“I didn’t know that I could do that”: Creating Art and Organizational Change in a Psychosocial Rehabilitation Clubhouse

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The Clay Group

The Clay Group was initiated as a group that values the experiences and recovery of individuals with mental illness, the structure of services and unequal distribution of power between staff and members. The Clay Group was initiated as an organization that values the experiences and recovery of individuals with mental illness, the structure of services and unequal distribution of power between staff and members. The Clay Group was initiated as an organization that values the experiences and recovery of individuals with mental illness, the structure of services and unequal distribution of power between staff and members.

Structure

The Together Center

• Groups or activities are time limited and purpose-based, and encourage continued activities outside of allotted time without the assistance of staff.
• Groups are conducted in a separate room and nonparticipating members are asked to leave.
• Generally one staff member is involved in activities with members where they act as facilitators or supervisors.
• Members must ask staff for permission before accessing art supplies and resources at the Center.
• Staff members have designated space (e.g. Staff Office and Staff Lunchroom) that is not for use by members.

The Clay Group

• Although Clay Group was scheduled at the same time every week, members were encouraged to work on projects for as long as and often as they wanted outside of the scheduled group.
• All staff members were encouraged to participate in Clay Group.
• Members were not required to ask permission to access materials.
• Clay Group was held in common seating area of Center and members were encouraged to remain in the area even if they did not participate.

Success of the Clay Group relied on active involvement of members. Clay Group had no expert roles. We permitted members to play in the group in the way they were comfortable. Members were encouraged to work with the clay they were delighted with. Members who feel that their involvement is not necessary to the group were not encouraged to participate. Successfully, the likelihood that members would participate in Clay Group.

Lesson Learned: Art-Based Initiatives

The opportunity to engage in a creative, arts-based set of activities in the Clay Group allowed adults coping with psychiatric disabilities the chance to occupy a social role of “artist.”

• Many of the members attributed their resistance to participate in Clay Group to fears that they were not “artistic” and capable of working with clay.
• Some members believed that their artistic abilities were limited to a specific medium or form of art, like coloring or writing. However, members were encouraged to work with the clay they were delighted to discover that they could be artistic in different ways.
• Members regularly expressed how much they enjoyed working with the clay and the projects we completed.

Lesson Learned: Relationships and Power

Although staff at the Center is a group that values the experiences and recovery of individuals with mental illness, the structure of services and unequal distribution of power between staff and members, the Clay Group is not limited to members from reaching these goals. Members at the Together Center were not given opportunities to take initiative or make contributions to the Center without permission and supervision. Members at the Together Center were not given opportunities to take initiative or make contributions to the Center without permission and supervision.

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Lesson Learned: The Work-Ordered Day

Although the structure of the Clay group differed slightly from the traditional work-ordered day, the procedures and outcomes were aligned with the foundational values and goals of the Clubhouse model.

• The structure of Clay Group provided members with many opportunities to observe the completion of projects and work on projects when they were available.
• Having the opportunity to observe the group increased the likelihood that members would participate in Clay Group. 25 of the 29 participants observed some part of the clay group process before they participated.
• Members did not need to work with the clay to participate in the group. For example, five members only participated in one or two groups but socialized with members during the Clay Group.
• Members worked on projects outside of regularly scheduled groups.

The success of the group relied on active involvement from members, who supported each other by giving suggestions, modeling how to complete projects, and encouraging each other when projects were frustrating.
Abstract

In this case study, I describe my experiences as a community advocate at a psychosocial rehabilitation clubhouse for adults coping with psychiatric disabilities. I focus on the development of arts-based initiatives called “clay group” which occurred over a one-year period. Clay Group was intentionally structured to counter the roles, structure of services, and social expectations of clubhouse members and staff. I present lessons learned about how the structure and process of clay group served to alter power dynamics between members and staff. Implications of my lessons learned in clay group to inform existing literature on psychosocial rehabilitation clubhouses are discussed.

Introduction

- A major goal of psychosocial clubhouses in the United States is to help create structures that facilitate meaningful and supported employment skills for adults with serious mental illness.
- Members of psychosocial rehabilitation clubhouses who participate in the structure of the “work ordered day” have been found to have increased confidence in their abilities.
- Relatively little is known about “work ordered day” activities for clubhouse members who are older, live in rural settings with less access to community resources, or who are not interested or unable to seek employment.
- Leisure activities, such as art, can provide individuals coping with serious mental illness opportunities to engage in social interactions, form friendships, and develop a sense of identity and social inclusion.
- Incorporating arts-based programming in psychosocial clubhouses can be a creative way to empower members by providing them with opportunities to engage in different roles, learn skills, and engage in meaningful experiences in their relationships.

My Role as a Community Advocate

- During my one year community-clinical practicum, I spent 20 hours a week as a “community advocate” at a psychosocial clubhouse that I will refer to as the Together Center (pseudonym).
- My responsibilities included applying community psychology concepts and theories into my work at the Center, developing an understanding of the Together Center as a system, building relationships with members, and finding and developing opportunities to empower members for systems level change.
- Members and I created Clay Group to allow members with serious mental illness to work with clay and make art together.
- Over the course of the year, I made notes about the group, participants and their experiences, and staff reactions to the Clay Group.
- I reviewed these notes to construct a first person account of the course of Clay Group to identify lessons I learned about creating programs to empower members.

