



Clubhouse International
CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF CHANGE

Transcript: Why Every Community Needs A Clubhouse w/ Jack Yatsko | CONNECTED

Brianna Harris

[Jack Yatsko](#)

Hello to all of our phenomenal viewers, listeners, and supporters.

I am your host, Brianna “Podcastbri” Harris, and I am so grateful to be here. Welcome to another episode of Connected, where we discuss all things mental health, recovery, and stories. Before we dive in, this episode is sponsored by Contra Costa Behavioral Services, Kaiser, and John Muir. Today, we are honored to have a special guest, someone with decades of experience in the mental health field, and a deep commitment to supporting individuals living with mental illness.

Our guest is the Chief Operating Officer of Clubhouse International. With a career spanning over 30 years, he has dedicated his life to improving the lives of those living with mental health challenges. Before joining Clubhouse International in 2002, he spent 13 years at Friendship House on the beautiful island of Kauai, Hawaii, where he developed a passion for helping people find meaningful work and support through community-based services.

His journey into this field began even earlier with a background in social work and communications. In fact, his career started in a very different place at a radio station in 1984, but he quickly realized that his true calling was not behind the mic but helping people directly. After making the transition to Two Gateway Clubhouse training center, he quickly found his stride in guiding individuals toward employment and eventually serving as the center's director for 13 years. Today, as COO of Clubhouse International, he continues to lead the charge in expanding the Clubhouse Model, a groundbreaking approach to supporting individuals with mental health conditions through work, education, and community integration.

We're excited to explore the transformative work of Clubhouses today and discuss why every community deserves one. Welcome, Jack Yatsko.

[Wow, what an intro. Thank you so much. I think in one thing, Brianna, that all that stuff just means I'm kind of old.](#)

No.



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But one thing you just highlighted, though, that when you're passionate about something, I think you don't really get caught up in the years or anything like that. And there's one thing that I'm very passionate about is this work and seeing how it has transformed so many lives. And that's why I'm excited to be involved with the podcast today. Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

Yeah, of course. And you know, if you were a 25-year-old COO, I probably wouldn't trust you as much as I do now. I'm like, what does he know? He just got here.

So you're fine. It all comes with wisdom and it just speaks to how qualified you are and your experience and just the passion behind it. So I don't think anybody stays in a profession for that long if they weren't really passionate about it.

I agree, 100%.

But what do I know? No, I'm kidding. So I guess this episode, like I said, is about why every community should have a Clubhouse and for our viewers and listeners and supporters, if this is your first episode and you don't know what a Clubhouse is, it is. It is a facility where members and staff can work side by side into just living a meaningful life to uphold the Clubhouse.

We have standards that we follow and we really try to get people back into the workforce and just support them mentally with school and work support and things of that nature. I've definitely talked about it on other podcasts, so you can refer to that. You can go to clubhouseinternational.com and see what else it's about. But I don't want to waste too much time talking about what Clubhouse is, but it is about why every community should have one.

Sounds good?

Sounds good, yeah. So we work with adults who have experienced some mental illness. That's basically the folks that come to these community resource centers called Clubhouses. They're not residential programs or places people come to during the day to get help with whatever their goals may be, whether it be getting help with a job, going to school, finding a good place to live, making friends. It's very holistic in its nature and I feel it's where the rubber meets the road in recovery and we'll talk a little bit more about that today.

Yeah. Thank you for cleaning that up for me. Jack, why do you feel like every community should have a Clubhouse?

Well, I think I'll answer that in two ways. One is in more of the words of members. We refer the people who come to the Clubhouse as members, not patients or clients because they're



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members of a community and they're involved in the day-to-day operations of the Clubhouse and I've been to over 200 Clubhouses.

To answer that question in the words of many and visiting over 200 Clubhouses, I constantly meet Clubhouse members who tell me, my Clubhouse not only changed my life, it saved my life. We take those words very seriously in our work and those words are why every community should have a Clubhouse because it changes lives and saves lives according to the testimonials of so many different members.

The other aspect of that is Clubhouses are a value add to any community. Think of Boys and Girls Clubs, senior centers, Rotary Clubs. Not everybody knows exactly what do they do at the Rotary Club or what's the programmatic components of the Boys and Girls Club but people have a general idea that these are good things and they add value to the community. So too does Clubhouses add value to the community for adults who've experienced some mental illness.

In that vernacular, while people think of every community needing senior centers and well-respected organizations like that, I too feel like if every community had a Clubhouse, because every community has people with mental illness but not every community has a resource center such as this, there's value added to that.

