



Gainesville Opportunity Center

GAZETTE

April 2024. Volume 6, Issue 4

gainesville.opportunity.ctr@gmail.com
www.goclubhouse.org · (352)224-5523



Kaitlyn Roberts, Bree Guiterman, Wendie Selene, and Brett Buell worked together to get Wendie housing



**How We Help
Our Members
with Housing
(Page 2)**



**City Leaders
Visit the GOC
(Page 6)**



**Clubhouse
Standard on
Housing
(Page 7)**

Finding a Home

By: Brett Buell

Affordable Housing is in crisis.

Wendie needed to move. We helped get her housing. I am not sure what Wendie would have done if the GOC and other entities had not gone to an excruciating effort to keep her stay housed. The GOC aims to support individuals reintegrating into the community. Housing instability

exacerbates mental health challenges. At the GOC, we are helping people move forward with their lives. Therefore, we also have to help people so they do not slip back into crisis. One of the ways we can do that is to help ensure that our Members stay housed. If you have no place to live, it is really difficult to work on goals to become part of the community again.

Lack of housing can lead to crises,

How We Help Our Members with Housing

P By: Paul C. LeBlanc

People that live with chronic, serious mental illness need stable housing to recover and return to the community. Without safe, decent, and affordable housing, Members struggle to engage in the work day here at the center and to participate in activities in the community, including work.

It's hard to focus on work, vocation, or even socialization when you are faced with homelessness. A Member who has a long-term goal to find housing says: "Finding affordable housing has affected my mental illness because it limits me. ... part of my recovery process is becoming independent ... Money

makes that hard to do."

As one of our Members puts it: "The biggest road block to finding affordable housing is getting enough money." Finding a place to live is extremely difficult for everyone during a housing crisis, but for our Members, there can be other barriers. 81% of Members that attended the center this month live below the federal poverty level.

For these Members, public housing is usually the only option. With public housing comes dozens of pages of complex paperwork, long waiting lists, and even stigma. Of all the goals a Member can set at the GOC, housing can be the most stressful, daunting, and time consuming for Members and staff. This process can take months or even years.



Councilwoman Desmon Duncan-Walker speaks with Kaitlyn Roberts, who works closely with our Members to help them achieve their housing goals. Here she shares some of the challenges that our Members face in meeting those goals.

Some of our Members have criminal records from times when they were in mental health crisis. This is another barrier to entry. Apartment complexes that accept people with low income often do not accept people with a criminal record.

The GOC wants to change this. With the help of your donation, we can make our dream of housing our own Members in homes with low or no barrier to entry a reality. Many clubhouses throughout the world and even in Florida provide this vital service to their Members, and the GOC is ready to start this journey.

Help us improve the lives of our Members by giving them a safe and stable place to call home.

The Amazing Give and Bike Day

THE
AMAZING
GIVE

April 25, 2024

8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

www.TheAmazingGive.org

Two of our biggest fundraising events of the year are coming soon! On April 25th is the Amazing Give. We will meet at First Magnitude Brewery on May 18th for our Third Annual Bike Day.



<https://www.theamazinggive.org/organizations/gainesville-opportunity-center>

Thank you to our major sponsors of GOC Bike Day. Sponsorships are still available!



Saturday, May 18th
First Magnitude
Brewing Co.

8:30 AM Registration

Ride at 9:30 AM

There are three lengths for beginner, intermediate and advanced riders. You can even walk to Depot Park if you don't have a bike. Music and food trucks are available after the ride.

Scan or click the link below



Finding

affecting medication management and hygiene. Government efforts are underway to address the affordable housing crisis, and the Clubhouse Model offers a framework for supportive housing solutions.

In Alachua County, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1200. The average Social Security income for disability only is \$943 per month. As you can see, it makes housing impossible without other assistance such as housing vouchers.

But the obstacles don't stop there. Wendie needed a deposit of \$3,000 to move in. However, since she receives Social Security Income, she is not allowed to have more than \$2,000 in savings. So how is someone supposed to pay \$3,000 if they aren't even allowed to save their money?

"I thought I was going to lose my dogs and be homeless," Wendie said.

At the GOC, we helped Wendie link to other community agencies that provide support. Two other entities actually offered resources to pay her deposit. Had St. Francis House and an Alachua County emergency fund not come up with the deposit, we could not have moved forward.

We ran into another problem. A landlord is legally not allowed to enter a lease that is paid by a voucher until the property is inspected. However, the agency performing the inspection did not respond. Fortunately, the owner of the property management company, Associates Realty, personally stepped in. She knew one of the inspectors and



City Commissioner Desmon Duncan-Walker visited the GOC to Wendie about her housing challenges.

called him. He was able to inspect the property and we signed the lease the day before Wendie's voucher expired.

Due to the lack of response by one agency, Wendie may not have been able to get into her home. On top of that, the landlord would have suffered by not having the property rented. We would have potentially ended up with an additional homeless person, an unrented apartment, and an unused voucher due to the lack of response by one agency.

Bree Guiterman says that some housing agencies are lacking the human factor. It makes it even harder for a property owner to

a Home



Members like Wendie help with all aspects of running our operation. Here she is with Gainesville City Director of Equity and Inclusion, Zeria Folston, giving him a tour of the GOC.

this month. As an advocate for affordable housing, she listened

rent to this segment of our population. It is simply easier and more profitable to charge higher rents and rent to people who are not on vouchers. Bree says, "The landlord gets hurt by the lack of urgency. It makes them not want to rent to the people who need it the most."

"Due to how hard this was, I would not have been able to navigate this process without the GOC." Wendie said.

