"Hard To Be Out There If We Are Focused on Here"
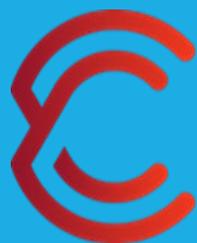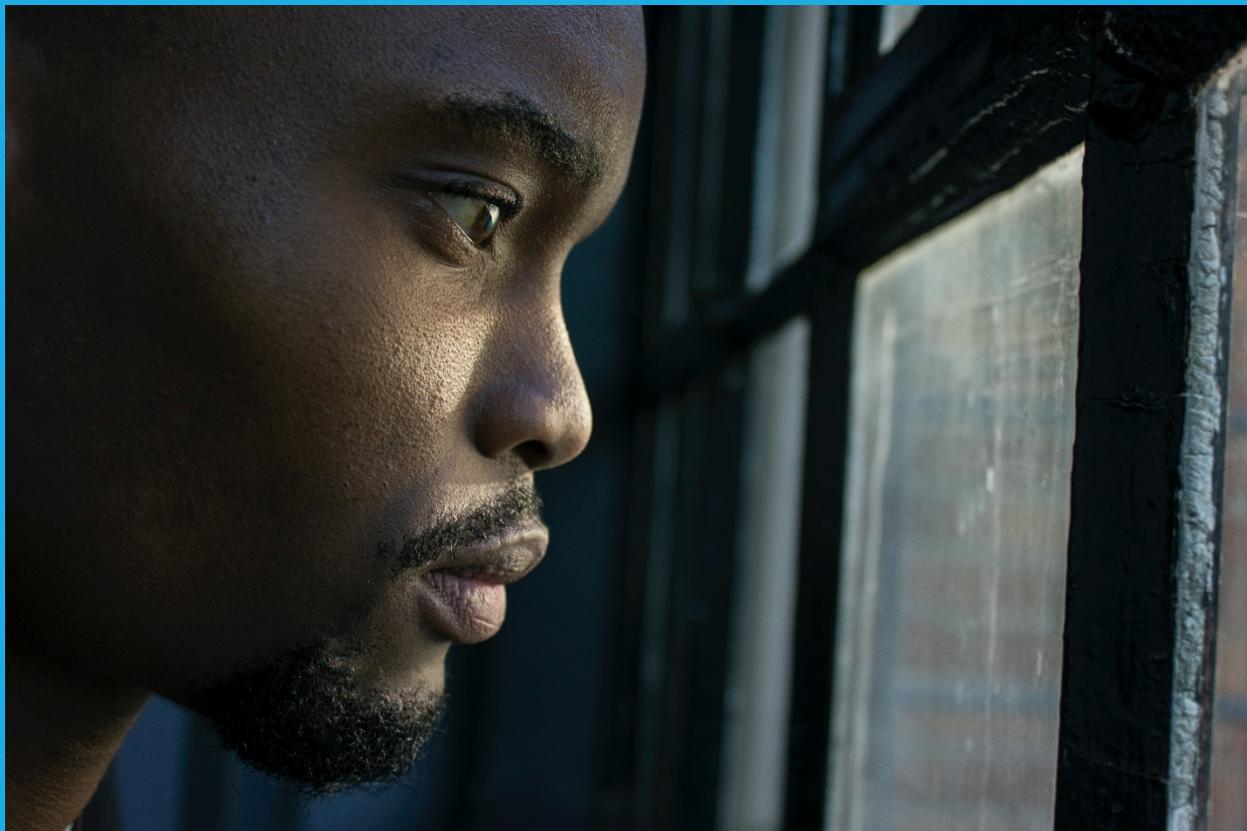
Moving From Center-Based Communities To Community Inclusion

Temple University
Collaborative
On Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

"Hard To Be Out There If We Are Focused on Here": Moving From Center-Based Communities To Community Inclusion

Richard C. Baron, MA. And **Mark S. Salzer, Ph.D.** are both with the Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities.

