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Clubhouse Relationships with Auspice Agencies: Supporting a Strong, Standards-based Clubhouse

By High Hopes Clubhouse and Kennebec Behavioral Health, Waterville, Maine

High Hopes Clubhouse, in Waterville, Maine, is a program of an auspice agency, Kennebec Behavioral Health (KBH). High Hopes and KBH have worked hard to establish a strong, mutually enhancing relationship. Together, the Clubhouse and the auspice agency have created this ICCD Download&Discuss, in hopes that their experience and insight can be helpful to other Clubhouses and their auspice agencies.

High Hopes is a strong, Standards-based, accredited ICCD Clubhouse. It is also one of many services of KBH. Our experience has been that High Hopes' strength as a Clubhouse is enhanced by its relationship with KBH, and vice versa. However, we are well aware of Clubhouse/Auspice Agency relationships where this may not be the case.

In thinking through our relationship with each other, we have identified the following as the core ingredients of our mutually beneficial partnership:

- A basic stance of mutual respect and appreciation
- A mutual understanding and appreciation of the philosophy, values, and myriad demands placed upon both organizations (Clubhouse and Auspice Agency)
- Open willingness to engage in collaborative problem solving, even in the face of significant differences regarding issues that are important to both parties.
- Commitment to finding solutions that work for everyone, even if the process takes time.
 - One example of this commitment to finding workable solutions has been our struggle to find a way that High Hopes Clubhouse could comply with the supervisory requirements of our funding sources, and at the same time to remain true to Clubhouse values and Standards. Working through this issue has taken a number of years. However, we have finally developed a mutually acceptable supervision model that takes place in the midst of the Clubhouse community, includes members, and taps the strength of the Clubhouse community to solve problems that might arise.

- A second example involves Auspice-required training on developing treatment plans that meet Medicaid standards for medical necessity. Although this originally seemed to conflict with Clubhouse values and Standards, we worked
- together to develop a training that included members, who along with staff learned what Medicaid plans require, and now write large portions of their own treatment plans. This has been a win-win for us, as in addition to creating a Clubhouse-friendly system, members now have a great deal of ownership and ‘buy in’ on these plans.

Over the years, we have repeatedly discovered that developing and maintaining a strong, mutually respectful relationship between Clubhouse and Auspice Agency improves and strengthens both parties.

From the Auspice Agency’s perspective, the following are some of the values, assumptions, and practices that have led to our mutually successful relationship with our Clubhouse program:

- KBH is committed to establishing and fully supporting best practices in all of our services.
- The Clubhouse runs itself in many aspects, but it also functions as a working part of the whole agency. All of our programs, including Clubhouse, understand that we stand or fall together.
- The agency provides global financial, IT, billing, and clinical support for the Clubhouses, supporting and promoting them. It is also the agency’s job to protect and advocate for them.
- We support and encourage the development of a strong Clubhouse Advisory Board, which provides another layer of community support for the Clubhouse. We encourage a strong relationship between the Agency’s Board of Directors and the Clubhouse’s Advisory Board.

From the Clubhouse’s perspective, the following are some of the values, assumptions, and practices that have led to our mutually successful relationship with our Auspice Agency:

- It is important to include Auspice Agency personnel in Clubhouse trainings and Clubhouse seminars; this includes intake, accounting and public relations personnel; clinical staff; executive management; and board members.
- Invite all departments of the Auspice Agency to come to the Clubhouse for a tour, employment dinners, and to attend a full Clubhouse presentation.
- The Clubhouse Director must be willing to stress the importance of independence and ownership of all Clubhouse decision making. At times, the Director must develop creative, workable options that meet Clubhouse Standards and that the Auspice Agency can embrace.
- The Clubhouse should use the ICCD Accreditation Preliminary Findings meeting and final report to support the Clubhouses needs to agency management. Be sure to invite the Auspice Agency to the Accreditation Preliminary Findings meetings.
- Stay focused on the Clubhouse Standards; follow best practices; and keep open communication with your Auspice Agency regarding concerns and/or needs the Clubhouse may have.

- Involve members in all mandatory trainings required by the auspice agency, giving all departments the opportunity to experience the skills and talents that members bring to the trainings. Support members to train agency staff on the Clubhouse Model.
- The Clubhouse must insist on some autonomy, including having its own Advisory Board, and managing its own budgets, referrals and decisions for the growth of the Clubhouse.
- The Clubhouse must educate and build working relationships constantly with new Auspice Agency management, as needed. A Clubhouse can never rest on our laurels that the auspice agency “Gets Clubhouse,” as there are always new funding pressures and/or changes in personnel.
- The Clubhouse must develop its own autonomous relationships within the larger community, rather than assuming the sole identity of a program of the Auspice Agency.