

2009

pro mente Vienna

[EMPOWERMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS]

Mental Health Europe Capacity Building Seminar
Brussels, June 12th, 2009

Dear Presidency, dear Members of the MHE Board,
dear Ladies, dear Gentlemen,

first of all I would like to thank you very much for your invitation today.

May I introduce myself, my name is Andreas Schwab, I'm 40 years old and a clinical and health psychologist. Since 2001 I've been working for pro mente Vienna and for 8 years now I have been developing and establishing the pro mente Academy. In addition to that I'm conducting seminars and also hold a psychological practice in Baden, a city close to Vienna.

I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to exchange today and share information about the activities of the pro mente Academy.

Let me also share with you that today it is a special occasion for me to be your guest in Brussels.

To provide you with a comprehensive overview, I've prepared a presentation, which will guide us through the next 15 minutes. Afterwards I understood that a brief discussion is planned.

Now, let's get to today's topic: empowerment for mental health professionals

The key questions are: what does an educational institution like the pro mente Academy do to support professionals in the social and health area? Which supporting tools can be used and which topics can be trained? Certainly I can't come up with a generally valid theory right now but I would like to show you the specific way of pro mente and also possible future ways and ideas.

Before getting to these two important points let me share a bit more with you about the history of education with pro mente:

Pro mente was founded in the middle of the 1960s. The main purpose from the very beginning has always been to inform the public about the situation of mentally ill people released from psychiatry and who should be re-integrated into our society.

First introductory courses in social psychiatry were offered at our "adult education centres" and reports showed a high interest of our population in these offers. The courses focused on making available knowledge about specific disease patterns, like schizophrenia, depression, anxiety disorder and alcohol dependency. Main target was to decrease prejudices and help relatives, persons concerned and professionals from different areas to get in contact with psychiatrists and other specialists to gain more knowledge and insight.

Another important side-effect of offering these courses for very reasonable prices was to win voluntary, unsalaried employees for pro mente which resulted in establishing the model of so-called “social tutors”.

The situation in those days was that patients were released primarily “unprotected” and there was no such post-treatment as we do know it today. Until today this mission of pro mente has not changed: we want to be available for people who have been in contact with psychiatry and support and guide them through a re-integration phase in our society. It has always been difficult to get some public funding for this essential task – that’s why we saw the need to establish the “social tutor model” instead of hoping that professionals exclusively take over these tasks because this seemed to be unrealistic. There is too much work already on their plate, they don’t earn enough money and hardly have some free time to focus on these tasks. We therefore also benefited from informative get-togethers at the adult education centres to find and motivate such non-professionals who were willing to spend their time on these post-treatment activities. The social tutors come from various professions and receive a step-by-step qualification, because it has always been essential to pro mente to provide these social tutors with education.

What did these courses look like? We established regular workshops with the goal to train treatment of and communication with mentally ill people and to transport knowledge about the different disease patterns and their development. A two-stage educational system was developed consisting of introductory courses in social psychiatry primarily offered at the adult education centres at approximately 10 evenings per semester, 1.5 hours each evening, and further on day-workshops with different focus topics for people who have decided to work voluntarily for pro mente. For these people these workshops are still free and take place various times a year.

But we also didn’t forget to focus on further education of our full-time employees. In the meantime - until the 1980s - pro mente associations were founded in almost all Austrian provinces and the question came up to offer a consistent social psychiatric, basic education to everyone. The purpose was to share state-of-the-art knowledge and also to create a networking opportunity for all pro mente employees.

Finally after various meetings of the local educational responsables a 100-hour curriculum was developed – the so-called social-psychiatric basic course, which was offered for the first time by the end of the 1980s/beginning of 1990s in various provinces, like Upper Austria, Vienna, Carinthia and Styria and later on in the Tyrol and Salzburg. Until today this course is an important part of our academy programme focusing primarily on: communication with and handling of mentally ill people, reflexion on one's own understanding of health and an overview of different key disease patterns.

We've always made a commitment that each employee – no matter if psychologist, social worker or assistant - will attend this basic course at the latest one year after initial employment. This variety of participants also encouraged networking besides professional exchange. It made cooperation much easier and also increased satisfaction and loyalty of our employees.

Today we've an even broader basis of participants, e.g. Caritas. And this makes the level of exchange even more interesting and exciting.

Being still THE key element of our academy the "social psychiatric basic course" later on evolved to a 300-hour-diploma curriculum, which is accredited all over our country. It consists of four elements: "social psychiatric basic course"/ basic modules covering applied psychiatry and methods in social psychiatry / advanced training courses additional ones by choice like consulting, residing, work / and further 80 hours of various seminar topics. At the end each participant works on his/her project and receives a diploma.

In the late 90s, based on the experiences with this 300-hour diploma, we started to work on a cooperation with universities. In 2006/2007 for the first time, we successfully offered a university curriculum for social psychiatry, which takes four semesters and covers 60 ECTS points.