Suggested citation: Baron, R.C. & Salzer, M.S. (2020). "Hard To Be Out There If We Are Focused on Here": Moving From Center-Based Communities To Community Inclusion. The Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities. Available at www.tucollaborative.org

November 2020

Cover Photo by Anaya Katlego on Unsplash

Introduction

Informal spaces, now known as Clubhouses, Drop-in Centers, Consumer Centers, Peer Centers, Recovery Centers, Wellness Centers, etc., were incredibly innovative when they emerged in the 1950s in response to the downsizing of the nation's state psychiatric hospital infrastructure. Substantial numbers of people had been in institutions for many years and oftentimes found themselves alone and under-supported in the community. Many desired a safe, welcoming, educational, fun, and dry/warm/cool place to go during the day, and perhaps some evenings. The nation's expanding number of such Centers in the 60's, 70's, and 80's offered something to do, initial training for work, leisure and recreational activities with peers, opportunities to learn new skills, emotional support, connections to other needed health care and social services, and more. For many, the simple offer of coffee, a meal, a TV, and maybe most important of all, the ability to escape a hostile world and experience a sense of community and belonging that was all that alleviated their feeling of abandonment in the community.

While many things, sadly, have stayed the same since the 1950s, other things have dramatically changed. Among them was the continuing advancement of consumer voice and a powerful disability rights movement, and these eventually led to the emergence of the concept of 'recovery' and community inclusion becoming established as a legal right embedded in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. The ADA declared that people with disabilities had the right to live in the community like everyone else, and has become a model for similar laws around the world. In 1999 the Supreme Court settled some questions about the scope of the ADA when they declared that "…unnecessary institutionalization was a form of discrimination prohibited by the Americans with Disabilities Act." Among other things, the Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision provided a legal framework for a move away from all segregated settings and towards life in the community. Based on the ADA and Olmstead decisions, community inclusion has been defined as "The opportunity to live in the community and to be valued for one's uniqueness and abilities like everyone else.[1]"

Today, the need for a greater focus on community inclusion and participation has become even clearer.

On the one hand, many of those with serious mental illnesses have been told for years that active engagement in community life is beyond their reach, leaving many largely segregated from the mainstream – often unemployed and financially dependent, homeless or living in specialized residential programs in challenging communities, with fragile linkages to family life and broken connections to friends, and spending their days in behavioral health programs that offer mental illness-oriented programming, social events, and group activities that have become a poor substitute for genuine, meaningful community life and participation.

On the other hand, there is a solid research base indicating that most people with mental illnesses 'would, should, and could' participate in the everyday activities of their communities, and this consensus argues persuasively that members: a) remain vitally interested throughout their lives in community participation; b) are more than capable – with the support of Centers – of building new lives beyond the sometimes overly-warm embrace (i.e., creation of overdependence) of mental health systems; and c) benefit substantially from engagement in the everyday world around them. It is from this perspective that community inclusion and participation has come to be referred to as a "medical necessity".[2]

---

[1] Salzer, M.S. (2006). Introduction. In M.S. Salzer (ed.), Psychiatric Rehabilitation Skills in Practice: A CPRP Preparation and Skills Workbook (pp. 1-5). Columbia, MD.: United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association.

[2] Salzer, M.S. & Baron, R.C. (2016). Well Together – A blueprint for community inclusion: fundamental concepts, theoretical frameworks and evidence. Published by Wellways Australia Limited, Melbourne, Australia. Available at http://tucollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Wellways-Well-Together.pdf

Centers can expand their role in increasing those opportunities by serving as a community-based hub that focuses on supporting participation in meaningful activities (e.g., work, school, dating, recreating, parenting, voting, volunteering, praying) of one's choice for people who have historically been disconnected and disenfranchised from the broader community. The shifts toward recovery-oriented and community inclusion ideals that have occurred since the 1950 place Centers in a key position to take the lead in moving policies and rights into realities.

However, promoting community inclusion and participation is not easy: it requires a change in perspective and three concerted sets of action[3].

