



BECOMING PART OF THE LARGER MENTAL HEALTH SOLUTION

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This plenary is to discuss how Clubhouses can become a larger part of the mental health solution.

As founders of Vincent House my wife and I believed it was extremely necessary to collaborate with all areas of the community to create inclusion for persons with mental illnesses and dispel the stigma we face daily. We have always understood that part of our role was also to help to infuse the values and core beliefs of our Clubhouse into the other systems and organizations that impact on people living with mental illness.

There are many areas our Clubhouses should be building these relationships. The area of inclusion that I will share with you today is law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

In the criminal justice system where our Clubhouse is, the people are represented by four separate, yet equally important groups. The police who investigate crime, the state attorney who prosecutes the offenders, the public defender who provides representation and hope for those less fortunate, and our Clubhouse, Vincent House, which improves how people with mental illnesses are treated in the community.

As we all know law enforcement is often the first responder to a mental health crisis. Clubhouses around the world can have an enormous impact on the way people with mental illness are treated when in crisis. Here are some of the ways Vincent House has done this:

Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice on our Board of Directors

- Our founding board member is the elected Pinellas/Pasco County Public Defender, Bob Dillinger. We had a close relationship with Bob for years in our advocacy roles. Bob continues on our board and is a strong advocate for persons with severe and persistent mental illnesses and is very proud of Vincent House. I once introduced Bob for one of the many awards he received and said if every elected official did one tenth of what Bob does for the community the world would be a much better place.
- Our board president is the past chief of police in our community. She attended our very first open house 13 years ago when we were operating out of a relocated sub shop in a strip mall. Chief Thomas retired this year from the police department and continues on our board for her 6th year as president. She is the first police chief in the state of Florida to attend the 40 hour NAMI – Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training – training to help law enforcement officers understand how to work with people with mental illness when they are in crisis situations. She also served a year as the president of the state chief's association. Her goal is to have the entire police force trained in CIT.

- Denise McCabe is the wife of the elected Pinellas/Pasco County state attorney. She has been a dedicated board member for over 4 years. One of the many things she has provided for us is this billboard donated to Vincent House. We have known the state attorney like the public defender for years before Vincent House opened. Denise has a technique of connecting us with helpful community people.

Pinellas Park Police

Through our relationship with the local police department:

- We had direct access to the chief and now have the cell number of the new chief. It is an effective tool to be able to have this access in case of emergency.
- All of our members carry a Vincent House membership card. When a member is involved in a possible violation, officers often call us before proceeding. They even have been known to ask a member in a situation if they took their meds today and offered a ride home to get them. One of our drivers was stopped for an illegal turn and when the officer recognized that he was a member of Vincent House he simply told him to be more observant.
- The homeless outreach police officers are readily available when we have a member, visitor or potential member who is homeless. They come to Vincent House and get them set up in a shelter.
- The Community Police Officers stop by periodically and often have breakfast or lunch with our community. Our members feel much more comfortable around police because of these visits.
- Police "Explorers" help with traffic control during our events. We have such a good relationship that when the Explorers are not available, our local police will assist, free of charge. Both the Explorers and officers know that a wonderful meal awaits at the completion of the event.
- In 2009 a donor offered us a \$10K matching grant. At our next board meeting our board president, Chief Thomas, gave Vincent House a check for \$10K to match. Our treasurer asked if the money was legal. Our public defender said "yes, it is money they took from my clients." I later thanked the assistant chief, who put us in for the match; he put his hand on my shoulder and said Elliott, our department has a saying, "if Vincent House wants it Vincent House gets it."
- Police and law enforcement see us as partners and part of the solution. They often refer and consult with staff and members to assist them in their duties on how better to serve people with mental illnesses.

Crisis Intervention Team Training

When our daughter was first diagnosed with a mental illness we got involved in NAMI. I became president of the state organization for two years as well as serving on our local board. Our local NAMI brought Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training to our county and eventually throughout the state. Currently over 20,000 law enforcement officers have been trained in our state on how to handle a mental health crisis and get the person to the hospital and not the jail.

- When we first opened Vincent House, our members did not want officers to come to our clubhouse. A young officer we knew, who had some knowledge of mental illness, wanted to share with members. He visited in plain clothes, had a discussion with members and staff, and later went into the bathroom and changed into his sheriff uniform. The message was he still is the same compassionate person when in uniform. This helped lay a good foundation for trust in building relationships with law enforcement.
- Twice annually our local NAMI provides the 40 hour training to local law enforcement on how to properly handle a mental health crisis.

- On the Wednesday of their week long training officers visit mental health providers. Vincent House is a big part of that day.
- Officers learn about recovery and the success of Vincent House members in employment, education, rebuilding friendships and the ability to dream again.
- The officers hear the story of Vincent House, meet and speak with members.
- The officers and members share questions and answers with each other.
- In the CIT evaluations the officers often say Vincent House was the highlight of their week. They keep a ready supply of our brochures in their vehicles. Many followed through with donations of many types to Vincent House.

Employment

- We have a mail clerk position at the Public Defender's office. Our members truly enjoy that job. Several comment that in the past they utilized the Public Defender's services and now they work there.
- We have a transitional employment position at the State Attorney's office also. You could say we have both sides covered.
- The state attorney and his wife sponsored this member's banner.

Police Networking Group

- The police networking group meets quarterly. Vincent House is a member and our director and a member attend. It is a meeting of local businesses who meet with the community police unit and discuss current needs from both sides. This is a great form of inclusion not only with law enforcement but also with businesses in the community.

Sheriff's Office

- The recently retired sheriff brought a philanthropist, who purchased a day with the Sheriff at a fundraiser, to lunch at Vincent House.
- The following week we received a \$20K donation from the Sheriff's Office.
- The retiring Sheriff said the new Sheriff would maintain the Vincent House relationship.
- The relationship continues as do the donations, support and visits to Vincent House.
- Most recently the Sheriff saw some of our Graphic Arts Team's videos and asked if we could produce a PSA for them.

Fallen Officers

- Several years ago there were 130 people organizing an emotional community funeral for two local officers killed in the line of duty.
- Local NAMI was asked to find a way to provide lunch for the organizers with less than one hour notice. NAMI contacted Vincent House and we successfully prepared and delivered a wonderful lunch on time.
- The chief of the St Petersburg Police Department gave us a plaque in recognition of our timely meal contribution.

As you can see from what I shared with you today, creating relationships with local law enforcement is a powerful way for us to change the world for people living with mental illness.

It is important for us to impact the larger world. I remember when we first evaluated Clubhouse and the potential for starting one in Florida. Some Clubhouses we wanted to visit told us we would need to make an appointment and arrange ahead of time for a visit. That is not what we wanted at Vincent House and by being open, demonstrating ourselves as a welcoming partner in the community we have built relationships that improve how people with mental illnesses are treated outside of Vincent House.

The only way we will experience inclusion and de-stigmatize mental illnesses is by including the community into our Clubhouses. It also charges us with the duty of having a state of the art community that exceeds everybody's expectations.