

My name is Sandy Callan. I have been diagnosed as mentally ill since 1994. I was ill before that but I self medicated with drugs and alcohol. Now my mental illness is pretty much under control with meds and some therapy. I have pretty well learned when I am not in control. I don't remember much of the first years of my mental illness, but I have progressed now to where I can remember the last four or five years. Before I became into control with my illness, I was suicidal for many years. At one time I attempted to kill myself with an overdose of drugs. After I took them, I started thinking hard about my daughter and granddaughter and what this would do to them so I made myself throw up several times to get the medicine out of my system and went into a hospital. Anytime I feel like I want to give up now I put myself in a mental hospital and stay there until I feel safe to go out in the world again. It has been almost been five years since I have felt that way. I still have days where I don't want to get out of bed and do anything but they are fewer and far in-between. I am proud of the fact that I can take care of myself now and not have to depend on someone else to stay and take care of me. Before, it was my mom taking care of me but now that burden has been lifted because I have been able to live by myself. I have even more independence by having a my own car! Now I have the freedom to drive whenever and wherever I need to go!

When I was asked to come to the meetings to help develop the clubhouse, I wasn't sure what the clubhouse could do for people like me. But, I've learned it could do a lot when it is fully-funded. I have visited other clubhouses and have seen for myself that a Clubhouse could give anybody with mental illness the opportunity to come to a place where they can be themselves. In a clubhouse there is not therapy or classes.

A big part of what a club offers is the opportunity to reenter the world of work at various places of employment for periods of six to nine months at jobs developed by the clubhouse. We call these job placements “Transition Employment” from there we move on to our own independent job or career. Transitional Employment is real jobs for real pay! Area businesses work with the clubhouse to secure positions that are then filled with members who can’t wait to work. There is support for the member. If a member can’t go to work that day then the person that found the job for that member will go in that persons place. The position will never be empty for the company that gave them that job. Most of all it helps reduce the Stigma community employees have of mentally ill members. They learn that most members are better employees than regular employees.

I began to believe that this is just what we needed for our state and county so I became a board member of the clubhouse now called Gainesville Opportunity Center. I now attend all meetings and am a part of making decisions about the functions of the clubhouse. I am proud to be a member of the board. There is still a lot to learn about the clubhouse and I am ready to learn.

Lastly, I need to tell you we are not going to do this without the support of the community. We need more funding and to secure a building that will be comfortable and safe for all who come. You can help today by calling the Gainesville Opportunity Center at: (352) 224-5523.

Sincerely,

Sandy Callan