First, it requires the simultaneous recognition that people who are lonely and socially isolated should have a place to go AND that these places can still be heavily focused on supporting and encouraging people to connect to their communities. In other words, Centers can still emphasize a strong sense of their program's community while also encouraging and supporting people in expanding their sense of belonging and connection to the broader community, spending increasing amounts of time engaged in meaningful activities in the world around them – independent of Center staff. The reasons for this are many. The surrounding community inevitably offers many more resources, participation opportunities, and diverse people to develop relationships with than will ever be available in the Centers or in the behavioral health system.

Second, promoting community inclusion relies upon the commitment of Centers to support the exploration of community-based interests and supporting participation that is 'like everyone else.' This may include limiting Center-driven group activities (e.g., Center picnics and leisure outings) in favor of supporting people in doing the community activities in which they may be most interested, including engaging with natural supports (e.g., friends, family, acquaintances, and fellow peers) with whom they can attend those activities . Centers can be critical sources of information about community resources, can help service recipients to develop the skills to identify and use these resources, and can respond to the hesitancies and barriers people may face as they pursue their interests.

Third, community inclusion and participation requires Centers to develop partnerships and engagements with mainstream organizations – congregations and colleges, civic associations and recreational programs, employers and arts organizations, and more – to develop genuinely welcoming communities. These mainstream organizations and communities need to be called upon as allies and supported as they explore their capacities for opening their doors - supporting new participants, and working toward genuinely welcoming people with mental illnesses *as individuals* into their ongoing activities.

This document is designed to support Centers as they consider what additional steps they can take to assist their members in their pursuit of meaningful, community-based participation. You will find here a set of five broad areas (and suggestions within each) that were developed as part of a brainstorming exercise with staff from Peer Centers in the State of Delaware and their partners as they considered what types of steps their programs might take to further promote community inclusion of their members. This is not a detailed step-by-step set of activities nor a list of required steps, but instead ideas developed by Center staff themselves about practical, but not terribly cumbersome, initiatives that could be undertaken with the current resources available in most Centers. The activities are organized into five domains: 1) Broaden Understanding of Community Participation; 2) Develop Pilot Programs; 3) Provide Staff Training; 4)

---

[3] These ideas were developed just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic that presented unique challenges – and opportunities - for community inclusion and participation. Please take a look at our "Keeping Connected While Staying Apart" resources that are available at http://www.tucollaborative.org/keeping-connected-while-staying-apart/.

Develop Welcoming Communities; and 5) Highlight Your Successes. Overall, these are intended to be initiatives that you can launch today to promote broader community inclusion and participation tomorrow.

Broaden Understanding of Community Participation

Many Centers begin by building a broader understanding of community participation within their own settings. The concepts of community inclusion and participation and the role Centers can play are still quite new to many. Making the commitment to work toward a strong Center focus on supporting members in connecting with local organizations can at first appear challenging, but can be overcome. Here are some initial steps Centers can take:

1. Educate Your Center's Staff. Advocates for an expanded commitment to community inclusion and participation will need to build their own Center's knowledge about, and comfort with, the demands of this new approach, to help build Center-wide support. You may find you need to start with your colleagues – the Center's Board of Directors, agency leadership, supervisors, and others - to make sure everyone supports establishing ambitious community participation goals. If so:

- *Educate yourself* – there are many resources you can turn to for more information about the fundamental concepts, research justifications, definitions, and challenges of community participation, and the more you know the better you can share your insights with colleagues.

- *Divide and conquer* – you may want to start with your program's Board or its leadership or build up from the foundation by talking with and presenting to Center staff and their supervisors, but plan ahead to make sure everyone is going to have an opportunity to learn more.

- *Plan your presentation* – there's a lot you can be talking about (e.g., concepts, research, fundamentals, evolving staff roles, relationships with the community, etc.) so plan ahead for how your presentation will go (a formal Powerpoint presentation may help), and know what you want to emphasize each time.

- *Leave substantial time for discussion* - these are new and challenging approaches to the work of your Center, and you want to be sure that your audience has an opportunity to raise their questions, their concerns, and their ideas about how to move forward most effectively.

