Hi Friends
Today I would like to introduce my and our experience of recovery and self-help activities in Japan.
“recovery”, “self-help”, “empowerment” etc. are among the many terms that have been imported by professionals and researchers.

Has there been no “recovery”, “self-help”, or “peer support” in Japan?

In the last two decades many professionals and researchers have imported many terms. For instance “recovery”, “self-help”, “peer support”, “empowerment” etc., and they introduce these concepts in lectures or meeting, as if there were no “self-help”, “recovery”, or “peer support” in Japan.

But I think everywhere we u/s live, we all experience and practice self-help, recovery and peer support, though we have no concept of them.
As an introduction I would like to give a rough illustration of the situation in Japan. The statistics are a little out of date, the UK ones being from 1993 and other from 1996. But the figure of Japan have not changed. Ninety–eight to ninety- nine % of beds are occupied and there are about 330,000 in-patients.
Average term of hospitalization is over three hundreds days.
Institutionalization in Japan

- Over 50,000 persons are hospitalized for more than 20 years (in 2000)
- Over 145,000 persons are hospitalized for more than 5 years (in 2000)
- Over 140,000 persons are in locked wards (in 2000)
- 5,109 persons are restricted by belts on beds and 7,741 people are isolated into locked cells (from the government research on 30th of June in 2003)

This will help you to understand how exclude from society Japanese users/survivors are.

There are too many hospital beds and there is little service in the community.

And we have no independent tribunal, no free access to legal aid, no legal right to access medical records, etc..

In fact the mental health system in Japan anyone can be forced to go into a mental hospital at anytime for no limitation of the term.

And the government enacted the new preventative detention law this year and made special hospitals for so called mental disordered offenders. They are strictly locked up in special hospitals or are forced to received treatments in the community.
Our national group

- Established in 1974
- Nation wide network of individual u/s and group of u/s
- Membership  u/s only
- Membership is about 500 individuals and groups

Some people do not like English name of our group. If directly translated, Our group’s name is “National Group of so called Mental ill people”
We dared to use very discriminative term “mental ill” for our national group.
Our activities: self-help

- Newsletter 6 times a year
- Members meetings once a month
- Provide information and mutual support
- Support people in mental hospitals, prisons etc.

These are all services the mental health system does not provide

Our main activities are to provide mutual supports to help people to survive. But there are too many things to do and we cannot deal with them systematically. We should learn a more sophisticated way to run the group as is done in the US and other countries.
Our activities: political activities

- The Essence of our political activities is to reclaim our own human rights.
- We are basically people like any other
- The ways in which we are different do not justify denial of our own human rights
- This is the core of UN convention and WNUSP position
- Without reclaiming our own human rights there can be no recovery or self-help

We have taken many political actions. There are many agendas.
But the essence of them is to reclaim our own human rights.
We are basically people like any other.
The ways in which we are different do not justify denial of our own human rights.
So we should participate the UN disability convention and on national level to make disability discrimination law in Japan.
My experience of the mental health system

- The mental health system robbed me of my self-esteem, confidence and denied my real feeling
- Psychiatrists told me that I was mad and bad and all my feelings were symptoms

I suppose you u/s have same experience all over the world.

I was hospitalized in nineteen seventy when I was seventeen years old. My parent, teachers and also psychiatrists judged me to be lazy, dependent, immature or as a spoil as a child. Every message was negative.
My (our) experience of recovery

- My first experience at “a local users’ group” in early 80’s

“ I can speak out! I can express my feelings, both positive and negative especially my feelings of anger!!”

It was a revolution for me

**It was a my first step towards recover**

When I participated in the meeting of one group, one member got angry and did not hesitate to express her emotion.

I was surprised.

I believed that users should not express their emotion or real feeling in the society. And also I believed that all my feeling was symptoms and especially negative feeling and if I expressed my feeling, I might be punished by mental health system or the society.

One who recently participate in our group said that he could recognize that it was OK as he was.

For a long time people around him or doctors or family have denied him, but he said ”This was the first time that I can share experience or information with peers and I can be free from people’s negative judgments”

I think that it was his first step to recovery and it was a similar experience as mine.
My activities and recovery

- I have been working as the contact person and the editor of the newsletter in our group for about 10 years.
- Real activities help me to recover.
- It is very difficult to recover in activities run by professionals.
- But there are also informal peer-support networks even in mental hospitals and they work to help us to recover.

When I was a new comer in u/s activities, I would never have believed that I could travel alone by intercity train, or speak in the meeting, write articles etc..
But now I am a editor of the newsletter, write many articles for magazines and also I can travel to here by myself !!
And I have also published my own book and translated two books into Japanese.

I had never dreamed that I could do these things, before I participated in u/s movement.
All I explained today started when I visited a small local group over twenty years ago.
In those days I did not get the concept of self-help or recovery, but these activities and experience themselves were self-help and recovery.

I believe that recovery happens in real activities and it is difficult for it to happen in artificial activities in mental health system. But I also believe that even in mental hospitals there are informal and underground networks of peer support and self-help and they work help us to recover.
Our problems and tasks in Japan

- Funding
- How to develop the systematic and practical tools to support recovery
- How to share the concept of recovery between peers and professionals
- How to make alternatives with keeping our philosophy and position and without co-optation

Our group is un-funded and all activists are un-paid and we cannot pay the traveling cost to attend the meeting. Money is the biggest problem.

Not everyone contributes to the work we do so a small number of us work harder and harder and burn out.
In Japan there are no paid-worker in users movements.

We are living under very sever stress. We should have struggled to survive and to resist. We could not have little time and energy to make our own alternative services.
Only a few groups run the alternative services in Japan.

In this decade we have learnt much from users movements in US or other countries. Especially we can get big presents from National Empowerment Center, we could published Japanese edition of “PACE” and Dr.Deegan’s guide book. I also translated Mary’s “stopovers”. And WNUSP activities provide great support for our movement in Japan very much. It is an exciting experience to exchange information and experience from all over the world.

But I think there is much misunderstanding of “recovery” by professionals and researchers in Japan.
One Japanese psychiatrist wrote that NEC is a alternative but this means getting a professional license like Dr. Fisher.

On this panel I hope that I could learn from your experience and organize our potential power to recover.
Finally I would like report the news from Japan.
We protested the new bill that will destroy all disabled people’s community life and whole social security system.
Our slogan is “nothing about us without us”
over 10,000 people came together and it was a historical action. All groups of people with different disability acted in unity.

Yesterday the bill passed the Diet.
Now we should protect our own life and fight to survive in the community, otherwise the government would keep and make more institutions.

In mental health area the government only change the name of the mental hospitals wards.
The government will say they are not hospitals wards, they become care homes or nursing homes, we finally can decrease the number of beds in mental hospitals.”

Our national group co-operated with people with physical disabilities from the beginning but activities of the UN convention and to protest the new bill made wider and stronger cross-disability solidarity and unity.

And also internationally we as a member of WNUSP got cross disability unity.

It is very strict situation in Japan.
But we will fight to survive and for the alternative world.

Thank you for your attention.