



Gainesville Opportunity Center

GAZETTE

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



Nancy Ryan and Kathleen Ryan are long-time supporters of the GOC

New Year, New Initiatives

The GOC runs on the July 1 to June 30 fiscal year. In our new year we are launching two new initiatives: our Ambassador Program, and our Wellness to Work program.

GOC Ambassadors are friends who will represent the GOC in the community, raise awareness about our cause, and find additional support for our program.

See page 2 for more

Wellness is the foundation for success for people living with chronic mental illness. With a strong foundation of wellness, GOC members are able to return to the community through volunteering, employment, and education. Our Wellness to Work Survey is helping to make that happen.

See page 3 for more

GOC Ambassadors

The Gainesville Opportunity Center (GOC) is excited to introduce our new Ambassador Program, a dynamic initiative aimed at amplifying our mission and expanding our reach within Gainesville and beyond. This program is designed for passionate individuals who believe in the power of community support and are eager to make a meaningful impact without necessarily contributing financially.

GOC Ambassadors play a crucial role in spreading awareness about our work and the transformative impact we are making on people's lives. Through this program, Ambassadors are equipped with comprehensive knowledge about the GOC, allowing them to accurately articulate our mission, programs, and successes. They become advocates for mental health, sharing our story, and engaging with potential supporters, volunteers, and partners.

Ambassadors help to broaden the GOC's social network, creating connections that might lead to new opportunities and resources. They attend community events, host informational sessions, and utilize their personal and professional networks to foster excitement about the GOC's impact. Their efforts are instrumental in making the GOC a household name in Gainesville and surrounding areas.



Gail Childs was our Board Chair until terming out July 1. Along with her husband Bill, and founding Board Chair Bruce Stevens, they can still help the GOC.

Joining the Ambassador Program is an opportunity for individuals to contribute to the community in a meaningful way, helping to break down the stigma surrounding mental illness and showcasing the strengths and potential of our Members. Together, we can create a supportive and inclusive environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Stay tuned for more details on how you can become a part of this transformative initiative and help us continue to change lives at the Gainesville Opportunity Center.



One person organized 10 riders from the Gainesville Cycling Club to participate in our Bike Day. Next year the 700 person club has offered to do more. Multiplying our message and support is what an Ambassador can do.

The Measure of Success



The GOC has always made a difference in people's lives. With our Wellness to Work survey, we now have a way to demonstrate the differences that we make. Implementing a thorough survey like this one will help us to write grants to enhance the program. Early data shows that Members who attend the Clubhouse at least once per week have substantially higher markers of wellness than those that do not.

Members make small, achievable goals within one of the 8 Dimensions of Wellness. By creating a goal and following it through to completion, they gain the confidence and focus necessary to achieve even greater goals.

In the photograph on the right, you can see five GOC Members achieving a long-time goal, finding a place in the community to work out together. Thank you to our community partner, the North Florida YMCA, for giving us this opportunity.



The GOC now has a system in place to measure our Members' progress. GOC Members are putting their focus on eliminating barriers to employment and returning to their community.

Our Wellness to Work program uses a results-proven SAHMSA best practice, The 8 Dimensions of Wellness, to target areas of strength and areas that need improvement. The 8 dimensions of wellness are: emotional, physical, occupational, intellectual, financial, social, environmental, and spiritual. We want to improve all areas of our Members' lives, and this provides a tool to do so.

In wellness planning sessions, Members make goals that seek to eliminate what keeps them from work, education, or volunteering.

Member Spotlight: Joel Andreasen



One of the Goals of the GOC is to reintegrate our Members into the community. Here is Joel enjoying himself at the Rotary Wild Game Feast after a day of volunteering.



Since Joel is working full time to support himself, we do not see him regularly. He came in for a dental screening and to take our new wellness survey. Christine Baker of HCA North Florida Hospital volunteered to administer it.

Joel Andreasen is one of our GOC Members who is successfully working full time. He works at Statrum House, an apartment complex at Midtown in Gainesville doing maintenance. He has been a Member of the GOC since 2008. While some of our Members get disability and housing assistance, Joel has had to work just to pay the bills.