2. Involve Center Members In The Process. Your Center's members have their own strong feelings about the changes in services and supports that a shift to community participation entails, and you need to make time to engage them in the process. Many members have simply gotten used to the idea that they *can't* participate. You could…

- *Use a variety of approaches* – some members will enjoy a presentation of this new direction in a 'community meeting,' a small group discussion, or one-to-one conversation. You should be prepared to offer all of the above.

- *Prepare for some negative feedback* – your program's current services (recovery-oriented programming, educational classes, group social events at the Center and in the community, etc.) are likely to be highly valued by current members, and you need to find a way to talk with members about re-balancing the Center activities to align with the promotion of inclusion and participation.

- *Highlight success stories* – Peer staff may want to highlight their own stories of community participation, or ask current or past members who have enjoyed engaging on their own in community life to talk about their experiences, encouraging others to give these new ideas a try.

3. Encourage Members to Promote Community Participation On Their Own. Members in your Center may be interested, and more than able, to promote community inclusion on their own – working with each other, connecting to the community, and grappling with the ways that different communities respond to the challenges of community participation. You might:

- *Assist interested members in developing their own peer-run community participation groups* – peer-run services within traditional agencies, as well as peer-run agencies – have proven their effectiveness in helping those with similar experiences to open themselves up to new experiences, and peer-run groups that focus on participation may be especially effective.

- *Educate members about their roles, rights, and responsibilities within the broader community* – Members can discuss roles and rights of participation in community settings and how they contribute to community life through their participation.

- *Talk with other Centers and programs about their community participation initiatives* – use county, state, or national networks to identify initiatives emphasizing community participation and seek their ideas and support in building your own approaches.

- *Develop online forums to share information related to community participation* – online forums can be used to share specific interests or fears, recount both successful and unsuccessful forays into the community, and encourage one another.

4. Develop a Community Participation Advisory Board. One effective way to strengthen your Center's commitment to community participation is to involve varied constituencies in guiding these changes, inviting varied individuals, including employers, educational institutions, faith leaders, librarians, community center directors, etc. to bring their ideas, concerns, and energies to a broad-based Community Participation Advisory Board. To get started:

- *Recruit individuals from varied perspectives* – Board members, Center leadership, and supervisors will be important contributors; peer staff and past and current members are key as well, and contact a few leaders of community groups (e.g., clergy, town council, etc.) for their involvement.

- *Develop a clear agenda for your first – and second – meetings* – you will want to review the basics of community participation again, but be clear about the roles you want the advisory board to play (e.g., redefining the agency's mission; monitoring ongoing progress; etc.).

- *Define a 'community participation planning process'* – the Advisory Board might want to define a 'community participation planning process that outlines (for members, staff, and community agencies) how the agency intends to proceed toward promoting community participation.

- *Focus on funding – y*our Board may be helpful in raising some funds to support your community participation efforts, such as encouraging philanthropic organizations to offer financial support for a 'community participation scholarship' fund to help meet the costs of participation.

5. Establish a Speakers' Bureau on Community Participation. The most effective spokespersons for community participation are likely to be participants themselves – members who are actively engaged in the community as well as community members who have enjoyed the experience of broadening their contacts with your Center. You could:

- *Recruit members willing to share their experiences* – you will find that many of those who are successful in connecting to the community are eager to share their experiences, both with other members and with community groups.

- *Recruit staff* – Center staff may be eager to talk about both their own experiences building their personal community connections *and* the experiences of members with whom they have worked to achieve their individual community participation goals.

- *Recruit community members* – employers are most easily persuaded by other employers, congregations by other religious leaders, recreation programs by other leaders in sports programs: find those who will become your 'community ambassadors' and put them to work.

- *Develop training for your speakers* – while many individuals may be willing and enthusiastic about sharing their experiences, almost everyone could use some help in developing a presentation, focusing on key points, responding to concerns, etc., so plan to offer some support.

