



## Community: The Power of Belonging

By Steven D. Manning

Good afternoon everyone.

First of all thank you for allowing me to share with you my thoughts on the positive impact Clubhouse has had on my life. I've been a member of the Carriage House Clubhouse in Ft. Wayne Indiana for 17 years. What goes on in the day to day operations of our Clubhouses are real world, true to life, practical examples what community is all about.

One of several definitions provided by Webster states that Community is a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. To even consider our Clubhouses as communities places us on a different level, a unique category; far different than other mental health programs. The powerful healing effects of our Clubhouses is prompting a slow transition from best kept secrets to well known, evidence based and successful methods of psycho-social rehabilitation.

Back in 2001, my life could have been labeled an absolute mess. If you were to look up the word, mess in the dictionary, there would be a picture of me, Steven D. Manning. Ever since I was a child I wanted to be successful, and there was a time period in my life when I Somewhat achieve that goal.

Until one day I started feeling kind of strange; meaning, I didn't feel like my usual self;

I felt tired and sluggish; my thoughts turned negative. This eventually became a severe depression. This feeling seemed to come out of nowhere; and more symptoms bombarded me; insomnia, loss of appetite, and suicidal thoughts. It became an absolute nightmare. As the days, weeks, and months progressed, so did the illness; so much so that my suicidal ideation turned into suicide attempts. I ended up losing my job as the city's program director for the public access tv station, and due to poor decisions due to my mental illness, I found myself homeless. At my worst, I was walking around our city with a green garbage bag filled with my close; nowhere to stay, nothing to eat, no money to buy food; I was hopeless and homeless.

Eventually my living conditions improved as I was assigned to a case manager at our mental health center. However, symptoms of my illness persisted. It was so difficult to keep living with such an awful feeling day by day, moment by moment, second by second.

One day my case manager took me took me to a place called Carriage House Clubhouse.

It's a beautiful white house on Lake Avenue on the near northwest side of town. I cannot

recall my initial thoughts and feelings about my first visit to Carriage House. But I do know that my life has not been the same since I step through the door. For me the welcoming aspect of Carriage House powerfully began my healing process. Their welcome was not a handshake, and it wasn't a smile from a staff or member, even though those things did take place. The welcoming gesture for me was their offer of a delicious meal. Remember now, here was someone who went through a period of homelessness; who barely eat at times. Carriage House has great food and that's the hook that initially kept me coming back.

A quick observation I made at one of my first meals there; among the silverware at our tables in the dining room were knives. Oh my gosh, during my hospitalizations they would never let us eat with knives at the table. And here's Carriage House letting us have knife? That was a clear sign to me that they trusted me; that they trusted us!

Welcome to the Carriage House Steven, we trust you, we believe in you. We appreciate you!

In addition to doing a great job of welcoming its members, Clubhouses specializes in inviting members and staff to create an energetic synergy and form working partnerships in our communities. These working partnership allows us to have natural, real, relationships; it also allows us to have something in common and it places us; staff and members on the same playing field; additional, simple yet powerful aspects of the healing process.

When I first became a member I was asked by staff if I wanted to do a task or two. I can recall turning them down multiple times. But as time passed and as I improved in my recovery, I began to volunteer to work a task or two. However, what really drew me in to become more involved at Carriage House was when we started our audio visual department.

We named this makeshift TV studio CHAV. It's an acronym for Carriage House Audio Visual. It was a perfect fit! I have a bachelor's degree in Radio, Television, film with lots of experience in different areas of media; radio news, TV Management, video production, and a little bit of acting experience.

After starting CHAV in March of 2010, I became intensely involved with the cracker jack studio. Our members and staff first started producing a short newscast to play at our Tuesday house meetings. These CHAV videos were so well accepted by the house that exactly a year to the date that CHAV started be added a video to play at our Thursday meetings; these videos were called UpClose, which are like mini documentaries on members as well as staff. Both the Carriage House report and Upclose are creative was to make announcements; such as what's going on in the house, birthday greetings, lunch menus, new members, recreations for the week, and lots of other fun, creative stuff. We've even created characters such as Mr. Potato Man and Mr Eyeball to give the lunch menus.

One of the highlights of CHAV was when we Produced a 3 part series called Super Standards Man; The series came complete with our hero and our villians. Member Jodi Felkey played Nurse Nasty Pants and our own executive Director, Andy Wilson portrayed the sinister Professor Von Forcem. And the beloved Super Standards man, complete with red cape and mask was played by Assistant Dirctor Tom Weir.

It really blows my mind when I think that it took 9 years into my Clubhouse membership for CHAV to come into my life and what an awesome and vital spoke in the wheel of my successful recovery. And not only did I benefit from

CHAV. I've witnessed time and time again the wonderful impact it has had on many of our members and staff.

Let me add here that after producing over 300 CHAV videos back in 2012, I became the president and CEO of a successful video production company company called Manning Video Productions, LLC. And MVP continues to grow and improve today.

Thank you Clubhouse for welcoming me. Thank you so much inviting me in. And thank you for for appreciating us including us along the way of our recovery that we are more than our mental illness; that we have marvelous and amazing talents, skills and abilities. And not only can we richly contribute to our Clubhouse communities, we can and we will contribute in a might way to our local, international, and global communities.