Mental Health Promotion by Recovery-Oriented Green Care Services

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The aim of this project is to contribute to the documentation of the possible health effects of various Green Care services and to focus on the practical implications of this knowledge. We will look for factors that are crucial to beneficial services in the long run, which can help in establishing the long hoped for Recovery-Oriented Green Care services as complementary supplements to medical treatment, therapy, rehabilitation and work training. We expect to obtain knowledge about factors that influence the way back to work and school for participants, and the improved functioning of defined indicators and the recruitment model’s impact on how early in the process participants are offered the services. Further, by use of the data gathered from users’ subjective experiences, we will identify which factors are most crucial in the recovery process, how the factors work together, how it is possible to build a flexible system in which individual needs are taken care of, and to what degree recovery-oriented green care services can constitute an alternative and supplement to traditional services. The last part of the project will be a discourse analysis in which we expect to identify some linguistic and epistemological conditions for communication and cooperation.

The project consists of 4 sub-studies:

I: A quantitative study of people between 16-30 years old who is out of work or school because of mental and/or drug related problems, and who are going through a Green Care program. The aim is to measure effects on connection to job or education, and other aspects of individual functioning before, during and after the intervention/project period, for example related to social support and mental health. We also want to investigate how participants experience the stay on a Green Care farm, and what they point to as important for their benefits from Green Care.

II: A qualitative study: Users experiences with Green Care – participants from 18-64. Qualitative interviews with Green Care –participants and leaders/farmers, who is, or recently have, participated in a Green Care program. The aim is to document and compare users’ and leaders’/farmers’ experiences with Green Care. The sub-study recruit informants form Green Care farms in the Norwegian counties Hedmark and Oppland.

III: A qualitative process study: Young peoples’ (16-24 years old) experiences with Green care. This study seeks to reveal beneficial factors and focuses on subjective experiences. The qualitative methods consist of participating observation, field conversations and semi-structured interviews with the participants at three different Green Care farms in the counties Hedmark and Hordaland. Altogether 30 days with fieldwork is carried-out in a period of 10-12 months, which is 10 days at each Green Care farm.

IV: Discourse analytic approach: Different languages and discourses among participants in the field such as farmers, activity leaders, participants, work and welfare officers, and health and agricultural professionals. Recovery-Oriented Green Care Services are based on communication among different groups, and it’s a need to develop a language which can
facilitate open dialogue and communication on equal basis. Ideas about illness and illness etiology, recovery, empowerment, responsibility, human dignity, rationality, etc. have been investigated in order to understand the mechanisms behind cooperation and communication.

The project also aims at investigating the recruitment process to Green care and other comparable services for the target groups, mainly by the use of qualitative focus group interviews.

**Challenges**

During the project period we have discovered that Green Care in Norway is a complex and variegated field, which means that it’s hard to define target groups as well as relevant services. Because of this it has been difficult to get exact information about how many Green Care projects is going on in Norway, or how many participants that are involved. This obstacle makes planning and designing of project complicated and time consuming.

Being in the nature and taking part in agricultural activities are by most people recognized as positive and beneficial. Some of the factors we find as effective are so universal for human beings, that it’s hard to communicate their special scientific value. One of the sub-studies has formulated this as: “how can we present the common, sufficiently uncommon, and interesting in a scientific context?”

Related to this dilemma our research group has started to discuss different meanings of the concept quality assessment. It’s interesting to reflect over the distance between quality as it’s defined in different quality systems and treatment/service manuals on the one hand and which important recovery factors are described by users in literature from the recovery tradition.

**Preliminary results**

The findings in the different sub-studies all point to some core factors:

- Safe personal relationships
- Environments that promote mastering abilities
- Holistic approach
- Being respected on equal basis
- Meaningful work tasks
- Experiences dignity
- Continuity between different parts of the help service systems
- Interaction with animals