Develop Pilot Programs

Pilot programs – an initial effort to focus on community participation with a few members or focusing on a single domain of community like, such as work, school, play, or pray – can be an excellent first step: it provides staff, members, Center leadership, and the community – a glimpse of both the challenges and the possibilities of community participation. You might:

6. Start With a Handful of Interested Members. Begin informal discussions – in either small groups or in one-to-one counseling sessions – about community participation, and then help each member establish his/her priorities, develop an implementation plan, agree on both staff *and* client responsibilities, and monitor progress. Why not:

- *Focus on 5 – 10 members, or a 5% sample of Center attendees* – you may want to work with only 5-10 members at a time, or perhaps have each direct service staff selects one or two members to focus on, or develop a 5% random sample of those attending the program regularly.

- *Discuss community participation with selected members* – in some cases, one-to-one conversations will be appropriate, while others may prefer small group discussions, but the key point is to *invite* members to participate in the process.

> *proceed informally* – in your discussions with individual members, try to identify each person's own goals – what types of participation would *they* like to pursue, which local organizations do *they* want to be a part of, what resources do *they* have to help them in this process.

develop an action plan – develop an informal but individua plan that includes responsibilities for the service recipient, staff, other sources of natural support (family, friends, etc.), and what you feel you can ask target organizations to provide.

set some timelines – implementation planning should always include a timeline that articulates what should be done (and by whom) by a certain date, and it will be important, even in informal situations, to review and revise those timelines as your project moves forward.

7. Utilize the Temple University Community Participation Measure. A more formal approach would make use of the Temple University Community Participation Measure, which helps members (either on their own or with staff assistance) assess their own current level of participation, determine their priority interests, figure out the types of support that are available to them, and develop a plan. Try to:

- *Download the Temple University Community Participation Measure (TUCP)* – the TUCP and support documents are available at http://www.tucollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/Peer-facilitated-community-inclusion-ACCESSIBLE.pdf.

- *Practice using the TUCP* – the TUCP may look overwhelming at first – to both staff and members – but is actually relatively easy to use: staff may want to set aside time to use it with one another first, to better prepare themselves for discussions with service participants.

- *Develop a data base using the TUCP* – one way to continue to track your program's initial success in your first community participation initiative is to use the TUCP periodically so that you can assess each individual's progress in connecting to life in their communities.

- *Make sure staff check-in with one another periodically* – even in a small program, Center staff can benefit from setting aside some time to discuss with one another their progress in using the TUCP - sharing problems, effective strategies, community resources discovered, and successes.

8. Focus Your Pilot Efforts on One Life 'Domain.' There are many aspects of community life – 'domains' – your members may choose to pursue, but your Center may choose to focus on one or two key domains (e.g., employment, religious congregations, recreation programs) where the agency already has established contacts, and where a 'welcoming community' may already exists. You could:

- *Education and/or employment* – many members want to return to school or find a job, and focusing your initial efforts on one or both of these domains (e.g., contacting local colleges and training programs, working with local employers) can be very helpful.

- *Religion and spirituality* – surveys of members often reveal an enduring interest in re-connecting to religious or spiritual groups, and staff efforts to work with different local spiritual groups or local congregations may open doors for broader community connections.

- *Public and private recreational programs* – contacting local public recreation programs (most county 'parks departments' have a variety of programs) and private resources (like local Y's) can open a variety of opportunities for healthy interactions.

- *Civic associations and local hobby groups* – you may want to assess the prospects for involving members as contributing members of local civic associations, or as participants in a few local hobby groups (e.g., book clubs, travel groups, etc.).

9. Connect to a Local Psychiatric Hospital. Your program may want to develop a strong connection to local psychiatric hospitals to discuss how you can connect to and support individuals in getting engaged in meaningful community activities upon discharge. Consider if you could:

- *Contact the hospital* – the first step ought to include connecting to hospital leadership and units, but be prepared to provide educational opportunities on community participation and your plans to help current patients do more than just 'live' in local settings.

- *Develop the resources to work with patients while they are still in the hospital* – quite a few Centers are able to begin to work with patients while they are still in the hospital, with a focus on assessing their community participation goals and the action steps needed to reach those goals.

- *Share success stories* – both hospital staff and their current patients who are on track for discharge may need to hear from your Center's members about their experiences in connecting to community life.

