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Title: Examples of involvement of experts by experience in the Czech Republic

Content:

In the Czech Republic there is a wide variety of programmes involving so called peer specialists. The presentation will shortly introduce two programmes of systematic peer involvement into mental health system. So called peer consultants and peer lecturers will be presented. The author will speak about his own experience with these projects. His current position is a peer lecturer of college mental health courses and a journalist specialised in "media and mental health" topics.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, dear guests.

Six years after I experienced my first psychosis, I worked as a French language teacher at a high school of hospitality management. For few months because of my obesity (I wished to be more attractive for my girlfriend) I had been trying to change my medication with the psychiatrist's approval. Unfortunately, I didn't lose weight and my mental state turned worse. I had to flee from my job and hide into the medical insurance, then the ID. It means invalid retirement.

After that for couple of years, single, but fortunately with the care of my parents I was slowly slipping into depression. Finally, my mother showed me an announcement, that new journalists are looked for by the project of ČAPZ (Czech Association for Mental Health). I sent my CV and started preparing my new future in media. It was protected job in the Esprit, the mental health care magazine and in a new website for people with health problems.

In this editors office I met my colleague Tomáš Vaněk. My education was journalist and he was a literary scientist. We both were story-oriented people. And our boss Jožka Gabriel gave us the chance to write a book of true stories of people with mental health problems. We worked hard and after two months the book was ready to be published. Finally it appeared october 2014. Both of us we started participating in the CMHCD (Centre for Mental Health Care Development) project of so called peer lecturers.

Now, I will present two peer projects of this Centre:

In 2013 two interesting projects involving so called peer specialists have started. One was the education of 10 peer consultants. After visiting places in Netherlands, where peer workers are regular members of mental health care teams, and after several months of education in the Centre (CMHCD) they started to work within NGOs throughout the whole of the Czech Republic as regular members of professional teams. Their work is about sharing their own stories to establish working relationships with clients. The peer consultants are very succesfull, currently there are more than 20 people working on this position.

In the winter 2013/14 other 10 people with experience with mental troubles started to learn how to present topics of mental health to students of Prague colleges. I am a proud member

of this team. We prepared four full-time educational modules for schools concerning such topics as “recovery, self management, destigmatization and peer programs”. Each of us participated in preparing these theoretical presentations, exercises, sharing our stories and discussions. This means that our presentations concern not only our personal experiences as patients or users. Then in October 2014 we started teaching students of helping professions: psychologists, social workers. Students gave us a very positive feedback. They said and wrote: “Finally I can figure out what the life with mental illness might feel like,” they thanked us. Unfortunately, medical colleges are less interested in our experience-based educational modules.

Our team of peer lecturers is going on and we are currently engaged in several activities as trainers:

This year I had the honor to be a trainer in a course for 7 people who started their preparation for the job of peer consultants in Prague region. Again, I am very proud of them, that they started working in different NGOs here.

We, peer lecturers (not peer consultants), are also planning to continue teaching in the next academic year, starting this October at schools where we have started last year. Simultaneously, our modules were offered for further education to professionals as open courses.

In yet another project we will together with professional case managers train social workers in municipalities this summer.

It happened that many new things became different during several last years in my life. I found myself in different roles, than I have expected not long before. Despite my continuous mental troubles such as anxiety and paranoid feelings I feel valued. Being a journalist and a teacher gives me good sense.

Certainly, my life was once restructured by my experience with mental illness, the crisis made me think of different things. My work and hobbies together contributed to my present successes. Many years I try to combine my skills of teacher, writer or actor and my handicap. Thanks to good care – and this is not easy to find – I can do my best in projects I mentioned. My patient role seems to be now less important than before.

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