The Importance of Service-user Communities. is Mainstreaming Always the Answer?

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The importance of service-user communities: Is mainstreaming always the answer?
Objectives: Participants will be able to describe programs which illustrate the benefits of service-user support.
Aims: Drawing an analogy with immigrant and ethnic minority communities, the presenter will argue that there is a value in the mutual support found in identity communities of people who have experienced mental illness.
Methods: Ethnic minorities have multiple successful pathways towards social inclusion. They can choose to live, work and socialize in the dominant community, remain in their sub-communities, or move back and forth, choosing activities in each. People with psychiatric disabilities can be offered these same choices: we should not assume that integration into the broader community through mainstreaming is the ultimate goal.
Results: Successful models that build on the value of the mutual support in communities of people with disabilities, such as social firms and the psychosocial clubhouse, will be cited. These models include business incubators that help community members develop micro-businesses and a user-friendly bank to assist in capitalizing such ventures. An economic development approach which identifies enterprises that can advance the economy of the service-user community and offer members work opportunities will be described.
Conclusions: Service-users should be given opportunities to appreciate the mutual support which comes from those with whom they share experiences, concerns, needs and goals, and not feel they must abandon this resource in order to integrate themselves into the broader community.