

## **“NON-TRADITIONAL ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES; SPORT HELPS TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL INTEGRATION”**

‘Good evening! I am Colin Godfrey, Activities Development Nurse with Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare (NHS) Trust.

I am honoured and delighted to have been asked to say a few words on ‘Non-Traditional Access Opportunities; Sport Helps to Achieve Social Integration’.

But first, I would like to say, on behalf of our ‘Coasters’, ‘thank you’; to the Bavarian Red Cross in Plattling, to Bernd, Philip, Gunther, Joshi and Stefan especially amongst others, and to the City Fathers for extending such warm hospitality to us and to our aspirations.

It is significant that such a major event as this can take place, affecting the lives of so many through the investment of energy, enthusiasm and tenacity of a comparatively small but effective organisation and group of individuals, working together with the people of Plattling, from all walks of life.

What might we mean when we say ‘Non-Traditional Access Opportunities (to Sport)?’. And what do we mean when we say ‘Achieving Social Integration’?

As a nurse working in ‘non traditional’ ways of engaging with people experiencing the effects of mental health problems; that is to say focusing on the positive possibilities through sharing the experiences of dynamic activity, and not focusing on ‘treatment’ by drugs or by ‘doing things to patients’; I was tempted to search for scientific papers which would describe and analyse the use and effects of sport on the physiology and well-being of participants, particularly of those with mental illness, and which would analyse and describe ‘Social integration’

For, traditionally, health services have been founded on the ‘research’, ‘findings’ and persuasion of learned professionals in the field of healthcare. Patients have been required to ‘fit’ into diagnostic and medical models of illness and disease. Treatment has been based primarily on the use of drugs to affect the ‘centres’ of disease and so produce a modification of ‘abnormal’ behaviour.

However, it became apparent to me that my desire for ‘professional’ and learned justification ignored the obvious; both in terms of simple facts and of self-evident truths visible to anyone able to see and understand human experience.

Traditional access opportunities to, say, the stadium of Bayern Munich’s football team are either through the public gates, or as a member of a football team!.

Inside the stadium, whether in the crowd or on the pitch, all human experience can be encountered: hope, despair, anticipation, joyful celebration, skill, determination, individual flair, teamwork, responsibility, support, the sharing of emotion, the feeling of belonging, the feeling of contributing to life, the feeling of being a part of life, the feeling of being able to 'receive' and give from, and to others.

Social Integration is self-evident within that stadium.. 'rich' and 'poor', men, women, children, businessmen, artists, commentators, analysts, food sellers, arbitrators and officials, players, ground staff, directors, managers, players from other countries and cultures, spectators from other countries and backgrounds, players who can speak well on radio and television and those who express themselves entirely through their playing of the game.

So it can be to those with the difficult experience of mental health problems. As it is in Plattling this week where everyone including those who are receiving care from the Mental Health Services in one form or another and those who are working to provide care and support in one way or another is sharing a common experience in which everyone is contributing to a common goal... to play football, to have fun, to share life, and to gain from the experience through the universal language of sport.

It is, I think, very obvious that 'Social Integration' can be achieved through sport. The evidence is here all around us.

In 2001, 3 members of the 'Coasters' visited Italy for our first contact with ANPIS (the Italian National Association for Sport and Social Integration). In 2002 two 'Coasters' groups, each of 16 persons visited Italy again, in June and September.

In 2003, a group from Manchester has already visited Regenbogen, a group from Trieste has visited Oxford and Southend in the U.K., we are visiting Plattling now, and a group from Southend will be visiting Prato in Italy in September. In July, 32 teams will, for the first time, get together in Manchester for a major Football Tournament.

This is very simple evidence of hundreds of people with a whole range of human experience getting together and 'integrating'.

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 families, friends and support networks in the preparation for the events.

Mental health service users cannot be 'passive' consumers or recipients. The nature of sport and the organisation of sport mean that everyone naturally becomes an active, dynamic contributor.

There is, I believe a challenge being delivered to the Statutory Health Services; a challenge which asks them to have confidence in the evidence of health benefits, social integration and self-determination so obviously available through International events such as these, and through the work

quietly being done by people with passion and enthusiasm, often with few resources.

This challenge also requires that the statutory services be more proactive in the allocation of financial and human resources to this work.

The members of RCK Plattling, C.A.T. de la Nièvre, Fokus Młoda Bolesław, Pro Sport, Regenbogen and the Coasters, along with Va Pensiero, Aurora, Fuori'centro, Soledalia, ANPIS, the Southend Scorchers, Swindon Rovers, Trafford Association of Mental Health and many others are already working hard. The stigma, fear and ignorance which has surrounded the term 'mental illness' is being reduced by the simple method of people engaging together in a wide range of sport and other activities.

Sport is not an 'invisible' activity, the visit to the Bayern Munich Stadium I mentioned earlier clearly demonstrates that simple truth.

There is nothing 'magic' nor psychologically demanding about the idea of 'integration' being achievable through simple, practical means.

I hope that we can continue to embrace and celebrate our common experience, through events such as these, and through the firm establishment of the European Association for (Sport and ) Social Integration.

Thankyou.

Colin Godfrey