

It takes a village to raise a child (African proverb)

Project name: *The Village*

Problem: Families with children suffering of mental illnesses are generally overloaded with practical tasks of everyday life that do consume an excessive amount of time and energy. This often results in additional distress within an emotional context already very difficult to handle. While these families need time and mental space to focus on (re)creating an healthy and harmonious environment that would support the therapeutical process of their child, a lot of this time and space are occupied by daily incumbencies such as household, work, other family members's needs. As probable consequence, the therapeutical process of the patient will have less chances to succeed simply because parents cannot dedicate the adequate attention and concentration required to pursue all cares and affection their child needs for his/her functional recovery.

What is the Village: The Village is a ("flexible") support tool offered by therapists to families with children affected by mental illnesses. The Village is a practical support system constituted by volunteering, responsible and committed individuals that feel close to the family. These individuals are relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbours, acquaintances that the family appoints based on specific criteria's such as trustworthiness, capabilities and availability. These individuals form a community that work together in taking over some practical activities from parents, without taking away parent's empowerment. As a consequence, parents can be relieved of (part of) the stressful burden given by daily incumbencies and thus they can dispose of more time, space and energy to dedicate to their own self-care and to the care of their child, increasing thus the chance of the patient's functional recovery. The Village members will not be responsible for the care of the patient.

Actors and their characteristics:

Therapists: Professionals with medical expertise in charge of the therapeutical process. They advocate the key mission of The Village and are willing thus to offer it to families as a tool external to the therapy itself. These are individuals who are very aware of the initial resistance parents might have in embracing this type of help because of:

- (perceived) intrusion into their intimacy
- and/or natural resistance in receiving support
- and/or a burden they cannot accept people to take
- and/or difficulty to let go control by delegating tasks they feel responsible for

They are thus empathetic, persuasive, proven listeners and communicators.

Facilitator: The gatekeeper of The Village. The function of the facilitator is to support the correct functioning of the system. He/She is the focal point for all Village related questions and ensure every actor has understood and signed off on rules and requirements.

The facilitator is very aware of the fact that the correct functioning of the system depends on clear agreements among all actors and also depends on a non-invasive regular supervision aimed at maintaining the correct flow.

UP!

The involvement of the Facilitator can be estimated in:

- 7 hours in setting up The Village (intake with parents, support in reaching out to their community and etc)
- 3 hours in meeting everyone to design alliance
- 1 hour weekly for supervision

That means the costs will be approximately of 700 euros for the initial phase and 70 euros weekly.

Parents: The patient's caretakers and providers. The role of parents is key in determining how The Village operates. They are those deciding what are the tasks The Village members can take and how they need to be executed. They understand and embrace the philosophy of The Village and therefore once they have defined the what's and the how's, they also accept to let go control on those tasks, given The Village members respects the "instructions" given.

Parents always need to feel empowered and supported, rather than impotent and in debt. They need to feel connected to the ultimate shared purpose which remains in service of the functional recovery of the patient (their child). They stay grateful to The Village and yet they do not need to feel obliged in giving something in exchange.

Village members: The support community. These are individuals who are close to the family and who parents feel close enough to appoint as support providers. These are relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbours that are conscious of the situation of the family and are willing to offer their help unconditionally without wishing anything in return than the well-being of the family. These individuals agree to offer a mount of availability hours per week keeping well in mind their own incumbencies and obligations. This step is essential in safeguarding consistency and clarity in the support they can offer and at the same time in ensuring to keep their lives (and their own families') in a controlled balance.

Process steps:

1. The therapist informs the parents about The Village
2. The parents meet the facilitator for additional information and agreeing on further steps
3. The parents receive instructions on how to select and appoint the Village members and how to reach out to them
4. All actors involved are invited to an opening meeting coordinated by the facilitator
5. The facilitator presents The Village and aligns everyone on roles and requirements
6. The facilitator answers all doubts and questions
7. Only the individuals that can guarantee availability and commitment are admitted in the system
8. All actors are asked to download The Village app (it includes a list of Village members, tasks, shared calendar, internal chat and more)
9. The app is the official digital platform where all actors can use
10. The app is populated with everything that is required and here the village members can get roles assigned that remind the social structure of a village (i.e. the major, the carpenter, the baker, the local farmer, the teacher and so on..just to ensure some kind of playfulness)
11. The Village can start
12. Parents and The Village members can decide to create rituals in the form of regular common activities, such as dinner, sporting, cooking or anything they find most appropriate to keep the internal bond solid

The logo consists of the letters 'UP!' in a large, white, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a pattern of small, dark dots, giving them a textured, stippled appearance. The exclamation point is also filled with this dot pattern. The logo is positioned in the bottom left corner of the page.

Rules of the game:

- Design alliance among actors: this will serve as a group manifesto to hold on
- Parents establish the help they need and how it has to be executed in order for them to feel confident in delegating
- Parents while let go control and have still the possibility to adjust their instructions
- Village members authentically want to support the family
- They respect instructions given
- The communicate their own requirements in adequate and timely manners
- The whole process exists in presence of collaboration and in absence of conflict

Benefits:

- Families will have more time and energy to take care of the patient, themselves and other children (if present)
- Families will receive support by people they trust and with whom they have an affection bond, giving them the feeling they are not alone in their struggle
- Village members can feel more connected to key values like support and empathy. This might result in higher sense of life purpose, meaningful contribution and self-worth
- The patient might feel more motivated in the therapeutical process knowing there is a community of people supporting the family (this one is a bit risky though as it might also trigger a sense of guilt in the patient. With respect to that, the therapist can help the patient to apply a positive, pressure-free perspective on this)

List of potential tasks the village members can take over:

- Groceries
- Cooking
- Cleaning
- Laundry
- Folding clothes
- Making bed
- Car maintenance
- Bringing kids to school
- Playing with kids
- Babysitters

The logo consists of the letters 'UP!' in a large, white, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a pattern of small, dark dots, giving them a textured appearance. The exclamation point is also filled with this dot pattern. The logo is positioned in the bottom left corner of the page, which has a dark grey background.