

From Philosophy to Practice

in the everyday work of a clubhouse

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Each one who comes to the clubhouse
contributes,
regains self-worth,
gets hope for the future
in a reality that is characterized by
respect, dignity and freedom!

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From philosophy to Practice...

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How in the World Can it Be Possible for a Clubhouse to Activate so Many Members Around Important and Enjoyable Work?

Or; how is the commitment of the clubhouse movement's members and staff actually born?

The 35 standards that have been developed by staff and members show concisely both the goal and the methods for clubhouse work. These standards emphasize that the clubhouse is a place, an organization that offers its members respect and possibilities. For the members the standards signify rights which the club has to realize, so that members can achieve their social and vocational goals and get a better sense of self-worth and a better quality of life.

A clubhouse consists of rather unique programs:

- The work oriented day and
- The transitional employment program

Compared to traditional rehabilitation programs both are unique.

This article will concern itself with the work oriented day in a clubhouse:

- Transitional employment
- The housing program
- The social program
- The educational program

These programs are of course a part of the work oriented day, and the different programs serve one another, and the fundamental and important relationships that improve your health derive from the clubhouse workday.

A Framework For the Working Day.

- A clubhouse is open during normal working hours.
- Members participate in the working day voluntarily.
- Only those who have been users of psychiatric care are welcome.
- Staff has the bottom line responsibility for making sure that the workday is inviting, creative and satisfying to the members.
- The work oriented day doesn't require any special skills of the individual member.
- The desire to participate is the basic premise.

The Clubhouse Standards Emphasize:

- The work that is done in the clubhouse must be necessary for the existence of the club, be genuinely goal oriented and thus meaningful.
- Members and staff run the clubhouse together.
- A member has the right to participate in all the work that needs to be done in the club.
- In the daily work the activities should concentrate on the members' strengths.

How Is it Possible for One Working Day to Appear Completely Different from Another?

There are lots of things to do and to contribute with. The work that gets done is that which the members want to do and in that way the workdays vary according to the people who attend.

The staff, though, has the bottom line responsibility. This means basing the work on the ambitions set in our standards. It is thus important

to get the members involved both in the mornings and in the afternoons, i.e. during the whole work day.

This is the great challenge for the staff employed in a clubhouse, that is run in accordance with the Fountain House philosophy.

The Goal - an Everyday Reality.

The 35 standards should, in their entirety be seen as a good philosophy for approaching people who have fared badly and encountered psychiatric problems.

These standards/guidelines are also so cleverly written that it is almost possible to directly transform them into concrete tasks in the daily activities.

Below follows a few examples of this train of thought:

- Documents, protocols and memos need to be written.
- Clubhouse policy and membership questions need to be discussed.
- The physical space must be taken care of so that everybody feels respect and dignity.
- The clubhouse must keep open during the agreed hours, and holidays celebrated on the actual day.

- Research has to be done that shows the effect of the clubhouse to members, financial contributors and the club management. That research can be about attendance, the development of the TE program, and so forth.
- Staff and members need introduction, new members are to be welcomed.
- Staff must be evaluated, employment interviews be held and so forth.
- PR and marketing needs to be done, visitors need to be taken care of.

As mentioned earlier there are many work tasks, practical work for members and staff to do. And all of these jobs can be done by all staff and members, regardless of whether you take part in the clerical unit, the kitchen or any other unit in the clubhouse.

All members, who so desire, can also work with the following:

- Supporting the members in independent employment.
- Supporting the transitional work program.
- Supporting those who study.

- Giving support in housing issues.
- Participating in helping any member who has a problem or who doesn't show up to the working day.
- Giving support to members who have social, economic, or possibly addiction problems. This is a central object of the work oriented day.
- Making a budget, taking part in accounting.
- Maintaining good relations with the board and also others who work with people in contact with the psychiatric sector.

John Beard (who started the first clubhouse in New York) expressed it something like this:

"Every human being has right to be a part of society, and that means that they has an innate capacity to take part in society."

