

## MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT FOR SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

The project seeks to improve mental health in the population by setting up community mental health services in the region. Ten community mental health centres (CMHCs) will be opened as demonstration centres in the eight participating countries by February 2005. Their shared goal will be to reduce reliance on in-patient care and to ensure high-quality care in order to produce positive outcomes for patients in their catchment area.

### DEMONSTRATION CMHCs

Country	Location of CMHC	Catchment area (population)
Albania	Vlora	110 000
Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)	Prnjavor (Republika Srpska) Mostar (Federation of BiH)	49 366 65 000
Bulgaria	Blagoevgrad	80 000
Croatia	Zagreb	83 617
Republic of Moldova	Chisinau	110 000
Romania	Bucharest	120 000
Serbia and Montenegro	Nis (Serbia) Kotor (Montenegro)	70 000 60 000
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Strumica	120 000

### Mental health as freedom

For people with mental illness, enhancing freedom means **freedom from** things that impair their capabilities (such as clinical symptoms, custodial restraint, poverty, stigma and humiliation) and **freedom to** live as normal a life as possible. This means being able to realize economic opportunities by having the chance to earn a dignified livelihood, being able to take part in social life, being a valued member of the community, and being able to fully exercise their liberties by being involved in decisions that affect their own lives.

This perception of mental health as freedom means that the success criterion changes both for psychiatry as a discipline and for public policy in mental health. The criterion for success is measured by the extent to which sources that restrain freedom are eradicated and sources that give freedom are enhanced for people suffering from mental illness.

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Mental Health  
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Europe

USER VOICES

FROM MENTAL INSTITUTION  
TO COMMUNITY CARE  
IN  
SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

## STIGMA

"When we break a leg and go to hospital, people come to visit us in hospital and bring us flowers. When we go to a psychiatric hospital, they just come to visit us." (A health-service user)

"I used to live with my brother. He kept telling me I was crazy. He took me to hospital and then moved into my house. I'm so scared he might take my daughter away from me." (A health-service user)

## DISCRIMINATION

"Throughout the job interview, I could tell that they were desperately trying to find some reason to reject me. I felt they despised me for having the cheek to apply for the job in the first place, given my gruesome health record." (A health-service user)

## HUMILIATION

"When all this happened to me, I went to see a psychiatrist at the hospital. He gave me a whole load of pills that made me feel even worse. Within a month, I thought I was going completely insane." (A health-service user)

"My wife left me when I fell ill. Now she refuses to let me see my kids. I wish I were not alive." (A health-service user)

"In hospital they would just tell me to take the pink or the white pill. No one seemed to care how I really felt." (A health-service user)

## ABUSE

"After experiencing abuse twice, I found that hospitalization had become the greatest of all my fears. Now, luckily, I know it can be avoided. There are much friendlier alternatives available in my community." (A health-service user)

"I hated hospital. And I was afraid of other patients. I was in worse shape on being discharged than I was at admission. They gave us orders all the time." (A health-service user)

## MENTAL INSTITUTIONS

The continued reliance on mental institutions is still a pressing concern in most SEE countries. The reasons for the paucity of alternative models of mental health care are many, ranging from inadequate policies to severe underfunding. No less important a barrier is the fierce stigmatization of the mentally ill in the community and even in the psychiatric profession.

"Inadequate", "cruel" and "degrading" are among the most frequent attributes associated with treatment in mental institutions. Violations of human rights, including inhuman living conditions and actual abuse, are alarmingly common in such institutions. Sadly, these violations are perpetuated in the community, where limitations in education, employment, housing and other social opportunities abound. They pose further barriers against recovery, and occasionally result in human tragedies.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES

Over the past two decades, the delivery of mental health services in developed countries has changed radically. There are two major reasons for this development. The first is the introduction of care in the community and the commencement of de-institutionalization. Community care aims at providing comprehensive, coordinated and high-quality services that are available and accessible to all members of a defined population. The second reason is the development of a movement for users of mental health services. This movement brought about substantial favourable changes in ways of understanding and responding to the needs of users.

The development of community care and the greater say of consumers in designing mental health policy and services have ensured individual improvements for many non-hospitalized mentally ill persons. These advances have also resulted in significant social changes towards the genuine acceptance of people with mental disorders.

## EMPOWERMENT

"The centre itself has a more positive impact on me than medication alone." (A health-service user)

"This has been a very beneficial experience for me and I'll keep coming to the centre in the future. I don't feel as helpless as I used to and things that I once dreaded don't bother me all that much any more" (A health-service user)

"Here in the centre, I have the opportunity to look after other patients. It gives me a feeling of responsibility. I feel much, much better now." (A health-service user)

## CONTINUING CARE

"The home visits first started a month ago. I was so pleased: they came to visit me; they came into my space, into my life. We had a little chat ... I was very pleased after this visit." (A health-service user)

"I like knowing that I belong somewhere, that I have somewhere to go to. Also, there will soon be work for us to do here in the centre. When I was in hospital in Zagreb, I grew plants. I liked that very much." (A health-service user)

## PARTNERSHIP

"I wrote articles about the centre's cooperation with other organizations, and they were broadcasted on the radio." (A health-service user)

"The doctor invited my wife to the centre for a talk. It helped - we did not get divorced in the end." (A health-service user)

## TRUST

"Treatment in our local mental health centre has completely changed my attitude towards the mental health professionals. I trust them more and now I dare tell them the truth." (A health-service user)

