



**BEING TOGETHER ON EVENINGS, WEEKENDS AND HOLIDAYS:
DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS, EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES**

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I am sure that many of the workshops you have attended thus far have been focused on the “Work” of the Clubhouse. In this plenary we are going to focus on the lighter side of the Clubhouse program which takes place outside of the Work-Ordered day: ***Our evening, weekend and holiday activities.***

The ideal ICCD Clubhouse is a place where members and staff relate to each other as freely and openly as people do in great families. Staff should feel motivated, idealistic and passionate about their work. Members and staff in the best Clubhouses know each other as good friends and colleagues and everyone feels as if they are part of a large extended family. When all of this is true, it follows naturally that such a place will want to do everything it possibly can for its members. This includes making sure that no one, absolutely no one, feels lonely, left out, or depressed because there is nowhere for them to go during times that our cultures naturally gather together with friends or family. Our Clubhouse mission is a great mission and nothing should be acceptable that comes short of shooting for the stars to make a better world for people suffering from a mental illness.

My Clubhouse, Gateway House in South Carolina in the United States, is an ICCD training base. That means that we have the opportunity to meet lots of people from lots of Clubhouses around the world. At Gateway House, over the years, we have discovered that most Clubhouses believe it is important to have a social program that takes place on evenings, weekends and holidays. BUT, we have also found that many of these same Clubhouses do not actually *offer* their members a full evening, weekend and holiday program – for many different reasons.

The speakers in this plenary are each going to talk about why it is important for a Clubhouse to have a strong evening/weekend/holiday program. But – based on my experience in our training program at Gateway House – I know that a lot of you sitting in the audience right now are going to be thinking to yourselves: Oh, that sounds great! BUT, we can’t do that because of THIS excuse,... or we can’t do that because of THAT excuse.

So, before we hear from our panel, I want to take a few minutes to go head to head with some of those famous excuses! I am sure that many of you have read Margaret Beard’s

article “Ten excuses not to do Transitional Employment and Eleven Reasons Why” and remember what an impact this had on energizing the Transitional Employment program. As we consider the importance of being open outside of the Work-Ordered day, our Clubhouse would like to address the following ten excuses that are often given to be closed and express eleven reasons why a Clubhouse should be open -- which tug so strongly at the heart of our Clubhouse philosophy.

Excuse 1: Our Staff should be with their family; Staff's children are young and they need to be at home.

An ICCD Clubhouse has the vision that a recreational and social program (especially holidays) is a necessary part of the Clubhouse culture. The Clubhouse makes this issue part of the interviewing process by informing staff before they are hired that working on holidays, evenings or weekends is part of the job. The program director should manage the program schedule to be sure the staff are not getting over worked and do not work every holiday. The evening and weekend programs should seek to meet the needs of the present membership which may change from time to time. The relationships in a Clubhouse should be well developed to the point that staff and members feel they are a part of an extended family.

Excuse #2: Members should be with their family.

Some members feel that they do not have family to see or they feel that their family does not want them around. To some members, the Clubhouse **is** their family. To other members the Clubhouse is their **only** family. Generally, when we think about visiting our family or friends during these social times, four hours is an average length of time. With a social only lasting for four hours on a holiday or weekend, members may choose to visit with both their family and their Clubhouse.

Excuse #3: Our Auspice agency or funding source says we can't be open.

First of all, a Clubhouse needs to know if the Auspice agency wants the Clubhouse to function as an ICCD *certified* Clubhouse. If this is not an issue, then the Clubhouse needs to educate the Auspice Agency. The director should have some influence on the agency because there are so many other things that a Clubhouse does that an Auspice Agency may disagree. If the agency will not let you open the facility, then plan to meet somewhere else. This is a time when the Advisory Board can step in for help. If it is a funding issue, then the Clubhouse may not expect funding for this time. Advocacy for the Clubhouse is crucial throughout the year. During a certification visit, the faculty can also help the Clubhouse by making recommendations to the agency that the Clubhouse be open on holidays and thus providing the necessary motivation.

Excuse #4: Transportation is a problem.

In all honesty, if transportation is the biggest issue we are facing then we have it made! Members can get many other places they want to go if they are truly motivated. Members can be expected to carpool with others or get families to bring them. The Clubhouse can plan and coordinate transportation ahead of time. Do not underestimate the resourcefulness of your members!

Excuse #5: Members will not come because they have other plans.

