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Clubhouses and the Journey of Recovery

Since 1948, when Fountain House was established in New York City, clubhouses have been a vitally important part of the recovery journey for many adults with persistent, severe mental health problems. Clubhouses are communities in which people who are experiencing mental illness can come together throughout the week--both during the work day and then for recreation in the evening and on weekends--to support and encourage one another.

Mr. Joel Corcoran, M.Ed., is the Executive Director of the International Center for Clubhouse Development (ICCD). He holds a master's degree in education from Cambridge College and worked in community mental health for 27 years before taking this post with ICCD. Prior to joining ICCD, Mr. Corcoran worked for Fellowship Health Resources, working in a community residential program in multiple states on the east coast. Additionally, he was a clubhouse director and helped to start three clubhouses. Mr. Corcoran's background also involved working with hospitals, housing programs, and psychogeriatric programs, as well as opening and operating numerous residential programs. In this interview, he discusses the history of clubhouses, the basic components essential to the clubhouse model, and the accreditation of clubhouses that operate and which are being developed around the world.

Mr. Corcoran, can you begin by describing what a clubhouse is?

"A clubhouse is first and foremost a community of people. Often it is thought of as a mental health program, but it is a mistake to think of it that way. A clubhouse is an intentionally developed community of people organized around those things that are important to people living with serious mental illness. These people are dedicated to each others' success.

"The way it works is that the clubhouse is a membership

organization of people living with serious mental illness, and it is organized around a structure that we call a 'work ordered day.' What that really means is that there is a safe, comfortable, image-enhancing environment. People with mental illness can come and belong as members as opposed to being 'patients,' 'clients,' or 'service recipients.' A clubhouse is not a treatment program; there are no clinical services that are provided there, there is no therapy or group therapy, and there is no medication management--none of those things.

"A clubhouse is designed to be a place within the community and within the mental health system where someone with a mental illness is not a 'mental patient' or a 'mental health client.' It is organized around the concept of membership, and membership means ownership and responsibility. A clubhouse provides a safe, comfortable environment, but also a very sophisticated and structured opportunity system that provides people with mental illness the chance to return to paid employment in local, community businesses for competitive wages as employees of a company. It gives them the opportunity to either start or finish their adult education and to pursue whatever their goals and dreams may be--everything from getting their GED to adult education or any kind of college or university degree. It helps people with housing, both supported housing and housing provided by other parts of the mental health system or other social service organizations. We have a progressive reach-out program to keep in touch with members who are not able to come regularly, whether they are in the hospital or in the community, which includes letters, phone calls, cards, and visits.

"Typically, a clubhouse is open 7 days a week, 365 days a year. During the day, during business hours from 9 AM to 5 PM, the work of the clubhouse is going on. In the evening and on weekends, there is social and recreational programming.

"The work-ordered day reflects things that are important to people when they come together in a large group, whether

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