

Work Ordered Day How Can Three Simple Words Have So Much Meaning?

For over 50 years the Work-ordered Day has been a primary factor in the journey to recovery for thousands of people with a mental illness. Historically the work of the Work-ordered Day has mainly involved focusing on the strengths, talents and abilities of members in running the daily operations of the clubhouse and substantial attention paid to the employment needs of members. Now we have realized that in order to further change the world for people with a mental illness we need to go further. Clubhouses are now addressing additional areas of need such as wellness and health issues, assisting members to better their education, helping people into decent and affordable housing and learning about technology and utilizing all the internet has to offer. Many clubhouses have been doing this with specialists and without a full engagement of members in the same way that we operate our kitchen unit, our advocacy efforts or other integrated work of the clubhouse. As a clubhouse community, our challenge is to embrace these opportunities into the fabric of our days rather than relying on specialists who may work outside of the clubhouse or in some other fragmented capacity which inevitably deny member's opportunities.

However, before we can truly blend areas such as wellness, supported education and housing into the work of the clubhouse we need to thoroughly understand the nuts and bolts of the Work-ordered Day.

The Work-ordered Day is flexible and there are many ways a member can be involved in the work of the clubhouse. Members can determine the work they want to be involved in and the people with whom they work with. The Work-ordered Day in a clubhouse provides an array of opportunities for members. This contrasts sharply with the more traditional day treatment models in which participants all attend the same class and have the same schedule although their needs are likely to be very different.

So what is it about the Work-ordered Day that makes it so different, so flexible and creates so many opportunities? Well, let's break down the components of the Work-ordered Day to analyse it further. Let's break it down word by word - Work, Order and Day.

WORK

Why Work?

Work is a common denominator in every society. Whether you are from Europe, United Kingdom, USA, Asia, Australia or New Zealand we all have a culture where the desire to work is highly valued. Usually when you meet someone one of the first questions you are asked is "What do you do?" Whether we like it or not we are often judged by our vocation and it is frequently a defining character of who we are.

The underlying belief of the Work-ordered Day is that regardless of a member's disability every member has a contribution to make that will assist with achieving the work required of the clubhouse. The belief of members being needed, expected and wanted portrays the message that we need you to be involved to get the work done. This sense of belonging is very powerful and ultimately helps members to increase their self-esteem and confidence.

Standard 19 states “all work in the clubhouse is designed to help members regain self worth, purpose and confidence: it is not intended to be job specific training”. Why is the work not intended to be job specific? One main reason is that several people with a mental illness have many vocational skills but experiencing a mental illness strips them of their self worth and purpose. It is no use being a brain surgeon if one lacks the confidence to walk out of the house everyday or to interact with people. The main purpose of the Work-ordered Day is to start assisting members to firstly feel better about themselves and then one can consider where to go from there. Developing self-esteem, purpose and confidence are the foundations that are essential in order for members to set additional goals such as employment or study.

What is the work of the clubhouse?

Well standard 16 highlights what the work of the clubhouse is. “The work done in the clubhouse is exclusively the work generated by the clubhouse in the operation and enhancement of the clubhouse community.”

The work of the Work-ordered Day needs to be meaningful. There needs to be a sense of urgency. It needs to be real work that the clubhouse requires to accomplish not work created by staff to merely keep members busy to pass away the hours of the day. If the work is not meaningful then members will rightfully not be interested. They will easily be bored and not see the purpose of completing it. One of the major challenges for staff is to create enough meaningful work for members to be involved in and engage members in identifying this work.

Standard 20 talks about members having the opportunity to participate in all the work of the clubhouse, including administration, research, intake and orientation, reach out, hiring and evaluation of staff, public relation, advocacy and evaluation of clubhouse effectiveness. If members have the opportunity to be involved in every aspect of the clubhouse, then there is usually an abundance of meaningful work to be involved in.

