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From hopelessness to possibility: a journey from marginalization to belonging through reconnection to family and healing of trauma

Author: A. Hun

Learning Objectives:

Participants will

1. Consider creative interventions for engaging reluctant family members of people who have been disconnected from their families in some way.
2. Become aware of the link between healing of trauma of individuals and of families.
3. Observe that change and recovery is still possible despite decades of institutionalization.

Abstract Text:

We present a case of a 63 year-old Latino man with psychosis and intellectual disability including illiteracy hospitalized for 41 years after committing a violent act within his family. The family as well as the consumer suffered severe unprocessed trauma, leading to estrangement of some family members for three decades of his hospitalization. In addition to this family situation, the cultural, socioeconomic, and structural issues prevalent in the high-stress, low-resource environment of a major urban area presented significant challenges to the recovery of this consumer and family.

Once stabilized, because he exhibited no behavioral problems, the consumer languished on a chronic unit in a state psychiatric facility for 30 years. Ten years ago, he was transferred to a residency training unit which had the resources to provide intensive milieu, individual, group, and family therapy. While some of the family visited the consumer regularly, they were reluctant to meet with members of his treatment team. By making persistent efforts at outreach to the family and validating their distrust of the system, psychiatric residents were able to build alliances with the family and initiate accompanied home visits. The consumer came to life, began attending a literacy program and participating actively in all aspects of the milieu. Concurrently, we assisted the family and consumer in beginning to process their shared traumatic history in the comfortable, safe environment of their home. The consumer was gradually able to move through the forensic system to the point of discharge, which is imminent.

In this poster we hope to demonstrate that the power of creative thinking, attention to the total context, and belief in human possibilities can be transformative. Through perseverance and hope in the face of trauma and serious psychiatric disability, we have seen that reconnection can indeed serve as a profound vehicle for recovery and for healing of trauma.

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**