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ABSTRACTS FOR WORKSHOPS

H. Rehabilitation

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Disability, rehabilitation, and dialogue – a Finnish perspective

Finnish disability and rehabilitation legislation dates back to 1940_s, the end of WW II. From the start, nongovernmental organizations have had an exceptionally strong position (in an international comparison) as service providers. A Finnish specialty, financing through grants from the Slot Machine Association, has supported to this day, for instance, the active development of peer support oriented rehabilitation.

From the 1960's onwards a psychosocial approach to rehabilitation has gained ground in disability and rehabilitation policies, and the International Year of Disabled Persons and the UN Decade (1983-1993) more or less finalized the ideological development towards self-determination of disabled persons, and independent living as a goal.

The psychosocial, multidisciplinary base of rehabilitation and counselling has reflected the contemporary theoretical and therapeutic ideas in psychology and social sciences at various points of its development. In the 1970's, disabled persons were encouraged to be more assertive, in 1980's the importance of social support to good health and active life was acknowledged, in the 1990's the rights of disabled persons gained an ideological upper hand, and now, perhaps, we have witnessed a revolution of information networks and accessibility.

But finally, all these problems have to be solved over and over again, in practice and everyday life. Programmes are not easily turned into action. Even our basic concepts – rehabilitation and disability – may be replaced by something else. Instead of rehabilitation, policy documents say employability and disability is just one problem of inclusion.

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Peer counselling for spinal cord injured patients during rehabilitation – in between professionalism and voluntary action

Taking charge and responsibility to arrange peer support and counselling for spinal cord patients is one way and form of empowerment social work during the rehabilitation phase. The social work unit in Käpylä Rehabilitation Centre has long-term developed peer activities for the purpose of strengthening the right orientation and participation after the spinal cord injury in cooperation with other professionals and also with voluntary work, i.e. earlier injured spinal cord patients with their own experience and expertise. The social work unit has a coordinating role in the interdisciplinary team.

Peer counselling activities have been a regular part of spinal cord rehabilitation in some form since 1995. The aim of peer counselling is to promote persons with disabilities to overcome their problems due to their disorders. Peer counselling helps and supports their fellow patient in daily living. Nowadays the activities are organized by a full-time working spinal cord person coordinating the activities, also meeting patients, and using the team of 10 part-time working counsellors with various spinal cord disabilities, age and gender. Also relatives are included in the activities.

An evaluation is made concerning different impacts of peer activities during rehabilitation. A follow-up study was done connecting the earlier developing project. The study in the field of social psychology and social work was prepared in 2008. The aim of this study was to examine peer counselling activities. The study focused on the following research questions:

1. What is the position of peer counselling in the field of peer support and voluntary action?
2. How can professional aspects and, on the other hand, voluntary and layman aspects be combined in peer counselling activities?
3. How does peer counselling function in rehabilitation?

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Severely disabled spinal cord injured person as an employer for a personal assistant

In Finland a severely disabled person has the right to have a personal assistant. The duration of the service is agreed on with the home municipality, which covers the costs for salary of the assistant. The SCI person should be the employer. Therefore there are many items, which are not clear for the newly disabled employer.

Käpylä Rehabilitation Centre is a rehabilitation unit owned by the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities. The Association promotes and supports equal opportunities, promotes human rights and opposes discrimination among people with mobility disabilities. The Association influences societal development and produces services required by the disabled.

Käpylä Rehabilitation Centre provides public health care and rehabilitation for persons with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, stroke or polio. The services and treatments are based on internationally accepted methodology, interdisciplinary teamwork and patients' own initiative

Many spinal cord injured patients need a lot of assistance in order to manage activities of daily life, ADL. According to the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act municipalities have to provide sufficient assistant services. Based on this act a SCI disabled person can employ personal assistants for him or herself. SCI persons receive direct payments from municipalities that cover all the expenses for a employer.

The social work unit of Käpylä Rehabilitation Centre has worked in a project the purpose of which is to improve SCI persons' skills as an employer to be. A social worker who has spinal cord injury himself has created special tools for group counselling the patient using lectures and dialogue discussion.

A general impression was that counselling raised essentially the knowledge in recruiting the employee and the labour legislation: how to make a contract of employment, which are the rules for responsibilities and rights of both parts and how to overcome disagreement. The program helped the counsellor more specifically to focus on lecturing and prepare attached brochures supporting the patient to be such as good an employer as possible.