

Quality of life in therapeutic communities for substance abuse

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Therapeutic communities (TCs) for substance abuse also called drug-free or concept TCs started in the 1960s in California, USA. The first TC, Synanon, originated as a utopian movement influenced by the AA movement, the ideologies of the 1960s and humanistic psychology. The movement spread over the United States, Europe, Asia, South America and Africa

The TC “De Kiem”, which will serve as a case study for this lecture, was the first Belgium (Europe) drug-free TC and started up in 1976. Within TCs the quality of life is perceived as “A measure of survival, success in treatment and positive evolution in diverse psycho-social areas of live and enjoyment of well being despite severe substance, alcohol misuse and/or poly-drug use”. Survival is an important aspect of life for addicts, who were often at close end to death. Within TCs, naming symbols of survival such as “phoenix house”, “last renaissance”, “second genesis” and so on refer often to survival. “The Kiem” means “germ” and denotes growth and development.

Success in TC treatment refers to a drug-free life that is considered the quality of life par excellence TC research is mainly build upon quasi-experimental methodologies. Here, a bulk of evidence indicates that success depends on time spent in programme, and that relapse (mainly in the first months) can positively be countered by the use of senior staff, family and social network interventions, motivational interviewing, screening and diagnostic interventions.

Positive evolution in diverse psycho-social areas of life and enjoyment of well-being are also considered as important contributors to quality of life.

In this vision the pursuit of survival and recovery, happiness and quality of life are seen as the quintessence of the human condition.