

The Significance of an Enlightenment Program Conducted by Individuals with Mental Disabilities~Reducing Stigma and Improving Self-Confidence~

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Individuals with mental disabilities have suffered stigma throughout their daily lives. It is quite well-known that removing this stigma is a matter of utmost importance in order to ensure the improvement of the quality of life of these individuals; in fact, there are numerous international, national, and local stigma-reducing programs. In most stigma-reducing programs, people with mental disabilities have been recognized as the consumers of mental health services.

This is a characteristic program in which not only do people with mental disabilities play the role of the consumers of mental health services but they also play the role of the providers of these services. Here, these individuals, as experts on mental health problems, tell stories to participants in this program, such as children in elementary schools, people living in the community, and students of mental-health specialties including occupational therapy. The stories relate their experiences, thoughts, and feelings concerning their mental health problems and the stigma in their daily lives.

It was seen that this program had a positive influence on the participants, since the community reduced its stigma to mental illness and people with mental disabilities. Furthermore, it was noted the community carried a stigma to mentally ill individuals because they were not aware of the mental illnesses. Therefore, it was but natural that the participants' attitudes toward mental illnesses would change after meeting with and listening to real people with mental disabilities in this program.

On the other hand, another significant achievement of this program is the benefits provided to the story-tellers. That is, by playing a major role as the staff members of this program, these individuals displayed increased self-confidence. This could have been brought about by the process of organizing the stories, learning speech manners, and so on. Moreover, the positive reactions of the participants could have been a major contributing factor.

The aforementioned factors suggest that the stigma-reducing program conducted by individuals with mental disabilities is useful for both themselves and the people living in the community.

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