

Productivity Commission
Mental Health

17 January 2020

The Productivity Report has a strong focus on clinical intervention and treatment. We would like to emphasize the importance of Community Mental Health supports as an effective method of prevention, recovery and empowerment, and highlight that investment in these services would decrease the need for clinical treatment and crisis intervention.

In particular, this submission will demonstrate the ways that the Clubhouse Model, and more specifically Stepping Stone Clubhouse, is operating as a successful community mental health service, providing support across the five reform areas identified in the Productivity Commission Report.

Clubhouse Description

Stepping Stone is a membership-based community of people with a mental illness dedicated to rebuilding their lives. Members share ownership and responsibility for the success of the organization. Through participation in Stepping Stone members are given the opportunities to re-join the worlds of friendships, family, important work, employment and education. Stepping Stone is an environment for people who have had their lives drastically disrupted and need the support of others who believe that recovery from mental illness is possible for all.

The Stepping Stone Clubhouse community is built on the belief that every member can sufficiently recover from the effects of mental illness to lead a personally satisfying and productive life. The Clubhouse is a community of people dedicated to one another's success. Recovery is achieved in the Clubhouse through work and work-mediated relationships, which are proven to be restorative and provide a firm foundation for growth, self-respect, and individual achievement.

History of the Clubhouse Model

The Clubhouse model, was established in 1948 in New York and currently there are over 55,000 adults with a mental illness in over 300 Clubhouses in 32 countries. Clubhouse International ([www. https://clubhouse-intl.org/](https://clubhouse-intl.org/)) is a global network that promotes the development and success of Clubhouses through its training and accreditation programs.

Stepping Stone commenced in 1994 and is situated on the southside of Brisbane. Of the 300 International Clubhouses, Stepping Stone is one of eleven International Training bases, providing Clubhouse training to Clubhouses from all over the world.

Clubhouse Membership

Stepping Stone has over 2500 members. As Stepping Stone is the only Clubhouse in Brisbane members come from all Brisbane and surrounding suburbs.

Clubhouse Location

Stepping Stone is located in Coorparoo, approximately six kilometers south of Brisbane CBD. The premises is an industrial unit that has been extensively renovated to provide the services of the Clubhouse. Stepping Stone conveys a sense of respect and dignity and is independent from any medical or treatment facility.

Components of the Clubhouse

All Clubhouse programs and activities are operated by members and staff working together, taking advantage of the talents and skills of the members. The activities provided are:

- **The Work Day:** Designed to include members in every aspect of the operation of the Clubhouse. Members produce daily and monthly newsletters, breakfast and lunch daily, and engage in a range of useful activities that boost self-esteem and help prepare for employment or education activities in the community. Produce healthy breakfast and lunches for over 45 members a day.
- **Employment -** a Transitional and permanent job placement program that provides opportunity for career development, on-the-job training and support, and job seeking services.
- **Education –** support is provided to further member's education, whether it be improving their literacy and numeracy skills or studying community college or University.
- **Housing –** 80% of those homeless have a mental illness. Stepping Stone believes everyone deserves to live in decent and affordable housing. Support includes finding, securing and moving into decent and affordable housing.
- **Social Program –** evenings, weekends and holidays are often a difficult time for our members. Members are often estranged from their families and friendships have dwindled due to their mental illness. Our social program provides an opportunity to make friends and have fun. We are open 365 days a year and Christmas Day and other holidays become a time of celebration, not a time of isolation.
- **Health Active Program –** Stepping Stone have developed a Healthy Active Living Program (HALP), focusing on encouraging a healthy lifestyle for our members which includes opportunities for fitness, healthy eating, increased well being, and most importantly, fun. Activities are daily, including walking, sport, yoga, gym and swimming.

