

European Association System and the possibilities of Sport as universal key of social well –being

It is an honour for me that Alessandro asked me for a few words. I want to say "Thank you very much" to Alessandro and Anpis for the invitation to Parma. We started our relationship 2002, when our football teams met in Prato the first time to participate at 8th Aurora Tournament. Meanwhile we have been meeting each after several times, in Plattling 2002, at the Easi Cup 2003 and at the 9th Aurora Tournament.

I am Working as a Social Worker at a mental health Service in Plattling, lower Bavaria near the Border to the Czech Republic. My 11 colleagues – a nurse, several social workers, one psychologist, Working Trainer and me offer a wide range of support for people with mental health problems.

First I want to explain, what our service do, what I do, and give an overview about Terms like "Well-being", "Stigma", "Mental Health promotion", which are central in usage of European concepts and work out that Sport is a very good possibility to tackle Stigma and Discrimination.

The Mental Health Service Plattling offers:

Advocacy is about having a voice in the kind of service you receive. It is about getting the right information and support to be able to make choices about your treatment. It is about being listened to and taking control of your situation.

It is important for people with mental health problems to have access to as much information as they want and need about their illness and the range of treatments available. Much of the fear and stigma can be resolved with appropriate information.

All Advocacy is about empowerment. It is about people speaking up for themselves and their rights, making their views heard and gaining control over their lives.

Counselling is listening by a trained counsellor who will not usually give you advice but will usually encourage you to work out what you want and what your next steps would be.

Counselling and psychotherapy can provide an opportunity to explore emotional problems in a confidential setting, and to look at difficulties arising from the past, which may be reflected in your current relationships.

Employment Service: We offers 40 jobs for people with mental disorders, who are not able to get a regular job because of their lack of job efficiency. A few of them work from 5 hours a week up to 15 hours a week we have some part time jobs and 3 full time jobs

"TagWerk" provides supported employment, training and work experience to learn or re – learn occupational skills. Access to meaningful job is also considered to be one of the most important ways of empowering people suffering from mental disorders. 1-2 placements in the normal workplaces are achieved every year.

Supported Housing

People with severe mental health problems have the possibility, to live together with other people with similar problems, supported by professionals, who care for them.

This Housing Service is part of my job. I visit people in their accommodations to help them organizing their daily life. Many of my clients are not able to live a structured life. Because of that it is necessary to help them build a stable framework. This framework includes employment, accommodation, leisure time and time for meeting friends for instance in our Bistro.

I am specialized in mental health. My responsibility is to provide help, advice and information for clients and their families / carers about a range of practical issues e.g. advice on housing and benefits. Together with the clients we work out assessments of needs and refer appropriate services e.g. residential care, day care, day activities, support within the home, financial management, employment advice etc. I am also the Care Coordinator.

Additionally I am responsible for Sport activities like football, badminton, swimming, and bowling. Regularly Sport activities, like football and Badminton weekly, other activities every 2 weeks..

Red Cross Team: the last five years

I am very proud of being the manager of the Red Cross Kickers, the football team of our health service. There I coordinate the sponsoring, plan trips to tournaments, look out for new players and work together with other teams in Bavaria and abroad.

The Trainer of RCK –Fritz Schmid is an involved Service User in the way that he organizes weekly trainings, is responsible for the team when we go to tournaments and he has an important role concerning the positive team atmosphere.

These sport activities are the most accepted group offers within our service. The reason for this is clear. Illness, disorders and disabilities play no role. Football gets a common experience in which everybody is contributing to a common goal. It is having fun, sharing life and gaining experience. In this sense sport becomes a universal language, which everybody understands.

I have never seen my team more fully integrated in social life than in Prato, Linz, Hradiste, Plattling, Munich or Manchester – all the places where we have played football on European Pitches the last few years.

Relationships have developed between players from different countries, friendships have arisen between sport groups leaders like Stefan, Jan, Colin, Chris, Paddy, Paul and between all the others, who quietly do their job, with passion and enthusiasm, often with few resources. All the members of pro sport, Regenbogen, Fokus, New Way Forward ... they are working hard often on an honorary basis and out of scheduled work hours.

And clients also work hard. With our help they compensate Anxiety, Attacks of Panic, depressive moods or Confusion for participating in training and trips.

Professionals and Service Users meet each other on the same level, and everybody tries to do his best.

The topic of this conference contains two statements:

European Association and well being

For both terms I will try to give an answer.