So let us then start this rehabilitation in the clubhouse. The members have a right to get involved in all the important issues as described by our clubhouse standards. Many people are needed in this work, many need a serious and living clubhouse.

The Commitment Must Be Organized.

To organize the workday, to which the members come voluntarily, where there are no scheduled obligations (nobody is forced to do anything) nor any artificial system of rewards, is for the staff with the aid of the members - an exciting challenge. This is a challenge that emanates from the deep conviction that each human being has a basic need to be needed, regardless of mental condition or capacity.

Mark Glickman, who is a clubhouse veteran, writes about the importance of the voluntary nature of the clubhouse.

“I had come to Fountain House very disabled by extreme anxiety and depression and was unable to concentrate. My participation consisted for the most part of just being there and getting to know people. However, I was very influenced by the clubhouse environment. The fact that other members were working both in and outside of the clubhouse impressed me deeply and led me to believe that I could someday do the same. On the other hand, if I had been forced to participate in some way, I would have been unable to. I had to go at my own pace. In my case, that meant at first just socializing.”

He also writes about bottom line responsibility:

“I only seek to illuminate the reality that lack of initiative or confidence are often by-products of mental illness. It is in the nature of the disability, the illness we struggle against, one which I know from the vividness of my own personal battle with it.

In the beginning of each day in the clubhouse, an important part of the staff's role lies in generating enough enthusiasm and sense of urgency about the club's needs to overcome the inertia and anguish which is a realistic part of mental illness.”

Dividing up the Work into Small Parts = making it possible to participate

This must be the basic premise when the members commitment is to be organized.

As described above, the standards comprise many typical work tasks. A clubhouse works with different units in its organization. This is a first division that makes it possible for members to choose the area which they would like to work in.

After that you get the finer division of the unit. "Fine division" is a good concept that was coined by a member, Rolf Karlsson from Falkenberg, Sweden, in connection with a discussion during a 3-week colleague training.

We were discussing the use of the whiteboard and the unit meeting. Henceforth we will take a closer look at this "fine division" and try to find out why it is done and how it can be done in a clubhouse.

Work and Friendship

The daily gatherings in the units are of course about distributing the work tasks. (N.B. Everything the club needs to have done, must be taken up at this meeting). It is also a great opportunity to get to know your co-workers.

There are some important things to consider, different components of the meeting that make it rewarding to all participants.

- Each individual's desire to participate.
- Getting an understanding of the meaning of the task itself.
- Decisions of different kinds.
- Possibilities for cooperation.
- Information about what is going on.
- An opportunity for looking out for one another.
- And as we mentioned earlier, the "fine division" of the tasks.

But before we look closer at these seven points, we will first describe the method of carrying out a unit meeting.

The Whiteboard - A Place to Gather.

The whiteboard is like a clean sheet of paper every new day. (It's the same idea as when we meet a member for the first time, without a psychiatric journal.)

1. This is where you write your name and also the names of those who are expected to come.
2. This is where everyone lets it be known what they would like to do during their workday.
3. This is where members and staff contribute ideas about what needs to be done during the day.

The point of this meeting then becomes that everyone is given the opportunity to think:

- "What should be done?"
- "What do I want to do?"

It is therefore of the utmost importance that the whiteboard is completely clean when the day begins. It mustn't be cluttered with general information - old or new, personal or impersonal - when the "fine division" of the day's work tasks are to be clarified and carried out.

Another central point during the unit meeting is that a new member slowly but surely realizes that: "We shape the working day together."

"We take up problems and other issues together"

"There is no other place where decisions are taken about what I will be doing."

The new member who isn't familiar with what is going on quickly gets information about what other people are working on - it may, for example, be a group work running over several weeks that was decided at an earlier meeting.

The present status is reported every day, in any case, in order to keep all of the members in the unit up to speed.

Even if there is no new member participating in the unit meeting, it is still just as important to hold the meeting centered around the whiteboard because it gives clarity, creates pleasure in and an understanding of what the clubhouse is doing.