- *Establish procedures for connecting post-discharge* – the first weeks after discharge are often difficult, so you need a clear plan for your program to support re-integration into the community with each individual and to start the process of building community participation opportunities.

Provide Staff Training

A key part of moving forward – of making community participation central to the operation of your Center's programs – is to insure that staff have the skills to work effectively with members in this new arena. Both initial, intensive training and ongoing support and supervision will be essential aspects of providing staff with the confidence to work effectively with members. Try to:

10. Revise Job Descriptions. For many Centers, their first step is to revise the job descriptions of the staff who are expected to work on community participation with members: many staff are very busy already, and they need to know the Center understands that working with members on community participation will require a new approach to their daily responsibilities. You can:

- *Review and revise current job descriptions* – many staff have already found themselves very busy simply keeping up with members' most basic needs, and finding the balance between these ongoing tasks and their new roles promoting community participation will be essential.

- *Consider creating 'community inclusion specialists'* – you might want to convert some staff positions into 'community inclusion specialists' (or establish a new role for new staff) and place community participation at the center of their responsibilities.

- *Develop community participation job descriptions focusing on assessment, prioritizing, resource assessment, connecting to the community, and supporting members* – your new job descriptions should take a comprehensive look at the roles staff should play in supporting members.

- *Make these new responsibilities clear to everyone* – whether these are new tasks for current staff or for new hires, everyone at the Center – leadership, supervisors, other staff, and each members – needs to know that at least some Center staff have new responsibilities.

11. Schedule Ongoing Staff Training. Training staff for new roles as community inclusion workers is unlikely to be successful as a 'one-shot' event: plan on a *series* of training programs that insure staff are familiar with the concepts of community inclusion, understand the varied roles they will need to play to support members, and reflect on their own experiences in the community. Plan to:

- *Schedule both introductory and ongoing training programs* – staff need an introduction to the basics of community participation, the skills required to assist members in establishing and achieving their goals, and the roles staff can play in community participation plan implementation.

- *Insure that the training programs includes opportunities for staff interaction* – staff may already have strong feelings about their own opportunities for and experiences with community participation, and helping staff explore their own perspectives can be very helpful.

- *Reconvene trained staff regularly* – the training program should include ongoing opportunities – biweekly or monthly – for staff and trainers to review their experiences in working on community participation, sharing both problems and innovative strategies with one another.

- *Ask your Center's community inclusion staff to regularly assess the program's progress:* the Center needs to periodically hear from its community participation staff about how things are going, not only for their members but also for staff members themselves.

12. Focus on Your Supervisors. Direct service staff will need strong support from their immediate supervisors as they move the community participation agenda forward: they need to know both that the Center values their work, and that they can turn to supervisors for support and guidance as they face new community participation challenges in their day-to-day work. Make sure you:

- *Train your supervisors* – it may be useful to ensure you have provided training to the agency's supervisors before beginning direct service staff training, so that peer workers do not get inconsistent messages about the importance of their new work.

- *Ask supervisors to take the lead in working with community groups* – supervisors are likely to be more informed about and supportive of community participation if they are the ones who are making presentations – and asking for support, from community groups.

- *Develop a 'community participation supervisors support network'* – supervisors need support too, and providing opportunities for them to talk with other supervisors – within your Center or in other settings – can be very helpful in building their competence and commitment to the program.

- *Contact other Centers involved in promoting community participation* – you may want to explore whether other Centers in your state or across the nation are working on community participation (many are!) and find ways to develop ongoing supportive connections with them.

Develop Welcoming Communities

New initiatives *within* your agency are important parts of promoting community participation, but Centers must also connect to and work with individuals and organizations in the community – the congregations and colleges, sports programs and civic associations, employer groups and social events that make local life so vibrant. To create more welcoming community settings, plan to:

13. Present on Community Participation to Community Groups. While many community groups do provide support to your Center and to groups of members – special programs, food banks, free tickets to a group of members – your Center needs to help community groups develop ways to welcome *individual* members as participants like everyone else and help address barriers that limit their participation. You could:

- *Schedule speaking opportunities to community groups on community participation* – many groups will make time for a brief presentation, so be clear about how much information you can provide, organize your powerpoints, and plan to follow up with more information and specific requests.

