

## Clubhouse Tours

Many Clubhouse members remember vividly their first day at the Clubhouse. Everyone and everything new and unknown! Much uncertainty, anxiety! A mixture of fright, hope, anticipation! Will I be welcomed and accepted? Will this place help me? For many new and prospective members a tour gives an initial answer to these questions that is decisive as to whether the person stays or leaves – missing or embarking on a life-changing opportunity. In addition, for prospective staff, potential donors, prospective employers, government officials, and visitors from all walks of life the tour can mean the difference between staying involved or rejecting, supporting or declining support.

A tour is personal and direct – giving one-on-one contact between visitors and Clubhouse people and providing visitors with a first-hand view of what is going on. There is no single procedure that guarantees an excellent tour, but there are a number of factors that combine to account for the impression a tour gives. It is essential that a Clubhouse recognizes the importance of tours and devotes time, energy, and resources to maximizing their effectiveness. As with other aspects of the Work-Ordered Day, cultivating successful tour outcomes entails commitment, ingenuity, flexibility, and vigilance.

A successful tour needs to convey information on all aspects of Clubhouse life. As tours usually occur during weekdays, visitors have a direct encounter with the Work-Ordered Day. In conveying information a successful tour needs to

- Add explanations to what the visitors see
- Reflect the enthusiasm and vitality of the Clubhouse atmosphere
- Elucidate what is seen in terms of Clubhouse philosophy.

For example, in an Administration Unit, the visitor may see people sitting at a table or at computers doing statistical work. An explanation should be given of the purpose of that work, such as attendance recordkeeping. Then at some point on the tour, the value of members working voluntarily with staff to operate the Clubhouse should be elucidated. All areas of the Clubhouse building should be shown, and aspects of Clubhouse life that are not in evidence such as TE, permanent employment, a housing program, and the Evening and Weekend program should be described and elucidated.

Conveying this information effectively entails a balance between detail and a summary overview – not too long and complicated, yet including edifying specifics. Personal testimony from members and staff enlivens and illustrates the information. Clubhouses should establish a set format for tours yet allow for spontaneity. Responsiveness to the interests and concerns of the visitors is important without letting individual issues throw the tour off track. Underlying all the specific information, a successful tour must present enthusiastic testimony as to the value of Clubhouse life.

Clubhouses have used a variety of overlapping practices in achieving successful tour outcomes. A strong focus on engaging and training new member tour guides by experienced member guides and staff is essential. Different arrangements are used by

Clubhouses in conducting the tours and providing information – single member tour guides, member pairs, member/staff teams, and a focus on people in units describing their work as a tour passes through. An experienced member guide can give a personal perspective on the value of Clubhouse life that is of particular significance to new and prospective members. Yet in accord with the basic principle of the Work-Ordered Day, single member guides should not be left without support and participation from others.

Practices used by Clubhouses in cultivating successful tours are as follows:

- Training sessions led by experienced guides and staff and arrangements by new guides to accompany experienced ones on tours.
- Written outlines given to tour guides detailing a specific format for tours and giving descriptive language.
- Refresher training for all tour guides to keep them up to date on new Clubhouse developments.
- Scheduling tours at least a day ahead of time, and at an optimal time during the day, so that guides can be lined up and prepared.
- Information on scheduled tours given to units in advance so that they will be prepared for the people passing through.
- Short descriptions of the work of a unit posted on the wall of each unit.
- Using visual displays within the Clubhouse to illustrate Clubhouse involvements outside, such as a wall board showing members who are employed.
- A staff, or a group of members and staff, meeting with guides and visitors after the tour for questions, review, and discussion.
- A Clubhouse unit, with members and staff working side by side, managing the entire tour process, including engaging and training guides, scheduling visitors and guides, meetings after tours, and monitoring and evaluating the process.
- Using written materials given to visitors, videos, and power point presentations to supplement tours.

Each Clubhouse needs to pay diligent attention to its touring process and find the procedure that works best for them. As an overall goal, the tour should be as good as the Clubhouse and reflect to visitors the hope and opportunity of Clubhouse life.