

HELLO.

Welcome to the 8<sup>th</sup> Australasian Clubhouse Conference here in Manly!

The weather is 27 degrees so if you have time you can take a walk along beautiful Manly beach.

My name is Stephanie Helich and I'm going to talk a bit of my experience of Pioneer Clubhouse and then I will read a short poem to express my experience of clubhouse over the years.

I came to Pioneer Clubhouse 6 years ago with friends who are consumers. I was nervous and apprehensive about arriving at this clubhouse as I didn't know what to expect but I remember on that 1<sup>st</sup> day the atmosphere was buzzing and there was a happy vibe. The consumers were warm to me and I began to feel welcomed. I was blown away by the consumers and staffs positive attitude. I recall thinking "a service for mental health consumers..... it can't be this positive..... but it was. I was put at ease from the consumers. There was a lot to take in and learn. There were new people to meet so I first began working on an Individual Service Plan which was supported by the Employment and Education Unit at the time.

I found this to be a great help to set some goals specifically employment focussed and clubhouse could assist me in achieving these goals.

I felt I was at a service that had a positive and realistic attitude towards mental health which was quite different to some of attitudes I had previously experienced. There was no stigma and I noticed the empowerment that was building confidence in the members. I began attending Pioneer Clubhouse daily alongside some inspirational consumers and staff. I went to meetings and participated in the Work Ordered Day.

If people know me they know I love to socialise which is an important component in recovery of mental health and I was often seen outside in the smoking area instead of working, but I think socialising is just as important.

I was encouraged to join the Balgowlah R.S.L. club, just close by to Pioneer Clubhouse in a TEP role which was 8 hours per week over 2 days. It was a hospitality role which I seemed to ease into as again there was a lot of social interaction at the site and the staff and management were always respectful and treated me as an equal. This was a fantastic confidence building experience and opened a lot of employment doors for me in hospitality.

After my employment at the R.S.L. club I worked part time in the community and attended Pioneer Clubhouse working in the kitchen and café unit. I was strengthening my hospitality skills and found working in the unit to be of great benefit to me. I thoroughly enjoyed working with other consumers and again enjoyed socialising.

Over this time I felt my relationships with other consumers was strengthening so strong in fact that I began dating a wonderful man named Richard who is doing a fantastic job of taking photos here today. We began to hang out a lot and decided that spending time together was something we wanted long term so 2.5 years ago we got hitched!!! And we haven't looked back.

I've been so grateful to be a part of a clubhouse here in Sydney which has been my stepping stone back into working in the community. I've met and are proud to know so many different members of the community and hear there experiences.

I currently have independent employment which I have held for 16 months and I also speak to people in the community about my experience with my condition and mental health related issues.

I love the clubhouse model. I think its wonderful and extremely useful. I believe in it strongly and it has worked really well for me. The model has empowered me and given me numerous opportunities within the working community. I know new members coming to our clubhouse that work and working through the model and are recovering. Its exciting and so strong.

I would now love to read you a poem which describes how I feel about my experience at Pioneer Clubhouse.

Begin, arrive, a friendly vibe.

A new environment, supportive, Creative Learning.

Working together, Socialising, Connecting and Mending.

Days are challenging, Daily greetings, along side meetings.

Relationships made, bridges been built, meaningful work, flushes out the hurt.

Confidence building, employment opportunities, new horizons, forward moving, illness improving.

Close friends, working together, positive attitudes with plenty of gratitude.

Hunger for knowledge, diminishing symptoms, medication resolving, moving forward.

Forever grateful, community involvement, learning and healing, lifelong positive feelings.

To all my friends in the clubhouse movement..... I hope you get a lot out the wonderful Plenarys and workshops and have fun too..... and have a great time here in Manly.

Thankyou.