

## **COOPERATIVE PYXIDA: THREE YEARS OF OPERATION**

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The Cooperative of Mental Health Activities "PYXIDA" is a limited liability social cooperative, which operates in Kallithea, Athens. It was founded in 2000, within the funding programme for New Freelance Professionals for people with mental health problems, of the Greek Manpower Employment Organisation. It constitutes the development of the Cooperative "AVGERINOS", which was operating since 1993 and is supported by the Society of Social Psychiatry and Mental Health.

It is a mixed cooperative and consists of people from the community, professionals from various fields and people with mental health problems, in accordance with the law 2716/99 for Limited Liability Social Cooperatives (KOISPE).

It operates as a clearly professional place where its members work in real work conditions of production.

The Cooperative's activities are divided into two sectors:

- a) the sector of retail sale, with a shop of goods of gifts
- b) the sector of wholesale sale where the members participate at 80% in the manufacture and production bee wax candles, lamps, jewellery and various seasonal small items, products with which the Cooperative participates in large commercial exhibitions, such as PANO, ROTA.

The Cooperative's policy is not to show the special characteristics of its members - workers, but operates in a clearly commercial and competitive manner like any other enterprise. The Cooperative puts forward exclusively the quality of its products and commercial transactions.

The Cooperative "PYXIDA" constitutes a small, flexible productive unit, which apart from the profit, aims for its members to:

1. Cultivate their professional identity and profile
2. Develop individual and social skills
3. Strengthen their self-confidence and self-esteem
4. Strengthen their communication with public services and with society
5. To actively participate in the decision-making processes and to represent the interests of the Cooperative

In the three years of operation we realised that small scale enterprises facilitate the process of adaptation of individuals with psychosocial problems in conditions of real work while at the same time they offer the possibility to apply and make use of various qualitative tools, useful for the achievement of the objectives mentioned above.

Within this framework and in combination with the productive process we apply processes of collection, analysis and evaluation of data, using tools

such as Swot Analysis; we proceed in year and five-year economic planning as well as in three-month group evaluations and self-assessment of the members. The small size of the enterprise enables us to have more direct contact and communication with the members, which makes them feel they are equal and that each one possesses a role that they continuously work to improve.

We also try to pass on this experience to undergraduate and postgraduate students, who come for practical training at the Cooperative.

The Cooperative PYXIDA constitutes a dynamic presence in the sector of social enterprises that operate according to the laws of free trade. The Cooperative often provides 'know-how' to other Cooperatives of similar fields.

The following are some of the positive results of the Cooperative PYXIDA:

- The members are on a daily basis in contact with various aspects of social life and learn to be active members of society.

- During the three years of operation there has been no serious relapse of any member and mainly hospitalisation, although members work in a clearly professional space with all the pressures and stress that this involves. This is even more evident if we consider the fact that some of the members have been in the Cooperative since the time of AVGERINOS, which means they've been working in the Cooperative for 7 years.

- Even though the Cooperative PYXIDA is a clearly professional place we wish for our members to experience it as a passage to the open market. This has already been achieved with 2 members, who for the last 3 years have been working on full time employment in the open market.

- A fourth positive result is the high rate of participation of the workers - members in the productive process that alternates between 80%-90%.

- Finally, we have not observed any frequent absences for health reasons as it happens with other healthy individuals.

Despite of all this the work of the Cooperative and its viability are impeded by:

1. The lack of an institutional framework that would cover the already existing cooperatives
2. The lack of tax alleviations
3. The contradictory way in which the Cooperative is being treated by the public services.

To conclude I would like to say that it is definitely a difficult, but according to the results, rising course through which the members can be optimistic and are looking forward to a creative development of their activities.

And we should not forget, as Mr Filis had said, that small is beautiful and that the product that a large enterprise sells cheap, has an expensive cost in dead animals, polluted air and water and all in all in downgraded health.