Fortunately, due to the GOC, Bree Guiterman, City Commissioner Desmon Duncan-Walker, St. Francis House and the emergency fund, Wendie is housed. That being said, it shouldn't be this hard.



We helped Wendie get her apartment.

City Leaders Visit GOC



Over the past month, all the Gainesville City Commissioners visited the GOC. It is important our community leaders understand the role we play. Our program works closely with City partners such as the Gainesville Police Department, Meridian's Co-Responder teams, and the Gainesville Fire Rescue Community Resource Paramedics.

Pictured: Akeem Johnson, LaSheka Roberts, City Comm. Desmon Duncan-Walker, Alina Harshberger, and Chris Rhodes

participation in Clubhouse International - ICCD activities help reduce hospitalizations, interactions with law enforcement, and other crisis situations. One Member shared with a community leader that she has gone from needing public crisis services several times a week, to rarely, since attending the GOC. We are making lives better and saving the community money. The GOC is a vital resource, and we want all residents in our area to know about us. By inviting City Commissioners to the GOC, this made a positive impression because they could interact with our Members. Our Members shared how the GOC has transformed their lives. These personal experiences were powerful for sharing with our local leaders.

For adults living with mental illness,

We hope to partner with the City in the future for creating jobs for our Members. At the GOC, we give support to our Members AND the employers to help people return to work. Partnering with our public policymakers will make sure that our Members get more opportunities for productive lives. We look forward to building our partnership with the GOC. Thank you to all City leaders who visited our Clubhouse!



Pictured: Reid Schreiber, Development Director Brett Buell, City Comm. Casey Willits, and Executive Director Deidra Simon.

Clubhouse Standards: Housing



Karen Lovely is another Member we assisted with Housing.

Standard 29: Safe, Decent, Affordable Housing for Members

When you live with a mental illness, having a safe place to live is one of the most important factors in your recovery. Clubhouse Standards state that Members should have access to safe, decent, affordable housing. In a housing crisis, this is hard to find. Finding resources is daunting. The GOC helps Members search for housing and programs to assist with down payments and back rent. We also help Members navigate the public housing system.

Even with our support, some Members become homeless. To stop this, the GOC is forming a housing committee to look into the possibility of providing housing directly to our members.

From Executive Director Deidra Simon

Getting Our Members Housed

At the GOC, we follow Clubhouse International Standards that act as guideposts for addressing issues surrounding persons with mental illness. Standard # 29 says: "The Clubhouse is committed to securing a range of safe, decent, and affordable housing choices, including independent living opportunities for all members."

In our daily work of supporting our Members, we see firsthand what it takes to live out this standard. We know there is still much work to be done to provide secure, safe, affordable housing for all, and we can only reach this dream by working with Clubhouse Members, City and County leadership, local businesses, and organizations that are leaders in housing services.

As the Amazing Give and Bike Day 2024 approaches, please consider donating to our efforts to provide future housing services to Members of GOC.

With appreciation,

Deidra

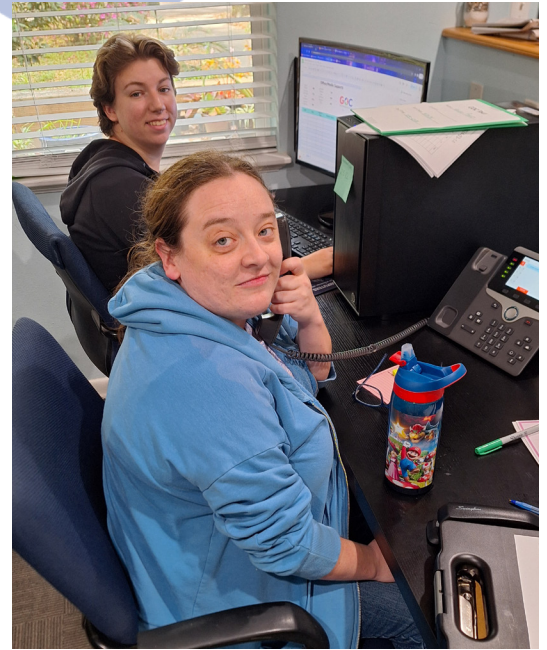


*Deidra Simon,
Executive Director*

A Month in Pictures



Here we are at City of Gainesville, FL - Government City Hall educating and advocating as to why we are important to our community. This year we are meeting with all 6 city commissioners and the Mayor in order to show how we are making a difference. Thank you to Commissioner Ed Book for taking the time show us around and to listen.



Valerie Sanders does a great job answering phones for us at our reception desk.



David Turull makes sure all of our computers are updated.



Thank you so much to Gainesville Mayor Harvey Ward for visiting the GOC. It is so important our community leaders understand the role we play.

A Month in Pictures



City Comm. Brian Eastman shared lunch with us and engaged with GOC Members such as Alina Harshbarger.



Joevan Jenkins loves working in our kitchen



Aaron Ramirez smiles while chopping vegetables



Mental illness can be an isolating disease. Sometimes you feel like you don't matter. That is why we hosted a Member Appreciation Breakfast at the GOC.

GOC GETS RESULTS.

Gainesville Opportunity Center

**For Florida
clubhouse
Members that
attend for at
least a year:**

98%

achieved fewer
(or no) psychiatric
hospitalizations

97%

report fewer
interactions with
law enforcement

89%

report improved
quality of life

***DONATE NOW
TO HELP PEOPLE
FIND A COMMUNITY
LEARN NEW SKILLS
GAIN CONFIDENCE
GET BACK TO WORK***

**Point your smartphone's
camera at this code to
donate!**