You could say that the whiteboard is the opposite of the blackboard, the board where you, in school, more or less were forced to solve problems, where the teacher perhaps described things you weren't interested in explained things you had to learn by heart,

and so on...

To Lead a Meeting During the Work Oriented Day Is an Art.

It's all about showing respect and about making possibilities distinct.

Those (it's a good idea to be two) who lead the meeting should consider letting as many as possible have their say. Maybe they should prepare themselves before the meeting, think through the work tasks, so that there will be a lot to offer.

For example if somebody wants to participate throughout an entire day there should be more to work with than watering 15 small plants. Plants are important - we don't use a service to water them. If they aren't watered they will die and our working environment won't be as attractive.

But the unit must be able to offer that particular member other important tasks so that she/he won't "year in and year out" just be watering plants.

Thus, leading a unit meeting consists of preparation, of giving the "fine division" some thought. Regarding this, the staff has the bottom line responsibility.

The qualities a unit meeting needs to include:

- **The desire to participate.**
- **An understanding of the meaning of the work.**
- **Decisions of different kinds.**
- **Possibilities for cooperation.**
- **Information about what is going on.**
- **An opportunity for the members to look out for one another.**
- **"Fine division" of the work tasks.**

Simply put, you could add the heading Relationships, but that would turn out wrong. Here we only want to include headings that describe how the unit meeting will provide relationships- in the vibrant working day.

Relationships that show that the individual member is capable, that together the group is capable. Thus relationships develop around participation in the work and in that way we come to understand one

another and we are then able to give and receive support.

The Desire To Participate

Deciding to come to the clubhouse may be a big step to take, to desire to participate in the work is another step for men and women who may have isolated themselves because of psychiatric problems. Nobody should be forced to participate in the meeting; it's only when the members themselves feel desire and feel that it is right - that's when he or she will participate.

Rolf Persson - a member of the staff at Fontanhuset in Malmö for around ten years - makes this quote:

"This is one of the pillars of the clubhouse philosophy, the voluntary nature of the clubhouse. This has grown out of the experiences of members and staff but at the same time it mustn't lead to a laissez-faire mentality or to a total lack of demands."

MARC GLICKMAN

Understanding the Meaning of the Work

- You have to put stamps on all these 300 letters, because they must go to the post office today! If a staff member urges a member in this fashion and the member ignores it, then it isn't the fault of the member. It is never wrong to ask a member to contribute, but the staff member must rethink his approach.

"How can my service or merchandise be made more attractive?"

Mark Glickman

- How should I as staff get the member to understand the meaning of the task?
It must be allowed to take time - understanding and desire can't be commandeered.

The staff has to activate the members so that they themselves get the urge and so are able to see the importance of the work and then ask for this task to be put on the whiteboard at the unit meeting. Because the clubhouse is a creation for the members by the members and the staff.

Decisions of Different Kinds.

As mentioned earlier, one decision the members make is to come to the clubhouse, and this is how she/he gives life to the club. Decisions about participating in activities or work, is also something that no one but the members themselves can make.

Knowing that there is a unit meeting - where decisions can be made - makes it easier, just as does the awareness that it is the unit meeting you participate in if you want information - and thus contribute.

Most of all the member knows that that is the only place where decisions are made about work in the clubhouse. No other authorities, rehabilitation experts, doctors or the clubhouse director can decide what I personally will work with.

In this way the work oriented day of the clubhouse is unique!

And this is why it is of utmost importance that the clubhouse is lit up with lots of work tasks and possibilities.

Without this I may not find a task that appeals to me and can then as a member not make the decision to participate.

Robby Vorspan of the ICCD expresses it well when she says that a clubhouse needs to be structured in such a way, that the staff is so

swamped with different tasks that being

dependent on the strengths and resources of the members doesn't just become philosophical finesse.

Possibilities for Cooperation

A unit meeting that has as a result that all the members "sit in separate corners" and work with "their" task is normally a bad result.

It is of course quite possible to work alone, certain tasks may require this. A cooperation between staff and members creates enthusiasm in the working day, just as does a group of members working side by side.

