



Transitional Employment: International Struggles and Successes

by Britt Bergendahl

Our TE office started in October 1994 with an empty room. One supervisor and four members began with great enthusiasm to equip a room on the ground floor of the Goteborg Fountain House in Sweden.

To keep the cost down, we all went out to a "do-it-yourself" furniture company. It was a challenge to get all the screws to fit into different tables and chairs. Such a challenge, in fact, that for some time we did not have enough chairs ready for use and so we had to work in turns. We got up early, as early as possible in the morning, to get access to a place to sit down and work.

At the same time as we were having "the problems of the furniture," we began to try to influence potential employers. In the beginning, we had to have conversation after conversation with every possible employer before the idea of TE began to make sense to them.

There were about twenty-five members out of a hundred and fifty who could imagine going out on a TE immediately. It became quite a press on us five people in the TE office to get jobs as soon as possible, but at the same time there was joy and strong engagement throughout the whole house about what we were doing.

We started with a campaign to educate and inform people about TE, both within our own clubhouse, and out in the larger community. Towards the spring, we started to invite different businessmen in the city to visit our clubhouse, and to talk with them about our activity and about TE. Most of these contacts were for restaurant work and cleaning jobs to begin with. Still, however, we had no real nibbles, but we were building a great network of contacts to work with.

By now we had gotten our own telephones, so we started calling different companies and introduced our idea of "employment without absence." In my opinion, it was difficult and impersonal to introduce ourselves via the telephone. One incident in particular left me with the belief that our contacts were more powerful and helpful when we made them in person. I had told the personnel manager over the phone about the clubhouse and TE, and he asked me: "Are they dangerous? Do they fight?" There is, at least in Sweden, a great deal of prejudice about mental illness. Although there will always be struggles against these unfair prejudices, we have a much better chance of overcoming them when we meet people in person and they can see who we really are. It is hard, BUT WE DON'T GIVE UP!!!!!!!!!!



Clubhouse International

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Before the TE office started at our clubhouse, the whole house had helped to get twenty-five of our members employment of their own, and helped a great number of members return to school and study.

Today, one year after the start of the TE office, we have three TEs in full swing and about six contacts which probably will result in actual TEs before the end of the year.

The first Monday of every month, we have an "employment dinner," which is for members who are either working, or going to school. All of the other the members in the house are also very welcome. We charge a small fee for the dinner. It is always a swell evening, and a great chance to exchange experiences.

We are very proud of our clubhouse and our work, even if it is a hard struggle. Every victory, even a small one, is worth every effort given. The vitalizing effect a TE office has on a clubhouse is amazing and almost impossible to describe.

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