



## **Clubhouse Employment: 'Tried and true' strategies, and new initiatives for a changing world**

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Before I found my way to the Clubhouse I had been hospitalized numerous times both for somatic and psychiatric reasons. My last hospitalization was in 2014.

There was a light in this tunnel, though, because that was when I found the brochure about my Clubhouse - Fountain House Stockholm. When I found the courage to come to the house in 2015, I was very insecure and my self-esteem and my self-confidence were at an all-time low. I started working in the kitchen unit where they suggested that I chop onions. I said no, I can't do that because my eyes tear up. I don't remember what I did instead and I know that no one made me feel bad about it; they just suggested something else, which I did instead. I recall feeling very angry with myself for my reason, -- we all tear up when chopping onions -- why did I think I shouldn't do it? The next day I went back and volunteered to chop onions for a week in a demonstrative way of making up for my negation.

After some time, I wanted to try something different so I started to work in the office. I remember one of the staff members asking me to do something on the computer and I was too afraid and said I can't do that "I'm not a computer person." He said I could sit and watch so I did and I learned as they were working and his words made feel like my verbal input was important and I was a part of the task anyway. It was my first steps to overcoming self-induced fears over my capabilities and my fear of failure.

I tried an array of tasks, everything from watering plants, sitting in the reception to cleaning bathrooms.

Because the staff and members were always so supportive and encouraging, I began to find that I could work. I could do things at the Clubhouse, and succeed at them. That was a great feeling for me, and the beginning of my journey into the world of work.

Eva has been so supportive and encouraging, and I found myself challenging myself even more in her presence. She was one of many mentors I look towards for guidance. Best of all I feel that Eva, and as a matter of fact most of my staff, are my friends.

I have gained trust and have such a respect for the weight and significance of their roles in my rehabilitation. I am ever thankful. Words can't express my gratitude. The support of my Clubhouse has made such a difference in my belief over my capabilities so that I now feel confident that I can and will work.

Since Transitional Employment is very difficult to develop within the Swedish social insurance regulations, we have integrated a Swedish program called the 'Ways Out program' into the daily life of our Clubhouse. This has been a good way for us to try to help all members access paid employment.

When I joined the program, I didn't have any expectations. I was merely curious and needed new challenges. But in this program, with the support of my Clubhouse staff and members, I learned an important lesson. I learned that I could transform the words "I can't" into "I won't." Once I was able to do that, I began to take responsibility for my decisions.

In March of 2017 I began a Transitional Employment job, cleaning a couple of art studios for 5 hours a week. I had a very positive view about it. I thought "Wow! I get paid for exercising and creating an environment that lets the artists feel better, which leads to better concentration." I know the importance of that because I'm a painter as well and it works that way for me.

Working at our Clubhouse, members work side by side with staff. I refer to them as 'staff' here, but the feeling is that we are the same level; they just have mandatory schedules, a paycheck and certain other responsibilities. But that closeness, trust, and sense of equality had helped me realize my own potential, and it has given me the support I needed to take risks like going back to work.

My Clubhouse helped me to get support from The Swedish Social Insurance Agency and The Employment Agency, and then helped me to get an Internship at a school for newcomers to Sweden. It was a project to integrate the newcomers into our society. I was told I would be working with art but instead I found myself teaching them Swedish, and that lasted for close to a year. I really loved it there. I would wake up before 5 AM eager to greet the day. I was still fully energized at the end of my day. With this job, I proved to myself that I was capable of working a 50%-time job. Having had this successful experience, I now also know that I could work even more than that.

Within a few months I received a scholarship from Fountain House New York for their Art residency program. I was there for 2.5 weeks. This trip was enriching on many levels. I got to see how the Clubhouse there works by working there, meet amazing people, learn about the art program and the importance of doing something creative to feel an overall balance. I painted at the studio, made friends I still have connections with, and exhibited at Fountain House Gallery. I even sold a piece in the small works exhibition. I was living a dream.

This opportunity, together with my growing sense of confidence in myself as a competent and able worker, led me to volunteer to lead an Art Workshop during the summer that had a total of 24 students. We met 8 times for 8 weeks. I felt that this was my right domain because of my passion for art as well as inspiring others to connect to their creativity. We had an Art Exhibition in the Clubhouse with hors d'oeuvres and alcohol-free bubbles. I presented certificates of participation to the members and felt so proud of myself for following through and not missing a single session. Most of all the positive feedback from the members really warmed my heart. They're still enquiring about a continuation of this course. Through all of these opportunities, with the continual encouragement and support of the Clubhouse staff and members, I now know that I am able to work. and it is possible to find work that fits my passions, talents, and personality. That is awesome to know!

The meaning of Clubhouse for me personally is that it has saved my life and in doing so it is indirectly aiding in the healing of family and friends that are connected to me. If you knew anything about my past you would see that this program is my miracle my family's answered prayers (and we're not religious). I know that educating people to break stigma is the way I can give back. By succeeding and demonstrating firsthand that even a person who has hasn't had a job for 26 years and has endured that which I have, can be integrated into a working society, and find joy and meaning in work. There is always hope. With a safe environment, good nutrition, encouragement respect and kindness a seemingly wilted flower will thrive.

I have an appointment next week with a collaboration between the Labor Agency and Social Services and will be starting a government funded job that is time limited for one year. This will give me experience and fill my CV. I'm again excited and a little nervous. I am enjoying the process.

AGAIN: THANK YOU FOUNTAIN HOUSE STOCKHOLM, Clubhouse, all of its members, staff and supporters.