At a unit meeting you always have to concentrate on this:

Who can work together on a certain task?

Experienced and inexperienced can be a suitable combination.

The great advantage with group work is that the members who have knowledge and experience get affirmation of their leadership capabilities and the inexperienced member gets support in handling the work task, and at the same time he/she sees that it's another member who provides the support: "If she's able to, then maybe I am, too". This is where relationships are created, relationships that increase the self-confidence of both, this is where work gets done with satisfaction and staff gets strength and time to carry the bottom line

responsibility. This responsibility entails creating enthusiasm for all the work in the unit.

Information about What Is Going On.

Sometimes certain tasks become, for a short period of time, tied to one person and when that occurs it is of the utmost importance that the unit meeting is informed about what is going on and how far along that work has proceeded, otherwise it is easy to think: - "They are doing something that doesn't concern me", and then different camps of "us and them" can easily be created.

In the daily recurring meetings (it's a good thing to have one in the morning and one after lunch) you naturally bring up events, work and worries that concern the whole clubhouse, so that support between the units is made possible. This prevents the isolation of the unit - an understanding of the totality ensures that several clubhouses within the clubhouse arises.

There is no obligation to attend, you have to find the pleasure and usefulness of gathering around the whiteboard for yourself. It must be exciting and important to attend the unit meeting - this is where you get most of your information. For example, you can report that a 163 of the 300 envelopes are ready.

An Opportunity to Look Out for One Another

- "Fantastic, well done - more than half of the envelopes are done and ready to send!" is something that may be nice to hear when the group meets. It was some years ago I got any appreciation.

- "Anders has promised to come today", a members says, "I wonder what happened to him? I'll call him or visit him."

This is another of the unit meeting functions - we look out for one another; everybody who has said they would attend, appear with their name on the board.

The member who makes the telephone call to Anders knows that it's an act of solidarity. She herself has been in the same boat as he.

And as Sven-Erik Liedman expresses it:

"Solidarity is a matter of seeing yourself in others."

The "Fine Division" of the Tasks.

All tasks that a clubhouse needs to have done are possible to divide up so that many get a possibility to participate, to contribute to the totality and thus feel needed. The whiteboard is an excellent vehicle to use when doing this "fine

division". This is where the job becomes distinct, this is where you get an answer to the question of why a - seemingly boring - job is important and thus not boring.

Earlier in this article we described concrete work tasks that were taken directly from our standards. These can be broken down into lots of different jobs. For example: Instead of having a staff member + possibly one member running the financial side of the clubhouse, break this work down into smaller jobs so that 20 members can get involved!

When this is done you automatically get many members interested in the clubhouse budget - that is, in the members' money.

With imagination and creativity the staff member who has the bottom line responsibility gets a "1000" things done together with the members and when that happens the clubhouse is leading a healthy life. The quality of the clubhouse increases as the amount of actively helping hands increases.

If two members constantly do 80% of the clerical work it indicates that the dividing up of the work tasks isn't done and that the whiteboard isn't used as well as it could be.

Certainly, some people work more, some less. The possibility to participate should always exist and new opportunities should always be created, where all the members in reality get the chance to participate. Without this chance there is also no chance of creating relations to other

people and then you won't be able to build up your self confidence nor feel needed in the clubhouse.

In Conclusion.

The unit meeting and the whiteboard constitute the hub around which all activities develop, and - according to the clubhouse member Martin Kant - the best opportunity to meet, feel needed and together build a meaningful working day. Here I would like to conclude this article, which has been about going from philosophy to practice, with the thoughts of Stephen Anderson, from the article "The role of the Staff at Fountain House":

"What is the single most significant way that Fountain House can provide rehabilitation for a member?"

(Stephen, as a relatively new employee, got this question by his supervisor.)

"I gave an answer which I thought was profound but now have forgotten. His answer to his own question, however I vividly remember. He said, "The single most significant way that Fountain House can provide rehabilitation for a member is for him to experience being needed."