

# WORKING FOR RECOVERY

Two Unique Strategies that Promote Employment

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# Working for Recovery: Two Unique Strategies that Promote Employment

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## Abstract

Houselink Community Homes combines work, supportive housing and inclusive community to promote and help people recover from mental illness and addiction. This report reviews two strategies that can help people living with mental health and substance abuse issues find work. The first strategy involves personally supporting Houselink members in their search for jobs. The second strategy involves Houselink employees sharing their lived experiences through the organization's Inclusive Employment Strategy. While implementing both of these strategies, Houselink found that members who are supported in their search for work acquire better social skills, as well as feel more confident and competent overall. Houselink also learned ways to improve the organization, which can inform similar programs currently in development. This review gives voice to the experience of both members and employees alike.

## Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

Houselink Community Homes, a supportive housing organization located in Toronto, Canada, operates according to a mental health recovery framework, wherein housing and food security, social supports and work are recognized as key contributors to good mental health. Research has shown that housing is particularly fundamental to recovery (Rog 2004). Supportive housing creates a sense of security that enables members to safely engage in recovery.

Promoting a workplace that supports mental health is a crucial objective for the organization. This intention is clear in Houselink's commitment to supporting inclusive employment – that is, purposely hiring people with lived experience, including members and former members of the program.

By considering the experiences of members and staff, using both survey and focus groups and reviewing related agency policies and procedures, this article examines two employment strategies: Working for Recovery and Inclusive Employment. Working for Recovery is a Houselink employment support program that helps members identify and seek employment in “alternative” and general labour market positions. Inclusive Employment refers to Houselink's commitment to hiring permanent staff with lived experience. This review was conducted in order to align a supportive employment program with the principles of recovery, assess the effectiveness of the program through the experiences of staff and members and develop ideas that can inform other programs in development.



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# Background

## Mental health recovery

Recovery is a way of understanding people's mental health and substance abuse problems. Many authors describe the principles of recovery (Anthony 2000, 2004; Copeland 1997; Deegan 1988; Everett 2000; Farkas 2005; Jacobson 2004; Mead and Copeland 2000; Onken et al. 2002), including hope and healing, empowerment and autonomy, a focus on wellness and resilience, commitment to learning and transformation, and involvement in peer support and self-help. Recovery represents a radical redistribution of responsibility (Storey 2011). Houselink is committed to these principles and endeavours to address the interrelated issues of recovery, housing and support in their programs.

While recovery is a process of personal change for individuals, it also relies on relationships (Anthony 2004; Copeland 1997; Deegan 1988; Freire 1994; Jacobson 2004; Onken et al. 2002; Storey et al. 2008; Storey 2007, 2011). Social activities that invite connection and community are essential to recovery. Member feedback confirms that support networks promote hope, inclusion, voice, dignity and empowerment. Houselink's support includes working with members on the day-to-day practicalities of living independently and choosing services. While this particular review relates recovery supports to work, Houselink's programs and supports promote reciprocal benefit.

## Work and recovery

There is evidence to suggest that supportive employment programs result in more work and longer employment for people living with mental health problems (Bond et al. 2001; Bond 2004; Cook et al. 2008; Crowther 2001; Lehman et al. 2002). The greater the preparation and support

provided, the better the employment outcomes (Cook et al. 2008). Evidence specifically points to work as an activity that promotes and supports recovery. In this report, outcomes are not only linked to employment, but also to an increase in personal comfort and enhanced social networking (Bergmans et al. 2009; Dunn et al. 2008; Le Boutillier et al. 2011), as well as improved personal development, organization and focus (McGurk and Mueser 2004; McGurk et al. 2010). Personal development promotes skills related to effective work, including accountability, focus, interpersonal comfort, confidence and competence — all of which instill hope, a core feature of recovery.

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Despite strategies aimed at promoting employment, such as Making it Work (2002) and various government initiatives

(e.g., Mental Health Commission of Canada 2011), there are limited social policies that encourage the employment of people with mental health problems. In its Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, the Ontario Ministry of Health (Flynn 2010) has recommended two strategies similar to those Houselink has adopted. For instance, the Select Committee similarly recognizes that “employers with an understanding of mental illness and addictions can provide an environment within which employees dealing with those issues are more likely to succeed and thrive.” The committee also states that a “job can do much to improve a person's financial situation, lessen their dependence on social assistance and, most importantly, bolster self-esteem at a critical point on the road to recovery.”

## **Systemic barriers to employment**

The numerous barriers to gainful employment are not well understood outside the immediate field of supported employment. Programs that privilege gainful employment as the only viable outcome lack appreciation for the fact that people with mental health problems require special accommodations. Experiences of marginalization and poverty further compromise people's comfort and confidence for work. Work, in many instances, is tenuous and interruptions can have significant consequences.

Disability benefit programs encourage recipients to participate in work at a level at which they can succeed. Integrating employment income with social assistance income is a challenging process. On the surface, encouragement to try working without losing benefits should encourage people who are building their skills; however, this contradicts the experience of many people described in "What stops us from working?" by Stapleton et al. (2011). A prominent fear involves housing security as it relates to Rent-Geared-to-Income guidelines. If work is episodic, then income is episodic – and so housing becomes episodic. For many, the stakes are too high. People with mental health and addiction issues have fought too hard to get to a place of stability and security to risk it all again.

Stapleton reiterates the episodic nature of work for some people and the importance of flexible and accommodated work that is not typically available in the general labour market. The same sentiment and experience is described in the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario (2012). The report recommends simplifying calculations and the process for reporting income, as well as changes that ensure subsidized or supportive housing. Both of these reports also recognize the costs of working, such as childcare, transportation and other personal costs, like suitable clothing.

