



## **BECOMING PART OF THE LARGER MENTAL HEALTH SOLUTION**

**Carrie Shaw, Vice-Chair, Progress Place, Canada**

I am pleased and grateful to be at the 18<sup>th</sup> International Clubhouse Conference here in beautiful Denver. My colleagues on the board told me that being present at an international conference was a transformative experience for them and I know it will be for me as well.

New board members have the opportunity to spend time in the clubhouse, participate in an orientation process and learn from other community members on the board as well as those board members with lived experience of mental illness. We learn that the clubhouse is described as an 'intentional community' in the literature. If you asked me as a new board member, "what does that mean?," I would say it is about the day-to-day clubhouse operation of people being part of a vibrant community that is based on everyone, members and staff alike, feeling needed and wanted based on their contribution and sense of productivity. As well, it speaks to the satisfaction derived from participating in a meaningful and esteem-building work and the development of relationships and social connectedness. Initially I thought that this great community that I was part of through my involvement in the board existed almost entirely within the walls of the clubhouse with the exception of the transitional employment program and the housing program.

As my participation increased I realized that this 'intentional community' of clubhouse was truly integrated into the community in ways I had not yet fully realized. At Progress Place our earliest community program outside of the clubhouse was the Warm Line, a peer support telephone line, for people living with mental illness who are lonely and isolated and who can call 7 days a week between 8 pm to midnight when most programs and services are closed. From the early days Progress Place always had supportive housing for members of the clubhouse and in the late nineties expanded the supportive housing program in the community for people with backgrounds of mental illness and homelessness. Progress Place also began a Double Recovery Program for people who had addictions and mental health issues and today it is operating weekly at 16 locations in Toronto.

All of these programs were developed because the board responded to a need that was present in the community and they believed based on information from the senior leadership that it would fit with the overarching philosophy of the organization. It was pragmatic and important and we were able to secure funding and fulfil a need for members of Progress Place and the community. The benefits of those initiatives were positive and increased our profile in the community and in the eyes of our funders as well as increasing our budget.

Let's fast forward to the work of the board during the past several years and to some organizational drama. Three years ago sparked a call for action on the part of the board and staff. Community mental health programs had been informed by the health authority funder to look towards an amalgamation with other programs or in the future they would be told more explicitly who to merge with. This pronouncement was in a climate of shrinking fiscal resources in the mental health and addictions sector.

Just prior to that (January 2012) the board had developed a strategic plan however the plan had limited action taken toward a strategic direction. There was board interest in investigating service integration activities and partnerships (not necessarily mergers) as well as other opportunities to interlace Progress Place philosophy/approach and expand/create broader awareness as it was sometimes difficult to explain, describe, promote or conceptualize the multiple components of the clubhouse within the broader system and to potential collaborators. Given the new reality, in September 2013, the Board of Directors decided in conjunction with the Executive Director and senior leadership to hire a consultant and review our Strategic Plan and move it towards operation of the plan in the context of our funder, the local health authority priorities and the mental health and addiction environment.

The consultants reviewed the board's strategic plan and had in-depth discussions with board, clubhouse members, staff and other community agency staff and government funder personnel. Additionally, the consultants spent time looking at the clubhouse model and our community programs developing a sense of the organization. The Board of Directors was given a set of strategic questions such as:

- What is the brand that Progress Place wants to promote?
- Where does Progress Place want to sit on the continuum? Will the target population change or expand?
- What areas of opportunity have the best fit with the Progress Place philosophy?
- How do you see Progress Place core functions shifting/evolving? In what settings?

Ultimately, the result of Progress Place's strategic positioning was the platform "Partnership Approach". It was compatible as the strategic direction given that:

- The philosophy and approach to care unique to Progress Place: members and staff always working in partnership
- Progress Place's value proposition is differentiating from other mental health and addiction agencies
- Progress Place philosophy is a source of pride – it is a commitment
- Progress Place core is based on the social justice movement, egalitarian principles

The consultants identified four areas (they called 'distribution options' using consulting terminology) that would operationalize and implement the board's strategic plan as follows: that the 'core' model of the clubhouse should be expanded into other areas of the city; that there should be a focus on developing the demographic constituencies of 'seniors' as well as 'young adults'; that technology should be a focus going forward to match what was occurring in the community; and explore mergers with other agencies by going through the process and learning what was involved in such a negotiation.

The report was fully vetted and accepted by the Board of Directors and by the clubhouse members and staff. Since that report was written the Executive Director and Senior Leadership were encouraged and supported by the board to move forward with those options for strategic direction set out by the consultants. As a result all of the options were successfully explored and this valuable exercise provided a great template to use in the future planning cycles.

I am proud to say that the board of directors has developed a broad strategic direction and part of that strategic direction is to work with partners in the community. The board developed the 'tag line', *PARTNERS IN RECOVERY*. Although we have always had partnerships with employers and with non-profit housing providers, it has been the members who have been our true partners at the core of all we do connected with the values of mutual respect and egalitarianism. In essence partnership is the underlying principle of the way the clubhouse works.

Although it was once a 'nice to do' or a 'programmatic extra' to develop new programs in the community **the board has now taken this task of reaching out beyond the clubhouse, beyond the intentional community and is intentionally**

**developing strategic alliances with other partners in the community.** Since the inception of clubhouse it has always made sense to develop transitional employment opportunities with businesses in the community. Much in the same way our board believes we must partner strategically in different areas and grow our agency. Progress Place is an organization that could be referred to as an ‘umbrella organization’ with the Progress Place Clubhouse as the **solid core** and many programs built around the core. Most of these programs will be located in the community where our philosophy of hope and recovery will have a reach beyond the walls of the clubhouse. Our board believes that it is essential for us to be a part of the fabric of the community and an essential component of the mental health system providing a variety of innovative recovery options. The philosophy of the clubhouse is one that can provide a compelling message to members of the community and one that we know will resonant for many years to come.

Boards need to be stewards and support the staff and members and ensure that the philosophy is sustaining and comes with funds and resources going forward. We are planning in the months ahead to revisit and ‘refresh’ our strategic plan and keep the impetus of growth and development around the clubhouse alive. We are looking forward to the years ahead and in so doing will be diligent with our strategic direction and keep it constantly renewed so that we always have an ear to the ground politically and economically and are strategically steps ahead of any potential dangers that would stand in our way of continuing to operate the thriving and dynamic clubhouse that I am here to day representing.

Criss Habal-Brosek, is our newly appointed Executive Director. She is our champion of change with our strategic direction to build and grow in the community. She will now tell you actually what she and her team are doing to manage this great new strategic direction.