

April 21, 2020

Gamian Europe

Enosh – The Israeli Mental Health Association respond to the COVID-19 outbreak

Dear WHO mental health department partners,

In times of crisis, it is more crucial to share knowledge and success stories in the field of community based mental health services responding to COVID-19. We are working to prepare for the new COVID-19 emergency routine that will be with us for the next months. As part of the thinktank group at Enosh, we try to collect ideas from around the world of how to create better community mental health recovery services that are meaningful and good at this time. We would be happy to get more information on community based mental health services, which are promoting recovery services.

The following review will give some ideas on how Enosh had addressed the emergency situation of COVID-19 in Israel. I hope this information might be helpful for you or your colleagues and partners.

[Enosh - the Israeli mental health Association](#) is the largest community based mental health organization in Israel. Enosh is providing community rehabilitation services to support the social inclusion and rights of people with a psychosocial disability and their families. Our goal is assisting people towards reaching an optimal level of independence within their community, following their changing needs. Enosh operates 70 centers nationwide, providing services for 6,700 individuals and 16,000 family members. Enosh team includes more than 900 professional employees and hundreds of volunteers providing vital services to our consumers in areas of **supportive housing, supportive employment, social centers, family counseling centers, as well as youth counseling centers for early intervention.**

COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on Enosh service consumers and care professionals

Symptoms of anxiety and depression may increase with the required physical distancing practices. Individuals who are already struggling with their mental health are at higher risk of experiencing worsening symptoms of anxiety and depression. As one of the most vulnerable and financially distressed populations in society, people coping with psychosocial disabilities need our solidarity along with professional and financial support, now more than ever.

The outbreak of Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has interfered with routine, social interaction, and the rehabilitation process of Enosh's service consumers. Adults with severe mental health conditions, youth that struggles with mental health issues and families that are now being isolated from their loved ones. It is also impacting our professional teams and peer support programs.



Nationwide, our community mental health rehabilitation services, adjusted to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and its circumstances, during the past month. We were transforming most of our programs, so they will now be in line with the new physical distancing guidelines. Whether it is online or remote communication, face to face according to the guidelines where we are needed. We added two mental health hotlines to provide support and information to the public, families, and youth in addition to the information line we operate usually.

Our teams are working tirelessly to provide support to all of our clients. More than 6,000 people with a psychosocial disability that quarantine or under lockdown. This situation obviously accelerates anxiety and depression, as we all feel from close. The past few weeks showed us that everything is possible!

How are we dealing with the challenges? (innovative programs, changes in the delivery of service)

As a response to the new circumstances, Enosh has adjusted its mental health rehabilitation services to the changing reality according to the guidelines and regulations of the Israeli Ministry of Health. In order to continue and provide essential services to people coping with psychosocial disabilities, Enosh was and still is facing unpredicted professional and organizational changes and challenges. Our adjusted services demand us to collect crucial information and resources for our service consumers - one of the most vulnerable and financially distressed populations in society. In the past month, we have created many changes in our services to adapt to the new emergency routine:

1. **Supportive housing programs** that offer services to more than 2,500 people. Housing programs are still operating with modifications, and we are working around the clock to ensure hygiene and sanitation equipment, food and medicines, and emotional support. We are providing recovery services and case management, with technological adaptations to support remotely and, in some cases, face to face according to the updated regulations. We have got a donation of smart phones from one of the largest mobile companies in Israel to support our new remote care.
2. **Social centers** – we developed and modified our social centers to an online platform and YouTube channel with recreational and social content (such as lectures, museums tours, wellness and sport lessons, virtual tours around the world etc.) acquisition of knowledge, feeling of belonging, healthy lifestyle, and learning social skills. We are providing a variety of activities to different clients with mental health issues, working on their recovery plan through social events. All with case management and check ins with the clients according to their needs.
3. Operating two designated **mental health support lines**. In non-emergency time Enosh operates information lines for people who want to understand how to navigate the mental health system. At this time of crisis, we opened two designated additional lines: one for people with psychosocial disability and their family members and the other line is for teenagers and young adults (age 12-25) who are facing and mental health crisis.

4. our **family support centers** continue to provide support and counseling, one on one and groups with an online platform.
5. Innovation and creativity work with the youth we provide services through our Headspace centers. Headspace is a proven youth mental health model, established to create youth-friendly centers catering to the mental and emotional health needs of young people aged 12-25 by providing a multidisciplinary enhanced primary care structure or 'one-stop shop', with close links to locally available specialist services, schools and other community organizations. Dr. Valery Hazanov wrote about our work [during COVID-19 in "Psychology Today"](#).
5. We are operating our **emergency resiliency program** and guidelines, which help our teams to cope with the new emergency routine and be there for our clients. We were building this program in the past two years.
6. We are modifying our **lived experience department** work in a nationwide peer-to-peer program (also supported through UPSIDES). The COVID-19 changed our research plans, and we transformed it into an online video platform which creates spaces for peer to peer support groups which are called "together." We are training Enosh employees with lived experience to lead peer groups from all around Israel.
6. We are continuing to **advocate** and shape policies in a time of emergency locally through cross-sector round tables, parliament discussions presence, and legal cases and globally through our advocacy partners around the world.
7. We do much more every day. We are in this together!

Personal testimony

Lion Gai-Meir, sharing her thoughts on our peer support programs:

"Recently the Corona took almost everything from us. Almost every hold in the ground and every anchor we have in life. It has an effect on each and every person who is close to us, who we love. There is not one piece that hasn't been Shaked from this virus - which like mental health pain, is transparent, you cannot see it, and it doesn't leave anything as it was before.

*Anxiety became a common word in Israel public discourse. Isolation and loneliness became, as well, to a common experience to many. But there is one thing, powerful thing that enable us to go through these deep abysses. It's the power of **togetherness**. Togetherness in common destiny like the destiny of a painful soul.*

The Coronavirus also cut the plans for us in developing our lived experience department. In essence, we were developing and promoting new programs (such as research with UPSIDES). We were changing not only our life plans but also our professional plans and decided to develop our new "together" program. It is a peer group model, which will be led by employees of Enosh with lived experience in mental health that are also working on their recovery. Their power will be in building resiliency through "togetherness." This is the origin of the name we picked for this program. Together we have more knowledge from our experience.

I am honored to take part in organizational progress. I am supported by a leading team of Enosh that placed the foundation to create a peer support program in the organization. I am passionate about giving our knowledge we gained from so many experiences of people to others, organizations, people, and societies. Involvement of people who walked through the "CORONA" way long before it was the world experience. I hope we can all feel more together. "

Lion Gai-Meir

*Manager of lived experience knowledge, Enosh – The Israeli Mental Health Association
Peer support group trainer, UPSIDES. Israel, April 2020*

Please contact us for more information on our work in Israel and our response to the COVID-19.
Stay safe, Sincerely,

Liron David, Adv (BSW, LLM)

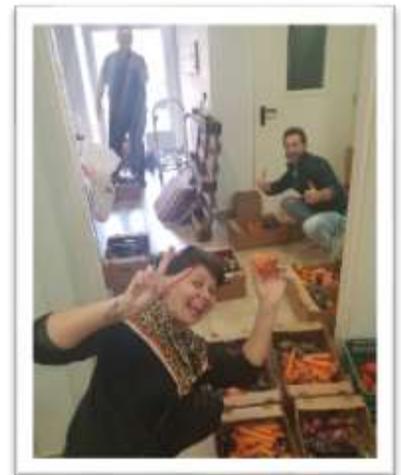
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Enosh teams and clients are working to provide the needs of more than 6000 people in Israel!