Benefits of the Clubhouse

The primary benefit of the Clubhouse to members and the community is to provide meaningful activity that helps people with mental illness to gain independence. Current research on existing Clubhouses has shown the benefits of the Clubhouse model and the positive results that have been achieved. The results documented from Clubhouse International Clubhouses are:

Higher Employment: Studies have shown that the Clubhouse model produces higher rates of employment, longer job tenure, and higher earnings than other programs (EG IPS) offered for people with mental illness. A study of 17 Clubhouses has shown that longer job tenure and higher earnings correlates to longer Clubhouse membership. (Henry, A. D., Barreira, P., Banks, S., Brown, J.-M., & McKay, C. (2001). A retrospective study of clubhouse-based transitional employment. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 24(4), 344–354. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0095070>)

Reduced Hospitalization: In one study, membership in a Clubhouse reduced the number of hospitalizations by one third and reduced the average number of hospital days by 70. The clubhouse model: An outcome study on attendance, work attainment and status, and hospitalization recidivism. (Masso JD¹, Avi-Itzhak T, Obler DR. The clubhouse model: An outcome study on attendance, work attainment and status, and hospitalization recidivism.

Work. 2001;17(1):23-30.)

Reduced Incarcerations: Criminal justice system involvement has been found to be substantially diminished during and after Clubhouse membership. (Johnson, J., & Hickey, S. (1999). Arrests and incarcerations after psychosocial program involvement: Clubhouse vs. jailhouse. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 23(1), 66–69. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0095192>)

Improved Well-Being: Compared with individuals receiving services as usual, Clubhouse members are significantly more likely to report that they had close friendships and someone they could rely on when they needed help. (Warner, R., Huxley, P., & Berg, T. (1999). An evaluation of the impact of clubhouse membership on quality of life and treatment utilization. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 45(4), 310–320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002076409904500410>)

Reduced costs of services: the cost of Clubhouses is estimated to be one-third of the cost of the IPS model and about one-half the annual costs of Community Mental Health Centers; and substantially less than the ACT model. (McKay C, Nugent KL, Johnsen M, Eaton WW, Lidz CW. A Systematic Review of Evidence for the Clubhouse Model of Psychosocial Rehabilitation. *Adm Policy Ment Health*. 2018;45(1):28–47. doi:10.1007/s10488-016-0760-3)

Productivity Commission Reform

Under the current mental health strategy, Stepping Stone will be unable to maintain our current levels of service provision. Below is a explanation of how Stepping Stone addresses the five reform areas and highlights areas that need to be addressed:

1. Early Help for People

Several members have had a history of suicidality before becoming a member. We believe that Stepping Stone reduces the risk of suicide attempts. At this stage our belief is based on quantitative feedback from members. We often hear from members that this place has saved my life. We are currently working with AISRAP to develop a research project on the impact on Stepping Stone on suicide rates. Stepping Stone often works with members on their suicidal thoughts and through support from staff and peers, members do not require to present to emergency departments.

2. Improving people’s experiences with services beyond the health system.

Funding for Psychological Services.

NDIS is creating a system of haves and have nots. There are very few psychosocial service options for those who do not have NDIS. Continuity of Support is inadequately funded. In addition it is not a continuity of service as ineligible people are forced to access new services, even though they had been with Stepping Stone for several years through Day to Day Living and Partners in Recovery.

Housing Support - we support members to access housing options in the community and provide the support required to live independently. People need assistance to find adequate housing and the support required to live independently. Previously we had a transitional housing program and a partnership with Community Housing and Department of Housing. In addition, Partners in Recovery was very useful to assist members to find housing, particularly with the assistance of flexible funding. Flexible funding removed financial barriers for people to move into decent housing. These programs were extremely successful to assist members to live independently. Unfortunately these programs are no longer funded.

Justice System – several of our members are part of the justice system, whether having spent time in correctional services or medium and high security mental health facilities. Stepping Stone is often a pathway for people back into the community from correctional services or high security hospitals.

3. Increasing participation of people with mental illness in education and work

Clubhouses need to be adequately funded for our employment and education programs. Members require a higher level of support than what is offered through Disability Employment Services. DES sets people up to fail, as the requirements of DES often means members are not accepted as clients as they are too difficult to place in employment, or do not make the 26 week outcome, as they do not receive the level of support required. Clubhouses provide highly supportive employment programs that bridge the gap between employment and unemployment. In addition, we develop relationships with our employment partners, as part of this relationship, provide mental health training to their workforce.

Our education program supports members to access mainstream educational options, including secondary, tertiary and vocational courses. Members provide a peer support tutoring service to other members, supporting them with their studies.

