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## Mission Statement

The Icarus Project envisions a new culture and language that resonates with our actual experiences of 'mental illness' rather than trying to fit our lives into a conventional framework. We are a network of people living with and/or affected by experiences that are often diagnosed and labeled as psychiatric conditions. We believe these experiences are mad gifts needing cultivation and care, rather than diseases or disorders. By joining together as individuals and as a community, the intertwined threads of madness, creativity, and collaboration can inspire hope and transformation in an oppressive and damaged world. Participation in The Icarus Project helps us overcome alienation and tap into the true potential that lies between brilliance and madness.

Together, we seek new space and freedom for extreme states of consciousness. We support alternatives to the medical model and acknowledge the traumatic legacy of psychiatric abuse. We recognize that we all live in a crazy world, and believe that sensitivities, visions, and inspirations are not necessarily symptoms of illness. Sometimes breakdown can be the entrance to breakthrough. We call for more options in understanding and treating emotional distress, and we advocate for everyone, regardless of income, to have access to these choices. We respect diversity and embrace harm-reduction and self-determination in treatment decisions. Everyone is welcome, whether they support the use of psychiatric drugs or not, and whether they identify with diagnostic categories or not. To ensure we remain honest and untamed, we do not accept funding from pharmaceutical companies. We invite anyone who shares the Icarus vision to join us, and choose "The Icarus Project" or any other name for the independent efforts that inspire them.



## Principles

*Beyond the medical model.* While we respect whatever treatment decisions people make, we challenge standard definitions of psychic difference as essentially diseased, disordered, broken, faulty, and existing within the bounds of DSM-IV diagnosis. We are exploring unknown territory and don't steer by the default maps outlined by docs and pharma companies. We're making new maps.

*Educating ourselves about alternatives.* A lot of what the media, medical establishment, and institutions tell us about "mental illness," psych drugs, and how we should live our lives is just not true. We educate ourselves and each other. We question what we hear on TV and read in doctor's office brochures. We explore holistic and spiritual approaches to handling extreme states of consciousness. We learn as much as we can about medical treatments, and encourage each other to make informed choices. Icarus is a sanctuary for people thinking outside the mainstream and creating their own definitions of health and wellness.

*Balancing wellness and action.* Icarus is a place for supporting each other in practicing real self-care. This includes but is not limited to: making sure we don't neglect our personal basics like food, rest, exercise, and community; encouraging each other to commit to the amount of work we can actually do, and not push ourselves past our limits; and challenging ourselves to find daily routines and projects that help us live out our dreams and have enough structure to get by.

*Non-judgment and respect for diversity.* We welcome people who support psych drugs and people who do not, as well as people who use diagnostic labels and people who do not identify with those terms. We do not exclude people on the basis of politics, lifestyle choice, diagnostic history, recreational drug use, "criminal" behavior, or other outsider identities. We all have a lot to learn from each other, so we respect each other's choices. While the current social system and medical model have the tendency to divide us, we want our understanding of and experiences with madness to unite us.

*Non-hierarchy and anti-oppression.* Local groups need to be anti-authoritarian, inclusive, and working against racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and other oppressions. As a radical mental health support network, our affiliated groups create safe and challenging spaces where

oppressive behavior is not tolerated.

## The Icarus Project on Campus

This guide is a work in progress on how to assemble a Campus Icarus group at your school. In an effort to help jump-start your efforts, we have compiled the experiences and inspirations of student organizers at the first Campus Icarus groups in the country. The contents detail the trials that have been encountered and offer tips for establishing a student-centered version of The Icarus Project on other campuses. The primary aim has been to open the dialogue surrounding issues of mental health and to build peer support networks on campus. Our projects have included engaging other members of campus in this discourse, organizing and facilitating various educational or community-building events, and taking the necessary administrative steps towards gaining official club status. Many students have already joined in creating communities that center on expanding the conversation about mental health beyond the normative model. We hope these tips will help you in the process of creating a group devoted to exploring some of these issues on your own campus.

## Campus Icarus Vision Statement

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We belong to a community that questions the normative frames used to define experiences that are frequently diagnosed and labeled as "mental illness." Our objectives are to break down society's hegemonic conceptions of what is and is not normal and expand our culture's view of "acceptable" mental states and experiences. We hope to challenge and reconfigure these socially

constructed lines separating the sane from the insane and the mentally healthy from the mentally ill.

