

M@kshivim

An Interactive Online Project to Promote Recovery & Social Inclusion of Persons with Psychiatric Disabilities

The Makshivim Project: A unique, online, social project

Makshivim is an Internet-based project for people with psychiatric disabilities. Through the project, participants chat with each other and/or with a professional guide to achieve one or more of the following goals:

- To raise awareness of mental illness and ease societal and self-stigma
- To practice social and communication skills
- To find friends from the consumers population with common experiences and interests
- To organize courses of study
- To find rehabilitative jobs and jobs in the wider community

The program's moderator online guides are consumers themselves and serve as instructors for courses set up by the program.

Rationale

People with psychiatric disabilities deal with a range of difficulties, including public, institutional, and self-stigma, difficulty adhering to formal, community-based rehabilitation services, and high unemployment. This may lead to social isolation and loneliness.

As a result, one of the only places where consumers can share their problems, dilemmas, wishes and fears, without shame or fear of judgement, is the Internet. This realization fueled the establishment of Makshivim: a forum for the mentally ill to build social ties with peers, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, while still maintaining anonymity.

Operation

Each group of members meets online with a professional guide using a chat program. The members can chat with friends at any time, with or without the participation of a professional guide, in the familiar, non-threatening environment the Internet provides.

During the chats, the members suggest social activities, with a guide moderating the conversation to give each participant a chance to contribute. For instance, the activity might be an online course in creative writing. The guides can also organize social activities in person, for members who feel ready. The in-person activity takes place in a normative place on which the group members decide.

A rehabilitative figure from various fields participates in the chat. This expert raises awareness of other projects in the mental health arena.

New members are screened before joining the group, and then are gradually integrated to ease pressure on the existing group members. A virtual contract governs members' participation in the project.

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Uniqueness

This is the only project of its kind that makes rehabilitation through the internet, and after 2 years of operation and one year formally, it has already proven that consumers – who want to live in a maximally normative way – need a forum for free and independent interaction without confining themselves to the mentally ill community.

Summary

This is a social-rehabilitative project, which serves a population that experiences pervasive social isolation. In the future, the aim is to widen the network to provide an opportunity for members to build ties with their peers from all over the world.

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