

Clubhouse International has succeeded in creating something that didn't exist before: A worldwide community that is changing the world of mental health. Through over 320 local Clubhouses around the world, we offer people living with mental illness opportunities for friendship, employment, housing, education and access to medical and psychiatric services in a single caring and safe environment – so they can recover and fully participate as valued and respected members of society.

## The Clubhouse experience has been proven to result in positive outcomes for many members, including:

- **Better employment rates:** 42% at Accredited Clubhouses annually – double the average rate for people in the public mental health system.
- **Cost effectiveness:** one year of holistic recovery services are delivered to Clubhouse members for the same cost as a 2-week stay at a psychiatric hospital.
- **A significant decrease** in hospitalizations as a result of membership in a Clubhouse program.<sup>1</sup>
- **Improved Well-Being** compared with individuals receiving psychiatric services without Clubhouse membership. Clubhouse members were significantly more likely to report that they had close friendships and someone they could rely on when they needed help.<sup>3</sup>
- **Better physical and mental health:** a recent study suggests that service systems like Clubhouses that offer ongoing social supports enhance mental and physical health by reducing disconnectedness.<sup>4</sup>

Clubhouses are a powerful demonstration of the fact that people with mental illness can and do lead normal, productive lives. Clubhouses are local community centers that provide members with opportunities to build long-term relationships that, in turn, support them in obtaining employment, education and housing, including:

- a work-ordered day in which the talents and abilities of members are recognized and utilized within the Clubhouse;
- participation in consensus-based decision-making regarding all important matters relating to the running of the Clubhouse;

- opportunities to obtain paid employment in the local labor market through a Clubhouse-created Transitional Employment Program. In addition, members participate in Clubhouse-supported and Independent programs;
- assistance in accessing community-based educational resources;
- access to crisis intervention services when needed;
- evening/weekend social and recreational events; and
- assistance in securing and sustaining safe, decent and affordable housing.

A Clubhouse is organized to support people living with mental illness. During the course of their participation in a Clubhouse, members gain access to opportunities to rejoin the worlds of friendships, family, employment and education, and to the services and support they may individually need to continue their recovery. A Clubhouse provides a restorative environment for people whose lives have been severely disrupted because of their mental illness, and who need the support of others who are in recovery and who believe that mental illness is treatable.

The word “Clubhouse” derives from the original language that was used to communicate the work and vision of Fountain House, the very first Clubhouse, which was started in New York in 1948. Since its inception, Fountain House has served as the model for all subsequent Clubhouses that have been started around the world. Fountain House began when former patients of a New York psychiatric hospital began to meet together informally, as a kind of “club.” It was organized as a support system for people living with mental illness, rather than as a service or a treatment program. Communities around the world that have modeled themselves after Fountain House have embraced the term “Clubhouse,” because it clearly communicates the message of membership and belonging. This message of inclusion is at the very heart of the Clubhouse way of working.

A Clubhouse is a membership organization, and the people who come and participate in a Clubhouse are its members. Membership in a Clubhouse is open to anyone who has a history of mental illness. This idea of membership is fundamental to the Clubhouse concept: being a member of an organization means that an individual has both shared ownership and shared responsibility for the success of that organization.

To be a member of an organization means to belong, to fit in somewhere, and to have a place where one is always welcome. For a person living with mental illness, these simple things cannot be taken for granted. In fact, the reality for most people who live with mental illness is that they have a constant sense of not fitting in, of

isolation and rejection. Mental illness often has the devastating effect of separating people from others in society.

“Mental patient,” “client,” “disabled,” “consumer” and “user” are all terms used by society as a reference to people living with mental illness. People living with mental illness are often segregated according to these labels and defined by them as people who need something, or as people who are societal burdens that need to be managed.

The Clubhouse offers a complete change in this perspective. It is designed to be a place where a person living with mental illness is not treated as a patient and is not defined by a disability label. In a Clubhouse, a person with mental illness is seen as a valued participant, a colleague and as someone who has something to contribute to the rest of the group. Each person is a critical part of a community engaged in important work.

In a Clubhouse, each member is given the message that he or she is welcome, wanted, needed and expected each day. The message that each member’s involvement is an important contribution to the community is a message that is communicated throughout the Clubhouse day. Staff and other members greet each person at the door of the Clubhouse each morning with a smile and words of welcome.

The daily work of the Clubhouse community is organized and carried out in a way that continually reinforces this message of belonging. This is not difficult, because in fact the work of the Clubhouse does require the participation of the members. The design of a Clubhouse engages members in every aspect of its operation, and there is always much more work to be done than can be accomplished by the few employed staff. The skills, talents, and creative ideas and efforts of each member are needed and encouraged each day. Participation is voluntary, but each member is always invited to participate in work which includes clerical duties, reception, food service, transportation management, outreach, maintenance, research, managing the employment and education programs, financial services and much more.

Membership in a Clubhouse gives a person living with mental illness the opportunity to share in creating successes for the community. At the same time, he or she is getting the necessary help and support to achieve individual success and satisfaction.

Clubhouses are built upon the belief that every member has the potential to sufficiently recover from the effects of mental illness to lead a personally satisfying life as an integrated member of society. Clubhouses are communities of people who are dedicated to one another's success, no matter how long it takes or how difficult it is. Clubhouses are organized around a belief that work, and work-mediated relationships, are restorative and provide a firm foundation for growth and important individual achievement (Beard, Propst, Malamud, 1982), and the belief that normalized social and recreational opportunities are an important part of a person's path to recovery.

The Clubhouse environment and structures are developed in a way to ensure that there is ample opportunity for human interaction and that there is more than enough work to do.

Clubhouse staffing levels are purposefully kept low to create a perpetual need for the involvement of the members in order to accomplish their jobs. Members also need the staff and other members in order to complete the work, but even more importantly, the relationships that evolve through this work together are the key ingredient in Clubhouse rehabilitation. (Vorspan, 1986). The Clubhouse members and staff as a community are charged with prioritizing, organizing and accomplishing the tasks that are important to make the Clubhouse a success.

Relationships between members and staff develop naturally as they work together side by side carrying out the daily duties of the Clubhouse. All of the staff have generalist roles in the Clubhouse; they are involved in all of the Clubhouse activities including the daily work duties, the evening social and recreational programs, the employment programs, reach out, supported education and community support responsibilities. Members and staff share the responsibility for the successful operation of the Clubhouse. Working closely together each day, members and staff learn of each others' strengths, talents and abilities. They also develop real and lasting friendships. Because the design of a Clubhouse is much like a typical work or business environment, relationships develop in much the same way.

The role of the staff in a Clubhouse is not to educate or treat the members. The staff are there to engage with members as colleagues in important work and to be encouraging and engaging with people who might not yet believe in themselves. Clubhouse staff are charged with being colleagues, workers, talent scouts and cheerleaders.