Furthermore, it concerns us that the inclusiveness of these classifications—normality, sanity, and health—is steadily decreasing. With every new diagnosis, our unique, individual space gets smaller and smaller and it becomes increasingly difficult to live within these

narrow confines. According to these rigid definitions, it has become nearly impossible to achieve our culture's current conception of normality or sanity. This disturbing phenomenon affects every individual in our society, threatening our right to various lifestyles and personal notions of wellness. We see the current psychiatric trends in our society as contributing to oppression, trauma, racism, sexism, and abuse.

Another problem with the current state of mental health is the predominately biomedical nature of available services. Psychiatric diagnoses and pharmaceutical treatment unto themselves tend to minimize the significance of cultural, social, and political factors. They may further isolate individuals and their issues. When internalized, a strictly biological basis for self-understanding can be detrimental to both individuals and communities.

Campus Icarus participants have witnessed and experienced the severe alienation and isolation pervasive within the student community. This feeling seems to constitute a major part of our peers' mental suffering. The sterile and uniform feel of dorms, classrooms, and education styles leave the impression that students are merely units to be processed through a dehumanizing system. We hope that through our work we can rally solidarity among a mad diversity of people committed to creating a more accepting, less pathologizing culture.



***Perhaps if we can change the metaphors that shape our minds, we can change the reality around us.***

### **The Nuts and Bolts**

In order to decide how you want your Campus Icarus group to work, it is important to think of what your goals are for the immediate, near, and distant future. This will help you decide whether setting up an official club is the best first step. Using the Campus Icarussite's discussion forum may be a helpful resource for ideas and processing. The forums

on The Icarus Project website are extremely extensive and can provide feedback, suggestions, and inspiration from the larger community. The struggle to introduce new mental health paradigms on your campus is all about mutual aid: You Are Not Alone!!!

There are many benefits to becoming an official school club; often funding, space and other resources become available with this status. Being recognized as a club is ultimately about having access to the tools you need. The following tips are based on previous experiences establishing clubs:

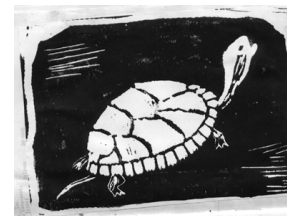
- Be conscious of timing and deadlines. You will probably want to begin the various administrative tasks as early in the term as possible. It is better to book space well in advance. Getting access to free space at school can be incredibly difficult.
- Utilize your school's club fair as a way to introduce yourself and the club. Club fairs provide the opportunity to engage potential members. If possible, try to have Campus Icarus materials to show and disseminate to interested students.

Your school's politics are going to impact how the administration responds to the presence of a Campus Icarus chapter. This guide is intended to provide tips on how to approach these issues, but ultimately it boils down to feeling it out and learning how to work with your school. Smaller, more progressive schools tend to be more receptive to reframing notions of health and madness, while larger schools with greater bureaucracy will be more difficult to navigate. Either way, starting this dialogue is a process and continuous engagement and discourse will be beneficial to all the members of the campus community.

### **Dealing With Club Administration**

You may have to do a lot of bureaucratic work to make your club "official"; for example, you may be asked to:

- Craft a mission statement
- Write charters
- Assign officers
- Fill out paperwork
- Propose event ideas
- Submit budget requests



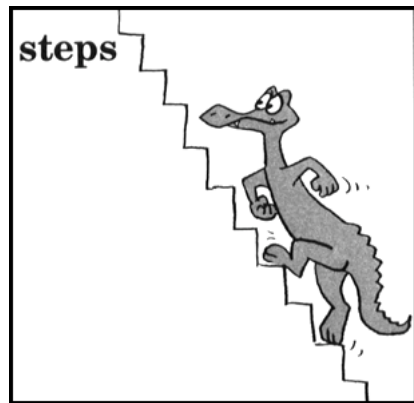
It may seem that completing some of these tasks is less important than other more creative, community-centered work, but these elements are necessary to truly establish your club. Dealing with these administrative tasks effectively will ultimately lead to you being allowed the resources you will need. Gaining the administration's approval is useful for making things happen.

