

## **SUPPORTING MEMBER EDUCATION**

*The clubhouse assists members to further their vocational and educational goals by helping them take advantage of adult education opportunities in the community. (Standard 25)*

Supporting the educational aspirations of members is a vital function of any clubhouse. It is specifically guaranteed as a clubhouse function under Standard 25 for Clubhouse Programs quoted above.

Marian Beard, John Beard's wife, first introduced educational services in the clubhouse with a tutoring program at Fountain House in the 1970's. These first steps eventually grew into the creation of education as an autonomous unit in 1985 with members invited to join with staff in tutoring other members, mostly in preparation for the General Education Diploma (GED) examination.

In the late 1980's the "supported education" movement emerged from Laurel House in Stamford, Connecticut. Supported education adapted transitional employment as its model and facilitated member integration in the community for schooling, particularly finishing their college education interrupted by illness. Frequently, members lacked self-confidence for resuming school after a long hiatus or for matriculating at a local college for the first time on their own. Laurel House documented its efforts with in-depth case studies of the supported education initiative. Fountain House followed Laurel House to first replicate and then disseminate the new educational initiative. Supported education was subsequently embedded in the three-week colleague training framework as the impetus for clubhouses worldwide to establish or expand education support services for their membership.

### **Why Support Education in the Clubhouse?**

The rationale for supporting education in the clubhouse is the same as for employment. Success in school is directly related to achieving self worth, purpose and confidence envisioned in Standard 19 for Clubhouse Programs. Individuals identify who they are in terms of their educational achievement in the same way that they describe who they are in terms of what work they do. Schooling is also crucial for career advancement in today's economy. More and more jobs require minimum levels of educational attainment or specialized professional certificates as a requirement for employment. In effect, the focus of education services has evolved to encompass not only the academic achievement of clubhouse members, but their specific career goals as well.

Another factor arising from the emergence of new psychotropic medications makes attending and finishing school more of a reality for individuals with mental illness. With new medications members have higher expectations regarding their future. As such, schooling will play an increasingly more important role in the rehabilitation process and will be viewed by members as an important resource in the clubhouse. Finally, strong personal pride flows from graduation from High School, college matriculation, or earning a proficiency

certificate. Graduation from school is a normative activity. Members receive recognition from their family and friends for educational achievement. For individuals with mental illness school success acts as a potent stigma buster.

In sum, modern technological economies and innovations in medication are conspiring with traditional motives for dignity and personal achievement to make educational resources crucial to the future of the clubhouse movement. Additionally, outreach to young adults with mental illness also underscores the function of education for the future of the clubhouse. Youth demand ready support services in education within the clubhouse. For young adults, achieving their educational goals is as pressing an issue as finding employment and in some cases more so. Indeed, **the work of youth is education**. Any clubhouse that envisions reaching out to young adults with mental illness will necessitate establishing vibrant educational services in the clubhouse.

### **How to Organize Educational Supports?**

Standard #25 for Clubhouse Programs states the goal of educational services in the clubhouse as helping members “take advantage of adult education opportunities in the community.” In this respect, the goal of education mirrors the goal of employment services in that it seeks to integrate members into their community in a meaningful and productive capacity. Standard #25 also stresses the central role of members in achieving this goal. As education plays a critical role in the lives of members, members play a critical role in expanding educational services in the clubhouse. Specifically, as Standard 25 emphasizes, members should be recruited as teachers in any classes set up in the clubhouse workday.

Clubhouses may consider making educational support services its own unit. Educational services provide an array of useful and innovative roles members can play in the clubhouse workday. Jobs could include:

- Mentoring fellow members who are returning to school in course selection, registration and financial aid.
- Teaching classes in practical math, writing and reading skills, and computer literacy on a daily basis in the clubhouse.
- Tutoring members one-on-one in specific subjects and with homework assignments.
- Assisting members with the research and application for scholarships.
- Raising money with donors to provide scholarships to members to attend school.
- Operating a clubhouse lending library.
- Leading a great books discussion club as part of the evening social program.

Essentially, there is no role that members cannot perform in providing supports to their peers in attending school. Furthermore, the opportunity for challenging high level responsibilities make an educational unit an attractive option in designing a clubhouse.

## **Ancillary Issues**

For any clubhouse that wants to expand its educational resource base, the place of computers in the clubhouse should be addressed. Computer supports are a necessary ancillary to educational supports. Anyone attending school in this day will need access to computers. Computers are students' tools for accessing information and preparing reports. Given that many members lack the financial resources for a personal computer, an education unit or resource center in the clubhouse could feature a bank of computers with open access to members. Computers could be used for training in computer literacy, practice in instructional software, and usage with applications such as Microsoft Office, and high speed Internet access. If finances are insufficient for purchasing computer technology, clubhouses should look to partner with a foundation to make computers available for free to members attending school such as the Christina Foundation does in the United States.

Another crucial component of supported education in the clubhouse is the relationships that need to be developed with local colleges, universities, and vocational/technical schools. School administrators, faculty, and staff all play a key role in providing necessary supports to member/students and clubhouse staff. The integration of members into the educational systems and college campuses in the local area call for the development of professional relationships with school personnel. For example, developing an educational advisory committee that consists of personnel from different schools in the community along with clubhouse members and staff is an excellent way of developing these relationships. Through this endeavor the clubhouse will be teaching the concept of the clubhouse model and supported education to influential members of the community. This dialogue promotes opportunities to educate the general public about mental illness (e.g. the myths involved, its symptoms and effects) and thereby promote the acceptance of members into the educational institutions of the surrounding community.

## **Summary**

The development and implementation of supported education services has always been a component of the clubhouse model in helping to raise the quality of life for members in their local communities. In today's world, developing and implementing supported education services has become a high a priority for any clubhouse. The attainment of essential academic and job skills that supported education provides is important both to the success of members in academia and their own career advancement as well as the future of the clubhouse movement itself.

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