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Newsletter Fall 2017



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Upcoming Open Registration Trainings

Please [contact us](#) if you want to arrange an IPS training at your organization or in your area.



London, England
November 13th - 18th

Melbourne, Australia
October 9th - 13th

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IPS and Social Ecology

by: Shery Mead

Because many mental health practices are grounded in a pathological framework, it is not uncommon for people's experiences to be interpreted as "something wrong with/in them." Too often ignored are environmental, relational, cultural and spiritual considerations. When these aspects of a person's life are not part of the "helping" conversation, meaning becomes filtered through a very narrow lens and people begin to understand themselves as "ill" or "the problem." They often become dependent on others for interpretation and assessment of their experiences and soon find themselves in roles that are defined by "other-than-ness." This is why an ecological approach to mental health is so important. An ecological approach not only offers us a richer, broader understanding of how people have learned to make meaning of their experience, it offers us a wealth of information about how people can build stronger, healthier relationships while becoming "change agents" in their own communities. In that, I would like to introduce the concept of interpretive frameworks and use it as a spring board to talk about "other" ways of knowing while thinking about it as a tool for helping people become more conscious about their roles and relationships.

Interpretive Frameworks

Different people have written extensively on the ways in which people "know" and the context within which "knowledge" exists. These authors have helped us think about how people have learned and consequently approach relationships, activities and problem solving and they have helped articulate the barriers that preclude less privileged ways of knowing. Belenky for example conducted an interesting investigation with women and the ways in which their worldview affects their abilities

ways of thinking and approaching action. Through the use of dialogue and the commitment to peer support she helps the women begin to shed light on how oppressive learning structures have kept many women invisible in conversation. Through the course of the project it becomes clear that as the women identify these structures, they can see the impact on their own and each other's ways of knowing and communicating. She writes, "those of us who have grown up where words were used as weapons and where betrayal was more common than trust are likely to envision dialogue as threatening and trust as precarious (Belenky et al, 1997, p. 81)." And so there must be a consciousness-raising component to it.

By supporting women in reflecting on their worldviews, they could begin to ask each other questions that would shed light on previously invisible problems and solutions. In other words by listening to each other deeply and with an ear to how they had learned to make meaning of their experiences, they began to illuminate and really hear their own ways of telling. While the women shared their stories and gained this perspective it became much easier to identify common themes and then collectively come up with action strategies that would benefit themselves and women in general. Important research questions they began to articulate included:

- How do women's understandings of their own mind and voice grow from and contribute to their peer relationships
- Will the effects of these relationships be self-sustaining also sell for nurturing so that they would actually continue to increase overtime, even after the program had ended?

Outcomes included:

- Women find their voices and build identities as activists
- Speaking up on behalf of themselves and others
- A new ability to really listen and learn in dialogue while still standing up for themselves.
- More developed problem solving skills
- A deeper awareness of rights
- Building a greater sense of trust for people and building mutual relationships
- Participants became members of volunteer community organizations, networks, and sat on committees.

This process for building community and building voice is important as we begin to think about challenging some of the current trends in mental health. Although we are beginning to see more inclusion of consumer voice in policy and practice, it is a voice that's been de-contextualized. People who end up using mental health services by and large have learned about mental health/mental illness from having had their experiences interpreted for them and so when they are asked questions like, "What works?" they often respond by saying, "More services," and specifically, "More medications." After all, they've been told that their very lives depend on them.

In peer support programs, not unlike programs like the Listening Partners (above), we can think together about how we have learned, how we make meaning of our experiences and begin to tackle some of the complex ways in which meaning,

creating relationships in which there is opportunity for reflexivity as well as personal and relational reflection. Finally, as we build new language, new ways of “being” together, and new ways of thinking about professional practices we find that we can and must influence dominant assumptions. We come to the table not just as recipients of services or as people labeled with mental illness, but as people who have had rich, meaningful lives; people who’s experiences have multiple contexts and we can begin to rock the boat. “It is only when the force of the group and tradition loosens its grip, the individuals can reflectively question the legitimacy of norms and moved beyond merely conventionally justified beliefs and values (Meehan, 1997.p. 3)”

Belenky, M.F., Bond, L.A., Weinstock, J. S., (1997). *A tradition that has no name*. New York: Basic Books
Meehan, J., (ed) (1995). *Feminists read Habermas*. New York: Routledge.

