

## **Learning from the Crisis – Recovery Work during the Pandemic**

**Side Event at the 64<sup>th</sup> Commission on Narcotic Drugs, 13:10-14:00 CEST on April 12, 2021**

*Organised by EURAD, World Federation Against Drugs, San Patrignano Foundation, the Turkish Green Crescent Society*

### **Abstract**

In the past year, everyone has been, in some way, affected by the pandemic. Yet, people in recovery are [again] vulnerable in times of crisis. This side event showcases the challenges of the crisis, the adaptation by NGOs, and what has been learned to bring into the future. The first speaker, David Best, presented an overseeing research focussing on the recovery in pre-and post-pandemic phases. Second, Petra highlighted the challenges to shift to online meetings within the Narcotic Anonymous fellowship. Third, Huseiyn Djemil showcased the innovative ways of 'Towards Recovery' to support people in recovery during the pandemic from a distance while still being connected. Lastly, Anna Ollo shared the importance of social and labour integration for people in recovery, even during the pandemic, and the projects organised by the Association Proyecto Hombre.

[Watch the Recorded Webinar here](#)

### **Speaker 1 – David Best**

David Best presented overseeing research focussing on the recovery in pre-and post-pandemic phases. The survey among the same group of people has shown that the chances of relapse appear to have tripled post-covid, although the study is not yet complete. Covid has also elevated the rates of alcohol consumption and emotional distress. The change to online support has led to support without fellowship, for example, no social identity nor direct social contact, which is essential in the road of recovery.

Dr Best also presented the CLERO, college of lived experience recovery organisations, which is an online space and a developing coalition for organisations to offer peer support to each other. There will be a CLERO event on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April and all are welcome to attend.

For the future, it is important to reconcile online movement with actual engagement, include CHIME (acronym for: Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Meaning, Empowerment), and create a genuine social community capital. Also, evidence-based researches on recovery-oriented interventions need to follow diverse quality standards than those on treatment, which are often about chronic dependence.

[Become a LERO member](#)

[REC-PATH website](#)

### **Speaker 2 – Petra**

Petra represented the Narcotic Anonymous (NA), a fellowship where addicts help each other in their recovery journey while following the 12-step programme. Being part of NA gives a new way of life, hope, identity, support, and positive relationships. It is a reliable source and a great service commitment.

In times of Covid, the in-person meetings had to be shut down and there was a fear of relapses and no new members. However, the community started to do online meetings and developed new methods. Meeting online has given the advantage of more attendance, more interest in special interest meetings, and the ability to join for those who usually were not able to join, such as single mothers, people living in rural areas, etc. However, online meetings do not replace human contact, the density

of support, the energy in the usual room, and activities outside the meetings and are therefore greatly missed.

[Website for online NA meetings](#)

[Narcotic Anonymous Website](#)

### **Speaker 3 – Huseiyn Djemil**

Huseiyn Djemil represented the organisation “Towards Recovery CIC”, which was established in 2012. The organisation mainly runs a Recovery café, where the ‘coffee and conversation’ is the main event. It aims to help people initiate recovery, sustain recovery, and integrate into the community. It does not advocate any particular model of recovery, just that everyone gets the opportunity to recover. Mr Djemil also elaborated the path or recovery that in reality is not linear and can be messy.

During Covid, the organisation immediately responded with online meetings to the first lockdown. The learning lessons from Covid mainly was the metaphor that we are not all in the same boat but are all in the same storm trying to get through it the best we can. We have to be adaptable as much as we can to live and stay on top of the water and not be overwhelmed.

TowardsRecovery organised the following activities and services during the COVID pandemic: virtual recovery cafe, started a Strava Club on the Strava app, increased frequency of meetings and via zoom, added whatsapp support, invested in IT and not in venues, turned recovery month daily reflections into a book, and started a brand narrative review.

[Website TowardsRecovery](#)

### **Speaker 4 – Anna Ollo**

Anna Ollo represented the Association Proyecto Hombre, an association with 27 foundations in Spain, assisting 18.000 people in treatment a year, working under the biopsychosocial approach, and focusing on recovery and social integration. Anna Ollo presented the adaptation to a new situation with the social and labour reintegration during the pandemic. The impact of Covid on the drug services in Spain have been severe. There is reduced availability of treatment services, risk of relapse processes, and an increase of treatment requests. It also brings increased health risks, especially due to physical and mental comorbidity and challenges within prisons. Also, the unemployment rates have worsened during the pandemic for the general population in Spain. Those in recovery face even more hardship to find a qualified job in these circumstances and remain more vulnerable.

The Association Proyecto Hombre has adapted to the new situation by adapting programmes, following the rapidly changing restrictions closely, and has implemented projects to improve the social and occupational integration of people at risk since social and labour insertion is a key element for addiction recovery. Projects include trainings, employment orientation, referral to insertion companies, etc. mainly through individualised itineraries, which is extremely important to prepare the people in recovery to actively search for employment.

The Covid pandemic has indeed provided many challenges but it gave the opportunity to evolve and incorporate acknowledged services. It should not be forgotten that face-to-face encounters are essential in recovery and focus should be on mitigate the challenges provided by the pandemic.

[Website Association Proyecto Hombre](#)