And we'll dive into more of that. I think the piece about like a broader conversation around the space around mental health is that we need to think of this more than just the treatment. People think, okay, get medication and get therapy or supports like that.

Those are very valuable components of many people who've experienced a mental illness but more so than that is the rehabilitation piece of that. Like, how do you know if you're a treating psychiatrist and you're seeing somebody once a month in your prescribing medication, like how effective that really is if somebody doesn't leave the house and go out into the community? My mom had a really bad anxiety problem and one of the ways of measuring that was could she get out of the house and interact with people?

If she's just staying behind the four, the sanctity of the four walls of her house, that medication may be helpful to keeping her out of the hospital but is it really helping her or anybody else to get out the doors and go to the grocery store, go to the movies, to have a life? Right. And that's what Clubhouses do.

So really Clubhouses are a bridge for people to reintegrate back into society. So we very much complement regular psychiatric treatment and other treatment components that are out there. So really it's like say, I don't know, another comparison might be if you have to get a knee replacement for example.



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And so you get your knee replaced, the surgery is done, you get your knee replaced but if you don't do the rehab and you don't do the work and the exercise to get that functional, then that may not, you may not progress being able to use your new knee in the same way you did before. So same sort of thing with the psychiatric community, there's so many much better medications, much worse, I mean much less of the worst side effects that sometimes came with older psychotropics.

That is really advancing which is a wonderful thing. But so too is the other rehab component. How is this really measuring and helping people with staying out of the hospital and reintegrating back into society through employment, school, housing and all those kinds of things. That's what Clubhouse is the secret sauce of getting people back into their lives.

Right. And I can, I have a testimony about that is we have a member here and we were having like some one-on-one some coach time and he was talking about housing and I was just like, you know, let's not look at it in a bigger scope. Let's look at it as, okay, first you can start coming to the Clubhouse so that you can build up the discipline to, you know, coming to work just like because it is a work environment. And so it's like if you just start coming here, maybe this week we can focus on you coming here twice a week and then coming here three times a week and building up so that you're used to like a 40 hour week so that you can't sustain a job, you know, so you can pay for your place where you're going to live. So it's like instead of, you know, looking at a bigger way, it's baby steps and this place can help you with those baby steps and integrating back into the workforce.

And I think a lot of his work was at home on the computer and he was like, I do a lot of work at home from the computer, but then I end up isolating. I said, let's not do that. Let's come to the Clubhouse and, you know, kind of work it in a different way. So I definitely agree. I love our members coming here. And even if they don't interact as much in the work order day, they're still here. They're still present and they get something out of it because they're still coming every day, you know, so I appreciate that aspect.

And so that's really nice. I believe that every community should have a Clubhouse, it's unfortunate that we only have two here in the Bay Area as big as the Bay Area is. We only have two. And I think our other one is just opened up near to our Sacramento. So we need we need more. And there's about what, 365? You said, 68, 70?

Yeah, you're close. We have 370 clubhouses in 33 countries. And actually, I mean, I don't know, geographically wise, counting in the Bay Area, you have your Clubhouse Mental Health Connections. There's Empowerment Clubhouse, Marin City, I don't know if that counts. But the Clubhouse in El Dorado.



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And then there's a newer one, right? And almost San Francisco proper called West Side Clubhouse. It just is opening their doors. And so things are percolating in California for sure. There's there's a lot of things rolling out with some federal and state support.

And so we're excited about the opportunities that are happening in California.

And speaking of federal support, let's say, so how can community leaders, policymakers and other organizations support the creation and sustainability of clubhouses in their area?

Well, one is funding. I mean, that's a big piece. Without funding, you can't get, you know, you're not going to be able to do much. But I think also educating themselves about what clubhouses are. You mentioned our website clubhouse-intl.org. And educating yourself about what clubhouses are and do. We have a training program. We have a lot of resources to help folks out and we encourage people don't be shy about reaching out to us.

I think aside from like one of the challenges is funding for these programs is that there's a lot of social stigma with people with mental illness. They're marginalized and stigmatized because of the misperceptions about people with mental illness.

And I always I mean, from 30, whatever years I've been doing this stuff, my feeling is that first and foremost, people with mental illness are human beings. They're not their illness. And people with mental illness have the same interests and desires as everybody else. We think having meaning and purpose in your life is very important to anyone, whether you have a mental illness or not. To wake up in the morning and have something you're thinking about during the day and have some structure and have something that you're aiming for during the day. When you know, so many of our folks that we work with don't initially have that and that is a big difference for people getting on the road to recovery. People with mental illness want a decent place to live. They want friends. They want some money in their pockets. A lot of folks want a job.

