



09/08/2021

Ms Corrine McMillan MP
Chair
Community Support and Services Committee
Parliament House
George St
Brisbane QLD 4000

Dear Ms McMillan

Re: Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness in Queensland

Please find enclosed Stepping Stone Clubhouse's written briefing in response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Isolation and Loneliness, which highlights how the services and supports we provide to the Greater Brisbane region offer a highly successful pathway to combatting isolation and loneliness amongst adults with mental health issues in our community, and recommends an increase in investment and implementation of such services across QLD moving forward.

Sincerely,

Melanie Sennett
Executive Director

Community Support and Services Committee

Inquiry into Social isolation and loneliness in Queensland

"Through Clubhouse I am learning all about friendship, after not having any when I was sick. I have learned to make time to call and catch up, and about sharing your life with people. This sharing and caring has left me with little to say to my psychiatrist, as a problem shared is a problem halved. Friends make the world go round." Mae – Member of Stepping Stone Clubhouse

Stepping Stone Clubhouse has been delivering services to adults with mental health issues in the Greater Brisbane region since 1994. Guided by the Clubhouse International Model for rehabilitation, <https://clubhouse-intl.org>, our supports are designed to foster social connections among individuals at risk for isolation as a result of living with a serious mental illness, and to engage and become active participants in the community. In the last financial year, Stepping Stone assisted 650 members.

Stepping Stone Clubhouse is a membership organisation. Here, to be a member of an organisation means to belong, to fit in somewhere, and to have a place where one is always welcome. For a person living with mental illness, these simple things cannot be taken for granted. In fact, the reality for most people who live with mental illness is that they have a constant sense of not fitting in, of isolation and rejection. Mental illness often has the devastating effect of separating people from others in society.

"Mental patient," "client," "disabled," "consumer" and "user" are all terms used by society as a reference to people living with mental illness. People living with mental illness are often segregated according to these labels and defined by them as people who need something, or as people who are societal burdens that need to be managed.

The Clubhouse offers a complete change in this perspective. It is designed to be a place where a person living with mental illness is not treated as a patient and is not defined by a disability label. In a Clubhouse, a person with mental illness is seen as a valued participant, a colleague and as someone who has something to contribute to the rest of the group. Each person is a critical part of a community engaged in important work.

The daily work of the Clubhouse community is organised and carried out in a way that continually reinforces this message of belonging. The design of a Clubhouse engages members in every aspect of its operation, and there is always much more work to be done than can be accomplished by the few employed staff. The skills, talents, and creative ideas and efforts of each member are needed and encouraged each day. Participation is voluntary, but each member is always invited to participate in work which includes clerical duties, reception, food service, transportation management, outreach, maintenance, research, managing the employment and education programs, financial services and much more.

Membership in a Clubhouse gives a person living with mental illness the opportunity to share in creating successes for the community, while at the same time providing opportunities to support their individual recovery through programs such as:

- a work-ordered day in which the talents and abilities of members are recognised and utilised within the Clubhouse;
- participation in consensus-based decision-making regarding all important matters relating to the running of the Clubhouse;

- opportunities to obtain paid employment in the local labour market through a Clubhouse-created Transitional Employment Program. In addition, members participate in Clubhouse-supported and Independent programs;
- assistance in accessing community-based educational resources;
- access to crisis intervention services when needed;
- evening/weekend and public holiday social and recreational events (open 365 days a year; and
- assistance in securing and sustaining safe, decent and affordable housing.

In the current mental health landscape which is heavily focused on one on one tailored individual support, the Clubhouse model offers an alternative, providing a platform for socialisation and meaningful connection to a population at high risk of social isolation that works in conjunction with a range of programs designed to foster the recovery of the individuals involved. Essentially, we have developed a highly successful model for reducing the symptoms associated with mental illness that are not directly managed through medication alone, such as social isolation, social withdrawal, apathy, the absence of self-confidence and self-worth.

The Clubhouse experience has been proven to result in positive outcomes for many members, including:

- Employment, with longer on-the-job tenure for members engaging in Clubhouse Transitional Employment. ¹
- Cost effective, compared to other mental healthcare approaches. The cost of Clubhouses estimated to be one-third of the cost of the IPS model; about half the annual costs of Community Mental Health Centers; and substantially less than the ACT model. ²
- A significant decrease in hospitalizations as a result of membership in a Clubhouse program. ³
- Reduced incarcerations, with criminal justice system involvement substantially diminished during and after Clubhouse psychosocial program membership. ⁴
- Improved Well-Being compared with individuals receiving psychiatric services without Clubhouse membership. Clubhouse members were significantly more likely to report that they had close friendships and someone they could rely on when they needed help. ⁵
- Better physical and mental health. A recent study suggests that service systems like Clubhouses that offer ongoing social supports enhance mental and physical health by reducing disconnectedness. ⁶

It is our recommendation that further investment in Clubhouses like Stepping Stone across Queensland would provide increased access to intentional social communities that have been shown to successfully combat social isolation of persons living with mental illness in our community.

“Before Stepping Stone, I used to sleep all day and pace around all night and that was my life without any purpose. I didn’t have any friends at all. I didn’t have any associations, no connections and no networking. I believe in the member’s rights and am grateful to Stepping Stone for a place to belong to and to socialize, to work and to have amazing meaningful relationships” - Paul H, Stepping Stone Member.

Sources: ¹ Macias, Kinney and Rodican (1995). ² McKay, Yates, and Johnsen (2005); IPS model reported by Clark et al (1998); ACT model reported by Macias et al (2001). ³ De Masso, Avi-Itzak and Obler (2001).. ⁴ Johnson and Hickey (1999). ⁵ Warner, Huxley and Berg (1999).. ⁶ Leff and colleagues (2004).