

The Independence Center of St. Louis changes lives

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The consistent and daily challenges of dealing with mental illness touches many people's lives, whether personally or through seeing the ongoing struggle of family, friends, neighbors and others around us. The Independence Center of St. Louis strives, through an inventive approach beyond the merely clinical, to

rental subsidies through HUD and two Center-owned residential care facilities offering 24/7 support and supervision, It also provides private one-bedroom and efficiency apartments, assistance with locating apartments throughout the community via a network of landlords supportive of the needs of its members, help with daily tasks such as grocery shopping and apartment cleaning, and regular apartment visits



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arrest the spiral of hardship and isolation through which too many people with mental illness suffer without hope.

The Independence Center is an innovative psychiatric rehabilitation program serving adults with persistent mental illnesses in the St. Louis community. The Center was founded in 1981 by a group of parents and concerned friends of people with mental illnesses who wanted to create a place where their loved ones could go to find jobs, rediscover and learn new skills, build friendships and get assistance living on their own.

The "Clubhouse Model"

The Center accomplishes this life-changing confidence- and relationship-building through a distinctive model of care and engagement called the "Clubhouse Model." Rather than focus merely on the clinical and medical treatment of "patients" or "clients," clubhouses work to engage the whole person in a participatory environment by focusing on meeting the larger constellation of needs of the clubhouses' members in four main categories: housing, employment and education, wellness and social interaction.

Housing

A sense of belonging begins with having someplace to call a home. The Center believes that everyone has a right to live in a decent, safe and affordable home and has created a comprehensive and consistently growing housing program to provide for the most basic of its members' needs.

The Center currently operates two Center-owned supported housing facilities with

by Independence Center staff to remind members that the Center is always there for them.

Employment and Education

Because employment and education play such an essential role in life and help form an adult's sense of identity and self-worth – it is one of the Center's principal core beliefs that everyone that wants a job should have access to one and the ability



to perform well at that job. In addition to building financial independence, work gives people purpose and connects people to those around them and offers meaning and a sense of dignity to their lives.

The Independence Center provides education assistance and volunteer work opportunities at the Center to allow its

members to create, or re-create after a diagnosis, a resume and job skills. The Center also then partners with various St. Louis-area employers, who provide meaningful job opportunities to the members, as a way of transitioning back into the work world by building a creditable work history.

Similarly, the Center's Clubhouse Shop specializes in selling upscale gently used furniture, china, crystal and apparel which helps to support the Center's mission. The Clubhouse Shop is run by and staffed by members as well as the Center's staff members.

Wellness

According to some studies, those with persistent mental illness can have life expectancies decades shorter than the average American. To work against this disquieting trend, the Center helps its members to get needed formal medical and clinical treatment required by their illness, but also seeks to attend to the whole person by providing health and fitness screenings, weight loss programs, nutrition education, smoking cessation and a fitness studio - which includes cardio and weight lifting equipment, daily yoga, dance, aerobics and stretch classes.

Social Interaction

Because sometimes the worst and most dangerous symptom of mental illness is isolation, the Center ensures that no one feels alone. Members and staff work hard to create a sense of, and connection to, the place and to build strong personal bonds and friendships at the Clubhouse formed through work and social activities. These are the all-important links that make a huge difference in the lives of people who can be estranged from family and other friends because of misunderstandings about and fear of mental illness.

Bringing together these elements in a cohesive whole, and attending to the broader person has worked wonders for the Center's members to build community, connection, competence, belonging and a sense of place, direction and purpose in a caring community of fellow workers.

Inquiries about the Center, its activities, fundraising, and becoming involved can be obtained by emailing the Center at info@independencecenter.org.