

# THE EMILIA PROJECT. THE STORY SO FAR

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## Introduction

EMILIA (Empowerment of mental illness service users: Lifelong learning, integration and empowerment) is a sixth frame-work European Project that is aimed to improve social inclusion of mental health service users by challenging the conventional role of users and professionals.

EMILIA promotes the empowerment of the users, the recognition of their expertise in the field of mental health and the use of this knowledge to help mental health institutions learn and develop. EMILIA introduces the concept of the user as an expert.

## Methodology

The innovative aspect of this Project is that users participate as researchers and teachers while at the same time forming part of the study group. 8 different European countries have been Demonstration Sites for the study: Athens (Greece), Barcelona (Spain), Bodø (Norway), London (UK), Paris (France), Tusla (Bosnia & Herzegovina) Warsaw (Poland) and Zealand (Denmark). Groups of up to 30 users have been recruited in Sites using strict

EMILIA criteria. Based on the methodology of Life Long learning; LLL, users have completed a training programme co-designed by the EMILIA users and mental health staff. Training includes topics such as: social network support, recovery, families, employers/employees. Major emphasis is put on the users own experience as a mental health service user, their relationship with others and with the mental health institution.

## Results

The Project is four years old and one year on after the completion of the training phase in all Demonstration Sites. Despite local variations of training content, a clear EMILIA intervention has occurred in all Demonstration sites. Two of these Demonstration Sites are Barcelona, Spain and Bodo, Norway who now compare the results of the EMILIA training. To evaluate the EMILIA intervention they use the criteria of:

- increased user empowerment
- users involvement within the mental health institution
- increased users involvement in meaningful activities.

Different training packaged were used in each site.

### Bodo:

16 users of local services suffering from a serious mental illness and without either a job or meaningful activity.

#### Training

In Bodø 3 training programs were offered:

*Powerful Voices:* Aims amongst other things to assess and develop consultancy and leadership skills in providing a service user perspective in service.

*Social Network Support:* To equip to the user with tools for the construction of a sensitive and effective social network, as well as to belong to such network of an active and significant way.

*Research Skills:* Aims to provide people who use mental health services with an opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and experience in research methods.

After the training the EMILIA team in Bodo have assessed the progress made by the users involved and have noticed great, positive changes in the hospital:

- Establishment of a user council at the local district psychiatric hospital giving users a voice within the institution.
- Newly created position for a user advisor at the hospital which recognises the user as an expert.
- 3 users have gained employment.
- 1 User has gained the confidence to invite friends for an evening meal and has reduced their social exclusion.
- 1 user has initiated the establishing of a user council at the local day centre and is now the leader for this, which is a clear use of the leadership skills gained through the EMILIA training.
- Users have carried out an evaluation of local mental services amongst the users of that service with the aim of improving current services.

### Barcelona:

25 users in EMILIA training.

#### Training:

6 training packages were carried out in Barcelona:

*Personal Development Profile:* focusing on past, present and future activities of each user.

*Recovery:* Dealing with the prevention of relapse.

*Social Network:* Where users examined the social relationships they have and how to maintain or improve them.

*Strengths:* An important recognition of individual strong point.

*Families:* Open to users and their families, working through key issues.

*Training of Health Professionals:* The user as the teacher in an awareness aimed training where professionals where shown the importance of incorporating users into the institution.

As in Bodo, the EMILIA research team in Barcelona have also noticed many positive changes in the mentality of users and staff alike:

- The EMILIA trained users have set up an EMILIA Social Club with weekly meeting and activities meaning a greater social inclusion for those involved.
- Due to the changing attitudes within the hospital a new post- EMILIA training programme is being organised to introduce the user on a working level within the institution as an Expert by Experience.
- All dissemination activities carried out by the Demonstration Site involve a user hence potentiating the user voice in all psychology and psychiatric conferences.
- The EMILIA users set us a internet forum on the EMILIA public web page to share their experiences and thoughts with others across Europe.

When we compare these two Demonstration Sites, which essentially are two polar opposites as regards geographical location, cultural and language, we see great similarities in the results. As regards user's involvement, both countries now have users involved, or in the process of becoming involved, in the running of the hospital. The EMILIA project has achieved the recognition of the user as an expert.

## Conclusions

The EMILIA implementation shows the success that can be achieved by empowerment. Presenting the results of the EMILIA training intervention from these two different countries reflects the true significance of a European project. By sharing results, both countries can learn from one another and plan for future training programmes.

For more information visit  
[www.emiliaproject.net](http://www.emiliaproject.net)