They want to be accepted into society and have the same opportunities as anybody else does and clubhouse has really help paved that way in providing what you refer to as a work order day is our therapeutic milieu, if you will. But we also have a three-tiered employment program that helps people a great deal.

So I think the what people need to understand is, you know, in our work is that it very much serves as a as a holistic resource for not just helping people reintegrate, but it's also a cost effective service. Clubhouses don't run with a lot of staff because the members in the clubhouse help operate the day to day operations. And so it's cost effective in the sense that when you have a clubhouse in your community, you're going to have less emergency room visits. You're going to have less psychiatric hospitalizations.



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You're going to have less involvement in the criminal justice system. But what you're going to have on the flip side of that, how many employers, I mean, this is a global issue really of trying to find good employees. Clubhouses are a tremendous resource for that. So we help fill that that gap. Clubhouses also want to be a part of the fabric of the community, such as, gosh, when I was working at a clubhouse out here, we helped out with the monthly beach cleanups. Many clubs also join Rotary Clubs, and it's a wonderful partnership between Rotary and Clubhouse.

What's a Rotary Club?

A Rotary Club is a group of folks primarily comprised of business owners. And they as a group do social service projects in the community, they raise money to benefit the community. So Rotary Clubs, they call them four truths and there's like these commitments that they make to making their community a better place. And so Clubhouses that join Rotary Clubs join kind of in that effort and they work hand in hand. And for us, a lot of Rotary Club business owners end up hiring members at their place of business.

Oh, wow.

Every community, like I said earlier, has a Rotary Club. In fact, mental health was their mission this year. And I spoke at a number of Rotary Club events talking about partnering with their local Clubhouses. So well over a hundred Clubhouses across the globe have these kinds of partnerships, but that's the one aspect of sort of reducing the stigma too when you have people working side by side with other folks out in the community.

So I know I touched upon a little bit of the challenges and some of the benefits there, but one statistic I kind of want to emphasize is that over 40% of members in an accredited clubhouse such as your own have their members out working in the community. A lot of times people think people with mental illness can't work. Well, Over 40% of our folks are out and paid jobs in the community. National statistics for mental illness, that's about 15 to 18%.

So in an accredited Clubhouse, we're almost tripling that average because of the supports that are provided to people. So we get involved with NAMI walks, we get involved with other charitable organizations. We don't want to be the best kept secret in town. We want to be known.

We want people to come to our open houses and we want to sort of take the help, take the out of the shadows and into the light so people can see who we are, what we do and how we want to be a part of the fabric of the community.



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Yeah, you gave us a lot of information, a lot of statistics and I appreciate that because it makes it seem like it's something legit and it is legit and just very tangible. This is something that can be done and added to the communities. Something that could be done that people could come to and get some rehabilitation in a good way, that makes sense.

Yeah, I mean, the evidence is in being an evidence-based practice. I think too, when we talk about being in 34 countries, one of the interesting things about that is it's cross-cultural. So we have, as you mentioned earlier, we have International Standards for Clubhouse programs that every Clubhouse follows. And even when we have Clubhouses, as far as South Africa, to Brisbane, Australia, to Pennsylvania, China, Korea, Japan, our motto crosses different cultures because it meets that human condition of, I think all of us feeling a need to be needed, wanted, valued, and having purpose in our lives. And that's what clubhouses do and that's why it crosses so many different cultural differences across the globe.

That's a really good point. I really appreciate you because I didn't even think about that. Like, this must work because it is international. And it's something that is, we need that human connection as humans, regardless of what separates us and what divides us. We all are humans and so we need that. So thank you for bringing that up. You're knocking out all my questions here that I have written down, so I don't even know what to ask.

Sorry.

No, it's okay. So for listeners who may want to get involved or advocate for a clubhouse in their own community, what steps can they take to help make this reality? I know you said when we talked earlier to have a good, solid group of people, you need a leader, you need someone who's persistent that keeps the group motivated. And can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Yeah, so I realize our audience are people who are hearing about this for the first time. Like, what's a clubhouse? What are these kids doing? Okay, it's mental health. Educate yourself further about this.

Many of us have loved ones with the mental illness. And even if you don't, but you're thinking, wow, this sounds like kind of a cool thing. Go to our website at www.clubhouse-intl.org and educate yourself by downloading articles, watching some videos. My email and contact information is out there. I'd be glad to get on a call with any group that would like to learn more.

