

Values statement:

There is in Denmark a need to change opinions and values towards those suffering mental distress so that they cease to be viewed as chronically ill, abnormal citizens.

That is a change we wish to be a part of.

Many years ago it was decided that people with mental distress should be treated differently than those suffering physical illnesses and/or social problems.

This came about due to a mistaken humanitarian viewpoint combined with the dominant medical opinions of the time resulting in those suffering mental distress being isolated in large psychiatric institutions based on the principle "out of sight out mind"

This viewpoint, even today, still greatly affects our approach to helping those who suffer from mental distress. As a result of this the general population tends to view these distressed people with fear based on ignorance, a viewpoint often supported by the media which results in the promotion of stigmatization.

Working towards developing a more humane practice within psychiatry has been slow and uneven in Denmark. Decentralizing psychiatry, seen as a positive move, has unfortunately not resulted in better quality or the hoped for results for the mentally distressed. Working practice is still very much influenced by a professional approach that mainly focuses on reducing symptoms rather than helping people learn to cope with life and becoming a part of society again. This approach largely ignores the resources and personal opinions of those suffering mental distress.

People suffering mental distress are still exposed to isolation, stigma, lack of understanding and abuse of human rights. The community services put in place when many of the institutions closed have become institutions themselves. Often they are promoting continued social exclusion and in some instances actively recreate social isolation and reinforcing the community beliefs that those suffering mental distress are different and need a professional treatment system which is separate from other services within society.

Research from the rest of the world has shown that it is possible to develop effective and humane services for those suffering mental distress which helps improve level of daily functioning and the possibility of being reintegrated into society. Humanitarian approaches also affect the myths and stereotypical views that exist in local communities resulting ultimately in less stigmatization towards those suffering distress.

There is a need in Denmark for a change in viewpoint and practice so that those suffering distress are not seen as chronically mentally ill and different from the rest of society. We must acknowledge that we can all become victims of mental distress and that the help and support we need in these situations are as individually personal as we are unique.

There is a strong correlation between a good psychiatric system and the local community's willingness to be involved in finding new possibilities which helps improve people's mental health and wellbeing.