

mht digest

Books

ALTERNATIVES BEYOND PSYCHIATRY

Peter Stastny, Peter Lehmann (eds)

Peter Lehmann Publishing, 2007 432pp £16.99 ISBN 978 0 954542 81 8

'One of the most important books on mental health to have come out in the last decade'

If you accept that the medical model approach to mental health doesn't work, you may well have been asked: 'But what would you replace it with?' Opening and closing with impassioned arguments against the psychiatric system, this thought-provoking and exhaustive anthology, featuring 61 authors from many different countries, looks at alternatives to psychiatry and its medical model approach. It describes a whole range of creative approaches to mental health and recovery that are about the efficacy of empowerment, support and cultural sensitivity, of inspiring hope and offering choice, information, self-determination, advocacy, and the possibility that mental health workers can create trusting relationships with their clients.

One of its many strengths is that it offers so many ways forward. It concentrates on the practicalities, reporting real, live projects and groups, what they have achieved and the challenges they've faced. It offers individual stories of how people have coped on their own, outside of the psychiatric system. It even includes contributions on using the law to challenge, for example, coercive and forced treatment and the failure to implement advance directives.

What could easily have been a disjointed collection of articles is skilfully edited into a narrative for radical change. It works on several levels, whether as a compendium of imaginative ideas and first-person stories, a toolbox of alternatives to psychiatry, or as a summation of the kind of support most service users and survivors would prefer to receive from the mental health system. If

read by enough people in a position to make a real difference, it has the potential to radically reform – even revolutionise – mental health care in this country. As such, it is one of the most important books on mental health to have come out in the last decade.

Shaun Johnson

