

Family Clubs

The Club System for Treated Alcoholics (CTA) has a history going back to 1964. It was developed by Vladimir Hudolin with a team of devoted collaborators. The first CTA was started in Zagreb and was nurtured in Trieste in Northern Italy. It spread quickly to Yugoslavia and elsewhere in Italy and as of now has permeated 34 countries. Concepts underlying the Club system have great acceptance today as an effective methodology in dealing with alcoholism and its related problems.

The Family Club system is based on the social ecological approach to the alcohol dependence problem. The involvement of the entire family to bring about the necessary behavioural change in the lifestyle of persons with alcohol related problems, is a special feature of the system. It is markedly different from the approach of Alcoholics Anonymous where the addicted person is obliged to accept that he/she is an alcoholic and alcoholism is a 'disease', which necessitated a therapeutical approach for cure. Under that system, other members of the family are kept out of the weekly meetings. Consequently the spouses of the alcoholics hold a parallel separate meeting.

On the other hand, in the Club system of Vladimir Hudolin, the entire family, which could include close friends and associates, has a key role to play in the treatment process. A Club has to meet on a fixed day and time and it is compulsory that the members of the Club attend weekly meetings regularly. The highest importance is given to the family, because the family as a whole is considered the most important bio-social system for each single person. Hence, by design alcoholics are treated inside their family environment. The underlying basic principle being that no change in behaviour or lifestyle can be achieved outside this bio-social system.

The upper limit of members in a Club is 12 families. With the 13th family a split is mandatory. This restriction of the number of member families to twelve is to get the highest possible participation of the entire membership in the affairs of the Club. Each member of the Club is assigned a particular role within the Club. This is an important feature of the Club system. Because of this it becomes obligatory for him or her to attend the weekly meeting of the Club. The reduced number of members further enables each member to speak at a meeting. Since the system allows each member to participate fully at the meetings, it ensures that members do not drop out.

Basic rules of a Club are kept at a minimum. There are 4 - 6 basic rules that members are obliged to follow. They are

- (1) A Club has to be divided with the 13th member.
- (2) There has to be a fixed day of a week and a fixed time for the meetings.
- (3) All members have to refrain from smoking during a meeting.
- (4) Members have to attend meetings regularly and they have to be punctual.
- (5) Confidentiality has to be maintained of all personal information revealed at a club meeting.
- (6) All have to attend the educational/training programmes consisting of 10 modules held at the Local Alcohol Schools. (These are itinerary schools and when it is in session a board stating 'School' is placed outside the place the lessons are being conducted. On any single day only one module is taken for discussion..)

Besides these rules, there are practices like the roll call, recording the days of abstinence, recording the day's proceedings etc., which are not obligatory.

At these meetings a 'servant-teacher' plays an important role. He/she is both a catalyst and a facilitator. Before becoming a servant-teacher he/she has to follow the 'sensibilisation' programme, which is of 50 hours duration. The term servant-teacher was coined because his or her duty is both to serve in the Club and be a teacher at the Local Alcohol School. The social ecological method developed by Vladimir Hudolin vehemently opposes that alcohol dependence is a disease. Hence, even the term therapist was deliberately not used and the term servant-teacher was adopted. Besides attending the weekly meetings, a servant-teacher has to attend the monthly meetings of the servant-teachers and other meetings in order to update information. A servant-teacher is not an outsider but a member of the Club and has to follow the rules of the Club.

The family approach of Hudolin is also called the systemic approach. In this the alcoholic is not separated from the family and the community. The 'treatment' though sometimes referred to as rehabilitation or social rehabilitation is more a social cultural process. In this process a change in behaviour and lifestyle of all members of the family is expected. Certain changes or 'sacrifices' have to be made by the entire family. The attitude to alcohol is important. There is no halfway house. The family as a whole has to reject alcohol in their lifestyle. There cannot be two norms of total abstinence to one member of the family and social or permissible drinking for the others. In the social process of change and maturation, alcohol could not even be served at home. Achieving such a change is a slow process, after which not taking alcohol becomes normal behaviour.

The splitting of the Club is also a salient feature of the systemic approach. The Club is not outside the community but part of it. Behavioural changes may be visible within the Club, but the aim is to achieve the behavioural changes within the community. The mandatory splitting of the Club with the 13th family joining, though sometimes opposed by the members (who could even be the servant-teacher), gives the right message to the members of the Club. Social events as a Club is also discouraged and the members, whilst being members of a Club, are constantly reminded that they are members of the community at large.

Another salient feature of the Hudolin method is that it is culturally friendly. It does not appeal to an outside power but to the internal spirituality of a person. The internal spirituality is something that has to be and could be developed. A spiritual dimension, without the assistance of an external power makes the system more culturally acceptable.