Aside from educating yourself, you've mentioned the next kind of steps. Once you feel like you're better informed as to, okay, this looks like a cool thing, how do we get one of these going in our community? It's the next step about giving other people that information who you may know that might be interested in this. And those types of other people might be disability counselors or psychologists. They work with students that are experiencing struggles with their mental health. They might be interested in having a clubhouse in their



community. Ministers, they do a lot of good in the community with social service kinds of things.

And they know everybody in the community. Vocal rehab counselors, therapists, counselors, psychiatrists, workforce development people. All those are different types of people who might—family members, consumer groups. We've had many Clubhouses start from family groups through NAMI, through MHA, and from consumer groups hearing about this and wanting to learn more about it. So think about those types of groups and give them the same information that you learned about.

And then let's hop on a call, get on a Zoom call together so we can learn more about your special community, whether it's rural, whether it's urban, what's funded in the mental health arena, what isn't. And then we run a New Clubhouse Development training that's designed around the infrastructure of starting a Clubhouse. Obviously, you need money to start a clubhouse. So how do you fundraise? If you're not a nonprofit group yet and you want to file to become a nonprofit organization, how do you even do that? A lot of times family members that I talk to say, I don't know how to write a grant.

I don't know how to do any of this stuff. It feels a bit overwhelming. We walk you through those steps in our training and we talk to you about whether you want to be like a free-standing organization with your own nonprofit or you want to be attached to like a mental health center. Many mental health centers, particularly in the United States, I would say I know 65 to 70% of our accredited clubhouses are operated through a mental health center. And so for a mental health center, a clubhouse becomes a shining star of the organization with some of the outcomes that we have.

And so in this training, we talk about doing like a SWOT analysis of your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats of what's the better way to go to start it? How are we going to fund it? What are we looking for in square footage and building in space? Where should the club be located? How do we find the best director? So we go through a variety of different topics and each group that comes to this training develops a unique goal plan targeted for their community to start a clubhouse. And we assign a mentor to each group that works with them for up to a year or longer to help them achieve the goals and objectives that they identified in their action plan.

And our batting average, if you will, is about 80%. So these groups come to us. They're not usually a place with a big pot of money and says “we got a big pot of money, let's get started.” We love when that happens. But usually it's just grassroots groups. And from those grassroots groups, our batting average is 80% of those groups that come to this training go on to start and sustain clubhouses. The 20% that don't, there's generally two reasons why they don't. One is they don't, they don't, they're not able to raise the money to do it. But second to that is something you probably wouldn't think of, but we've seen it in



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our own research of doing this a number of times, is that the group loses momentum by stopping meeting regularly.

You need a group leader who's going to hold people accountable. Like Brianna is going to do this each month. Jack's going to do this each month.

And then you continue to meet each month and you start to pick things off. I have found that busy people get things done. So don't be shy about trying to get people involved that are busy. Don't presume, well, they're too busy. If people have things to do and they're committed to a cause, they tend to get things done.

So when people stop meeting, then energy starts to dissipate. And so we really encourage the group leaders to keep the momentum going by having regularly scheduled meetings to achieve the goals that they outlined in their action plan. And from that, that's where that 80% comes from with, we went to this, when we do it in person, it's a three day training. We've been doing it virtually since COVID and we do it over three half days on Zoom. Who could seem to be more than that on Zoom, frankly, but we do three, four hour sessions over the course of those days to implement the training. And we haven't seen any drop off in the success rate as compared to when we've done it in person, when we've done it virtually. So we feel like we've successfully thus far transferred the in person applicability to the virtual capacity.

It's pretty cool. How long does that typically, how long does it typically take to establish a Clubhouse? Like years, months? Like, what does that look like?

It's a great question. On average between one and a half and two years, because if you're starting from scratch and you have zero, this is the group that is at the baseline of, hey, there's three or four people who want to get one of these started. It usually takes between 18 and 24 months, year and a half, two years to raise the money, to get your nonprofit, to get this thing going. We've had some Clubbuses do it in less than a year.

In fact, in San Point, Idaho, we just have the first clubhouse starting in Idaho and they came to our training in December of 2023. And here we are in November and they've opened their doors. They're open three days a week right now. They have a big grand opening next week. And we've also had one in Aiken, South Carolina that's opened up in less than a year. So depending on the right group of people, depending on getting the funding, the average has been, though, 18 to 24 months.