This is GREAT! We ultimately want members to have other plans. We should be happy when they tell us that their family has invited them to celebrate the holiday together. We should also be happy when we learn that small groups of members have made plans to socialize together in the community. This happens more often when a Clubhouse has worked hard to see that most members have been provided more opportunity to live and be independent. However, some members are on tight budgets and it is doubtful that they have made big plans. Members need to have choices and the Clubhouse needs to be one of them. Especially during the holidays, members may be extra lonely when everyone else has plans and they do not. We have found through experience that if a well-organized social is planned out, members will come. We also need to consider our working or student members that cannot access the work-ordered day program but can look forward to set times during the month that they can utilize their Clubhouse in the evenings or weekends.

Excuse #6: Other businesses are closed so we need to parallel the business community.

This is not totally true! Hospitals, gas stations, fire stations, pharmacies, nursing homes, police stations are open both on holidays and weekends. We are in the service business and ultimately the health care service business. But wait, we are more than just a business because the relationships we develop are an important aspect of the Clubhouse. It is these relationships that beckon us to go the extra mile and get together outside of the work-ordered day.

Excuse #7: Our members have agreed by consensus that the Clubhouse should not be open so staff do not have to work.

Our members are kind and sometimes more considerate of our "Staff" lives than we are of their lives. Standard #31 states, "The Clubhouse has recreational and social programs during evenings and on weekends. Holidays are celebrated on the actual day they are observed." This was written because the Clubhouse community determined it was important and addressed an important need of our membership. In addition, the standards are simply the "givens" of a Clubhouse, and this should not be an issue that is up for a vote

or consensus. Our members and staff should want this camaraderie. We all take pride in the fact that we stay open on holidays for our members.

Excuse #8: Staff are already overworked and underpaid.

Most employees at every job feel overworked and underpaid. The social program of a Clubhouse needs to be managed properly so that responsibilities are fairly divided. The social program is also a great avenue for a Board member to get to know the Clubhouse members and staff. You cannot imagine the joy it will bring you if you step back and see the good times that can be had when members and staff spend fun times together. Holiday socials need to be well planned and made sure that the Clubhouse is not functioning as a soup kitchen where staff work long hours in the kitchen cooking and cleaning. This is not fun, not fair and not Clubhouse! Relationships and responsibilities do not cease at the end of the work-ordered day. The entire Clubhouse can be involved in the preparation for a social. The social aspect of the Clubhouse should be a time to relax and to be enjoyed by all who attend.

Excuse #9: Members feel obligated to come because staff have pressured them.

If members feel *pressured* then they probably will not come anyway. However, as mentioned in Mark Glickman's article "What if Nobody Wants to Make Lunch?" many of our programs just put up a sign-up list and expect members to sign up with no personal invitation. This is definitely a staff and program issue and probably also an issue with how the members are being engaged throughout the work-ordered day. Members have a choice with any opportunity but need to feel genuinely wanted and needed even at social activities. A social success is all in how it is presented by the Clubhouse and organized. Staff and members should work together to create these opportunities to get together.

Excuse #10: The Clubhouse is centered on the work-ordered day! We all need a break! We got time off and everyone wants to do their own thing.

It is true that our Clubhouse's do focus much on the meaningful work of the Clubhouse. You will find that after an active work-ordered day members (and staff) are able to enjoy a relaxing evening or weekend with a sense of accomplishment. However, a Clubhouse that is open at least one evening during the week and gets together during the weekend and celebrates holidays on the actual day will address a great weakness that much of our memberships struggle – learning how to relax and socialize outside of a working environment. Again this might be considered going the extra mile, but is it not still a part of the rehabilitative process our Clubhouse's offer. Members know they have an option to attend and staff should be compensated for their time invested. *Clubhouse directors and leaders* should be setting this example to emphasize the importance of the social program beyond the work-ordered day of the Clubhouse.

Finally, Reason #11:

Our Clubhouse was founded from a Club that began long ago which called themselves WANA. We all know that this stands for “We Are Not Alone”. Major holidays, weekends, as well as some evenings, are among the most difficult times for people with mental illness. It is important to simply establish the fact that the Clubhouse will be open! When a member knows that their Clubhouse will be there for them, the Clubhouse social program becomes an asset to the rehabilitation process, and the holidays become a treasured tradition of our Clubhouses.

Here is our challenge! How can we keep the integrity of our work-ordered day and balance it with a recreational and social program during the evenings, weekends and holidays? The answer is simple – TOGETHER! This is how we as a Clubhouse tackle any other opportunity or challenge.

We will now hear from the rest of our panel as they share experiences from their Clubhouses in providing an active social program.