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The Amitim ('friends') program: An innovative model for social rehabilitation of people with serious mental illness in the community and the promotion of community resilience

The promotion of recovery is a central goal of public mental health systems. Recovery includes the pursuit of active living (i.e., enjoyable, expressive, and meaningful leisure experiences), and meaningful inter-personal relationships. While most social recreation programs for people with serious mental illness (SMI) are segregated, the Amitim program (by the Israeli Ministry of Health and the Israeli Association of Community Center) offers an innovative model of social and recreation oriented rehabilitation for people with SMI within the general community. Over the last decade Amitim program has reached 75 cities nationwide and gives service to 3000 people with SMI. Amitim aims to achieve two main goals: the promotion of personal recovery via meaningful leisure activities in the community; through (a) monthly meetings with a mental health professional within the community centre (non-stigmatic facility) and creating with the person with SMI a tailor made suit to comply with his personal social recovery objectives. In addition, the person with SMI takes part in (b) leisure and volunteering activities within the community, whereby he practices his social skills and participates in meaningful activities. Lastly, the person is entitled for (c) a leisure-oriented scholarship that enables him to reach his social-oriented aspirations. The second main goal of Amitim is the promotion of social change and community resilience with and by people with SMI, through lectures and workshops to the general community concerning mental disability and stigma, thus increasing partnership and resilience in the community. To the best of our knowledge, Amitim represents a "one of a kind" model that enables both social-oriented recovery for people with SMI in their community, alongside the promotion of community resilience and social change.

Recent Publications

1. Dor I A B and Savaya R (2007) Community rehabilitation for persons with psychiatric disabilities: Comparison of the effectiveness of segregated and integrated programs in Israel. *Psychiatric rehabilitation journal*. 31(2):139.
2. Halperin G and Boz-Mizrahi T (2008) The Amitim program: an innovative program for the social rehabilitation of people with mental illness in the community. *The Israel journal of psychiatry and related sciences*. 46(2):149-156.
3. Iwasaki Y Coyl C and Shank J (2010) Leisure as a context for active living, recovery, health, and life quality for persons with mental illness in a global context. *Health Promotion International* 25(4):483-494.
4. Iwasaki Y, Coyle C, Shank J, Messina E, Porter H, Salzer M and Ryan A (2014) Role of leisure in recovery from mental illness. *American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation*. 17 (2):147-165.
5. Iwasaki Y, Messina E, Shank J and Coyle C (2015) Role of leisure in meaning-making for community-dwelling adults with mental illness: Inspiration for engaged life. *Journal of Leisure Research* 47(5):538-555.

Biography

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