



Summary

Advisory report: The use of experiential peer support in the probation service

Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Protection of Juveniles (RSJ)

The Advisory Division of the Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Protection of Juveniles (RSJ) has issued an advisory report on the use of experiential peer support in the probation service. The report was issued on 25 January 2024 to the Minister for Legal Protection.

Experiential peer support

For several years the Ministry of Justice and Security and the probation service have been interested in the use of experiential peer support in rehabilitation practice. For this reason, the ministry has asked the RSJ to advise on this topic. Support by experiential peer workers is still little used in the probation service. That is why, in the preparation of this advisory report, other related fields where experiential peer support is deployed, such as addiction care and forensic care, were also examined.

Added value

A variety of benefits of experiential peer support have emerged from the practice of the related fields of forensic care and addiction care, where information on the use of experiential peer support was collected for this advisory report. These benefits are related to the fact that experiential peer workers and clients share certain experiences. As a result, clients feel understood and recognised by experiential peer support workers. Also these experiential peer workers offer clients perspective and hope in the sense that it is possible to overcome their problems.

The initial experiences with experiential peer support in the field of the probation service are in line with this conclusion and they are considered promising. Probation service clients describe the contact with experiential peer workers as accessible and familiar, which makes them more willing to share. Because of their similar background, experiential peers could put clients at ease, better than professionals can. This allows them to play a bridging role in the rehabilitation process. Experiential peer workers can increase probation officers' knowledge and understanding of clients. More generally, they can motivate and support clients and create a sense of recognition among clients. Moreover, experiential peer support workers show that change is possible.

All in all, in practice there seems to be an added value of using experiential peer support. It offers opportunities for further elaboration of the use of experiential peer support within the probation service. However, there is little systematically collected evidence

