Ex-patient self-help movements in Poland. A rising perspective-practice from ASPMI.

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Current trends in supporting persons with mental crisis experience are strongly influenced by transitions in modern psychiatry. Quality of changes depends on the engagement of ex-patient movements. In Poland, such activities are faintly pronounced. One of the first initiatives in this scope is the Agreement for Support of Persons with Mental Illness (ASPMI).

AGREEMENT FOR SUPPORT OF PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

WHAT WE DO?

Our Organisation was settled in Warsaw, 2013, under the auspices of Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education, to gather non-government organisations, environmental psychiatry professionals, officials and persons with mental crisis experience and their families. It is a forum focused on mental health issues.

We are a group of practitioners and psychiatry users. Throughout years of our experience, on both sides, we have learnt how important it is to adjust the quality of psychological and medical help to expectations and needs of its users. We believe that this cooperation makes our actions fresh and helpful.

HOW WE WORK?

We are a non-profit organisation. Our aim is to make these activities continuous and applicable for the environment of care givers.

- Monthly meetings for professionals
- Fortnight meetings for independent support group ‘TRACK’ (‘TROP’)
- Helpline

WHAT MAKES US WORTHWHILE?

- Independent support group ‘TRACK’
  
  An independent support group ‘TROP’ consisting of persons with mental crisis experience was emerged amongst the members of the Agreement. The group provides mutual support by systematic meetings, educates school pupils and clinks in the field of mental disorders, researches the condition of psychiatric services and presents in various affairs (conferences, workshops).

  TRACK, with its independency is very important, because it strongly influences ASPMI actions.

  TRACK work is based on forum meetings and support meetings. Each are handled fortnightly.

- Helpline
  
  The Agreement provides a helpline for persons in mental crisis, available four days a week, settled by four ‘TROP’ members who are professionally trained and supervised. It is available nationwide, every caller can obtain a support and guidelines on further actions (e.g. how to obtain a medical help if it is needed, human rights, support groups, financial and governmental help).

- ASPMI, ‘TRACK’ and The Human Rights Defender
  
  In 2014 the Agreement together with ‘TRACK’ and the The Human Rights Defender pursued a course of workshops on human rights focusing on the aspect of psychiatry users rights.

  As the main effect, in May, 2015 course attendants became graduates and are now certified ‘Human Rights Educators’ and aiming to visit psychiatric clinics to educate people with mental crisis experience and their families on rights and possibilities of claiming support.

  We are still in a regular cooperation with the Human Rights Defender. Our aim is to evaluate the project and pursue education.

  ASPMI is a co-author of a manual on psychiatric services and its current issues published by the Humans Rights Defender bureau.

- Events
  
  In ASPMI, we try to make our actions consequent—we believe that continuity is the key to success. By creating events such as regular meetings for professionals and “TRACK” members, annual conferences but also seminars and workshops we do our best to create a forum that makes a very important source of current issues. On knowing them, it enables the whole environment to improve the quality of life among the psychiatry users.

ASPMI RESEARCH GROUP

We belive that practical examples are the best way to promote our initiative. In April 2014, together with ‘TRACK’ members we created a research division. Its main assumption is to investigate topics that are important to psychiatry users rather than professionals.

We have a few projects to be accomplished. We would like to present the one that is complete.

Differences in environmental support settlements and medical institutions. Psychiatry users opinions.

The aim of the study was to investigate what are the differences in perception of environmental versus medical support in the group of psychiatry users.

The group (N=69) consisted of psychiatry users who are currently an environmental establishments participants.

The research was conducted with the use of questionnaires (PAPI). Results have shown that majority of respondents feel a lack of complex support after leaving a hospital, feel stigmatised and that there is a strong need of regular environmental support for psychiatry users.

EVALUATION

Since 2013, when ASPMI was established, we managed to fulfill our statutory goals. Of course, every action brings new issues that need to be explored. Thus, we are open to discussion. We are very happy to stay in cooperation with different groups that have a lot to bring in the scope of mental health care.

In the beginning of 2015 we got granted by the City of Warsaw Mayor wish enables us to promote actions nationwide. The effect of this project would be a guidebook for persons with mental crisis experience, written from the perspective of psychiatry users – we hope it will be a fresh and useful overlook on the matter for those who experienced their first mental crisis.

OUR GOAL

The main goal of the Agreement is to build a strong ex-patient movement in Poland to emphasize the significance of subjectivity, independence and empowerment among psychiatry users.

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