

Supporting Clubhouse Members in their Role as Parents

Kathleen Biebel, PhD

University of Massachusetts Medical School
Department of Psychiatry

Betsy Hinden, PhD; Toni Wolf, MeD

Family Options



Background

•The majority of adults with mental illness experience parenthood at some point over the course of their lifetime

•65 percent of women with a psychiatric disorder are mothers, and 52 percent of men are fathers (Nicholson, Biebel, Katz-Leavy, & Williams, 2002)

•Parenting is an important life role that is central to recovery

•Efforts to support adults who are parents are best served by including their children, as they are integral to parents' identity and their day-to-day lives

•Clubhouses, built on the principles of recovery and psychiatric rehabilitation, have not traditionally identified and responded to the parenting related goals of club members

•Implementing supports for parents within the traditionally adult and individual-oriented clubhouse poses many challenges to the clubhouse community

Clubhouse supporting members as parents

Employment Options, Inc. (EO) is a free-standing community mental health agency in Marlborough, MA with a long history of supporting clubhouse members as parents

1. Mental Health Legal Advisors Project – family legal support and council to clubhouse members across MA
2. Family Project – supports and resources to non-custodial parent members
3. Family Options – intensive, community-based care, identifying and responding to the needs of custodial parent members

Methods

A grounded-theory, ethnographic approach was used to collect data from multiple agency and clubhouse stakeholders, at multiple points in time

Participants

Nine focus groups (n=9) with three distinct groups of clubhouse and agency stakeholders

1. Clubhouse members and staff
2. Agency leadership staff
3. Agency Board of Directors.

Data collection

•Focus group probes targeted perceptions of the relative advantage/disadvantage of supporting clubhouse members as parents, and the "fit" between clubhouse values and philosophy and supporting members as parents

•Investigators met after each group to record observations and review verbatim notes

•Clubhouse member participants received gift cards for their participation

Data analysis

•Data were reviewed, segmented, and coded by investigators using an iterative, constant-comparative process to identify emerging themes and recurrent patterns

•Inter-rater reliability of more than 90% was achieved by two investigators comparing randomly selected coded pages from focus group notes

Discussion

•Despite initial concerns and challenges, supporting clubhouse members in their role as parents did not harm the "soul of the Club"

•Supporting members as parents enriched both the clubhouse and the clubhouse community

•Supporting members as parents within the Club raised fundamental challenges to Clubhouse integrity and identity, and posed dilemmas that needed to be addressed

1. There are no clubhouse standards related to parenting, risking clubhouse certification by the International Center for Clubhouse Development
2. Integration of supports for parents and families may challenge the central role of the Generalist staff, a fundamental component of the clubhouse structure
3. Recognizing parents may expose experiences of loss for both parent and non-parents in a setting which emphasizes strengths and recovery, and require the Clubhouse community to develop new areas of competency to support each other, and each other's recovery

Results will

•Contribute to understanding the strengths and needs of the clubhouse movement with respect to supporting the parenting role for adults with psychiatric disability

•Provide preliminary guidelines for the development of strategies to support clubhouse members as parents

Conditions Necessary to Support Clubhouse Members in their Role as Parents

Secure Buy-In of Critical Stakeholders

- Identify parenting as a critical life role
- Acknowledge supporting parenting roles fits within larger strategic plan of the agency
- Recognize clubhouse member buy-in as critical

Identify Shared Values and Principles of Clubhouse Members and Parents

- Recognize supporting clubhouse members as parents fits within the values and principles of the clubhouse
- Acknowledge supporting parenting fits within strengths-based model of the agency

Develop clarity about how clubhouses will support members as parents

- Clarify how supporting members in their role as parents affects existing clubhouse activities
- Identify which parent support activities fit within the clubhouse, which would be part of the larger agency, and discuss these distinctions with the entire clubhouse community

Facilitate Ongoing and Active Communication with Stakeholders

- Address concerns of staff and membership including:
 - ❖ leaders and staff "spread too thin"
 - ❖ changing clubhouse staff roles
 - ❖ sustainability of efforts to support members as parents

•Providing ongoing reports re: efforts related to families and parenting and facilitate conversation amongst the entire clubhouse community

•Develop a standing agenda item for Board of Director's meetings re: updates on agency's efforts to support the parenting role

Explore Opportunities to Maximize Resources that Support All Clubhouse Members Including Parents

- Develop existing clubhouse resources and infrastructure to support clubhouse members in their role as parents-examples include:
 - ❖ Joint trainings for all agency staff on issues of family and parenting
 - ❖ Opening social functions to all clubhouse members in their families
 - ❖ Using the clubhouse van to address the needs of parents