- *Plan a 'Listening Tour' with community groups* – to convincingly convey to community groups that your Center is interested in hearing from them, plan a 'listening tour' in which your purpose is to hear from community groups with regard to their concerns <u>and</u> the possibilities of collaboration.

- *Develop a list of the opportunities each community group can pursue to become more of a welcoming community* – talk to interested groups about what they can do to respond to the interests of individual members (rather than 'group' programs) to facilitate their participation.

- *Create an ongoing support group for key community participation champions* – as your Center's community participation programs move forward, find ways to bring together and reward the individuals in your community who are this initiative's best 'champions'.

14. Identify Community Participation Opportunities. The more you know about the range of opportunities for community participation – and especially in those 'domains' of community life that members want to explore – the more likely it is that you can find a 'match' between service recipient interests and community possibilities. Try to:

- *Develop a staff/service recipient committee to develop a list of community participation possibilities* – staff and members can work together to develop a reasonably comprehensive list of the opportunities in the community – congregations, employers, colleges, recreation programs, etc.

- *Explore 'what it takes' to participate in each group* – your community participation committee can also provide basic information on each possibility: what does it cost to join, when does the group meet, who should be contacted ahead of time, how to resolve transportation issues, etc.

- *Discuss the issue of 'disclosure' with members* - some members are comfortable if they are identified as participants in the Center, while others would prefer to 'fly under the radar' and join community activities without revealing their experiences with mental health issues.

- *Ask community groups to publicize their community participation activities* – some of your community groups may want to 'fly under the radar' as well, but others may be happy to let the broader community know why and how they have made a commitment to this new direction.

15. Marshall the Resources of Your Community. Every community has a wealth of resources that can be marshalled to support individuals who need assistance in participating in community life. Tapping into those resources not only expands opportunities for members but also builds community awareness of the need for greater inclusiveness. See if you can:

- *Develop a transportation plan* – in many settings poor 'transportation' options are a significant and costly barrier to broadening members' engagement, and working with public transportation authorities, private services like Lyft, and other groups can encourage greater support.

- *Work with other public agencies to build cooperative relationships* – public agencies (e.g., local parks and recreation departments, community colleges and technical schools) – all have the capacity to do more to welcome individuals with mental illnesses into their ongoing activities.

16. Explore Funding Opportunities With Community Groups. Community groups and philanthropic individuals should be encouraged to provide financial support to your Center's community participation initiatives, shifting from grants for operations or group activities to funds that support genuine 'participation.' Try to:

- *Talk with philanthropic individuals and local foundations about support* – local foundations can support hiring 'community inclusion specialists,' or establishing a new scholarship fund to support the real costs of community participation (e.g., dues, transportation, etc.).

- *Talk with community groups about possible contributions they can make* – local groups may want to waive their usual 'dues' for participation, or support the costs of an individual's joining them on a trip, or provide funds toward tuition costs or any necessary equipment needs for sports, etc.

- *Develop a community fair or an auction event to raise community participation funds* – your development office may already have some plans underway, but see if you can encourage them to focus on raising funds specifically to support the costs of community inclusion.

- *'Repurpose' some public funds* – a few Centers have developed creative ways to use case management dollars or Medicaid funding or other grants to support the emerging need for community participation programming.

17. Develop Mentoring Programs. Another excellent pathway to encouraging individuals and groups in the community to support participation is to sponsor 'mentoring programs' – designed to link an individual community member with a service recipient with a common interest, with the community member serving as a 'mentor' or guide to community activities. See if you could:

- *Search (google) for mentoring programs across the country* – there are many excellent mentoring programs, and guides to establishing and maintaining them, that focus on establishing mutually beneficial relationships and/or focus on community participation.

- *Seek organizational sponsorship for mentors* – a local congregation may have a number of congregants who want to volunteer as mentors, and so too may a community college, a civic association, or other groups: start contacting a few key organizations to find out who's interested.