### **A Strategic Decision: Setting up a meeting with your counseling center and/or school administration.**

Certain schools are going to be more receptive to The Icarus Project mission. Although discontent with the way our society deals with mental illness is increasingly prevalent, not everyone will be supportive of Campus Icarus or of the idea that students are utilizing peer, rather than professional, support. Peer-support and mutual aid is sometimes regarded as threatening for schools in light of legal liabilities.

Campus Icarus supports an “and/or” approach to counseling centers on campus: while not everyone is pleased with their services and ways of framing mental illness, some people utilize and have good experiences with them. Being staunchly critical of the counseling center is going to make it harder to gain recognition and is not inclusive of everyone's experience. Moreover, taking a stance of unmediated opposition may discourage people from recognizing sincere efforts to provide a comfortable form of support. We believe that all different lenses of mental health contain potential value for some. It is important to remember that different methods of coping and healing are better suited to different individuals, and to promote a person's right to determine that for their own self.

It is a strategic decision for a club to open lines of communication with the counseling center. Do you want your club to be academic in nature, focusing inquiry into specific issues, theories, and schools of thought surrounding mental health? Or do you want your club to be more experiential, involving mutual



mental health aid, support meetings, the creation of safe zones, and peer counseling? Campus Icarus can take many forms: peer support, academic engagement, activist campaigns, community-building. What you're striving to accomplish may involve a meeting or even continuous collaboration with the counseling center. One suggested first step to gauging interest on your campus is to hold intellectual events that may draw both students and faculty alike. This will help show the administration that you have the support of the community. The counseling center may be more open to you if they observe the community has already demonstrated its support. Also, it may be easier to facilitate peer support meetings if you have already held education-based events.

If you approach the counseling center or administration and are prohibited from meeting independently of professionals, you may consider organizing an activist effort. Anyone who is interested in having a safe space to meet that is not under the counseling center or administration's authority can rally together and undertake a campus campaign to secure that as a right.

### **Tips for Getting and Keeping People Involved:**

#### *Solidarity*

When people come together to share their stories and experiences and find common goals, they create solidarity. This story-centered process of unification constitutes the lynchpin of Icarus work. It is our foundation, and without it, all other activities lose their potency. For our voices to be heard and taken seriously, and for a strong support network to be maintained, solidarity is essential.

#### *Maintaining Membership*

This is really important because we want the movement to be self-sustainable and continue to evolve after we graduate. Frequently when activist projects crop up on campus, administrations hamper groups from flourishing with the expectation that a movement will phase out. If club leaders graduate without looking back, this can sometimes mean the discontinuation of efforts to create change.

#### *Sensing Interest*

Be aware of activist burnout—trying to change things (or even just attending to the administrative nuts and bolts) can feel like an uphill battle. It can be extremely taxing. Be aware of the fact that college is a

busy time and everyone has a number of obligations constantly demanding their attention. Some people prefer to use their time outside of class as a reprieve from intellectual work, while others welcome the opportunity to pursue passion projects.

That being said, people might drop out no matter how important they consider the group's efforts. Don't be discouraged; just be mindful that this is inevitable and not necessarily a reflection on the urgency of the cause or the work of the leaders.

### *Delegation*

Don't take on too much responsibility! The key to doing this work is taking care of yourself while you're doing it. Recognize that while sometimes delegation seems like another burden, having other people take on various roles or forming working teams (such as administrative assistants and club leaders) can be helpful. We're in support of a non-hierarchical organization, but structure and assuming responsibility is critical. Delegation is difficult, and the only way to get good at it is through experience. Moreover, sharing tasks includes others. Trying to include everyone in decision-making and posting discussions online so that all members of The Icarus Project can share a voice is a good way to keep your community engaged.



### *Welcoming and Engaging Atmosphere*

In the beginning, it can be difficult to bring in membership because the club is so new and there is no pre-existing model to build from. To foster a welcoming environment, you may want to begin an event with introductions. Asking everyone present to state a couple of personal details (ie: major, year of study, hometown) encourages more warmth and intimacy among those present. In addition, sitting in circles, having food, making events interactive, and concluding the

event/meeting with a "check-out" in which everyone voices some kind of feedback (ie: emotional state, something learned, overall assessment of their experience) are other helpful tools for community building.

