



Independence Center Receives \$94,000 Grant to Help Those With Mental Illness Stay Connected

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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 received a technology grant from the St. Louis County CARES COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Fund for \$94,009.

The grant will ensure those struggling with mental illness have access to their medical providers and can participate in Independence Center's Virtual Clubhouse program from the safety of their homes.

In early March, Independence Center quickly implemented telehealth services to ensure the availability of essential mental health services through the COVID-19 crisis. Independence Center Executive Director, Mark Bethell, said 99% of its members live below the poverty line and many do not have access to a phone, computer, or internet and had no means to access telehealth services.

He said finding a way to ensure they could stay connected to other people and healthcare providers became an urgent necessity. "This was not an expense we could have foreseen a year ago, but it is vitally important now," said Bethell. "Research tells us that isolation can often worsen symptoms of mental illness so we were very concerned about how this pandemic has already, and will continue, impacting those we serve. This grant will help us ensure that those who are home bound or are medically fragile can still receive the care they need and stay connected to our Virtual Clubhouse community.

"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.

Since shifting to telehealth services, Independence Center has conducted nearly 3,500 telehealth/virtual group services and more than two thousand individual telehealth services. Bethell added that many members are now seeing their health providers more regularly through telehealth appointments than they were for in-person visits.

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.##