out self-help, taking responsibility and feeding hope. The project also gives every young person the opportunity to develop their own WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan). WRAP is a self-composed plan for the daily, weekly and monthly maintenance of mental health and well being, a plan for identifying and managing illness and crisis.

The services provided by Penumbra include advice, skills development, one to one support, drop-ins; issues based groups, creative activity groups, life-skills, outdoor activities and action therapy. Young people also benefit from outreach support, residential houses, psychiatric wards, mental health agencies, and schools.

The project seeks to deliver recovery- oriented services as promoted by the Scottish Recovery Network, in which Penumbra is very closely involved. Although the project does not specifically target young people with disabilities,

⁶ Good Practices for Combating Social Exclusion of People with Mental Health Problems, A collection from Ten EU Member States resulting from Mental Health Europe's Transnational Exchange Project 2005-2007, Mental Health Europe, 2007

it is worth being mentioned here due to its systematic focus on recovery throughout the system of service provision.

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The Moray Healthy Living Centre⁷ - Scotland, United Kingdom

Types of service

The Moray Healthy Living Centre supports people in making positive lifestyle choices and developing life skills which will improve their health and maximise their potential to enjoy life.

Target groups

Clients groups targeted by the project are people with mental health conditions, medical problems, social isolation, physical, learning and sensory disabilities, suicidal and self harming behaviour, and older people.

Description

The Moray Healthy Living Centre project based in Elgin has been established since 2002. The project aims to motivate, support and empower people to make positive lifestyle choices, develop life skills to improve their health and potential to enjoy life. It provides access to leisure activities and individualized therapies in a community social setting which is a non stigmatised environment. The project addresses barriers which prevent individuals from accessing leisure facilities and participation in society, such as for example transport, childcare or financial difficulties. Clients have the opportunity to take part in complementary therapies, gym sessions, health referral programme, swimming, relaxation suite, ice skating, art classes, childcare facilities, walking groups, studio classes and self help workshops. The project's flagship is the Tailor Made Leisure Package programme which provides an individual package of relaxation and exercise for the targeted clients.

The project also offers a Choose Life Support Programme providing an intensive therapy and support package for those who have suicidal or self harming behaviour. Although this programme is foreseen for nine month duration, it often lasts longer in accordance with the needs of the client. Evaluation has shown that individuals who have taken part in both programmes and who have had complementary therapies have reported significant improvement in symptoms both physical and mental.

The programme works to prevent the deterioration of mental health condition through self awareness, self management and empowerment, increased social interactions and improvements in overall health and well-being. The unique features of the project are mainly its person centred- approach in a non clinical setting, the provision of facilities such as childcare on the

⁷ Good Practices for Combating Social Exclusion of People with Mental Health Problems, A collection from Ten EU Member States resulting from Mental Health Europe's Transnational Exchange Project 2005-2007, Mental Health Europe, 2007

premises, and the wide variety of leisure activities and complementary therapies.

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Urbanités⁸ - France

Type of service

The project allows for the target groups to meet with people in the community, share convivial time and assume responsibility through the design and set up of open events.

Target groups

This initiative targets persons suffering various forms of discrimination (disabilities, impairments, illness, etc.).

Description

A consortium of non-profit organizations has pooled their resources to facilitate at a larger scale the exercise of citizenship for the target groups. The project has been developed under the umbrella of a national political programme for the promotion of the integration and pacific coexistence of all in urban areas. It involves more than 100 professionals with different professional background (care, artistic...).

Each individual contributes to design two festive events each year in accordance with their personal skills. These events (one in Spring and one in Winter) are focused on a given neighbourhood and intended to involve the local population in various activities: drawing, painting, dance, participative outdoor theatre. Through this engagement, every individual assumes responsibilities, meet with external people in the community and must accept to confront foreign gazes. Most of them are referred through institutions that take the opportunity of this project to diversify their out-door activities in the community. Some professional performers or artists are called by the consortium to frame this common work, which creates opportunities for training or acquiring new skills. The organisation in charge coordinates with local public authorities to be granted public spaces for the events, and with various artists.

For people with mental health problems and related disabilities, this initiative is an opportunity to regain confidence and hope, discover new potentials and give its own direction for one's life experience. Individuals are encouraged to come up with personal initiatives allowing personal accomplishment in an open social environment. This project intends to make the cultural and artistic sphere accessible to disadvantaged individuals, especially to persons with intellectual disabilities, for which artistic creation in the community itself is often out of reach.

