

## **Psychosocial Rehabilitation (PSR): PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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Real Psychosocial Rehabilitation (PSR) is primarily a process of continual and facilitated change. It is a metamorphosis in the making, working towards required goals. These goals should be designed by the very people who make use of the services themselves. Essentially PSR is about helping individuals within a community. It is a process whereby every individual strives to discover their true purpose in life. With this enlightenment, we naturally become more passionate about our lives, living it to the fullest and making a greater contribution to the community within which we live.

The goals of this process are not simplistic and therefore not easily defined. Every individual has their own unique set of goals and aspirations. These goals and aspirations differ not only from individual to individual but also between cultures and countries. This is especially evident in South Africa where we have a very diverse and cosmopolitan population with no less than 11 official languages.

The Core Principles of Psychosocial Rehabilitation play an enormous role in goal setting. The unfortunate reality is that since the inception of de-institutionalization in the 1990's, the South African government has not been able to take a leading role in promoting PSR.

The practical implementation and knowledge of PSR remains limited, especially within the various South African government ranks. This is not necessarily due to a lack of interest but rather the result of limited resources. In South Africa, de-institutionalization is seen as a way to save on stringent budget deficits. It is common practice for individuals to be discharged from hospitals and placed in dilapidated old hospital buildings instead of being integrated back into the communities, which is one of the goals of PSR.

As a result thereof, budgets do not move with the clients. This places an enormous burden on the few Non Profit Organizations (NPO's), willing or able to take on the role and responsibility of the core functions which, according to the South African Mental Health Act, should remain the responsibility of the state.

However, it is not all doom and gloom! The focus now, is on establishing community based services and integrating mental health services into primary health care. Despite all the challenges described above, there is a group of community organizations known as MHNS (Mental Health NPO Stakeholders) who have taken on a new attitude. This group represents more than 150 community based projects focusing on service delivery in the communities of the Western Cape. They are well represented and recognized by the Western Cape Department of Health, having a good working relationship. They are planning on expanding to all 9 provinces of South Africa within the next 2 years.

The MHNS seeks to advocate for those without a voice; to ensure consumer participation on all levels of decision making, and to focus on recovery as the ultimate goal, by ensuring the following:

1. Constant bi lateral communication and collective planning with relevant government role-players.
2. Access to the appropriate services for all in need thereof.
3. Community integration within the constraints of limited resources.
4. Self determination of the clients' future, (Greek=parakletos: to walk alongside with) rather than to make decisions on their behalf or dictate to them. We find life coaching techniques to be very helpful in this area of facilitating rather than causing change.
5. Engaging clients on an equal level, assisting them in an almost spontaneous way in their living, working, learning and socializing environment.