

<i>Tag: Mental Health; Country: Finland; Language: English; Year: 2013; Event: ESN Seminar (Helsinki)</i>	
Programme's name	"Expert by experience" within "The Ostrobothnia Project"
<i>Original title:</i>	<i>Kokemusasantuntijatoiminta Pohjanmaa-hankkeessa</i>
<u>Organisation / Country:</u>	The Hospital District of South Ostrobothnia / Finland
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<u>Summary:</u>	<p>The project context of a mental health service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ostrobothnia Project was a project on mental health and substance misuse that started in 2005. The training of "Experts by experience" was introduced within the project. • The Ostrobothnia Project ended in 2014, and since then the activities within this project have been organised by the Hospital District of South Ostrobothnia. • The project was part of the implementation of the national plan for mental health and substance abuse called "Mieli 2009". <p>Within the Hospital District of South Ostrobothnia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Experts by experience" and peer counselors work as group tutors both in inpatient and outpatient units side by side with professionals and offer peer support for persons with long-term mental health problems. • "Experts by experience" and the peer counselors collaborate with professionals across varied areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ in the development stage of a hospital during consultative meetings, ▪ in offering mental health service users a meeting place with a low threshold in terms of accessibility,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ by sharing “lived experiences” of recovery in different kinds of frameworks involving health and/or social care, ▪ by participating in the creation and development of user organisations which raise awareness on mental health issues and make the users’ voices heard. <p>Effects of service user involvement and recovery-oriented peer support</p> <p>Through these activities, service users become empowered and develop a feeling of recovery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This recovery is reflected in a feeling of hope, which is considered a belief that it is possible for a mental health patient to regain a meaningful life despite a serious mental illness, • Users stay in control of their life and maintaining autonomy and independence even though they experience a mental health problem. • Service users get support and focus on supporting others in order not to reduce mental health problems to the treatment or management of symptoms. • After the running out of the project, the training is part of the subsequent Recovery College project in our Hospital District. Within the project, different types of courses directed to service users, carers, students and professionals are organised. On each course, one of the lecturers is an “Expert by experience” and the other is a professional. • Within the Hospital District, “Experts by experience” and peer counselors work side by side with professionals on various kinds of forums concerning planning, implementation and evaluation of mental health and substance abuse services, as well as group tutors both in inpatient and outpatient units. • The training of “Experts by experience” is only the first step in the implementation of peer support. Implementing service user involvement and recovery-focus in psychiatric care, and influencing attitudes requires long-term commitment. Support from the management and sufficient resources for
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	the co-ordination are essential for the full-scale implementation of the peer support framework.
<u>Issues:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In practice, there are many barriers to user involvement. These include attitudes of practitioners, paternalistic cultures of particular sectors and organisations as well as administrative barriers. • Influencing attitudes such as value-based attitudes of professionals requires long-term changes.
<u>Resources:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In years 2005-2014, the funding came from the national development programme for social welfare and health care (Kaste) and from municipalities. • Today, the funding comes from the Hospital District • The project has two full-time workers: a professional coordinator (a psychiatric nurse) and an assistant (an “Expert by experience”).
<u>Objectives:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing service user involvement is one of the main objectives in this project • Improving service users’ and carers’ empowerment • Reducing stigma connected with mental health and substance abuse problems • Offering a joint learning opportunity for different target groups • Gradually increasing the involvement of “Experts by experience” and peer counsellors in the planning, implementation and evaluation of mental health and substance abuse services as part of the national plan.
<u>Outcomes:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychiatric nurses’ professional attitudes have become more positive towards increased user involvement. • “Experts by experience” have influenced the attitudes of social and health care students, who can adopt new strategies more easily. • The service system responds more effectively to users’ needs. • Peer support for clients with long-term mental health problems has been implemented on a broader scale.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health users develop a feeling of empoweredness • Between 2010 and 2014, 70 “Experts by experience” have been trained.
<u>Evaluation:</u>	<p>Some key conclusions through informal, internal evaluations have emerged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The combination of training “Experts by experience” and counseling professionals through information and awareness have been considered success drivers. “Experts by experience” are perceived to have made a remarkable contribution by influencing the attitudes of professionals. • Job satisfaction (and staff empowerment) is increasing when improving service user involvement.