Intentional Peer Support Training

A reflection by: Robin Middleton, PRSS-S
Recovery Communities

“People spend a lifetime searching for happiness; looking for peace. They chase idle dreams, addictions, religions, even other people, hoping to fill the emptiness that plagues them. The irony is the only place they ever needed to search was within.”

Ramona L. Anderson

It’s 6:58 am on an overcast Monday morning, light traffic for such a busy city. Over the past few weeks I have mentally prepared myself for this training. Accustomed to traditions, I expected an overload of information, disintegrated textbooks, and the prostrated facilitator who’s running late because he overslept. Intentional Peer Support is our thesis for the week, and this one question has been lingering in my mind anxious for an answer; How can I truly help someone, when I struggle with a mental health challenge.

Sitting in this diverse room filled with people of different backgrounds and life experiences, and facilitators whose presence cannot be concealed, this class was everything but traditional. We are surrounded by an atmosphere that allows us to be transparent, non-judgmental, trusting, accepting, and honest and you can see the passion in these individuals, seeking answers to their own questions, yearning to ignite hope in people similar to who they use to be. We all have our own agenda, and the reality of this situation is, we are here to shift the framework on which we were built so that we can move towards connection and mutuality.

This class was about teaching the peer leader, mentor, sponsor, counselor, son,

community, at our jobs, in our family, on their journey to restoration. This class challenges us to face our demons, and teaches us how to create intentional learning relationships that creates hope and possibilities. The lightbulb moment clicked for me when I realized how much of an impact my childhood had on my worldview. I realized I no longer have to subject myself to labels or symptoms, that in the moment of emotional distress I do not have to say I am depressed, however I am feeling sad, I will process through my feelings so that I can connect with myself and other individuals.

"Instead of preferencing certain roles or expertise, we see both of us as having something important to contribute. We spend time learning about each other and avoid defaulting to problem-solving. We examine our assumptions and the ways we've learned to make meaning. Ideally, we construct a shared meaning together. " - Shery Mead

An Update From Intentional Peer Support Aotearoa New Zealand

by: Suzy Stevens, IPS-ANZ

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IPS began in New Zealand in the early 2000s when Shery Mead visited, opened our eyes to it and offered some training so it could be delivered after she was gone. Since then there have been many peers trained and facilitators have done really well to keep IPS going here.

In January 2016 we (Kites and Te Ara Korowai) received permission from IPS Central to promote and set up IPS Aotearoa New Zealand. Our base is on the Kapiti Coast which is just north of Wellington, our capital city and we have just launched a website: www.intentionalpeersupport.nz

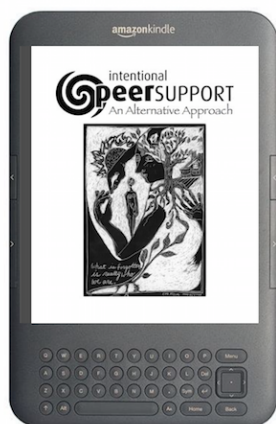
Since starting we've organised 3 Core Training events, 1 Train the Trainer, supported 4 facilitators to run their own Core Training and developed key relationships with peers across the country. We rely a lot on volunteers, part-time staff and the awesome community of people who are passionate about IPS. This is just the start and we know we have a secure foundation for promoting and improving access to IPS in New Zealand.

Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou katoa

Our first Core Training event held in the Hutt Valley north of Wellington.

New Resource - Updated Core Competencies

We recently updated our IPS Core Competencies, a useful resource for self-reflection, co-reflection, and organizational development. Click the picture below.



[IPS An Alternative Approach](#)
[is now available for Kindle!](#)



LIVE & LEARN

New research about psychiatric
medication discontinuation



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