That's very surprising because I was thinking five to 10 years. Something like that.

Yeah, we often hear that from people and that's what sometimes makes them a little bit more apprehensive. Man, we can't wait this long. This seems like a really long time.



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It doesn't take that long. If you have a group of committed... It's that Margaret Mead quote, "never doubt that a few people can change the world." I'm not quoting it exactly right.

And then the second part of this, that's the only thing that ever has. You get a group of small group of people dedicated to a cause. We have found that Margaret Mead quote to be true. They get things done and they get this thing launched. And once it gets launched, it very rarely loses momentum because word of mouth, referrals, resource providers hear of it and they start referring more people. So very often one common mistake that new Clubhouses make is they have to grow their space quickly and they need to be looking for a new building because they've gone from 5 members to 40 members. And so they need to quickly be thinking strategically about the space that they need and plan ahead with that.

A good board will be thinking about not just in the year to come, but what's down the road three years. You want to be... One of the tips also is try to find your location along like a public transportation route if you can because you want it to be easy for people to come and go to it. That's not to say that we have a lot of clubhouses in rural areas that don't have any bus line and there is no public bus system.

Then the clubhouse gets their own vans and they develop a sophisticated transportation system to go pick up members in the morning and bring them to the clubhouse and help people get home in the afternoon. So that's a barrier, but it's an overcomable barrier to the transportation component.

Well, thank you, Jack, for answering that question. My last question is, as we look towards the future, what do you envision for the growth and evolution of the Clubhouse Model?

We have our own strategic plan. We talk about Clubhouses doing that, but we do our own. We have a board of directors that we're accountable to. And our goal is to double in the next few years and triple over the next five to seven years the amount of Clubhouses. That's a big number, but we also feel like the more opportunities we have such as this one, the more opportunities we can get in with government funders and broaden the landscape.

Not just in the United States, but in countries where we don't have any Clubhouses. We feel like this model has the track record is something that we should be able to, with the right kinds of support, be able to replicate two to three times over. The other parts that we're really looking at advancing is developing more digital kinds of trainings and online access for people who otherwise can't get to an in-person training.

We're developing modules that people can take online to learn more about the model, how to implement the model. We're doing, we have 26 clubhouse coalitions. And these are groups of Clubhouses that in each state or province or region work together to help advocate, to help bond together to help strengthen the overall Clubhouses in the region and develop more Clubhouses.



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When you're like you're in California, you guys know the turf more than we do at Clubhouse International. You know the funding streams, you know the pockets of where there's Clubhouses, where there's not, where there might be a really good opportunity. So we will see the work with coalitions as another way of broadening out the network.

But again, where places don't have a coalition because they don't have a Clubhouse to begin with, I think our digital growth and our reach out to these organizations by going to other conferences too that are held not just in the United States but globally. We recently were in Portugal at a mental health conference and that country is looking at starting some Clubhouses there based on us being proactively involved with some conferences there.

So those are a few touch points about our goals of doubling, tripling the amount of clubhouses, providing more and broader training opportunities and working with coalitions to help expand our mission, our three components of where we see sort of the future growing on this. We want to be partners. We're not looking to replace existing resources.

We're looking to complement them with trying to add a Clubhouse into communities.

Right on. Well, Jack, this has been very informative. I really appreciate all the knowledge, the expertise, the statistics, you know, you know your stuff. And so I'm excited to see where clubhouse international goes where us as mental health connection goes and just the growth of it becoming more of like a common household name because I didn't even know about it until I started working here. So I really appreciate this this interview and this conversation—I had a lot of fun.

Oh, thanks for the opportunity. People should know too that those of us who work at clubhouse international 70% of our staff, we have 11 staff people we work with about 125,000 people. Across the globe, are grassroots people folks, we all—70% of our staff—started working in Clubhouse[s] and worked their way up.

And then, you know, when this organization was formed 30 years ago, we're celebrating our 30th anniversary this year. You don't have to feel like you're talking to somebody formally like just lay it out and feel like you can have a regular conversation about why you think your mental health system needs to improve for your loved one or people that you know in the community. And let's have the conversation.

We're more than willing and open to helping people learn more about what we do and us learning more about what they have what they don't have what are the opportunities that could present themselves so don't be shy about reaching out to us.



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Of course, right on. Well, Jack, this has been wonderful. You have a great weekend and take care.

Thanks a lot, Brianna. Thank you for the opportunity.

No problem. See you.

All right. Bye bye.