

## Clubhouse Model

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**CLUBHOUSE MODEL** Recently, I visited J-Town, New Passages's Clubhouse in Jackson County, MI. I've often said that if a clubhouse is accomplishing its mission, there is a certain magic in the air. You know that something very special is going on when you walk in the door. The members in the clubhouse are upbeat, friendly and exhibit a certain level of ownership that you only find in truly great clubhouses.

When I returned from New York in 1986, I was determined to see the clubhouse model implemented in Michigan. During my stay in New York, I had become familiar with Fountain House, the original clubhouse. I was particularly intrigued by this model, because of my background as an educator. It's been very clear to me for quite some time that people with severe mental illness need more than medication to improve their lives and begin a process of recovery.

At J-Town the whole person is being addressed. This is certainly evidenced in the case of one of the clubhouse members in Jackson. He had been in prison for 21 years. Upon his release, he was diagnosed with serious mental illness. He was unable to get a job or appropriate housing. He was referred by the prison re-entry program to J-Town Clubhouse. At that time, he was living in an AFC home and on probation, with very few friends, and almost no daily living skills. His primary goals were to stay out of prison and to get his own place. While at the clubhouse, he worked in the Kitchen Unit and Clerical Unit. Through this process, he has become much more self-sufficient. He even relies on public transportation to get to and from the clubhouse and to all of his appointments. In April 2008, he was released from probation and is now living in his own apartment. He has a paper route and continues to grow in his personal skills, learning to cook in the kitchen. He runs the breakfast bar daily, and people look forward to his friendly attitude every day. He is a remarkable role model for the other members of the clubhouse.

These are the kind of stories we hear routinely at New Passages. Programs like J-Town literally help change the world. When a person with severe mental illness can find a place where they feel safe, welcomed and empowered, that's a pretty big deal. I really believe that the staff who support consumers who attend programs like J-Town are truly the unsung heroes. In a society where people with mental illness are often viewed as some how defective, a place like J-Town provides them with a place to begin the recovery journey.

I just want to say how proud I am of J-Town, and only wish that more people knew about this amazing program. As always, your comments are welcome.