

THE HISTORY OUTLINE

Everything began in 1992 when the first contact of English and Polish users of mental health services was made.

The group of English users came to visit Kraków and its mental facilities. At that time, we (about 10 people) were attending the English Club at day centre in Kraków. The Englishmen told us about their structures and functions. We found out about projects run mostly by users of mental health services. We became inspired by what we heard and after departure of our guests we began to work on our own written constitution.

There was strong determination among us to create similar user group in Poland. One of the incapacitated users proposed the name of the association which all of us accepted. In April 1993 the organisation was officially registered in court as Braterstwo Serc (The Brotherhood of Hearts) Association for Mental Health. **The most significant was and is that our NGO consists only of users/exusers/survivors of psychiatry.**

There are only 4 such groups in Poland. However we maintain relations with many others also of mixed character- for some reasonable extent.

Our group and Krakowska Hamlet Foundation (a partner organisation of Hamlet Trust) were established almost at the same time and we became to co-operate from the very beginning.

These two bodies, the said foundation and the Londoners were a kind of umbrella organisations and we had a very good contacts for years: friendly and fruitfully. Though, recently we feel too much "old" and experienced to be "umbrellaed" and we set our position as free of any dependences.

However, owing to the grants from Hamlet Trust from London and other mostly domestic sponsors, we were able to launch and develop most of our activities. in the past. We have been changing our abodes three times to settle down in Self-Help Community House in Kraków. It is a mental health facility for 80 people, realised in co-operation with governmental and municipal authorities.

Even now some of our members, nevertheless, attend the House. But in a matter of fact the Brotherhood's address and abode are located in another place.

We discuss current matters during the meetings which are held once a week. Our members regularly visit the local psychiatric hospital where they meet and talk to people who feel very lonely and isolated. Our headquarters is opened throughout the week and offers programme of daily activities.

Our patients' advocate tries to help those of patients who need legal advice. It is worth mentioning that our organisation sent our opinion concerning the Mental Health Act to the Polish Parliament and created Patients' Charter.



"BROTHERHOOD OF HEARTS"

ASSOCIATION
FOR MENTAL HEALTH

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Preamble of the Statute

Considering the rights belonging to every human being to live in conditions guaranteed by Human Rights Charter, we the founders have brought into being Braterstwo Serc (The Brotherhood of Hearts) Association for Mental Health.

Our concern is to acknowledge that people who use mental health services have the same rights to live in suitable conditions and efficiently perform in society on equal terms with its others members. In our opinion participation in social life of those people who suffer from mental health problems and their families is essential. In order to carry out this purpose we intend to organise formal self-help groups and integrate them within the society as well as protect and advocate for their rights.

The main issues of the association are:

- To make mental health users aware of their rights
- To assist in creating alternative bodies such as Patients' Councils in psychiatric hospitals and at local and country level as well as alternative services
- To realise a programme of social education which would draw public attention to the needs of the mentally ill and the fact of their isolation; to propagate the idea of alternative methods of treatment
- To guarantee proper medical care and respect for the patients' dignity
- To co-operate with state-run institutions to lay down laws referring to medical, social and legal protection of users of mental health services.

International contacts:

Since our beginning they have been grown rapidly and are kept continuously, not only in Europe. One of our members was and is a board member of ENUSP (European Network) and last year he was elected the European delegate of

WNUSP (World Network of Users/Exusers and Survivors of Psychiatry). The Brotherhood participates in European programs for mental health and organise mutual exchange of partners from abroad.

Responsible member of board:
Jerzy Bajkowski

Our current activities:

- We maintain contacts with users in community and daily centres all over the city and pay regular visits in local psychiatric hospital and in other social welfare institutions.
- Our patients' advocate Piotr Iwaneyko, LLD, protects the rights and interests of individuals when they come into contact with mental health services
- We provide care and financial support to all our members who have very low disability pensions.
- We co-operate with Polish Coalition for Mental Health; we represent people who suffer from mental illness in Poland and abroad.
- We have access to mass-media and co-operate with them