

# Pathways Clubhouse help builds confidence after mental health crisis

ERIN ELLIS, VANCOUVER SUN 12.29.2015 |



Jamie Cornish at Pathways Clubhouse in Richmond,. Cornish, 38, has been coming to Pathways ever since he was released from Riverview Hospital as a young man with schizophrenia. He now works in the kitchen of Richmond's Cactus Club three days a week and has been accepted into VCC's Asian culinary arts program in 2016. *ARLEN REDEKOP / VANCOUVER SUN*

Jamie Cornish may be an over-qualified prep cook and dishwasher, but that's OK by him.

"The steady routine of employment has really helped me deal with schizophrenia," he explained recently. "It takes my mind off it."

“I have goals and I can achieve them,” says the quiet-spoken 38-year-old, who has earned an entry-level Cook 1 certificate.

Cornish has been a member of Pathways Clubhouse in Richmond for 15 years since he was discharged from Riverview Hospital in Coquitlam after treatment for delusional thinking. Living in the big city, away from his family in Bella Coola on the Central Coast, his life could have taken a bleak turn.

Instead, he has his own subsidized apartment and works three days a week in the kitchen of Richmond’s Cactus Club restaurant, adding extra shifts in busy December.

He’s keen to let his friends at the clubhouse know he’s been accepted into Vancouver Community College’s Asian culinary arts program next year and has been offered the chance to become a line cook, something he’d like to do if the stress level isn’t too high.

“I think it’s the next step.”

A gradual, measured approach is the hallmark of Pathways and similar groups that are part of Clubhouse International, a movement for people with mental illnesses started in New York during the late '40s as psychiatric hospitals began closing and releasing patients.

Pathways executive director Dave MacDonald, who has worked there since it opened in 1987, says new members are often too overwhelmed to even speak when they first arrive. Over time, they’re asked to take on small tasks that are broken into manageable chunks: stapling photocopies, sorting clothes for the tiny thrift shop or putting supplies in their mini-store that sells chocolate bars and toiletries.

“It’s the process that’s important, not the result,” says MacDonald.

With the participation of 14 businesses in Richmond, 40 members worked more than 7,000 hours in 2014-15, earning a total of \$67,000. Many of the positions are janitorial, but also include kitchen help or labourers. Another 35 members have independent employment that they maintain on their own.

Pathways has about 350 active members now and 70 typically visit each day. There’s a staff of 18, but half work outside the clubhouse in housing and employment.

(Not-for-profit Coast Mental Health in Vancouver runs a clubhouse based on the same model, but is accredited through Accreditation Canada. It has 520 active members and sees 180 of them each day. About 200 members earned hourly wages last year, mainly in outdoor cleanup.)

The clubhouse model purposely doesn't have enough staff to do all the work needed to run it. That means the \$1 and \$2 homemade lunches served each day come out of a kitchen full of members who take orders, prepare and serve it to other members who drop in.

"It's not about getting lunch out exactly on time. It's about making it together. That's where the recovery takes place," MacDonald says.

The current Pathways Clubhouse is in a light industrial area of central Richmond that's giving way to condo buildings. The City of Richmond has already pledged a new home to Pathways as part of an ambitious social housing project on Granville Avenue that will bring five non-profits together in the same complex with 129 subsidized apartments in 2017.

Safe, dependable housing can mark a turning point for new members.

Andy Birch, 63, says finding a decent apartment through Pathways 10 years ago was a relief. A former photocopier technician and salesman, Birch developed late-onset schizophrenia at 43, the same age it struck his mother who committed suicide when he was a teen.

He lost his marriage, his job and a home.

"Before I got the subsidy, I was in some pretty rough housing. I used to hear gunshots, there were fights outside. It was not a place for getting better."

Pathways has its own 24-unit apartment building, but also oversees more than 100 privately owned apartments throughout Richmond that are subsidized by B.C. Housing, in this case, for people with mental illnesses.

After keeping to himself for years, Birch began to help out at the clubhouse. Small duties turned to bigger ones.

Now he's on the Clubhouse International committee that conducts accreditations, travelling to locations in Hawaii, San Diego and New York on his own.

“I’ve come along way from the person I was when I first joined Pathways. I was afraid to be by myself on a bus.

“In the last five years, I’ve enjoyed life. For the first 15 years of schizophrenia, I didn’t enjoy life, in fact I tried to end it.”

Birch tells his story at other clubhouses when he travels and says hearing about personal achievements can mean a lot to members who can’t picture a brighter day.

“I tell them you can get better from mental illness. You don’t get 100-per-cent, but you sure get better than you were.”

Watch a video about Pathways Clubhouse [here](#):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5fRV2OHgXw>

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Coast Clubhouse, 295 East 11th Avenue, Vancouver

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Info: [coastmentalhealth.com/our-centres](http://www.coastmentalhealth.com/our-centres)

<http://www.coastmentalhealth.com/our-centres>

Fraser Health’s clubhouse programs:

Abbotsford, Chilliwack and Agassiz/Hope Clubhouses; Burnaby; Delta; Langley; Mission; New Westminster; Pitt Meadows/Maple Ridge; Surrey; Tri-Cities

For more information and links to all sites go to: <http://bit.ly/1UHaJdU>

<http://www.fraserhealth.ca/your-care/mental-health-and-substance-use/mental-health-services/clubhouses/mental-health-clubhouse-programs>

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**Lori Edwards** · Works at VCH Mental Health & Addictions Services

Arrowhead Clubhouse in Sechelt is also part of the Clubhouse International Community, and is a thriving, dynamic environment for adults with mental illness. We are very grateful to have Arrowhead in our community.

Like · Reply · 15 January 2016 09:58



**Lea Bianchin** · Enthusiastic Career Seeker: Mental Health Worker &/or Admin/Transcribing at Enthusiastic Career Seeker: Mental Health Worker &/or Admin/Transcribing

I'm so happy to hear this!

Coincidentally, they had a couple of open positions this past month. & guess who enthusiastically applied? Me!

@MentalHealthLea on twitter

#sicknotcrazy #sicknotweak #invisibleillness #stigmakills #weareallequal #livedexperience

Like · Reply · 30 December 2015 12:34 · Edited



**Clàudia Vidiella Badell** · Producció, administració at BSO

We're a group of students of Barcelona University (spain) studying how to start a Clubhouse and this article helps us alot, thanks

Like · Reply · 29 December 2015 01:26



**Jackie Powell**

Great Article! Parents are working hard to bring a Clubhouse Interntional to the City of Victoria. This is a wonderful program - this is not a bandaid.

Like · Reply · 👍 2 · 28 December 2015 14:46

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