### **Cultivating a Community:**

Campus Icarus aims to provide a safe environment within which people can feel comfortable voicing their diverse perspectives and experiences related to madness. Groups must be welcoming, inclusive, and respectful of differences in lifestyle and personal choices. For example, we welcome people who choose to take psychiatric medications and those who



choose not to, as well as those who identify with diagnostic labels and those who do not. Group members revealing intimate stories may feel particularly vulnerable. Groups can ease anxieties by cultivating a respectful environment in which confidentiality can be trusted. Your group should agree to a confidentiality policy and be consistent in observing it. Also, a meeting's structure can help determine the way a community develops. Although we believe that flexibility is critical to maintaining a functional group, meetings and group discussions can benefit from some structural implements. Having clearly established time and space boundaries may contribute to members' sense of safety and enable you to maximize what you get out of your meeting.

### Sample Agenda

1. Welcome and Meeting Overview and Agreements (5 minutes)
2. Personal Introductions and Check-In (5-10 minutes)
3. About The Icarus Project (5 minutes)
4. What are our needs and desires as people struggling with madness? What projects are we inspired to do? (15 minutes)
5. Decide what needs to be done before the next meeting. Pick tasks, delegate responsibilities, agree on next meeting time and place (10 minutes)
6. Check-out (5-10 minutes)
7. Circulate contact list, distribute literature, close meeting: 5 minutes

## Facilitation

Hosting group discussions or events is not an easy task: To ensure group cohesion, facilitation by one or two group members, leaders, or officers can be extremely useful.

### *What is a facilitator?*



“(A) facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding and cultivates shared responsibility.”

- Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making

The role of a facilitator is to foster an atmosphere where everyone is able to express their thoughts and feelings. Moreover, a facilitator's job is to help the group listen more effectively, and to pay attention to the overall needs of everyone involved, not only to those of one individual. Facilitation is asking the hard questions that acknowledge the “elephant in the room,” or helping others to see and understand different perspectives that would affect the way

in which people engage with one another. Your ability to do this depends on your understanding of your own facilitation style, your strengths and your struggles. Good facilitators try to listen carefully on three levels. (1) Visually observe reactions of the participants, hear what is being said with (2) ears and (3) heart. A facilitator should avoid bias or getting too focused on one particular topic.

### **Facilitators' Role:**

- Acknowledging participants, regardless of what they share.
- Playing “host” and welcoming participants as they arrive.
- Welcoming and sensitively updating/orienting any participant(s) that enter the workshop after it has started.
- Clarifying any words or behaviors that will meet the group's needs or help it to come to a better understanding.
- Making adjustments to maintain the safety that has been created within the group.

- Responding to questions, statements and other forms of communication (both verbal and non) in a non-threatening and non-judgmental way.
- Being genuinely interested.



There are many things to consider when creating a respectful space. There are physical as well as emotional considerations. Think about changes that can occur to make a space less

safe/respectful. It may help to make a list of techniques you have observed, or think would work for a facilitator to maintain or re-establish trust in a group when it is challenged.

### **Goals for good communication:**

- Be willing to be honest and open in the things I share with others.
- Be willing to be patient and supportive of others, avoiding ‘rescuing’ or defending them.
- Be willing to accept others as they are, without needing to judge them.
- Be willing to experience new ideas, feelings and people.
- Be aware of the difference between feelings and thoughts.
- Be aware and give attention to cultural differences in communicating.
- Be responsible for ideas, feelings and myself.
- Respect others and myself as individuals and valuable human beings.
- Use ‘I’ statements; speak about your own thoughts, reactions, feelings, and experiences, not those of others; do not debate someone else's experience. If they say \_\_\_ happened, do not argue with their statement.
- Be aware of my own assumptions.
- Listen to feelings as well as words.
- Notice body language and other non-verbal communications.
- Don't talk over others or interrupt. If someone interrupts, gently ask them to stop. Take turns. Raise hands or go in order.
- Don't rush. Create a calm, quiet space without interruptions or distractions.

