

Testimony to the House Committee for State and Federal Affairs

Presented by Katie Gibbons

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Good morning, Representatives, I am Katie Gibbons. I am the Program Director of Milestone Clubhouse. I have worked with the Clubhouse model for over 33 years in various roles including as Faculty Member of Clubhouse International. I'm going to give you some background on the Clubhouse Model and describe to you the kinds of things that happen on a day-to-day basis in a Clubhouse setting.

A Clubhouse is a membership organization. The people who come and participate in a Clubhouse are its members. At the Clubhouse, members are not defined by their mental health challenges but are active participants in their own recovery. Membership signifies a sense of belonging, community, and ownership. This idea of membership means that an individual has both shared ownership and shared responsibility for the success of that organization.

The term "Clubhouse" originated in the late 1940's when seven psychiatric patients at Rockland Psychiatric Center in New York State formed a self-help group that met in a hospital "club room" to prepare themselves for discharge and discussions on how they might continue to support each other in their efforts to avoid relapse. Subsequently this group formed "W.A.N.A.", We Are Not Alone. They had two principle aims:

- To provide a helping hand in areas of a place to stay, furthering education, recreation and friendship.
- To provide a collective voice – educating the public about mental illness to decrease stigma.

Fountain House Clubhouse was established as a result of this group in 1948 in New York City. In 1955 the members of Fountain House decided to hire professional non-consumer staff to assist in the operation and the modern concept of the Clubhouse Model was established.

Clubhouse is recognized by SAMSHA as an evidence-based program that supports and empowers people living with serious mental illness to participate in their own recovery. Clubhouses offer people living with mental illness opportunities for friendship, employment, housing, education and access to medical and psychiatric services.

A Clubhouse creates an intentional work-mediated community that provides a safe and restorative environment for members committed to one another's success.

There are 4 Guaranteed Rights of Membership:

- A right to a place to come
- A right to meaningful work
- A right to meaningful relationships
- A right to a place to return.

A right to a place to come:

Membership is open to anyone with a history of mental illness, unless that person poses a significant and current threat to the general safety of the Clubhouse community. Our intention is to create a safe space for folks to work on their recovery.

A right to meaningful work:

All work in the Clubhouse is voluntary. Work of the Clubhouse community is organized in a way that reinforces the message of belonging. We believe that work is restorative and provides a firm foundation for individual growth.

A member is seen as a valued participant, a colleague, someone who has something to contribute to the community engaged in important work. In a Clubhouse, each member is given the message that they are welcome, wanted, needed and expected each day. We acknowledge their skills, talents, and creative ideas and efforts.

A right to meaningful relationships:

Working side by side and needing the help of one another creates an environment where the focus is not on hierarchy – expert/patient roles. We are equals and, as equals, we can openly share our ideas and challenge each other to do more. We can laugh together and work together collaboratively. This results in higher self-esteem for members and helps them overcome anxiety, take risks, take advantage of opportunities and have fun!

A right to a place to return:

Once a member, always a member. Folks never have to reapply. It is their Clubhouse and members can enjoy the benefits of membership as long as they like.

The design of the Clubhouse engages members in every aspect of its operation. Although participation is voluntary members experience the need to get involved in accomplishing the work for their own benefit and the benefit of their colleagues to keep the Club going. Tasks such as clerical, food service, outreach, maintenance, financial services, advocacy are performed on a daily basis. The work stems from the natural needs of the Clubhouse community. During the day we get hungry so there is a need to plan the day's meal, create a shopping list, go shopping, prepare the meal, serve and clean up afterwards as well as managing the food budget.

We miss our colleagues who are not attending so we keep attendance stats to identify how long someone has been gone. We send cards, visit them in the hospital, or make a home visit. We create newsletters so that our colleagues know what is going on within the Clubhouse and in the community, collecting information, writing articles, designing, copying, collating, and distributing.

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.

On a typical Clubhouse day members and staff first engage in a morning meeting that outlines the work that needs to be done for the day, upcoming events, announcements, celebrations, and identifying member needs. Members volunteer to perform tasks they are interested in doing alongside staff. In the afternoon, another meeting is conducted to do much the same thing to engage those members who arrived later in the day and to identify work that remains undone.

On any given day you may observe members and staff leaving for a meeting in the community together to engage in discussions around housing or decreasing mental health stigma. You may see a staff and member going to work interviews or going to an appointment with a doctor. Members provide tours to visitors, make outreach calls to other members, or work on financial reports.

In the evenings and some weekends and all major holidays, members and staff enjoy each others company while attending local events, bowling, attending sporting events, going to plays, taking day trips or celebrating the holiday. We believe it is important to work but also to play! Too many individuals with lived experience of mental illness have become so isolated that it is important for them to engage with others in building relationships and friendships.

Clubhouses serve as part of the continuum of care in partnership with mental health centers, consumer run organizations and others.

Members do not need an appointment to come to the Clubhouse. If they are having a bad day, they can just come to the Club to obtain support from other members and staff. Sometimes all that is really needed is just to be with others who care about them to avoid escalating into further crisis. Other times members will need more intensive support and that's when we can assist members in connecting with their case manager or therapist or psychiatrist for appointments and follow-up treatment. We work closely with mental health center staff to help individuals obtain and maintain housing, provide employment services, and access resources in the community. A Clubhouse is a place where folks can come to obtain help, but it is also a place where folks can come to give back to others. Members and staff, in a way, feed off each other's energy.

As Andy already stated, Clubhouses go through an accreditation process to ensure that they are meeting the Standards of Clubhouse International. This set of Standards is followed by all Clubhouses across the world and serves as a bill of rights for members and a code of ethics for staff. They outline the rights of membership, define roles and how we are to relate to one another as colleagues, stress the right to employment in the community and to pursue education goals. They emphasize the importance of wellness and state that, if there is a lack of decent, affordable housing then Clubhouses have the responsibility to do something about it so their members will not remain homeless or living in squalor. The Standards also emphasize the expectation that members are involved in all areas of Clubhouse governance. Decision-making is shared among staff and members when it pertains to the operation of the Clubhouse.

At this point Breakthrough Club is fully accredited by Clubhouse International and Milestone Clubhouse was just fully accredited last year. Lotus Clubhouse just recently completed an accreditation visit and Reclamation Clubhouse will be going through the process later this year. Railway Clubhouse in Newton recently opened last summer and we hope to celebrate the opening of a Clubhouse in Saline next year.

So, what still needs to be done?

As was already stated but cannot be emphasized enough:

We need to continue expansion of Clubhouses into Western Kansas and other areas of the state so more individuals living with mental illness can benefit from the resources a Clubhouse has to offer.

We need to increase our capacity to serve more individuals in areas such as employment, housing, transportation, and decreasing hospitalizations and incarcerations.

In my 33 plus years working in this model, I have seen countless lives changed by the powerful impact of Clubhouse and my sincerest wish is that others can experience this as well!

Thank you!

