

Interview with Annette Callow

member of Caledonia Clubhouse, Falkirk

www.caledoniaclubhouse.co.uk

1. What do you think are the best things about the Clubhouse model?

Clubhouse empowers members, giving us support and encouragement; this enables us to develop our personal and social skills as well as providing many opportunities for all members to access, all this promotes recovery from severe and enduring mental illness, in fact Clubhouse is often referred to as the "Recovery Model". Many people with mental illness develop the first episode of the illness at school, college or university and this often results in them being unable to complete their courses, this affects their goals and aspirations, as well as having to cope with the illness.

Clubhouses provide in-house educational courses as well as helping support members back to college or university education. Many members have been told by health professionals that we will never be able to return to work, Clubhouse provides three employment programmes, including transitional employment programme (TEP) which is unique to the Clubhouse model. These offer varying degrees of support depending on member's individual goals, ranging from highly supported part-time and time-limited jobs to full-time independent employment. Clubhouses also provide a work-ordered day which is a structured work in units ranging from catering to business and finance, members and staff work together to do all work tasks. This enables members to develop work skills, increase confidence and self-esteem, as well as developing relationships and trust in each other.

Clubhouse membership is voluntary and without time-limits, all members are needed and wanted in Clubhouse regardless of their perceived abilities. All Clubhouse members are guaranteed a right to a place to come, a right to meaningful relationships, a right to meaningful work and a right to a place to return. The Clubhouse also provides a range of social activities which members and staff participate in. One of the first things that you can lose when you become mentally ill is your social skills and the ability to communicate, taking part in social activities helps members to develop and practice these in a safe environment at our own pace.

2. Has attending the Caledonia Clubhouse made a difference to your life?

It has made a huge difference in my life. Before I became a Clubhouse member I had spent years as an in-patient and attending day hospitals, I was told during my first hospital admission in 1995, which lasted four and a half months, that I would never be able to work again, that I wouldn't be able to learn and retain enough information to do any other job, I had been a qualified general nurse for many years. I became a member of Caledonia Clubhouse, Falkirk, in August 2000. I learned to use a computer very slowly; I had never touched one before. I did a basic computer course in the Clubhouse with tutors from Forth Valley College, this led me to gain several recognised computing qualifications and eventually I passed my European Computer Driving License in 2004. I went to college for two half days a week for two years, I got a lot of support from staff and members of the Clubhouse and I graduated in 2008 with an Higher National Certificate in Business Administration with my friends from Caledonia Clubhouse there to support me. I started working on a highly supported transitional employment placement two years ago, working four hours a week as a clerical assistant with Falkirk Council. I am now working six hours a week on my own supported employment placement. This has increased my confidence, social and work skills and given me some independence.

I attended Clubhouse training and several international and European conferences and did a specialised training course in Massachusetts in 2004. I am now a member of the ICCD Faculty, (the ICCD is our governing body) and do certification visits to Clubhouse all over the world; I have certified two Clubhouses in Finland and Ireland and one each in England, Sweden, Australia, it has been a great experience. I am also involved in telling my recovery story in our Clubhouse public relations group where we talk to health professionals, service users, high school students and university students on a regular basis talking about our illness, recovery, the Clubhouse model and challenge the stigma and myths surrounding mental illness. I recently spoke at an international conference to 800 people from all over the world. The Clubhouse has changed my life so much that I am unrecognisable from the person I used to be, I am so lucky to be a member of Caledonia Clubhouse.

3. Are there any differences between a Clubhouse and a Drop-in Centre or Day Hospital?

There are many differences. Drop-in centres focus mainly on social activities, befriending and some illness education. Day centres focus almost entirely on treating the illness and symptoms, providing access to medical staff and illness-orientated information groups. They can also provide depot injections and blood monitoring for certain medications. Clubhouse is not a medical model at all; it is based on the psychosocial model of rehabilitation. We do not focus on the illness, unless a member is ill, but rather on the strengths, talents and abilities of each individual member. We focus on what members can do and want to do, not on their limitations.

4. What about the international dimension of being a member of a Clubhouse?

Clubhouse is an international organisation, founded in New York in 1948 with, currently, over 370 Clubhouses in 32 countries and on all continents. As we are an international organisation, we have the opportunity to meet with our colleagues every second year at international conferences. This provides us with the opportunity to see what is happening in the wider community, to be really aware of the global aspect of Clubhouse and to recognise and learn about different cultures and the diversity of different cultures. Every alternative year, we have the opportunity to attend local conferences, for us it is the European Clubhouse conferences. It is a great opportunity for us to learn from each other and network in the wider Clubhouse community.

5. Would you recommend the starting up of a Clubhouse again in Fife [there used to be the Core Club (house) in Dunfermline]?

I would definitely recommend the setting up of another Clubhouse in Fife. Core Club was the first Clubhouse in Scotland; it was a very strong and active Clubhouse and a leader in helping other Scottish Clubhouse to set up. I know when the Core Club ceased to function as a Clubhouse; many members were devastated and found it difficult to adapt in the local community. The Clubhouse gives so many different opportunities to all its members and as Clubhouse is voluntary, members have full control over their participation in the activities of the Clubhouse. With the support of people who were involved in the Core Club over the many years it was open, I think a new Clubhouse would be a great asset to all the people in Fife who are living with mental health problems. It would provide a vehicle for service users to truly go down the road to personal growth and recovery, it would provide hope. Having been at the conference in Fife and listening to the views being expressed, I really believe that a new Clubhouse in Fife would provide a focus for you all and be really successful. I wish you all the very best.