

REVIEWS

ALTERNATIVES BEYOND PSYCHIATRY

By PETER STASTNY AND PETER LEHMANN, EDITORS, PREFACE BY ROBERT WHITAKER
Peter Lehmann Publishing, 2007, 431 pp., \$40, £19, ISBN 978-0-9788399-1-8, ISBN 978-0-9545428-1-8.

Reviewed by Ben Gray

No review, synopsis, or commentary can possibly do justice to the meaningful, often heartfelt, and profound accounts of (ex-) users and survivors of the psychiatric system, activists, and academics involved in their movement that are presented in the innovative and new book *Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry*.

Certainly the book provides no unilateral and easy answers, but rather encourages diverse perspectives, interventions, dialogues, and methods for dealing with mental illness. It asks the questions, put simply:

What helps me if I go mad? How can I find trustworthy help for a relative or a friend in need? How can I protect myself from coercive treatment? Where can I talk to like-minded people about my own experiences with psychiatry and about my life? What should I do if I can no longer bear to work in the mental health field? What are the alternatives to psychiatry? (p. 15)

The book is a brave attempt to begin to tackle these difficult issues via a collection of reports from anti-psychiatric, radical-psychiatric, non-psychiatric, and post-psychiatric alternatives in different countries. The book highlights the pressing need for structural change in psychiatry and appraises the individual, organized alternatives and measures that need to be taken in order to effect this change and to

build strategies toward implementing humane treatment and provide freedom of choice.

Sixty-one authors (ex-users and survivors of psychiatry, therapists, psychiatrists, lawyers, relatives, care-givers, politicians, and social scientists) offer insights into new practices, therapeutic alternatives, and positive examples of democratic partnerships with those who have been diagnosed with mental health problems.



Above all, the book is full of personal (and therefore humanized) accounts of those who have been failed, trapped, forgotten, or even abused by the psychiatric system, with its over-reliance on powerful anti-psychotic medication and the sovereign ability to administer unfreedom and forced treatment.

The majority of articles are specialist chapters about alternatives and ways of realizing these alternatives and humane treatment, written by (ex-) users and survivors of psychiatry, by professionals or relatives, or in cooperation.

There is not even a shade of the typical split—we the “experts” (who own the objective truth), they the “ex-patients” (who made only subjective personal experiences)—in the book. The typical hierarchy is overcome, which is to the credit of Peter Lehmann, self-employed

publisher and international activist of the movement of (ex-) users and survivors of psychiatry, and his co-editor Peter Stastny. The latter is a founding member of the International Network toward Alternatives and Recovery (INTAR), an advocacy platform for the most important alternative approaches from around the world. For many years, he was Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx and conducted several publicly funded research projects in the area of vocational rehabilitation, social support, and self-help, in collaboration with individuals who had survived personal crises and psychiatric interventions.

The editors seem an ideal pair to enlighten the readership about a broad spectrum of alternatives and to provide a synthesis of interventions that protect against unwanted medical methods and advocacy for alternatives beyond psychiatry. The book will be of great help and assistance to people with emotional distress and mental health issues, their caregivers, professionals seeking more holistic and democratic approaches of treatment, as well as academics and activists involved in the movement of (ex-) users and survivors of psychiatry. The book is set to become a classic and radical alternative in itself, and will influence alternatives beyond psychiatry now and in the future.

BEN GRAY, Ph.D., is a Senior Research Fellow at Canterbury Christ Church University, in Essex, United Kingdom. He has an established reputation covering research on the social exclusion of marginalized groups in the health and social care systems.

HONEN THE BUDDHIST SAINT: Essential Writings and Official Biography

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