

## NOTE ON THE EUROPEAN PROJECT “HERO” COORDINATED BY ASL ROMA 2

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On June 14th and 15th, 2019, an international conference will be held at San Eugenio Hospital in Rome to conclude HERO (Housing: an educational European ROad to Civil Rights). The three-year-long project was promoted and coordinated by the Department of Mental Health at ASL Roma 2, the largest metropolitan DSM in Italy, with over 1,300,000 residents.

The project originated in the Roman district of San Basilio, from a network of mental health sites including the therapeutic community of Piazza Urbana and the so-called “supported apartments,” where people affected by serious psychic disorders live on their own with appropriate assistance, taking part in a project actively promoting their social inclusion in local community life such as in parish churches and libraries.

HERO aims to understand what makes a place “therapeutic” for mentally disturbed people and their families as well as for social workers and residents, starting from the concept that “place” means not only a “house” but a system of structures, relationships and rights.

Apart from ASL Roma 2, the project was joined by the Don Luigi Di Liegro International Foundation, the University Psychiatric Hospital of Zagreb (Croatia), the Pegode Association of Antwerp (Belgium), the Merseyside Expanding Horizons Association of Liverpool (Great Britain), and the PEPSAEE Association of Athens (Greece). [www.housing-project.eu](http://www.housing-project.eu)

The HERO project is an integral part of the 2013-2020 Mental Health Action Plan promoted by WHO and is included in objective n. 3, “Good Health and Well-Being” launched by the United Nations Sustainable Development.

This project was ranked first among 114 participants in Italy, at the Call for bids for Cooperation, Innovation and Exchange of New Practices on the subject of Adult Education for the European Program Erasmus+/2016.

After one year of hard work, the e-book “Housing and Mental Health” was published in five languages: quality indicators for local communities generated by a fruitful exchange of housing experiences, whose aim is to detect indicators that can become European guidelines for future initiatives within the recovery program for mentally distressed users.

After three years, at the end of the HERO Project, the final product of the “Curriculum” is presented; it is a European handbook of 212 pages of material for training and learning activities and aiming at increasing knowledge and competence about housing in connection with mental health. The project not only concerns housing but individual relationships with the environment, and stresses the importance of “living outside” rather than “living inside”.

The "Curriculum" is comprised of four segments, one for each target group: users of mental health services and their families; mental health professionals; non-health organizations, and general residents.

The segments are associated with short videos that include descriptive elements, criticalities, perspectives, examples of good practices with related links, proposed activities to be carried out individually or with a group, and exercises for self-evaluation.

Anyone who uses the "Curriculum" - which is available online in five different languages - will be issued a certificate of attendance.

The main objectives regard the motivational system, with the implementation of self-determination processes and sharing of choices. Inclusion is important to generate a sense of belonging in the neighborhood, and the possibility of having more reference points, with opportunities for gathering and socialization.

People with mental illness live better and feel safer when they feel accepted in a community and a support network, in areas where shops, public transportation, and other necessary services are easily accessible.

Good relationships must be established with the other residents, promoting mutual respect and trust, combatting stigma and bias. This can be achieved through ad-hoc educational activities in schools, which can help increase the acceptance of people with mental disorders.

Flexibility is necessary, meaning the opportunity to choose from among different accommodations, where and with whom to live, the implementation of co-payment procedures, treatment and support plans based on the individual users following an assessment of their characteristics, needs and expectations. Volunteers are an important resource as they represent a symbol of social inclusion.

Important is the role of the case manager who can offer individual, social, health and professional assistance through the online publication of the area's various resources (organizations, associations, cooperatives), and services providing support to people who are following a recovery program.

The ability to manage money must be carefully assessed and monitored, as it is also part of users' personal recovery. People affected by mental disorders usually tend to spend more money when their conditions worsen, but direct management of money is an extremely important step towards independence and personal responsibility, as it encourages the right to choose and to self-determination.

Depending on the users' level of independence, each house should offer different types of assistance: from the visit of professionals once a week or whenever necessary, to collaboration with local health departments in case of emergency situations, to high protection housing units monitored 24/7 by dedicated professionals.

Local authorities, in addition to social and health assistance, should provide a sufficient amount of adequate housing and develop procedures to ensure equal opportunity access to accommodations for people with mental disorders.

In conclusion, the "Curriculum" represents an integrated product for users and their families, health workers and other operators and citizens, which could facilitate the empowerment of local communities and the development of specific skills aimed at developing independence and inclusion of users in the communities. Its purpose is to promote housing projects as a strategy to create an inclusive society, especially with regards to mental health users.

The "Curriculum" was first tested in Liverpool (United Kingdom) in July 2018 with representatives of the European partners, and subsequently underwent a piloting phase on around 200 people belonging to the target groups of the project.

All information about the Project is available on its website: [www.housing-project.eu](http://www.housing-project.eu)

The conference will be held simultaneously yet in close connection with the National Conference for Mental Health at Rome's University La Sapienza [www.conferenzasalutementale.it](http://www.conferenzasalutementale.it) as they both will revolve around "housing" as one of the core themes for the safeguard of mental health.