

Clubs of Alcoholics in Treatment (CATs) and systemic approach

From Vladimir Hudolin's work

Clubs are founded on the concept that alcohol related problems originate from different types of behaviour, life styles, difficulties arising from problematical relationships and interactions within the ecological systems, in the local community and the family...

... consequently, the “treatment” must start in the environment in which alcoholics live, as both alcoholics and their families should not be treated like patients, isolated and cut off from society, but are integral part of it.

The Club work is based on a systemic approach, which implies observing and identifying alcohol related problems inside the bio-social system where people live and work.

- Clubs consider the family as a whole, that is the most important biosocial system for each single person.
- A specific behaviour related to alcohol drinking is regarded as a part of a more complex behaviour of this system.
- No change in behaviour or in life-style can be achieved **outside** this system.

The Club of Alcoholics in Treatment is organised as a multifamily community, and its activity is based on the social-ecological approach.

Ecological because it is de-medicalized
Social because it develops within the same bio-social system where each single person lives.

The aim is to create the conditions for a change in the life-style of the families.

A treatment is often described as a rehabilitation, or better a social rehabilitation.

However, what happens in a Club could be better defined as a socio-cultural process.

It is not a technique for the rehabilitation of alcoholics, but for changing the health and general culture of our communities.

Indeed, the Club activity is addressed to families **and** to the local community where the families live and work (which means getting involved in **prevention**).

The aim of the Club is the empowerment of the families. They become able to grow and mature, and to better communicate and interact within themselves and with the community.

Family members will accept more easily to join a Club, when they are in a critical situation.



Local community school for alcohol related problems

A family take part in the basic training programmes right from the beginning and, step by step, accept that alcohol related problems are considered as a behaviour involving the **whole** family system.

Family members are required to stop drinking completely, to eliminate alcohol drinks from their house, and to give up the habit of offering alcoholic drinks to people visiting them.

Drug free life-style

All close relatives, sometimes also other relatives, and even close friends are allowed to join the Club.

Clubs accommodate extended families, so it is not necessary to discuss what is intended as family.....

....because members of a family are also those people who, even if they do not have blood ties with alcoholics, are important to the family. They are friends, workmates, employers etc.

Often, someone gets in touch with a Club, without the alcoholic, and asks for help or advice.

It can be the alcoholic's wife/husband, son/daughter, or a friend.

They ask for help because, as they say, they cannot convince the alcoholic to attend the meetings.

A person asking for help is part of a family system, a system involved as a whole in the alcohol related problems, and she/he **needs the treatment too.**

During the period when only one member attends the meeting, the approach will be the same as if the whole family were present.

The **children** must also take part in the Club's activities, as attending the meetings would help them overcome all difficulties arising from an alcohol related problem inside their family.

They probably find the Club's atmosphere better than what they experience at home.

They have the right to attend the Club like any other member of the family.



If an alcoholic's family cannot be contacted or its members are not willing to take part in the treatment, a substitute family has to be found by the Club.

A substitute family must accept all the obligations and duties, including their own sobriety.

A change inside the Club must be followed by a change inside the community, otherwise it has little value. The change is really successful if the families bring such change inside the community, and do not keep it secret, inside the Club.

Theoretical links

Social psychiatry (Joshua Bierer)

Therapeutic community (Maxwell Jones)

General system theory (Ludwig Von Bertalanffy)

Family and systemic approach (G. Bateson, N. Ackerman, S. Minuchin, M. Bowen, C. Whitaker, J. Haley, J. Weakland, P. Watzlawick, V. Satir).

P. E. Dimauro, “Il sistema familiare e la comunità multifamigliare”. Relazione al Corso “L’approccio familiare e sistemico nei Club degli alcolisti in trattamento e nella comunità locale”, Zovello (Udine), 6-8 Settembre 2002.