⁸ Good Practices for Combating Social Exclusion of People with Mental Health Problems, A collection from Ten EU Member States resulting from Mental Health Europe's Transnational Exchange Project 2005-2007, Mental Health Europe, 2007

It is also a way to face the outside world through taking part in recreational forms of socialisation. Since the events has started in 2004, participation of the local population increased steadily. Inhabitants appreciate taking part in the events and express encouragements and acknowledgment to the participating individuals. These events also have noticeable effects in reducing stigma, they create opportunities for open debates and public information involving local inhabitants. This action offers numerous possibilities for local partnerships, involvement based on mutual confidence in the capacity of all kinds of individuals.

Vocational coaching of young people at risk of exclusion - Heli, Finland

Type of service

Vocational coaching of young people at risk of exclusion

Target groups

Young people between 15 and 20 years old with disabilities and mental health problems.

Description

Pulmonary Association Heli is Finland's largest non-profit organisation for people with disabilities. It caters for people with different kinds of disabilities and mental health problems. Luovi Vocational College, member of Heli Association, runs a programme for vocational coaching of young people at risk of exclusion, which notably targets young people between 15 and 20 years old with disabilities and mental health problems.

The programme counts clients with particularly weak social support network, with deficient psychosocial skills, learning disabilities and difficulties. Although no recovery model as such has been implemented in a systematic way, the service has developed components of the recovery philosophy. It particularly emphasizes the support to clients to help them find their own strengths, to re-orientate self image and turn it to be more positive. By doing so, the programme aims at reinforcing self confidence and hope. Clients are encouraged to play an active role for their own progress and to set their own goals.

The method employed by Luovi consists of individual guidance to help clients find the right education path for themselves and the right job through vocational coaching. A personal counsellor is assigned to each client with the mission to establish a closer relationship and to follow the client throughout their vocational plan. The client also finds support in peer groups. At their entry in the service, an interview is carried out with the family to chart the situation and involve significant others in the process, which lasts around 8 months.

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Fresh Start - Momentum, Scotland, United Kingdom

Type of service

Fresh start supports its clients to find their own training, employment or education path.

Target groups

Individuals with mental health needs or stress related illnesses.

Description

Momentum, Scottish member of the Rehab Group, runs a programme called Fresh Start; which lasts about 5 months and is designed for clients with mental health needs who are in unemployment and willing to move forward into employment, further education and / or training.

Clients are offered time, assistance and possibilities to explore future employment options. This service puts the accent on empowerment of the client, to allow them making positive and informed decisions about their own future, testing their strengths and finding ways to break down the barriers that prevent them from moving into employment. Clients are encouraged to set personal goals and professionals support them in achieving those. The programme has shown high success rates, with about 80% of the clients moving every year into employment, further education or training. A follow-up with the employer or college is then ensured to make sure that the special needs of the client are met even after the exit of the programme.

Areas covered by Fresh Start include social skills, communication and listening skills, stress awareness, confidence building and assertiveness techniques, employment profiling and interview skills, ICT, etc. The activities are structured around groups of up to 12 clients, allowing them to exchange skills, experiences and knowledge. It counts a number of core modules, to be complemented on an optional basis with other modules.

For more information

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Energiser - Momentum Scotland, United Kingdom

Type of service

Support to strengthening social and economic inclusion through pre-vocational activities.

Target groups

Adults experiencing or who have experienced severe and long lasting mental health difficulties and /or suffer from long-term illness

Description

Energiser is a programme run in the Scottish city of Aberdeen, which lasts up to 12 weeks. Working in partnership with other local organisations, Energiser offers excluded individuals the first steps towards social and economic inclusion. The Energiser programme aims to help people with mental health difficulties to break out of their existing routine and give them the motivation and confidence to move forward with their lives, helping them build their own life path. Clients are encouraged to set their own goals, and are then supported to achieve them, while they are free to choose the tools among a wide variety of services and activities. In this sense, the service implements several components of the recovery philosophy and could represent a first practical step for the establishment of the recovery concept.

Moreover, the programme provides a variety of pre-vocational activities which are 50% centre based and 50% working in the community. Working in groups of about 8 persons, the centre-based activities focus on personal development. This includes working with others, problem solving skills, confidence building, healthy living and health management. Each Energiser group makes extensive use of the local community, which is seen as the most valuable asset in an inclusive approach to personal development. In partnership with another mental health agency (Mental Health Aberdeen) a strong “green” and environmental emphasis is given to community activities in a variety of settings. This includes supporting gardening, construction of play areas and pathways for other projects, etc. Other partnerships have been established with public authorities and services companies, notably to provide individually tailor-made activities such as alternative therapies (dance, music, etc). The self-confidence of the client is tested and / or established at a latter stage of the programme through involvement in outdoor education experience. The Energiser programme intends to be a model in working with local external organisations to create real added-value to the activities, widening and strengthening the scope of the service delivery. The professionals working in the service ensure that every client has access to personal support even in the community.

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