Jobs are an entry into having relationships with others. Even though Joel has struggled to form relationships in his life, he has made rich friendships at the GOC with the Members that he has met here.

The GOC has been supporting Joel for over 15 years. We first supported Joel in a Transitional Employment position at St. Francis Catholic High School working in the kitchen, where he would put food out and make cookies for the students.

Since Joel works during the GOC business hours, he participates at the GOC by being involved in community functions such as weekend socials, roadside cleanups, and some events the GOC has participated in GOC partnerships with local Rotary clubs.

Joel says, "The GOC has helped me to have the guts to get up in the morning and not give up." The GOC has also supported Joel by helping him fill out resumes, checking up on him to see how he is doing, giving him access to free dental care, and helping him fill out job applications.

Forward Focus

As we look ahead to the future, the GOC continues to strive towards creating a supportive, empowering environment for everyone. Our mission is to foster collective progress and personal growth, and we couldn't do it without your unwavering support.

Upcoming Events: Mark Your Calendars!

- GOC Fall Festival Open House: Join us on November 15 from 11 AM to 5 PM for a day of community, celebration, and connection. This event is a wonderful opportunity to see firsthand the positive impact of the GOC.
- GOC Bike Day: Save the date for March 29, 2025. Our next GOC Bike Day promises to be an exciting day filled with energy, camaraderie, and fun.



Call for Sponsors:

Both events are crucial in supporting our programs. We are actively seeking sponsors to help us continue providing for our Members. Your sponsorship will directly contribute to the success of these events and the ongoing support of our community.

Introducing the Ambassador Program:

We are thrilled to announce the launch of our Ambassador Program. This initiative aims to spread the word about GOC and bolster our sustainability efforts. Ambassadors will play a vital role in advocating for our mission, sharing success stories, and engaging with the wider community.

At the GOC, we believe in the power of community and the strength that comes from working together. Our Members' personal growth stories are a testament to the supportive environment we foster. Whether it's through attending our events, becoming a sponsor, or joining our Ambassador Program, your involvement is invaluable.

Thank you for being a part of our journey. Together, we can continue to make a positive impact and support the progress of every individual at the Gainesville Opportunity Center.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Brett". The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Brett Buell
Development Director
Gainesville Opportunity Center

Strengthening Community Partnerships

Sarkis Clinical Trials and UF Health Psychiatric Hospital

Visit the Gainesville Opportunity Center

The Gainesville Opportunity Center (GOC) recently had the privilege of hosting visits from leading psychiatric providers in our area: Sarkis Clinical Trials and UF Health Psychiatric Hospital. These visits are significant milestones in our ongoing efforts to build robust community partnerships that enhance support and services for our members.



Member Jacob Warshofsky with Sarah Barnes and Dr. Taylor LaCorgne.

Sarkis Clinical Trials, part of the esteemed Sarkis Family Psychiatry, known for its thorough and innovative care, visited the GOC to explore collaborative opportunities. Represented by Sarah Barnes and Dr. Taylor LaCorgne (pictured left), the team engaged in meaningful discussions with our staff and Members. Many of our Members, who are underinsured, may be eligible for the latest medicines through Sarkis Clinical Trials. Sarah and Taylor were impressed by our recovery-through-work model, which empowers individuals with chronic mental illness to rebuild confidence and regain independence. They expressed enthusiasm for integrating their services with our programs to provide more holistic and continuous care for those in need.

Shortly after, we welcomed representatives from UF Health Psychiatric Hospital, another leader in mental health care. Joe Munson, Clinical Services Director, and Jessica Yupanqui, Administrative Care Coordinator, visited the GOC to understand our operations and identify areas for collaboration. Joe and Jessica participated in various activities. They discussed potential partnerships to enhance the continuity of care for patients transitioning from hospital treatment to community reintegration.



