

BEYOND THE SUBSTANCE



A Relational and Community-Based Perspective in the Treatment of Problematic Substance Use

Adriana Lamboglia^{1,2} · Klaus Baumann¹

¹ University of Freiburg, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

² Hogar de Cristo Nuestra Señora de Lourdes, Paraná, Argentina

BACKGROUND AND AIM

Problematic substance use is shaped not only by pharmacological effects or individual symptoms, but also by adverse experiences, disrupted relationship, and conditions of social exclusion [3,4]. Recovery may therefore involve more than reducing or discontinuing substance use: it may also involve rebuilding supportive relationships, strengthening belonging, and developing meaningful social roles [5], while affirming the person's dignity. This poster presents a practice-based reflection on the experience of Hogar de Cristo Nuestra Señora de Lourdes. It examines how hospitality, sustained accompaniment, and community-building contribute to a person-centred and relational response to problematic substance use.

SETTING AND APPROACH

Hogar de Cristo Nuestra Señora de Lourdes is a community-based programme in Paraná, Argentina, supporting people experiencing problematic substance use and social vulnerability, including homelessness. It combines psychological care, individual and group accompaniment, therapeutic and occupational activities, peer support, and instrumental activities of daily living. This practice-based reflection draws on the first author's professional and coordination experience. It focuses on three guiding principles of the institutional model: hospitality, sustained accompaniment, and community-building [6]. The concepts of a holding environment [1], attachment [2], and social identity in recovery [5] inform the interpretation. Published research on the model in Buenos Aires provides context [4]. No participant data were systematically collected or analysed for this poster.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

Hospitality “Welcoming life as it comes”

The programme seeks to offer a non-judgmental welcome, recognising each person's history, dignity, and present circumstances. Listening, shared meals, hygiene facilities, informal conversations, and practical support are everyday expressions of this orientation [6].

Side-by-side accompaniment

Professionals, peer supporters, and community members provide accompaniment that connects psychological and therapeutic care with everyday needs. The approach prioritises continuity through crises, relapses, and interruptions, aiming to sustain contact and keep opportunities for re-engagement open [6].

Building community “The family of the Hogar”

Shared meals, responsibilities, celebrations, and everyday encounters offer opportunities for participation and mutual support. The institutional image of the “Hogar family” expresses the intention to offer a lasting place of belonging, particularly where personal or social networks are weakened [4,6].

PRACTICE-BASED INSIGHTS AND DISCUSSION

The reflective synthesis highlights three interconnected practice principles:

- **Relational Continuity:** The approach prioritises maintaining contact during crises, relapses, and interruptions. Maintaining contact can preserve a pathway back into care.
- **Belonging and Social Support:** Recognition, mutual support, and meaningful participation may strengthen pro-recovery social networks and contribute to a recovery-oriented identity [5].
- **Integration of Care and Every Day Life:** Psychological and therapeutic support is connected with concrete needs involving health, food, housing, hygiene, education, work, and access to rights and public services. Rather than acting only as external experts, professionals participate in a caring network together with peer supporters and community members. Everyday life may thereby become part of the therapeutic and holding environment [1,4,6].

CONCLUSION

This experience suggests that responses to problematic substance use can extend beyond the substance itself and address the person's relational, social, and everyday context.

Recovery may involve rebuilding meaningful relationships, strengthening belonging and relational safety, affirming dignity, and developing future-oriented goals. Where personal and family networks are weakened or absent, a community that welcomes, recognises, and remains present may provide a foundational therapeutic space.

Beyond controlling substance use, recovery may begin through the experience of being welcomed, valued, and accompanied by others who remain.

LIMITATIONS

This single-site reflection is shaped by the first author's professional involvement and does not include a systematic analysis of participants' perspectives. It cannot establish effectiveness or causal relationships; its relevance to other settings requires further examination.

REFERENCES

- 1.Winnicott DW. The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development. London: Hogarth Press; 1965.
- 2.Bowlby J. Attachment and Loss. Vol. 1: Attachment. London: Hogarth Press; 1969. 2017;2(8):e356–e366.
- 3.Hughes K, Bellis MA, Hardcastle KA, et al. The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Lancet Public Health. 2017;2(8)–e366. doi:10.1016/S2468-2667(17)30118-4.
- 4.Azparren AL. La dimensión territorial y religiosa en el abordaje de los consumos de drogas: el programa Hogar de Cristo en villas de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Argentina. Cultura y Droga. 2020;25(29):63–88. doi:10.17151/culdr.2020.25.29.4.
- 5.Best D, Beckwith M, Haslam C, et al. Overcoming alcohol and other drug addiction as a process of social identity transition: the Social Identity Model of Recovery (SIMOR). Addiction Research & Theory. 2016;24(2):111–123. doi:10.3109/16066359.2015.1075980.
- 6.Federación Familia Grande Hogar de Cristo. Centro Barrial [Internet]. [cited 2026 Sep 7]. Available from: <https://hogardecristo.org.ar/centro-barrial/>

Conflict of interest: None declared.
Funding: No specific funding.