European Association means, that we try to play in a European league, that means we have to follow the agenda of the European Commission, the European Parliament and Decisions of the European Ministerial Conference on Mental Health

One of the most important documents is the WHO Mental Health Action Plan for Europe, discussed in Helsinki, Finland this year.

The priorities for the next decade are to:

- foster awareness of the importance of mental well-being
- collectively tackle stigma, discrimination and inequality, and empower and support people with mental health problems and their families.
- design and implement comprehensive, integrated and efficient mental health systems that cover promotion, treatment and rehabilitation, care and recovery.

The **first point** of this action plan is to promote mental well – being.

Mental health and well-being are fundamental for quality of life, enabling people to experience their life as a meaningful one and to be creative and active citizens.

In my opinion we have to look more critical at the term “Mental well-being” . There is a spectrum of mental states that range from clinically diagnosed psychopathologies such as depression, eating disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorders to total wellness that might be represented by constructs such as high self-esteem, subjective well-being and life satisfaction.

The **Third point** of this action plan is to tackle stigma and discrimination

Human rights and the respect for people with mental health problems must be a priority. Stigma, loneliness and disgrace probably affect our clients more than any other groups of disabled people.

People with mental health problems consistently identify stigma and discrimination as major issues affecting their lives. They can make it more difficult for people to find or keep work, to receive health and social care services or adequate housing and to generally enjoy life. In addition, while mental health problems are usually time limited, stigma and discrimination last. They often affect people long after the symptoms of mental distress have been resolved. Discrimination can lead to relapses in mental health problems and can intensify existing symptoms.

Both terms Well – being and Stigma / Discrimination are connected very closely with mental health promotion

What is mental health promotion?

Mental health promotion involves any action to enhance the mental wellbeing of individuals, families, organisations and communities. It is important to recognise that everyone has mental health needs, whether or not they have a diagnosed mental illness. Mental health promotion programmes that target the whole community also include and benefit people with mental health problems and mental illnesses.

Mental health promotion does not emphasise the disease. It emphasises the individual resilience and the supportive environment. The values of trust, community participation, cooperation and empowerment, are central to mental health promotion.

In this way it is as user – centred as possible. Mental health focuses on the peoples` real and whole lives, not just on the problems and symptoms. Well being as focusing on what keeps people well, not just dealing with what let them feel “unwell”.

Mental health promotion works on three interconnected levels which may be relevant to the whole population, individuals at risk, vulnerable groups or people with mental health problems:

strengthen individuals: Increase emotional resilience through interventions designed to promote self esteem, and develop life skills such as communicating, negotiating, relationship. Actions to build protective factors would strengthen psychosocial, life and coping skills of individuals. This might include cognitive behavioural skills for managing stress, mental distress or anger management. It might also include skills for active participation and enhanced opportunities for lifelong learning.

strengthen communities: Increase social support, social inclusion and participation; improve community safety and neighbourhood environments; develop health and social services which support mental health; Actions to build protective factors would increase social support as a buffer against adverse life events.

reduce structural barriers to mental health: Develop initiatives to reduce discrimination and inequalities in society as a whole and to promote access to education, meaningful employment, housing, services, and support for those who are vulnerable. Interventions to strengthen protective factors would include: increasing access to resources and services that protect mental well-being.

Now I want to work out how sport activities with our clients fulfil the EU's and WHO's programs.

Sport as Treatment

Many people experience mental health problems at some point in their lives.

Some recent research shows that in average in every year 1 in 4 of us is affected by mental health problems, although many of us do not seek professional help. Within the group of people with professional treatment about 80% suffer from depression, anxiety or other stress – related problems, while 10% suffer from psychotic illness and a further 10% from dementia. .

While medication is often an important feature in that treatment, -particularly for people with a psychotic illness,- counselling, relaxation and other stress-reducing techniques like sport yakuable approaches as well.

Probably you know the “up and running” campaign of Mental Health Foundation in UK. They started because substantial evidence shows that exercise therapy can be an effective treatment for depression.

The campaign aims to

- increase the use of exercise referral schemes in treating mild to moderate depression
- raise awareness of the fact that physical exercise is one of the most effective ways to look after and improve your mental health
- raise awareness of the importance of finding and using effective ways of treating depression

Mental Health is not simply the absence of mental illness or disorder.