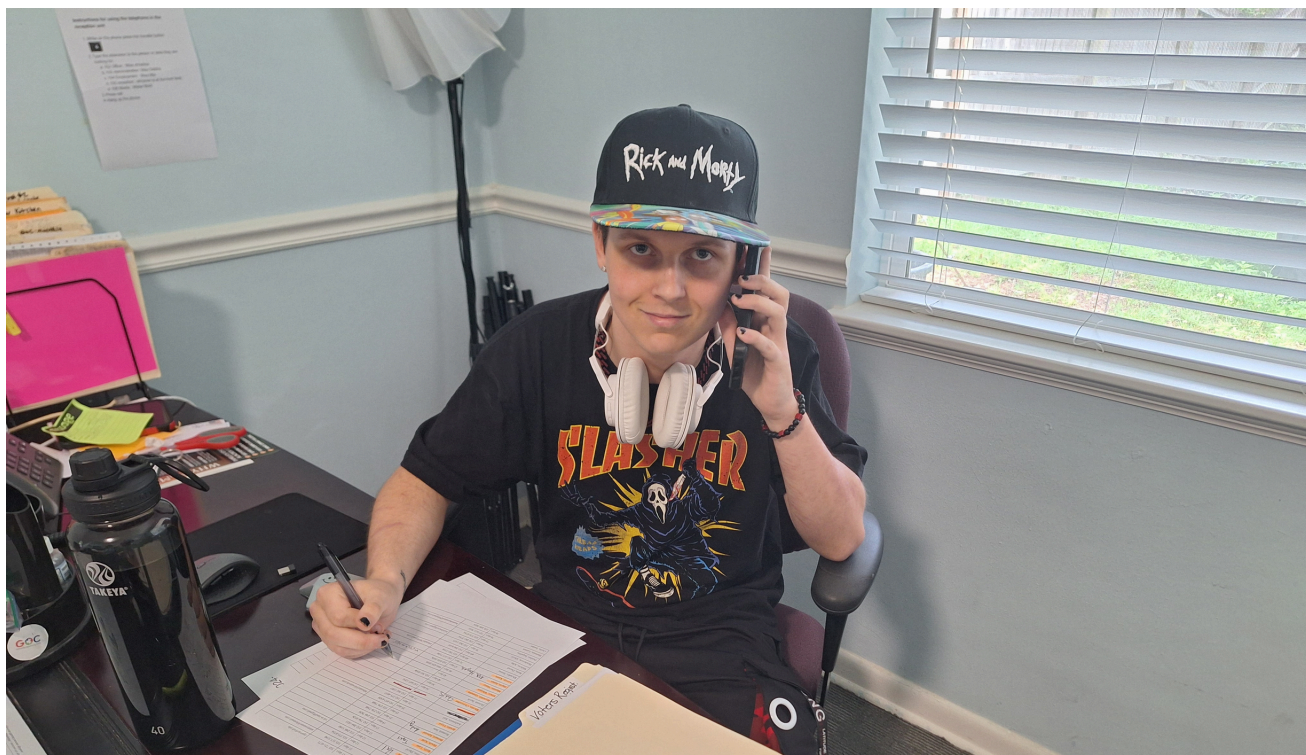
Member Reid Schrieber, with Joe Munson and Jessica Yupanqui. Joe wanted a GOC Member working for UF Health, and actively recruited Reid. That sounds like something a GOC Ambassador would do.

Moving Forward

These visits underscore the importance of collaboration in addressing the complex needs of individuals with chronic mental illness. By partnering with Sarkis Clinical Trials and UF Health Psychiatric Hospital, the GOC is poised to offer more comprehensive support, bridging the gap between clinical treatment and community-based rehabilitation. We look forward to the positive outcomes these partnerships will bring, enhancing the well-being of our members, and strengthening the mental health support network in our community.

Reaching Out to Those in Need:

GOC's Commitment to Clubhouse Standard No. 7



It feels good to know someone cares about you. Zach Scarton will tell you it also feels good to make someone feel that way. It's common sense and is part of the magic that makes GOC special.

At the Gainesville Opportunity Center (GOC), we understand that staying connected is vital for the well-being of our Members. Following Clubhouse Standard No. 7, we have implemented an effective reach-out system to support members who are not attending, becoming isolated, or hospitalized. Our approach ensures that every member feels valued and connected, even during challenging times.

