



UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP AIMS TO BRING MORE HOPE, OPPORTUNITY TO THOSE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

By Jordan Vandenberg

CLEVELAND — A unique partnership between the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Sciences at Case Western Reserve University and a storied nonprofit, the Magnolia Clubhouse, aims to better the health and wellness outcomes for those dealing with mental illness.

The university and Magnolia Clubhouse, a pioneer in the realm of psychiatric rehabilitation, have partnered as part of a research initiative that intends to identify what facets of the "clubhouse model" have proven successful for Magnolia as well as the barriers that exist and prevent individuals from seeking mental health services.

For the uninitiated, the organization that would become Magnolia Clubhouse was founded in 1961. At the time, inpatient, institutionalized care for the mentally ill had been slowly growing out of favor and, instead, medication was viewed as the preferred treatment. Under the clubhouse model, mentally ill individuals become "members" of a small community and are assigned roles and responsibilities. This distinction provides members with meaningful work and responsibilities, while also providing essential job training and relationship-building skills.

This is for people who are usually marginalized, living in isolation, and often living in poverty,” said Lori D’Angelo, the executive director at Magnolia Clubhouse. “There is sort for everything against them and it creates another environment where people have hope. It works because, in every way, it makes sense. It’s a humanistic model that goes to the core of what makes everyone enjoy life and look forward to going on with their life because there is purpose and community.”



D’Angelo, a Case Western Reserve University alum, began working at what eventually became Magnolia Clubhouse in the late 1990s. Over the years, the nonprofit opens its doors to around 70 individuals on any given day and provided care to nearly 500 people last year.

“Members” of the clubhouse assume any one of a myriad of responsibilities, including cooking in the clubhouse kitchen, working in the neighboring, high-end resale shop, or creating content, including newscasts, at the clubhouse media center. Members are also granted the freedom of choice; they are permitted to leave or return to the clubhouse on their own accord. Ultimately, the goal is to encourage members to build the life they want to live.

It’s about making progress and feeling good and going forward. Hope is just a natural part of the experience. The staff’s role is to do everything clinically to foster that,” D’Angelo said. “Most often, when people live with mental illness, less than half of the people get treatment. When they do, it is primarily medication. There really isn’t a way for people to rebuild their lives. It’s so crucial and would help prevent the problems that we see.”

