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Sana Loue

Therapeutic Farms

Recovery from Mental Illness



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Sana Loue
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio, USA

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Preface

The original founders of the asylum movement envisioned the provision of a caring, supportive, structured environment, away from the chaotic and stressful demands of daily living, as a mechanism to help individuals recover from their mental illness. The compassionate care by asylum staff of those suffering from mental illness was often seen as a sacred duty:

Always bear in mind that you are in your senses, and that those who are under your care are not: this is your health and happiness; that is their affliction and disease: and you cannot shew your gratitude to God for his mercy and goodness to yourself, than by shewing kindness and consideration to these your afflicted brethren. (Smith, 1999, p. 141, quoting staff instructions from the Oxford Asylum)

Such a setting, it was theorized, would allow individuals the space and time to recalibrate and regain the ability to interact with others. Indeed, the word asylum in its original usage referred to “a place offering protection and safety,” or “the protection afforded by a sanctuary” (Pickett, 2000, p. 112).

The original asylum founded on these principles—“moral treatment”—gradually evolved into what is now thought of as the modern asylum, those overcrowded, bureaucratic institutions, in which individual needs succumb to staff demands for orderliness and government edicts to reduce costs. And now, when people think of an asylum, they often conjure up an image reminiscent of scenes from the book and film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*: a decrepit, poorly ventilated building, with barred windows, locked doors, tasteless meals, and a brutal staff with little understanding of mental illness or compassion for those suffering from it (Kesey, 1962).

Therapeutic farm communities designed to aid individuals in a peaceful, supportive, caring, and therapeutic environment as they move toward recovery from mental illness continue to exist in both the United States and Europe. Today’s therapeutic farms are quite diverse with respect to their underlying philosophy, their organizational and financial structure, and the services that they provide. This book is intended to acquaint its readers—mental health care and public health professionals and students, policymakers, and mental health-care consumers and their families and friends—with therapeutic farms, the services they offer, the challenges they face, and their potential to aid in recovery.

Chapter 1 focuses on the development of the therapeutic farm as a treatment modality in both the United States and in Europe, noting their different evolutionary trajectories. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the variety of services that may be offered at the therapeutic farms, which range from a structured work and vocational training program to equine therapy to yoga to medication management. Chapter 3 focuses on the organizational and financial structure of therapeutic farms. The differences noted reflect the specific legal requirements of the jurisdictions in which the farms are situated, variations in the motivations for the establishment of the farms, and the extent to which funding may or may not be available.

Chapters 4–6 provide case studies of three specific therapeutic farms for adults with mental illness: Hopewell Therapeutic Farm Community in Mesopotamia, Ohio; CooperRiis Healing Community in Mill Spring, North Carolina; and Slí Eile in Churchtown, Ireland. While all three focus on providing a setting to facilitate individuals' recovery from the effects of their mental illness, each is unique with respect to its organizational and financial structure, programming, and entrance requirements.

The final chapter examines both the strengths of therapeutic farms for adults with mental illness and the challenges that they face. Suggestions are offered for the way forward.

Unfortunately, therapeutic/care farms garner little attention and are relatively unknown until someone is actively in search of a solution to their own or their loved one's mental difficulties. Although they are not appropriate or advisable for everyone, therapeutic farms offer an alternative to hospitalization and to outpatient care. Above all, they serve as a place of respite and recovery and a source of hope for a better future.

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Cleveland, OH

Sana Loue

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