

## Prosper Place Clubhouse: A mosaic of inclusion for recovery

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The recovery philosophy is being embraced by the mental health community as a means of guiding practice and promoting psychosocial rehabilitation principles while recognizing values such as personal uniqueness, self-determination, strengths and responsibility (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2015). Prosper Place Clubhouse in Edmonton, Alberta, is an example of an organization that applies recovery principles to practice. Helen Tam and Esther Wong are second-year student occupational therapists who completed a fieldwork placement at Prosper Place Clubhouse. This article uses excerpts from Helen and Esther's journaling and discussions to reflect on how the philosophy of recovery and psychosocial rehabilitation principles are expressed in the daily operation of this clubhouse. The authors also reflect on how the philosophy and principles of the clubhouse mirror the values of occupational therapy.

### The clubhouse model

Established in Edmonton in 1997, Prosper Place Clubhouse is a member-driven community mental health day program that welcomes any adult living with a primary diagnosis of mental illness. It is modeled on the original clubhouse, Fountain House, which was established in New York City in 1948. Today, clubhouses worldwide operate under the belief that a clubhouse "provides a restorative environment for people whose lives have been severely disrupted because of their mental illness, and who need the support of others who are in recovery" (International Center for Clubhouse Development d/b/a Clubhouse International, 2016, "What is a Clubhouse," para. 2).

Clubhouses, such as Prosper Place, offer opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and engage in meaningful and productive activities. Participants are "members" and are welcome to attend as frequently as they like, with attendance being voluntary and without time limits. All members participate in the operation and policy decisions of the clubhouse, direct their participation in daily activities and are not defined by their illness or diagnosis. Ultimately, Prosper Place Clubhouse is a community of staff and members working collaboratively to keep the clubhouse running while members are simultaneously actively engaging in their own recovery.

*Helen wrote: "I quickly realized that knowing their diagnosis meant very little to my understanding of the members. I would rather read about their interests, goals, families and just things that matter to them. We say time and time again that your mental illness or disability does not define you, but I never really understood that concept until today."*

### Prosper Place: The clubhouse model in practice

The path for recovery, as identified by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, is guided by hope, dignity and inclusion (2015). The values of dignity and inclusion are embodied within the clubhouse model. Members are solely defined by their individual contributions and unique qualities. Staff participate and work alongside members as colleagues in completing daily clubhouse tasks. Mutually respectful and equitable relationships serve to support members to feel invested in, rather than the recipients of, services. The third value, hope, is fostered through members' opportunities to share in each other's daily successes and achievements. In this way, members see others in various stages of their unique recovery journeys and gain inspiration and motivation.

Prosper Place offers three main programs. These include the work-ordered day, supported individual and group employment, and social recreation and educational activities.

The work-ordered duties centre around completion of administrative and business tasks, including publishing a monthly newsletter, operating a café, running a canteen and thrift store, and doing general maintenance and upkeep of the clubhouse. Through program participation, members identify and cultivate their strengths while acquiring the tools to shape and take responsibility for their own recovery and reaching their potential. Prosper Place also encourages and supports members to take on volunteer positions and community, individual or group employment if they wish. These opportunities offer the members real work in inclusive environments that help to break down the stigma associated with mental illness in the community.

*Esther observed: "It is wonderful that a place exists for individuals to build their skills from the ground up and have the chance to begin believing in themselves, their skills and their worth."*

Socialization is part of the daily routine of the clubhouse. In addition, recreational activities are offered on a regular basis, which can include sharing meals together and celebrating holidays and other special events. These shared experiences are pivotal in developing a sense of belonging, safety and acceptance that may not be present in other aspects of the members' lives. They also offer opportunities for friendship and fun.

*Esther wrote: "I can already see that the members of the clubhouse aren't merely acquaintances but that some of the members rely on the clubhouse as their sole source of social support. As I am getting to know the members more, I can see how valuable this clubhouse is to them and how it has changed their lives."*

The clubhouse also offers members workshops supported by community professionals, for example, art therapy, creative writing and drama club. Student occupational therapists aim to **the** enhance educational components of the programming and this has become an integral part of the students' role at Prosper Place. Helen and Esther prepared and delivered a variety of educational workshops relating to meaningful daily activities (occupations), designed to inspire and bring joy to the members, while also enhancing their own professional learning.

*Helen noted: "As I got to know the members, I was blown away at how important this centre is to the community. I can't imagine how else the members would learn essential skills, transition back into the community or have a safe place to go to every day."*

### The students' reflections on their experience

One of our priorities during our fieldwork placement was to promote and advocate for the occupational therapy profession by explaining our unique skillset. We took time to share with members and staff the relationship between engaging in meaningful daily activities and the promotion of health and wellness (Krupa, 2010). During education sessions, we also strived to address the health and activity needs and interests of the members and were surprised at the breadth of what occupational therapy could offer, as demonstrated by the diversity of education topics covered. Topics that we offered the members included effective communication, self-esteem and confidence, diabetes and foot care, and sexuality.

In providing education sessions, we learned the power of peer involvement for enhancing the learning process. For example, our presentation on intimacy and sexuality was our most successful presentation, and also the one we were most anxious about. During this session we asked the members to create a script on how to disclose their mental illness to a partner. While we facilitated the session, the members were equal partners in the process by answering each other's questions with knowledge from their own experiences. We quickly realized that we could not help members as effectively as they could help each other; we did not know what it was like to be in their shoes.

At the end of our clinical placement, we decided to create a sunflower mosaic with the members of the clubhouse as a celebration of our time there. At Prosper Place, members and staff alike feel valued for their differences and the unique skills and insights that they share with the clubhouse community. This diversity, represented by the pieces of the mosaic, represents something beautiful—a community of acceptance, respect and inclusion. Prosper Place is an inspiring example of how



**Mosaic completed by students and members of Prosper Place at the completion of the occupational therapy student placement.**

occupational therapy practice, psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery can harmonize to promote health and wellness.

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