When a Member is absent, our dedicated staff and fellow members promptly reach out through phone calls, messages, and home visits if necessary. This consistent communication helps us understand their needs and provide the necessary support. Whether it's a friendly chat, offering assistance, or connecting them to resources, our goal is to remind them they are not alone.

Not only have we implemented a reach-out system, but we have also made a video featuring our staff and Members discussing how we reach out. This video highlights our commitment to staying connected and can be viewed on our [YouTube Page](#).

Through these efforts, the GOC ensures that every Member remains an integral part of our community. By upholding Clubhouse Standard No. 7, we not only combat isolation but also promote a supportive environment where Members can thrive and rebuild their lives.

Sharing His Journey

Dr. Jacob Atem, Former Lost Boy of Sudan, Visits the GOC.



Member David Stevens asked Jacob if he ever lost hope. Jacob said after surviving death multiple times, there was not an option to give up.

The Gainesville Opportunity Center (GOC) was honored to host Dr. Jacob Atem, a Lost Boy of Sudan, at our recent Employment Dinner. Dr. Atem, who lives in Gainesville, captivated Members and staff with his powerful story of resilience and triumph over adversity.

At the age of six, Jacob walked 2,000 miles across war-torn Sudan, a journey during which many of the children he walked with did not survive.

Despite these unimaginable challenges, Jacob arrived in the United States with no knowledge of English. His determination and perseverance led him to overcome bullying and language barriers, ultimately earning advanced degrees from Michigan State University and a PhD from the University of Florida.

During his visit, Dr. Atem shared his incredible journey, highlighting the importance of education, community support, and unwavering dedication. His story resonated deeply with our Members, who face their own battles with mental illness. Dr. Atem's message of hope and perseverance was a profound reminder that with support and determination, one can overcome even the most daunting obstacles.

Dr. Atem, is proud of the GOC for giving people hope. He is active in his community as a Rotarian, and is giving back to many local projects. He has also started his own project to bring sustainable food and water to South Sudan.

Jacob's visit exemplifies the GOC's mission of fostering resilience and hope in the face of adversity, and his words have left a lasting impact on our community.

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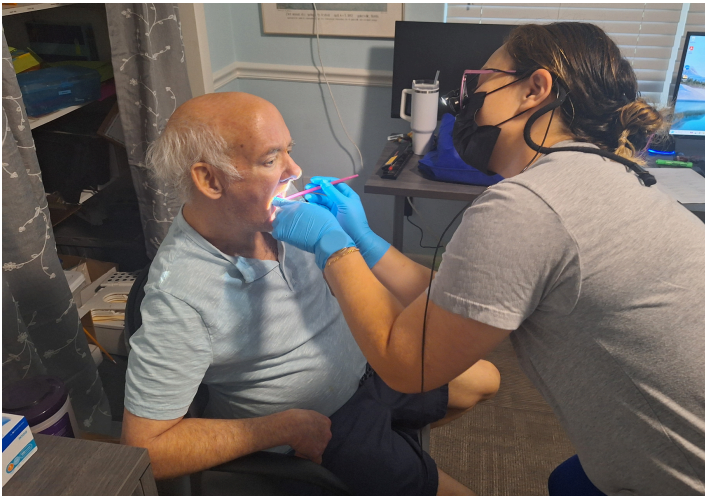
Month In Pictures



Gainesville Police Officer Bill Gough routinely stops by the GOC to check on our Members. He is part of a special team that responds to mental health related calls.



Dr. Joe Munson is the Clinical Services Director for UF Health Psychiatric Hospital. He takes time out of his busy day to talk to our Members.



People living with severe mental illness are often unable to access basic needs. Members who participate in a Clubhouse program like the GOC are more likely to get that basic care. Forming strong community partnerships, such as with UF College of Dentistry, allows us to help our Members access that basic care.



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Month In Pictures



UF Volunteer Hamashi Lianarachichi works with Susan Thomas at our Computer Workshop.

Our Members are committed to making GOC a better place. Akeem is painting our sidewalk.



Members came in at 7 am to help. This shows how much they feel appreciated and are committed to our program. Once a month we have a membership appreciation breakfast. We had blueberry muffins, corned beef hash, and oatmeal with fruit.