4. Reforming the funding and commissioning

Clubhouses need to be funded through one Government Department for the full range of services we provide on a minimum of five year service agreement. Historically we have had to have parts of the Clubhouses funded by different funding programs – Partners In Recovery, Day to Day Living, Disability Employment Services, Queensland Health Community Funding. This creates a massive amount of unnecessary administrative tasks as well as extra hoops for members wanting to access more than one service at Stepping Stone.

We believe monitoring and evaluation are crucial for services to demonstrate their effectiveness. There is a wealth of research on the Clubhouse model. Unfortunately the majority of the research is international. We require funding for Australian research on the Clubhouse model.

Members' and Carer's Stories

John's Story

Stepping Stone Clubhouse provides a safe environment where acceptance, understanding and support are given; lives are saved..... and I should know.

My name is John and I am a member of Stepping Stone Clubhouse. Do you remember the saddest moment in your life? I remember mine. It was when I woke up in a psychiatric hospital realising that my attempt at suicide had failed. I was discharged from hospital three and half weeks later, having to face a world that I was not ready to face and that I still had thoughts of leaving. It was Stepping Stone Clubhouse that came to my rescue, believing in me at a time when I didn't believe in myself.

Matt's Story

Life was pretty good to me for the first eighteen or nineteen years of my life. I represented my state in both Australian Rules Football and tennis in primary school. I received a pretty high TE score in high school and I was a prefect of a school of some twelve hundred students in year twelve. I was also the Queensland secondary schools tennis captain in grade twelve. Yes, life was pretty good to me in those early school years.

Then university came and I fell apart. In my second year of study, at the age of nineteen, I broke down for the first time and was diagnosed with Bipolar 1 Disorder. I was studying a double degree of Information Technology and Law.

The whole episode was devastating. A lengthy hospital stay was followed by psychiatrist and psychologist visits. I was completely lost and confused by the whole affair. I didn't know what was happening to me. The medications made me really drowsy and I put on a heap of weight. I ended up deferring my university

study for the year and then tried several part-time jobs but couldn't make any of them work. I was really struggling to keep it together.

I went back to university the next year to study just the IT part of my course and ended up pulling out of the course again because I couldn't concentrate and my memory just wasn't there. My confidence was also at an all-time low.

The following year I tried university again and somehow passed three subjects of the four I was enrolled in. From then on, I just hung in there. I passed a few subjects and failed a few. It took me six long years to pass the three year IT degree but I did pass in the end.

Then I started the daunting prospect of working in IT as a computer programmer and I really struggled with the pace and content of the work. I had ten different jobs over a six year period. Something had to give. When I was thirty I had a huge breakdown again while working at a software development company and I have not worked since.

That was ten years ago and I am now forty years of age and after a number of breakdowns, still trying to get my life back together. I have recently been feeling a bit better with a change of medication and have been coming back to the Stepping Stones Clubhouse again after first joining some years ago. They offer a great service to the mental health community in providing a place for you to go and feel a part of something meaningful. The staff are just so warm and welcoming and can assist you in a number of different facets of your life including employment, education and housing. You can mix and chat with fellow members who have shared a similar life experience. I am now getting enthusiastic about life again and I have Stepping Stones to thank for that.

Tilly Story

My son, was one of the earliest members at Stepping Stone Clubhouse.

During his adult years, Stepping Stone provided a safe haven where my son was accepted unconditionally, supported in all matters of daily living, and taught skills such as computing, office administration and cooking. It was rare for him to be happy, but my enduring memory of my son at Stepping Stone was of his wide smile and the great pride he took in his achievements at Clubhouse.

Where rejection and stigma in the outside world significantly undermined his self-esteem and made him feel worthless, Stepping Stone was a refuge where his sense of self grew and he knew the dignity of being part of the Clubhouse team, making a worthwhile contribution to this wonderful organisation.

In his own words, he wrote - Stepping Stone is the best rehabilitation I have come across since the onset of my illness. Prior to this programme I have tried just about everything, but Stepping Stone has proven to be the most successful.

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide submissions in response to the Productivity Commission Report. We hope that there is significant improvements to the mental health system. There is a great deal of improvements that need to be achieved quickly in order for people with mental health issues to live satisfying and productive lives in the community.

Yours faithfully,

Melanie Sennett
Executive Director