

Independence Center Reopening its Clubhouse to Those Needing Mental Health Support

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ST. LOUIS - Independence Center, a local nonprofit in the Central West End, dedicated to helping adults struggling with mental illness, has reopened its Clubhouse program. The program focuses on expanding social connections and providing mental health support for people who often feel isolated from the community.

Along with many other businesses, COVID-19 forced Independence Center to temporarily close its physical locations while social distancing orders were in place. Independence Center's Clubhouse plays an integral role in its members' mental health recovery process by helping people regain the confidence lost by the stigma of mental

illness. More than 180 members normally come to the Clubhouse each day to set goals, learn life skills, improve their health and interact with other people.

While the Clubhouse has been closed, Independence Center rapidly adapted its “Work-Ordered Day Program” to function virtually and continue supporting its members through telehealth services and utilizing private videoconferencing to facilitate meetings. The Clubhouse has also connected with other Clubhouses in the U.S. and internationally to help lead the way in offering services virtually.

Independence Center Executive Director, Mark Bethell, said while their Virtual Clubhouse has created innovative programming options, he realizes this time of isolation has still been difficult for many.

“I’m so proud of the tremendous efforts our members and staff have made to continue offering Clubhouse and other mental health services to our members virtually,” said Bethell. “Yet, we know statistically speaking, that socialization and routines are key to improving mental health, so we are anxious to return to interacting in person. To help with this process, we created a Clubhouse Reopening Task Force, comprised of members and staff, that prepared for a safe and effective phased reintegration into our physical space.”

Bethell explained that the Clubhouse Reopening Guidelines include temperature checks and screening for COVID-19 symptoms before entering the building, requiring everyone to wear masks, maintaining physical distancing within the Clubhouse space, expanded and enhanced cleaning and disinfecting processes and other safety measures. During Phase I of the reopening, the Clubhouse will welcome two cohorts of 50 members and 10 staff for limited amounts of time. Bethell said all Virtual Clubhouse meetings and telehealth services will continue to be offered for those not able or ready to return to the physical space.

Independence Center is a community-based rehabilitation program for adults with mental illness in the St. Louis area, built on the Clubhouse model of psychosocial rehabilitation. Its mission is to provide all the services and resources a person with a serious and persistent mental illness needs to manage their symptoms, find belonging and purpose and gain the independence to live a healthy, quality life. For more information about Independence Center, or to learn more about their services, go to www.independencecenter.org.