

## **ESTUAR Foundation, Romania: Our experience at the EMPAD pilot training course in Amsterdam**

Between 22<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of May in Amsterdam a few people from different countries, interested in the mental health domain, gathered to learn from the experience of the members and staff of the Clubhouse. The participants at the training were from three different countries (Belgium, Basque Country and Romania). From Romania we were a team from ESTUAR organization, one of the biggest mental health organizations in Eastern Europe. Our team was composed from Valentina (social assistant), Alina (psychologist) and Eva (a member of our social center).

We were so looking forward to this experience and we can tell that our expectation was totally fulfilled. In order to understand better the clubhouse model before we arrived in Amsterdam the organizers send some really interesting articles about the clubhouse model and how does it works so when we got there we already had a vague idea about what to expect.

In first morning we started the actual training. We were welcomed by both members and staff from the Waterheuvel so we learned quickly in a natural way the clubhouse idea about staff and members working together. It was hard for us to know who is a member and who is staff but that was ok because as we understand later that meant that they were doing a really good job.

We were so curios and had so many questions that were all answered in a really professional yet relaxed way by everybody. One of the things that we admired was the fact that the theoretical parts of the training described perfectly the reality of the clubhouse. Wander, Alex, Ashraf, Martin, Adelbert, Janneke and the rest did an incredible job in explains us all about how the clubhouse works, the standards of the clubhouse, the idea of the members and stuff working side by side, decision making, standards, funding, etc.

The training also included some member stories that we enjoyed a lot. Alex and Ashraf (members) spoke really honest and open about their problems and about how did the clubhouse helped them gain their life's back. This part of the training, along with the other dissections with the members answered really important questions: does the clubhouse model really work and does it work better than other kind of services developed in order to help people with mental health problems? Also in order to validate our empiric observation Martjin and rest recommended us some articles about the research made in how people with mental health problems develop by becoming a member of a clubhouse.

Another interesting experience was the visit that we had at Adelbert's home (one of the members of the clubhouse). Adelbert was kind enough to welcome us at his house and shared with us his opinion on clubhouse model, on problems linked with the mental health field and also on life issues.

The practical part of the training, and also the part from which we learned the most were working in units. We all worked in the kitchen, the reception, the bar and the office. The atmosphere was really relaxed, both staff and members helped us understand every detail of how do things work. This experience also developed us as protectionists a little bit more because some of our beliefs that we had before changed.

We also had an interesting tour at the some employment sites. We visited and also tasted the work of the former members of the Clubhouse at «The Buren». They show us the fact that people with mental health problems can have a normal life.

A great thing in the trading in Amsterdam was the fact that most of the members spoke fluent English and it was easy for us to understand directly from them a lot of things. It is also important to mention the fact that we had the chance to discuss and learn more about the history of the Clubhouse and the International Centers of Clubhouse Development from Mikko and Anne from Finland. Also they shared a lot of their experience and knowledge.

Several other things made the training a great experience. One of those things was the other participants of the training: Tanja, Vivian and Amaia, who were really opened minded people coming from different organizations and countries so talking about the similarities and differences in our organizations and countries was an important resource for us.

Last but not least the spare time that we have spent together (with the clubhouse members, staff and other participants at training) completed the experience and made it incredible. It got us the chance to bond with each other and knows us better. We want to thank everybody for taking the time to do this with us.

Oh, and not to forget... if you ever have the chance to visit the clubhouse in Amsterdam make sure you eat at least once the shrimp soup. It's a must!

*Valentina, Alina, Eva*  
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