It can include:

- self-esteem, self confidence, be aware of controlling the own life, being a part of the family or local community

It can be reflected in the use of various skills:

- communication, assertiveness, problem solving, decision-making

Sport is also part of Mental Health promotion to:

- improve physical health and well-being
- provide capability to cope with mental distress in life
- prevent or reduce the risk of some mental health problems, notably behavioural disorders, depression and anxiety
- assist recovery from mental health problems

Meeting other people with similar problems and discussing ways of coping is an immense benefit. The fear and stigma unfortunately often attached to mental health problems frequently stop people from

talking about it and this leads to an isolation in the way 'I'm the only one who feels this way and has this problem'.

On the one hand, the importance of movement- and body-oriented therapies in the treatment of psychosomatic diseases and psychiatric patients is increasing. A well-known German psychiatrist, W. Blankenburg, thinks that, aside from psychopharmacology, movement therapy will be the most important therapeutic tool in psychiatry in the future. On the other hand, the empirical evidence for effects going beyond physiological stimulation is rare.

Besides supporting the physical and mental well-being (body concept, self-concept) developing social contacts and skills is an important aim as well.

Sport is not only an excellent way of being physically active. It has an important social dimension as well. This contributes to the mental health and well-being.

Sport activities are effective, alternative low-cost therapies, with no negative side effects.

Mental health promotion does have a role in preventing certain mental health problems, notably depression, anxiety, substance abuse and behavioural disorders. However, mental health promotion also promotes recovery and quality of life for people with mental health problems.

Therefore it helps to strengthen individuals.

Strengthen community and reduce structural barriers

In 2003 our Mental Health Service in Plattling organised the first E.A.S.I. Cup with 5 teams from England, France, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany and as well as a very welcome representative from Italy - Alessandro. Our budget was about 7000€, so we were able to invite 60 people from abroad to spend 4 days in Plattling. The preparation, organisation and holding of such events require "integrating" with community and civil resources, the search for funding assistance beyond the health services, sponsors, contact with travel providers and the involvement of friends and support network in the preparation of the event. The nature of sport and the organisation of sport events as the EASI Cup and annually tournaments means that everyone naturally becomes an active, dynamic contributor. I was in contact with many people in our town, the mayor, town councillors, local radio and TV to explain our aims and achieve awareness.

All of them have an idea of what people with mental health problems need, what they do, how they feel. All of them were directly included in preliminary discussions and preparations.

The first EASI Cup in Plattling had also certain positive effect subsequently:

Discussions with many "non – affected" people, who asked me, why it is necessary to organize such events.

We have no problems now, to get the stadium or sport grounds for training and sport Events.

Red Cross Kickers is like a label ; Newspapers know about our work.

Many other Mental Health Services in Bavaria are interested in what we do, started also sport activities.

Most important for me: Easi Cup and public interest convinced my boss

He was sceptical of my involvement in Sport and asked me from time to time if this was really part of my work. Since the first EASI Cup he has never asked me again.

Stigma and Discrimination against the mentally ill.

Last point of my talk

Good treatment is a cornerstone in minimizing discrimination. Sport activities for people with mental health problems are a very good “treatment”. Schizophrenia for example is highly stigmatized. The changed treatment and care of our clients have improved their living conditions and their quality of life. Our engagement in Plattling has changed negative attitudes and promote awareness of the clients rights; people get enabled to lead fulfilling lives in the way they choose. Over the years – and especially since the inaugural EASI Cup 2003,- we have become an integral part of the scene here in Plattling.

This was recognized by the German Section of the World Psychiatric Association and “openthe doors”. Probably you know about the international campaign against stigma and discrimination.

From all the projects presented we won 2nd prize. Good mental health isn't something you have, but something you do, and organizing EASI Cup in Plattling was the best, that we have done in the last years.

EASI will bring together people interested in sharing information about sport - including detailing local, regional, national and international sports events, promoting new services, supporting community participation, and building the evidence base for the value of sport in maintaining positive wellbeing. So there is no magic or psychologically demanding about achievable integration. It just includes simple, practical means.

Our regular football training every Thursday evening throughout the year is open to anyone, who cares to participate – not only users of our mental health service. Some 10 to 15 years old boys from the town take part regularly. This is a good example of social integration through Sport at a very young age. These young boys are meeting and playing football with our clients without barriers, without prejudice.

Our job must be to learn to be wise, to have the kind of wisdom that comes from understanding the injustice experienced by those suffering from mental illness and the wisdom to confront ourselves with our attitudes and actions. Our collective challenge is to reach us each other through our individual differences and break down the wall of silence.

If we do our job well, we who meet us here today have the power to create a movement of healing.

Thank you

Günther Skibbe