The Clay Group

- Begun in October of 2015 and ended in May of 2016.
- Met at the same time every week across a 21-week period. Groups were scheduled for an hour but lasted as long as four hours.
- Total of 20 clubhouse members and 5 staff participated in Clay Group at least once.
- Members also worked with the clay or on their projects at least 21 days out of Clay Group.
- On average, members participated in 4 group sessions (SD = 3.89; Range = 0 – 13 days) and worked on projects about one and a half days (1.4) outside of group (SD = 1.76; Range = 0 – 7 days).
- I provided a brief description of each clay group activity and the number of participants in each group.
- The Clay Group was intentionally different from other programming at the Center in terms of the roles available to members, the structure of the group, and the general cultural expectations of participants.

Lessons Learned: The Work-Ordered Day

Although the structure of the Clay group differed slightly from the traditional work-ordered day, the processes and outcomes aligned with the foundational values and goals of the Clubhouse model.
- The structure of Clay Group provided members with many opportunities to observe the completion of projects and work on projects when they were available.
- Having the opportunity to observe the group appeared to increase the likelihood that members would participate in Clay Group.
- 25 of the 29 participants observed some part of the clay group process before they participated.
- Members did not need to work with the clay to participate in the group. For example, five members only participated in one or two groups but socialized with Clay Group members during almost all of the groups.
- Members worked on projects outside of regularly scheduled groups.
- The success of the group relied on active involvement from members, who supported each other by giving suggestions, modelling how to complete projects, and encouraging each other when projects were frustrating.

The Together Center

- Located in the downtown area of a small Midwestern town in the United States.
- Although the center is not ICCD accredited, the structure of services is based on the clubhouse model.
- Center is operated by local community mental health center. Five staff and five peer support workers run center. Programming is provided six days a week.
- The Center is open to all individuals with SMI in the local area. About 360 individuals have access to services and the Center services an average of 30 members a day.
- The Center offers a space for members to socialize with each other, access to computers, programming based on member interests and recovery, a transitional employment program, and case management services.

Social Roles

- Clay Group
- Clay Group had no expert roles. We had limited exposure to working with clay and relied on online tutorials and active problem solving and communal support from members in order to complete projects.
- Members were encouraged to take on leadership roles and consulted consistently about all aspects of the group, including planning, leadership, facilitation, and evaluation of group projects.
- Success of the Clay Group relied on active involvement of members.

Setting Expectations

- Clay Group
- Clay group members were encouraged to remain in the sitting area of Center and members were encouraged to participate in the group.
- Members were not required to ask permission to access materials.
- Clay Group was held in common seating area of Center and members were encouraged to socialize in the area even if they had not participated.

Lessons Learned: Art Based Initiatives

The opportunity to engage in a creative, arts-based activity in the Clay Group allowed adults coping with psychiatric disability the chance to occupy a social role of “artist.”
- Many of the members attributed their attendance to participate in Clay Group to fears that they were not “artistic” and capable of working with clay.
- Some members believed that their artistic abilities were limited to a specific medium or form of art, like coloring or writing. However, members were encouraged to work with the clay they were delighted to discover that they could be artistic in different ways.
- Members regularly expressed how much they enjoyed working with the clay and the projects we completed.

Lessons Learned: Relationships and Power

Although staff at the Center held a group-based belief that values the experiences and recovery of individuals with mental illness, the structure of services and unequal distribution of power between staff and members severely limits members from reaching these goals.
- Members at the Together Center were not given opportunities to take initiative or make contributions to the Center without the permission and supervision of staff.
- Members who feel that their involvement is not necessary to successfully run a clubhouse may be less likely to develop a sense of ownership over their responsibilities as a member.
- Members were treated as valuable consultants for Clay Group. As a result, the group was informed member-driven activities and projects.
- Staff members repeatedly tried to change the structure of Clay Group so that it was similar to the structure of other groups at the Center.

Clay Group

- Clay group members were encouraged to remain in the sitting area of Center and members were encouraged to participate in the group.
- Members were not required to ask permission to access materials.
- Clay Group was held in common seating area of Center and members were encouraged to socialize in the area even if they had not participated.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clay Group Projects and Participants</th>
<th>Total Groups</th>
<th>In-Group Projects</th>
<th>In-Group Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Body Building</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 Staff</td>
<td>5 Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Paint Figurines</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 Staff</td>
<td>5 Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Clay Pots</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 Staff</td>
<td>8 Members</td>
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<td>4. Paint Pinch</td>
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<td>5. Ceramic Pot</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Clay Ornaments</td>
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<td>7. Ornaments</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Clay Houses</td>
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<td>9. Clay Plates</td>
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<td>10. Paint Hand</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Painted Salt Dough</td>
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<td>12. Painted Salt Dough</td>
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<td>13. Painted Salt Dough</td>
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<td>14. Painted Salt Dough</td>
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<td>15. Painted Salt Dough</td>
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<td>16. Pet Rocks</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Recycling</td>
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<td>18. Recycled Clay</td>
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<td>19. Painted Picture</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Botanical Gardens</td>
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Figure 1. Plates made by members in Clay Group. From left to right: a figurine of a member’s sister, a pinch pot, and an animal figurine.

Figure 2. A member’s dream home made in the botanical garden class.

Figure 3. A member’s clay work.