

## SUMMARY REPORT

### **“Towards inclusive political participation in mental health”. Putting political participation of people with mental health problems on the agenda.**

21st August 2018

Seminar Programme

21.8.2018 - 13.00 - 17.00

Lapinlahdenpolku 1, 00101, Helsinki

13:00-13.45 Lunch (Lapinlahden Lähde)

13.45 Welcome words: Kristian Wahlbeck

13.55 Expert by experience: video comment and discussion with Charlene Sunkel

14.20 “Modern Mental Health Activism” Koala Group

14.40 “Citizen Initiatives, political participation & Mental Health” theme discussions with Tarja Parviainen

15.10 Active break & coffee

15.25 Mini-workshop and discussion: international examples on mental health and taking political action - Claire Goodfellow, Anna Macintyre, Silvia Krumm

Tour of Lapinlahti for interested guests 16.45 →

Researchers, advocates, and activists joined together in Helsinki on 21st August 2018 to discuss political participation by people with mental health problems.

The seminar, hosted by Mielenterveys Pooli jointly with the EU H2020 funded Citizenship, Recovery and Inclusive Society Partnership, explored what it means to participate in politics and activism for people with lived experience of mental health problems.

The seminar was opened by Professor Kristian Wahlbeck, Director of Development for the Finnish Association for Mental Health, who highlighted the importance of participation in mental health policy making and service provision; “Nothing about us without us”. Professor Wahlbeck highlighted important issues to be taken forward: How do we move from stigma and discrimination to active citizenship? How to move from isolation to involvement in the political chambers? He also raised whether it might be time for a citizen’s initiative on mental health in Finland.

As a leader in global mental health activism, Charlene Sunkel, Principal Coordinator of Movement for Global Mental Health was interviewed by video connection from South Africa. Charlene highlighted the importance of participation and consultation in the mental health system, and that it is vital that people with lived experience are on an equal platform with others. She recognised that whilst issues regarding participation and mental health will vary from one country to another, the principle of consultation is fundamental. The seminar also heard from the Koala Mental Health Activists group on “modern mental health activism”, exploring key tensions including the pros and cons of social media versus

employing a more “grassroots” approach by influencing people face to face. The Koala Group outlined their use of a board game methodology to educate and raise awareness of mental health problems and the challenges encountered when navigating the mental health system.

Executive Director of the Finnish Association for Mental Health Sari Aalto-Matturi and the Executive Director of the Finnish Association for Autism and Asperger's Syndrome Tarja Parviainen led discussion on Citizens' initiatives as a form of political influence. The Citizens' Initiatives Act, which came into force in 2012 allows citizens the opportunity to have a proposal considered by the Finnish parliament. The process can help to raise awareness of important issues and gain public support; at the same time it was recognised that it requires a significant amount of resource and coordination to gain momentum.

International perspectives on political participation and mental health were represented by Silvia Krumm, from the University of Ulm (Germany) and Claire Goodfellow and Anna Macintyre from University of Strathclyde (Scotland). Claire Goodfellow highlighted the work of the Scottish Youth Parliament, which recently published a report “[Our Generation's Epidemic](#)” on youth mental health. Anna Macintyre outlined an example of good practice, research conducted by the Lived Experience Research Collective in Scotland “[Untapped Potential](#)” (Johnston et al 2018), which explored the involvement of people with lived experience in civic and political life. Silvia Krumm considered political participation in relation to parents with lived experience of mental health problems. She highlighted stories from past experience which demonstrate poor treatment of parents, and identified that building self help networks and peer support may be key to ensuring improvements in the future.

The seminar closed with a discussion on how inclusive political participation and engagement can be supported. It was recognised that political activism requires considerable energy and resource; how can political participation be supported without compromising mental health? The discussion also highlighted issues of intersectionality and inclusion; how can political participation be made more inclusive for everyone?

It was recognised that the UN convention on the rights of people with disabilities requires reasonable adjustments to enable participation. Extending this to include political parties and policy actors may support the political participation of people with lived experience and help to move towards more inclusive participation in mental health. .

Mielenterveyspooli ([www.mielenterveyspooli.fi](http://www.mielenterveyspooli.fi)) unites 21 Finnish Mental Health NGO's. We influence society to improve general mental well-being in Finland by creating public policies that promote mental health of the population. We aim to reduce the stigma of mental health problems and encourage decision-makers to evaluate mental health effects at all levels of decision making. For any additional information, contact Alviina Alametsä, +358 408286553, [alviina.alametsa@mielenterveysseura.fi](mailto:alviina.alametsa@mielenterveysseura.fi).

Citizenship, Recovery and Inclusive Society Partnership is a 4 year knowledge exchange programme focused on social inclusion and mental health. For more information on the CRISP partnership please visit: [www.crisppartnership.eu](http://www.crisppartnership.eu) @CRISP\_EU #CRISP\_EU

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Johnston, G., G. Syrett M., McElwee B., Tweedie H, Curtice L., Quinn N., White C., McAuslan W. (2018) Untapped potential. How people with lived experience of mental health issues engage in civic and public life. VOX- Voices of Experience: Glasgow.

<http://voxscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/14183-Mental-Health-DRLL-Report-A4-Rev7.pdf>

Scottish Youth Parliament, (2016). Our generation’s epidemic: Young people’s awareness and experience of mental health information, support and services. Scottish Youth Parliament: Edinburgh. Retrieved from:

[https://www.syp.org.uk/our\\_generation\\_s\\_epidemic](https://www.syp.org.uk/our_generation_s_epidemic)