

Introduction

What helps me if I go mad? How can I find trustworthy help for a relative or a friend in need?

How can I protect myself from coercive treatment? Where can I talk to like-minded people about my own experiences with psychiatry and about my life? As a family member or friend, how can I help? What should I do if I can no longer bear to work in the mental health field? What are the alternatives to psychiatry? How can I get involved in creating alternatives?

Assuming psychiatry would be abolished, what do you propose instead? These are the main questions addressed by the 61 authors—(ex-) users and survivors of psychiatry, therapists, psychiatrists, lawyers, relatives, politicians and social scientists and relatives from all five continents.

Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry is a collection of reports and approaches from non-, anti- and post-psychiatric everyday life in different countries and provides an appraisal of individual and organized alternatives and measures that point to a need for structural change in the system. This is a book of practice and ideas, more personal than generalized. It offers suggestions, highlights contradictions and problems, and shows positive examples and models but does not provide easy answers.

Our alternatives beyond psychiatry are far removed from the academic remains of the '68 generation; nor are they a reform-oriented variant of Italian psychiatry, social psychiatry or community extensions of psychiatric institutions. Instead, alternatives beyond psychiatry are truly innovative, initiated and carried out by critical professionals and independent (ex-) users and survivors of psychiatry, the real experts in the psychiatric domain, dedicated to the right of self-determination, physical inviolability and social support.

Alternatives beyond psychiatry originate from an undogmatic and humanistic movement. Accordingly, the texts in this book are filled with a contrarian spirit and the fundamental conviction that (1) psychiatry, as a scientific discipline, cannot do justice to the expectation of solving mental problems

that are largely of a social nature, (2) its propensity and practice to use force constitutes a threat, and (3) its diagnostic methods obstruct the view of the real problems of individuals.

Furthermore, the texts in this volume describe a commitment to (1) developing adequate and effective assistance for people in emotional difficulties, (2) safeguarding civil rights in treatment on a par with “normal” patients, (3) joining forces in cooperation with other human rights and self-help groups, (4) use of alternative and less toxic psychotropic substances and a ban of electroshock, (5) new ways of living with madness and being different—with as much independence from institutions as possible, and (6) tolerance, respect and appreciation of diversity at all levels of life.

This book has been published without any financial support from sponsors. We have no connection to the pharmaceutical industry and to organizations that are dependent on them, nor to Scientology or other sects and dogmatists of whatever color. Beyond health, nothing is more valuable than freedom and independence.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the many supporters who have provided valuable ideas, translated, corrected, and illustrated, in particular Arno Hessling, Christine Holzhausen, Craig Newnes, Darby Penney, David W. Oaks, Katy E. McNally, Kerstin Kempker, Martin Urban, Mary Murphy, Paula Kempker, Pia Kempker, Reinhard Wojke and Tricia R. Owsley.

August 2007

Peter Stastny, Peter Lehmann

Translated from the German by Mary Murphy