ORDER

The Work-ordered Day needs to be ordered to provide the necessary structure so that many members can be involved in the unit. Think about when you are driving a car in a place where you have never been before. Being in a foreign place, not knowing where you are going can be stressful for the driver. You drive around trying to determine what is the right road, usually getting very lost and having to stop and ask for directions. This can cause anxiety and stress.

However, then you find a road map in the car. You now have a layout of the unknown area. The name of the destination can be found on the map and you can determine the shortest route to reach your destination. You no longer feel lost and out of control.

Like a road map in a foreign environment, structure in the Work-ordered Day highlights the layout of the work of the unit. It becomes the blueprint. It allows members to determine what aspects they are interested in and takes away the fear of the unknown. In order to achieve this work, units need to be very visual so that work can be easily identified. The use of signs to notify people of the location of the work is useful. As are duty sheets/whiteboards for displaying the duties of the unit.

Standard 18 states “the clubhouse is organized into one or more work units, each of which has sufficient staff, members and meaningful work to sustain a full and engaging Work-ordered Day. Unit meetings are held to foster relationships as well as to organize and plan the work of the day.” This standard explains the major components of the order required in the Work-ordered Day. I like the fact that this standard highlights that staff, members and meaningful work are all the key aspects to the unit. Without one of them the unit will not be successful. Another important aspect of this standard is the inclusion of relationships. Unit meetings are a time for the whole unit to come together, getting to know each other better and to take stock of where everyone is at with the work they are involved in. More importantly it is a time when members and staff help each other out and for members to be engaged in the work.

Having structure in the Work-ordered Day means that everyone is informed of what happens in the unit, rather than a few people knowing what is going on. Structure means members are self-reliant rather than staff reliant. This structure can also assist staff and members and member and members to work side by side.

DAY

Simply the Day component refers to the fact the Work-ordered Day occurs during the day – Standard 17 states that the “clubhouse is open at least five days a week. The Work-ordered Day parallels typical working hours”. This standard refers to the Work-ordered Day mirroring a working week. The Work-ordered Day provides the opportunity for members to be involved in work oriented activities that are structured and meaningful similar to the general community at the same time that the community is also working. Something we frequently say at Stepping Stone is “What happens in the real world?” we know we are apart of the real world but this is a reminder for us to stop and think about what commonly happens in the world of work –Monday to Friday, 8 hours a day. Therefore a clubhouse needs to offer the same opportunities to members. During these hours the focus is on work for the duration of the Work-ordered Day. So frequently clubhouses implement a social recreational program in the afternoons. Once again I ask you “What happens in the real world” – I don’t think Dow Jones stop at 2:30 every afternoon for some ceramics and table tennis.

I am not saying that Dow Jones or the world of work is all that we aspire too as we each have many other traits who make who we are as human beings. However, having meaning and purpose usually is found to be more successful when you have structure and the day to day activities in the clubhouse provide these.

A large focus of what we do in clubhouse is work in partnership with members to help with recovery and reintegration back into the general society. If these structures are somewhat similar, rather than polar opposites, doesn’t it follow that it would be easier to reintegrate back into society?

CONCLUSION

So now that I have considered work, order and day separately I want to stress that the three go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. There is no use having great work, if it is not ordered or order if there is no work or if the work is meaningless. Obviously there is no use for ordered work, if there is not sufficient time in the day for the work to occur. Confused yet?

Well ultimately if you have a strong Work-ordered Day you will have many members involved in the unit. If you have meaningful work, engaging staff, member leaders and structure in the unit, members will want to be involved in the unit.

The Work-ordered Day helps members to reinstall hope in their ability to feel that they are worthwhile and have many skills, talents and abilities to offer. With the confidence, self worth and purpose that members develop in the Work-ordered Day they will be better equipped to move onto additional achievements such as work or study. A member of Stepping Stone Clubhouse, Andrew Strachan, at an international conference in Australia spoke about recovery. I would like to conclude with something he said in his presentation. “Clubhouses use true partnerships to develop and build members abilities, self-confidence and self-esteem, lessening the focus on symptoms, lost skills and knowledge due to illness. Clubhouse replaces these things with hopes, dreams and opportunities.”

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