- *Provide training and supervision for your mentors* – the role of community mentor is demanding, and your program should provide a series of initial training programs and some form of ongoing support and supervision to make this work.

- *Assess your mentoring program's operations and success* – you will need to continuously assess the success of your mentoring initiatives, asking mentors themselves, as well as your Center's members in the program, about its operations and outcomes.

Highlight Your Successes

Nothing builds greater enthusiasm for community participation better than your initial successes: your Center may be pursuing only the 'first steps' outlined above, but letting funders, Center leaders and direct service workers, members, *and the community* know about your work and about your successes is the best way to insure a thriving program. Think about adopting one of these approaches:

18. Develop Data. You can make a strong case for the possibility and impact of community participation programming by developing strong data that demonstrate that people with mental illnesses really 'should, could, and would' be engaged in the life of their neighborhoods if given a chance, the resources, and the support to do so. See if you can:

- *Develop a system for tracking service recipient interests and community participation outcomes* – you could develop a system for tracking the kinds of community activities members would like to pursue and their success at community engagement, and share the data widely.

- *Develop some qualitative examples* – you can bring together members for 'before and after' discussions of their interests in and experiences with community participation initiatives, and share these results as widely as possible as well.

- *Explore the 'evaluation resources' of local colleges and universities* – many local schools have students looking for an opportunity – a project – to collect, analyze, and present data on program effectiveness, and perhaps they will find your Center's program the perfect fit for them.

- *Present your 'data' in a variety of settings* – you can use both quantitative and qualitative data to present to your Center's Board and to community programs, or to develop journal articles or conference presentations.

19. Design a Traditional Public Relations Campaign. Get the word out – both about your community participation plans and your program's outcomes - by designing a "public relations" initiative, taking advantage of all of the usual information outlets in your neighborhood. You could:

- *Talk with local information outlets about feature stories* – you may want to talk to the editor of a local paper, the news directors at local television stations, or the features chief at a local magazine about focusing on your Center's connection to community groups.

- *Plan a community fair on community participation* – plan a community event yourself or host a table at a local community fair to make sure everyone knows what you are doing and how successful you have been, and to seek community volunteers.

- *Invite community groups to participate in your Center's programs* – sponsor a baseball game, with Center and community teams, or an arts program inviting both Center and community displays, to begin the process of connecting the community to your Center's individual members.

- *Use awards events to highlight successes* – sponsor a dinner and provide awards to successful members, local organizations that have worked hard to create welcoming communities, and – especially – individuals in your communities who have been especially helpful.

20. Utilize Social Media. Traditional printed media and other similar strategies for getting the word out about your efforts only go so far, and you may want to utilize social media to make sure you reach the widest possible audience with your community participation goals, spotlight successful members, and focus on community partnerships. Try to:

- *Be there on social media* – help staff, members, and community organizations to post information – and pictures – about their community participation activities, to provide a sense to the community that this is now a part of everyday neighborhood life.

- *Develop your own website* – provide opportunities for your Center's staff and members and individuals in the community to talk about their experiences with community participation and to highlight successful members and local community champions.

- *Use storytelling techniques* – everyone loves a story, and there are opportunities for you to organize 'storytelling' events in your community that focus on the experiences of those who have overcome isolation to lead fuller and more satisfying lives as full participants in their communities.

- *Use social media to highlight other program successes from throughout the country* – your social media activity can focus on your own Center, but take some time to let participants know about other initiatives throughout the country, perhaps sparking new ideas in your own setting.

Concluding Thoughts

But, of course, you may have some other ideas about how best to begin promoting community participation within your Center. And, of course, you may have already begun working on one or another of the initiatives outlined above, and are ready to take the next step – taking on a bigger project or developing more long-range goals. If so, congratulations, and make sure you are letting everyone know about your work and about the changing landscape of community participation for persons with mental illnesses. The ideas above may be useful next steps for your Center, or a thoughtful way to at least take a first step - or two.

A Last Piece of Advice – Start Now / Broadcast Your Success / Keep Going