- Allow periods of silence when people can think of what to say.
- Don't react or speak up automatically. Observe how your reactions reflect your own experience, not the person's who is speaking. Give yourself time to respond from a deeper place.
- Ask permission before giving advice or responding directly to what someone has said. Sometimes people just want to be heard.
- When someone responds to you or gives advice, allow yourself to take what is helpful and leave the rest, rather than defending yourself if you disagree.
- Listen as a receiver, not as a critic. Imagine different perspectives and experiences rather than assuming they're just like yours. Do not simply go from one person to the next. When you hear something that is moving to you, something that you think may be a good point for the group to discuss, ask the person speaking to expand on that comment.
- If possible, work with at least two facilitators. This allows one facilitator to focus on emotional or group process, while another attends to content and activities or keeps track of the discussion.
- Focus on the things that can be controlled and let go of things that cannot, but don't give up on visions of change and revolution!
- Encourage quiet people to speak, but don't require them to or put them on the spot
- Intervene in situations where people are making thoughtless or offensive comments. Re-focus on the agenda, and remind everyone of the need for group safety. Recognize the intention behind someone's word choice, and give them an opportunity to correct themselves or recognize how their words may have been offensive. It can help to say, "When you said that, some people may have felt you used an inappropriate or disrespectful term. Can you re-word that statement?"



## Icebreakers and Activities

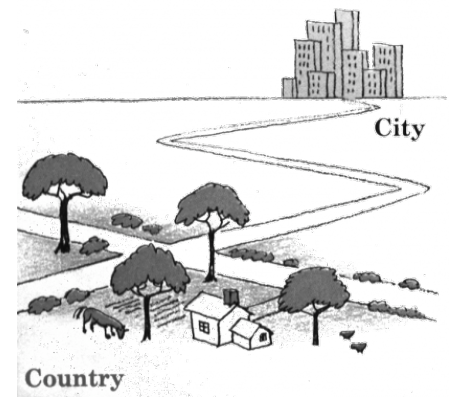
Using icebreakers and group activities can be another way to stimulate interesting discussions.

## Suggestions:

Put the name of a diagnosis on a post-it note on each person's back. Participants walk around asking each other yes-or-no questions until they are able to guess what is on their back. It's a great way to desensitize people to potentially triggering vocabulary, and get everyone mingling, talking, and laughing.

Break into groups of 5-10 people, depending on the size of the whole group. Give each group the following supplies: flipchart sheets, markers, masking tape, and write the following words on paper or a medium of your choice: patient recovery, profit/money, effective drugs, non-pharmaceutical treatments, community health, public image, providing jobs for people, the environment, independent thought and research, therapy, equal access to treatment, diversity of options in the marketplace, accurate research, disclosure of side effects, open information, government regulation. Have the groups assemble the pieces of paper onto the flipchart paper in order to graphically represent an answer to the question: what do the pharmaceutical companies value? Give them some time to do this. Also give each group a few blank pieces of paper, so that they can add their own topics to the list. Each group presents their results. Depending on group size and meeting length you can allow time for questions and comments after each group presentation, or save all questions and comments for the end of all the presentations. Either way, its important to have some time for comments at the end of the presentations, so that people can point out common threads and process.

Give each group a second set of words. This time, have them arrange the pieces to graphically represent an answer to the question: What do *we* value? Synthesis discussion: What were trends? What does this mean for our future? How do we get our world to reflect what we value, not what the companies value? What are some possible next steps for us? What can we do?



## Discussion Questions for Workshops and Groups

Having a series of go-to questions can be a great way to guide a workshop discussion in more deep and meaningful directions.

Brainstorm ideas beforehand, potentially including:

- What does it mean to be “mentally ill”?
- What are the implications of being labeled sick by a society that is obviously sick?
- How do we figure out what’s society’s madness, and what’s our own, and when the lines are too hard to draw?
- Is madness a continuum rather than a set of definitions and diagnosis?
- What alternative frameworks exist for interpreting our mental health struggles?
- Can we look at the role of race, class, gender, and other aspects of our identities in shaping our struggles while still taking responsibility for ourselves?
- Can diagnostic labels help us see patterns without putting us in a box or becoming self-fulfilling prophecies?
- When does behavior become “dysfunctional”?
- Can we define for ourselves what an appropriate level of functioning looks and feels like?
- What kinds of healing and wellness practices have helped d us to get better?
- What are our ‘early warning signs’ that we need to focus more on our wellness and health?
- How do we take care of each other and ourselves?
- How can we respect decisions to take psych medication but still be honest about the risks of these drugs?
- How can we respect decisions to try alternative treatments and/or reject conventional medical treatment?
- How can we respect choices to use recreational drugs when they seem self-destructive?
- What are our options when we or someone we know seems to be going into crisis?
- What topics aren’t being discussed in our communities that we want to see discussed?
- What are people struggling with and how can we find better ways to talk about it?