

The Introduction of Experts by Experience in a Barcelona Psychiatric Hospital due to the Implementation of the EMILIA (Empowerment of Mental Illness Service Users: Lifelong Learning, Integration and Action) Project

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Introduction

The EMILIA (Empowerment of mental illness service users: Lifelong learning, integration and empowerment) is a sixth frame-work European Project aimed at improving social inclusion of mental health services through the implementation of a training programme based on the Life Long learning (LLL) methodology. The project has 16 European partners in total, eight of whom are Demonstration Sites, Barcelona being one of them, where training has been carried out with 20-30 mental health users.

The project which has lasted 4 years and will end in February 2010 has brought about change in these institutions. Five training packages have been carried out based on the lifelong learning

methodology and aimed at both mental health service users and professionals. The training has created an open and interactive environment within the hospitals and essentially has brought about a sense of empowerment among the mental health users. But with the end of the EMILIA project in sight, both users and staff want to guarantee that these positive advances are not forgotten.

Having examined different areas within the mental health institution and with the aim of improving at all time the services provided by the institution along with the users' personal recovery, the Expert by Experience (EbE) profile has been created.

Aim

Determine how the EbE works to bridge the gap between mental health users and the mental health institution. The EbE is a newly recognised working profile within the psychiatric hospital which aims to:

- offer a better understanding of the mental health institution to mental health service users
- inform them about hospital layout and procedures
- strengthen the relationship between service users and professionals
- stimulate the relationships between the service user and their social network friends and family

This act of sharing experience and knowledge, and passing it on from one user to another is vital to give continuity to the lifelong learning process.

Methodology

Having completed the EMILIA training, the users now realise the value that their own personal experience as users of mental health services has and they want to offer this knowledge to others. To move onto the next step and qualify as an EbE, further training needs to be completed this time focused on:

- communication and people skills
- learning more about the workings of the mental health institutions and social health services
- collaborating with clinical teams and learning how to delegate (pass on) relevant information
- learning to learn from experience
- learning how to encourage relationships between other users and their families of with professionals
- encouraging others to work towards empowerment

Results

The EbE training started on the 3rd of March 2009. All ten participants of the course were previous EMILIA trained users. The training was given by hospital staff with the help from some users and for the next training course it is planed to have users primarily as trainers,

with some back-up support from the professionals. Like the EMILIA training, the EbE training also applied the methodology of Life Long Learning. This meant that the training took a very interactive dynamic style and the personal experience of the user was given huge importance.

Conclusion

The traditional line of sanitaria care in mental health institutions has sometimes ignored the importance of recording the knowledge that users can give. By creating the profile of EbE within the mental hospital, this knowledge is guaranteed to transcend from one user to another and hence, not only benefiting the recovery process for the users involved,

but also improving the care given by the institutions. The sharing of knowledge and personal experience is an immediate step towards better understanding between mental health users and professionals.

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