Highly motivated by this successful implementation our colleagues from Upper Austria and Carinthia continued to work on the development of a master curriculum, which will be launched in September 2009 for the first time in Austria. By that we wanted to meet the increasing demand of qualified professionals needed in various contexts and bridge a gap in the market, as there had not been offered such an education in Austria so far. This master programme will take 5 semesters, equal 100 ECTS points, and will be offered at the university of Klagenfurt, capital city of Carinthia. It will cover primarily the following cornerstones: social psychiatry, law & business administration, management and research methodologies. Participants graduate as Masters of Mental Health (Social Psychiatry), abbreviated MMH.

To summarize what I just described: based on our mission to offer support for mentally ill people in their daily life we developed a feasible educational system for voluntary laymen as a response to reduced possibilities of the professionals. Parallel to that we continuously optimized our educational offers for our full-time employees, which ultimately resulted in a university level education.

Our programme: what are our current offers?

Moving from our history to my second topic I would now like to talk to you about the focal points of our programme.

Traditionally, education has always played an essential role with social and health professions. Besides that, today we are talking about the necessity of life-long learning and learning as a continuously evolving process. This is very well described by Richard Sennett, who provided statistics that today a person with at least undergraduate education will change his/her job approximately 11 times in a 40-year working life and needs to build up new basic knowledge from the scratch at a minimum of 3 times a life.

Learning and development are considered key factors for social balance and peace, playing a critical role in increasing opportunities on the labour market and promoting social integration and finally individual health.

On developing our educational offers we consider both the high qualitative requirements applying to social psychiatric and psychosocial topics and future focus areas, which haven't yet sufficiently been taken into consideration. You can also get more details on our programmes when looking at both our homepages: www.promenteakademie.at and www.bildungsinstitut.at - they are not only available for our employees but also for other organizations, personally concerned/involved and interested people.

So, let me summarize now our current focus areas of education:

As already described we provide various seminars, workshops and short-term curricula, which increase competence in dealing and communicating with mentally ill people. Again, I'd like to emphasize that there are a lot of self-reflexive elements included as working on one's own understanding of health.

Secondly, we offer legally accredited professional education - like counselling, mediation or psychotherapist preparation curricula. Apart from getting a profound professional training by these programmes the advantage lies in achieving a legally accredited certificate, which is highly appreciated by various companies and organizations but the graduates can also work as self-employed person and start an independent operation/practice.

Last but not least I would like to mention a very new field of activity of increasing importance: workplace health promotion. Many companies have already realized the relevance of not only focusing on professional qualification but also prevention. This includes destigmatization of mental/psychological burdens and diseases, visualization of working conditions fostering such burdens and the development of methods to sustain and improve mental health at work.

Finally I would like to talk about our participants: They come from various social and health professions, but also career changers take part. Our success is based on the fact, that many of our trainers have gained experience at pro mente and that's a perfect combination of theory and practice. The participants appreciate our vivid form of lectures.

A point that makes us different from other providers of such courses is that our participants can do their practical experience directly at pro mente.

Outlook – future projects planned at pro mente

During the last years we could primarily observe a quite “disconnected” development of activities from our different pro mente associations in Austria and we did not proactively drive work on joint programmes. Based on that, primarily two organizations and networks in the pro mente family successfully grew – the Viennese Academy and the Upper Austrian Educational Institute in Linz, capital city of Upper Austria. The cultural capital city of Europe 2009.

Two years ago, in 2007, the Viennese Academy then successfully supported the organization of the MHE Congress in Vienna which again confirmed our belief in finally bringing together all our educational programmes under ONE umbrella/one academy.

And this is the most recent result: from January 1st 2010 on this will become true and I’m pleased to announce that I’ve been offered the joint executive management of the new pro mente Academy together with my colleague Mrs. Aschauer. We are expecting a more streamlined marketing and networking and are looking for a further enlargement of our legally accredited parts of education as well as further educational locations in Austria. Furthermore, on the long-term, we also plan to win further cooperation partners within Austria and beyond.

Finally some facts and figures: currently we do have a turnover of approximately 1.5 million EUR and teach about 4,000 people a year (which amounts to 6,500 hours): 80% of our results derive from our efforts in Vienna and Linz (Upper Austria). The rest comes from the other pro mente educational departments in Austria.

Now, getting to the end of my presentation and as input for the following discussion, I would like to emphasize the following as future co-CEO: my interest in a cooperation beyond borders is extremely high and I deeply believe in opportunities deriving from a European cooperation of MHE and the potential development of a future study group. Not having yet done intensive research let me share topics which came into my mind when thinking about highly interesting, interactive topics: international studies about mental diseases and poverty; state-of-the-art studies about measures and prevention regarding mental diseases of employees and about counselling of relatives across European countries, evaluation and statistics about mental diseases in child- and youth-related literature, illustration of educational paths of professionals in this area and development of tools for media and our educational system to respond to the burning topic of mental health.

No matter which topics the European task force is working on, the goal has to be to generate an educational event of high quality and sustainability. Our participants should be empowered with new knowledge and perspectives to go back to their workplaces having a better competitive situation.

Last but not least: From my point of view, there is “learning by doing” in every day life and politics; “learning by talking” with colleagues and friends; “learning by reading” on the couch; and: “learning by pro mente” in our academy ;-)

I’m looking forward to an interesting discussion now and hope that you have enjoyed my presentation and inputs. Again, I’d like to emphasize that any future exchange or project on European level would be a great success from which we all could benefit.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.