

APPLYING RECOVERY

I'd like to talk a little bit about the practical applications of recovery and about the future directions that Houselink may take.

Prior to the introduction of Recovery Houselink already had some structures in place that are compatible with recovery principles. We have a member education bursary fund that our members can use to further their education or interests. We have a mental health library that staff and members can access – one of the key recovery ideas is the provision of information about mental health/illness. We have member employment programs. We have a monthly member advisory forum, a member organized group where members can contribute their ideas to the organization. But there is always room to develop new programs and adjust the services we already provide.

Implementing recovery principles requires reviewing what you are currently doing with more care and time. And that can be as simple as shopping for and preparing healthy foods vs. ordering pizza or consciously choosing juice and water over pop for group events.

Houselink is now using a recovery checklist with members and I'd like to tell you about its development. I was one of the staff who participated in the staff recovery training session earlier this year. As part of the training all the participants were asked to prepare something that reflected how Houselink could implement Recovery. Our director of member services had already been contemplating a tool for supportive housing workers to ensure equitable and adequate service provision to members, so we decided to work on that. Using the principles of recovery we turned the idea around so that the object was now to provide information to members about the types of support Houselink offers, both through Supportive Housing Workers and through our food programs and employment supports. Members would be provided with all the possibilities available to them so they could then define what Houselink's support would look like to them.

The initial draft presented at the recovery training was in the form of a questionnaire. Staff did not like the tone or language of the questionnaire. That relates to a concept I found very interesting, which is how the use of language informs ideas and service

provision. I think I had some initial skepticism about that during the recovery training because in social work, as in many other fields, there are always new buzzwords that don't necessarily represent new ideas. When it came to recovery staff had internalized some of the new language and were unhappy with the questionnaire model. They found that it still emphasized members providing information to Houselink rather than getting information from Houselink.

So it was back to the drawing board. Reading a recovery text led to the idea of using a strength based checklist. The checklist is a tool members can use to start thinking about areas of their life they might like to work on. The checklist attempts to cover areas of life that are within the realm of support workers to address, either by direct support or referral to our or outside services.

When the checklist was completed it was sent out to the staff that attended the recovery training and was presented to members at two member advisory forums. Feed back from those sessions was incorporated into the final edition. An example of that feedback was from a member who had recently been locked out of her unit. She wished that she had thought of a "just in case I'm locked out" plan in advance, so that idea was included in the checklist.

The recovery checklist has now been sent out to all our 400 resident and non-resident members and will be implemented with all new members as part of their planning with supportive housing workers. The tool will be evaluated in the spring of 2006 to gauge its helpfulness. We have included the checklist in the disc.

In May of this year we had a one day in-service conducted by the staff of our tenancy department. They included Pat Deegan's recovery oriented practice tools. As others have mentioned supportive housing workers have a hard to balance dual role of landlord and support person. These tools provide a framework for assessment and problem solving about when and how to intervene regarding tenancy matters.

Once the atmosphere opens up and people begin to talk about recovery, ideas grow exponentially. One of the items on the member checklist was about alternative healing. That started a discussion

among members who wanted to know more, so it became a topic at another member advisory forum.

There are so many ideas that develop that one of the complications can be the allocation of resources. Supporting new programming ideas requires time in addition to the duties that staff are already carrying out, at least in the initial stages. We are hiring a peer development worker to help with the implementation of some of these projects.

In late summer Houselink formed a recovery reunion group. The initial membership was directed to staff that attended the recovery training and members who had completed WRAP but was open to anyone interested. The aims of the recovery group are still evolving but a key member request was the development of peer support groups.

We have begun to collect recovery stories from members and include them in our bimonthly social issues newsletter to encourage hope in others.

Currently a second group of staff is attending the recovery training. New WRAP sessions are being held in November and WRAP facilitation and peer support training is planned for the New Year.

Considering and implementing new ideas from a recovery perspective can be time consuming but rich in growth potential. Recovery is not a model. It is a set of guiding beliefs. Implementing recovery means creating an environment where recovery can take place.

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