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Elkhart County Clubhouse



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An intentional work community for adults with a history of mental illness

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Open Monday-Friday 8:30am-5:00pm

Tours open to all!

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Clubhouse Units: Broadening our Scope

In the Clubhouse world, it is standard to divide the work of the house into two or more “units,” each with their own distinct focus and identity. The typical Clubhouse unit has its own space, assigned tasks of a specific nature, and individuals who identify with that unit. We do this in order to:

1. Create a Clubhouse with distinct communities that are formed based upon the interests of each member.
2. Create an environment where relationships can grow more effectively, thus allowing relationship-based engagement in work to occur more effectively.
3. Divide into smaller pools of individuals, so that each unit can use those relationships to better conduct reach out.
4. Ensure that members understand that, if they wish to perform tasks of X nature, then they should join unit X.

Over the years, we have attempted to create two distinct units within our Clubhouse, and have approached this in several ways – all of which have resulted in failure. At a recent house meeting, we decided to hold monthly “unit planning meetings” as two separate units – one upstairs, and one downstairs. This led to a house-wide discussion about why this failure occurred, and how we can successfully create two distinct, thriving units in the future.

We had previously decided that it is most productive to meet as a single “unit” in the mornings, and split into two units for the afternoon meeting. Whether or not the upstairs unit’s meeting occurred was very inconsistent. Many times when we had low attendance or general chaos in the house it was decided that holding a second unit meeting was not necessary. This is antithetical to the nature of Clubhouse units, even if it is temporary, and it leaves the impression that a unit is simply a way of dividing up tasks.

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Upstairs Unit having fun, but in need of more colleagues!

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Thursday Evening Receptions

Since October we have been meeting every Thursday evening for a meal and an activity. Once a month we have been focusing on employment and celebrating our employed members and the other Thursdays we have been engaging in a range of recreation activities.

These Thursday recs and employment dinners really have been a lot of fun and we have had as many as 20 people in attendance. This level of attendance dwarfs our weekend recreations where we rarely get more than eight people to join in. Activities have included carving pumpkins, a movie night, a backyard bonfire, making Christmas cookies, and an arts and crafts night, among others. At our employment dinners we have focused on finding a job, resume writing and stories celebrating our favorite work experiences.

Thursday recs and employment dinners have been a success not only because of the high level of attendance, but they have also really helped energize our work day. We start making the evening meal between 3:30 and 4:00 to be able to get food on the table soon after 5:00. A great team of members have stepped up to make sure this happens. Our Thursday recs have also been popular with members who work full-time jobs but still want to participate in the Clubhouse. We are looking forward to many more enjoyable Thursday evening recs and employment dinners in the years to come.

- Erich Miller

Clothing Closet Donations Needed!

First off, I want to thank everyone who has donated items to the Elkhart County Clubhouse. Thank you to The Window and thank you to all the people who have donated in our community.

With that being said, we need more clothes! Much of our clothing has disappeared and seems to be moving fast. This is in part due to the cold weather, plus we have spring just around the corner and our clothing needs will change. (We hope spring comes soon; we all know this Indiana weather has a mind of its own.)

We need clothes again! Thank you so much in advance!

Please note that when donating clothing please bring them to the side entrance to the Clubhouse located off of the alley.

- Shy Irrizary



Vera having fun crocheting at Crafts Night



Laurie before her organ recital



Sirquincy & Delilah sharing a laugh at a Rec



Organ Recital Resounding Success

On January eighteenth, several Clubhouse members gathered at the Eighth Street Mennonite Church. We were there because our beloved member Laurie Blough was playing a pipe organ recital specifically for us. Several musical numbers took us through the church liturgical year and the final number fulfilled a special request for my birthday. Laurie played the Tocatta from Bach's Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor. That is one of my favorite pieces of classical music.

Laurie is an accomplished musician and organist. She shared her knowledge with us, even giving us a peek into the pipe box where the pipes for the organ are housed.

On our way out of the church, some members participated by tying knots for comforters that will be going overseas to Syrian refugees.

A great time was had by all. This was a rather unusual recreation activity as it was a private concert for members given by a member. I express my gratitude to those who made it happen and especially to my friend Laurie: you had a big part in making my birthday a happy one.

If you have ideas for recreational activities for the Clubhouse, by all means suggest them at our Recreation Planning Meetings the second Tuesday and following Thursday of each month.

- David George



David, Corey & Rich taking a behind-the-organ tour

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In order to develop unit identity, consistency is key. These excuses must be rare exceptions rather than common practice, because we must build unit meetings that colleagues can count on and look forward to in order to have a thriving work unit.

It seems the Clubhouses who most successfully divide a single house into two units distinguished by floors define their work in part by the needs of the floor itself. Our previous approach to unit division was to identify tasks that would belong in an upstairs "administrative" unit, and those that would be more suited for a downstairs "kitchen/maintenance" unit. We had identified that organizing the clothing closet was a downstairs unit task. However, the clothing closet is located on the second floor. Another example is banking, something that clearly belongs in an "administrative" unit conceptually, but has a dedicated area in the downstairs. This effectively meant that our work was split between two floors. It is the job of unit staff to engage colleagues in the work of the Clubhouse, but this becomes logistically difficult when the unit's activity is so spread out.

To fix this, we decided to move away from identifying units exclusively by their primary functions, and instead define them by the space they occupy. For example, vacuuming and cleaning were previously the responsibility of the downstairs unit alone. Now, the upstairs is independently responsible for vacuuming and cleaning the upstairs, and the downstairs unit will do the same downstairs. This is part of creating a special identity for each unit.

With this new perspective in mind, we hope to increase the quality of our relationships, streamline the tasks we do on a regular basis to make them accessible and efficient, and increase the scope of what we do at Elkhart County Clubhouse. This division into units will inevitably face many logistical issues as we pilot this idea. What we need now are members who are willing to identify with one unit or the other and help us navigate these growing pains as we move forward. This will take a significant amount of work and critical thought, but it CAN be done, and our membership is up for the challenge.

- Andrew Borntrager

Member Spotlight: Sherry Higginbotham

Shy: How are you this morning?

Sherry: Doing pretty good.

Shy: How long have you been a member here?

Sherry: It is four months now, since the nineteenth.

Shy: So, wow, you have only been a member four months. We are all so glad you are here; you do so much and are so involved in our duties and responsibilities, especially in the kitchen!

Sherry: Well, I grew up with a mom who knows how to cook. (smiles)

Shy: How do you feel the Clubhouse has helped you?

Sherry: Well, it has given me a place to go so that I am not just sitting around at home. I had always wanted to work in the community and they told me about the Clubhouse at Oaklawn.

Shy: That answers my next question of how you heard of the Clubhouse. So what has been your favorite rec? I know that you attend a lot of recs.

Sherry: It would have to be between the Fort Wayne

Zoo and the light show at Shippshewana....oh yeah, and the Christmas party at [Clubhouse of St. Joseph County]. I really enjoyed that. I had already known Francis [Disori] from Oaklawn in Elkhart and now he works at the Clubhouse in South Bend. He is a generalist.

Shy: Do you have anything you would like to say in closing?

Sherry: I would just like to thank everyone I know here for helping me!



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