These observations are consistent with Houselink's inclusive employment strategy and support the use of an organizational environment that is already sensitive to, and respectful of, mental health experience as a useful skill for employment. Similarly, the above descriptions of employment supports are consistent with the role of Houselink staff, who encourage and support members seeking to sustain employment. These reports also resonate with member feedback regarding their response to working. Houselink is thus grappling with the issue of how to build jobs that are suitable and meaningful for both workers with mental health problems and society in general.

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# Methods

Houselink's employment strategies were reviewed using a content analysis of its relevant policies and procedures for employment support, including those related to program descriptions, recruitment, monitoring and relevant internal documents. In order to give a voice to the experiences of staff and members, four focus groups were conducted with (1) management staff, (2) members who became employees and staff with lived experience who are not previous members, (3) member-workers supported in the Working for Recovery Program and (4) employment support staff. Two feedback consultations for staff, who were also former members, were also conducted and this information was passed on to the board of directors.

Focus groups allowed participants to respond to open-ended questions about their experiences and give opinions in settings with their peers. The semi-structured format of the focus groups also allowed participants to lead the conversation, discussing the issues most important to them. In order to get the widest range of responses regarding the experience of working for Houselink, all staff were invited to contribute to an online survey, which had a very high response rate of 60 percent.

A researcher external to the agency led the evaluation team with a Houselink staff member who has lived experience with mental health issues. Using a leader external to the agency lessens the possibility of coercion to participate and helps maintain the confidentiality of the participants' responses.

Informed participation and confidentiality were of central importance to the program evaluation. People were told that their participation or lack thereof would not affect either the services they receive or their employment at Houselink. Survey participants were also told that their responses would be anonymous, that no identifying

information would be collected. In the survey, participants were invited to indicate if their word-for-word responses could be included in any presentations or publications emerging from the study. Participants in the focus groups were instructed to withhold what they discussed with anyone outside of the group. However, they were informed of the inherent confidentiality risk of sharing in a group setting, and were asked to only share as much as they were comfortable with sharing. Focus group participants were informed that no identifying information would be used in the report either. Only those respondents who provided permission are directly quoted in this report.

# Findings

## Review 1:

### **Working for Recovery program**

Working for Recovery is an employment support program provided by Houselink that helps members identify and seek employment in their community labour market. Houselink has also developed an innovative partnership with an employment agency where members are supported in their work.

Partnering with an employment agency offers Houselink an opportunity to develop and shape jobs that are flexible and relevant to members and the organization's own housing community. In this unique partnership, Houselink contributes to job recruitment, workplace supervision and general support through the Working for Recovery program. These jobs include tasks that Houselink requires such as maintenance and landscaping, as well as positions coordinating and delivering the social and recreational programs that are essential to recovery, such as the community kitchen and drop-in.

These jobs are accommodated: the hours are flexible and support is available to change or adapt one's work based on ability. Houselink prefers to make these jobs available to members since they are flexible and easily tailored to accommodate their specific needs. Members are aware that these jobs are "real"; they are not make-work. One of the goals of the program is to allow participants to experience the value and benefit of working without the intention that one has to become permanently employed. However, there are a number of people for whom this work is a stepping stone to permanent employment.

### *Recruitment and member support*

There are several ways for members to learn and decide about work. Information about job opportunities are first presented to new members and then discussed on an ongoing basis with housing and peer-support workers. Job

postings are circulated in the monthly newsletter. Employment support staff may target members already in their program for certain positions based on suitability. There are also informal processes to learn about opportunities for work at organizational meetings and through word of mouth within the community. Ideally, in order to maximize the consideration of, and engagement in, employment opportunities, members must understand that work is possible and that support is available for them to explore their interests and aptitudes.

Houselink is also exploring ways to formalize conversations that encourage members to consider work as a part of their recovery planning and invite them to engage with the Working for Recovery program. Houselink expects that implementation of the Ontario Common Assessment of Need (OCAN) tool will formalize conversations that encourage members to consider work as a part of their recovery planning and invite them to engage with the Working for Recovery program. Compliance with OCAN reporting will provide some structure both in terms of Houselink's operation and monitoring interest and engagement in its services.

Employment facilitators work with members to provide support in the program. An employment support coordinator oversees all aspects of the program and provides specialized assessment and advice. The collective impression articulated by the employment staff during the focus group is that their goal is not necessarily to negotiate a conventional workplace for members. Rather, their goal is to help members find their comfort and competence levels at work and to use work as a tool to support personal change that may, or may not, lead to employment.

Working with employment support staff, members explore their strengths, skills and aptitude for work based on history and interest. Members are introduced to employment opportunities and

alternatives to conventional employment, including volunteering, as preparation for work. As a result, members often realize the benefits of paid and unpaid work and, particularly, how work supports recovery.

Houselink staff help members returning to work take into account the financial impact of working. If members decide that work will support their recovery, support is provided to set goals, develop resumes and establish references.

Coaching and support are provided to prepare for interviews and there is a focus on learning from these experiences. Employment support staff develop and share links to employment and promote negotiation and self-advocacy regarding workplace accommodations that will help enable successful employment for members.

According to feedback from the employment support staff during the focus groups, the core functions that comprise their support include encouragement, motivation, redirecting/ refocusing and practical feedback. The staff consider their key job functions to be “address[ing] the whole person” in order to build safe, trusting relationships; enhancing work-related skills and knowledge; offering practical suggestions about jobs; providing feedback and encouragement regarding performance; and supporting access to information, workplace instruction, and resources and training related to the job.

During the focus group with employment staff, they collectively agreed that their role is comprised of collaborating with members to “make sure the work is a good fit,” assess whether the member’s “performance is safe” and

determine if the “work is well done.” Together the employment support staff and members identify barriers to work and build ways to reduce/ overcome/work around them. The employment support staff promotes constructive feedback and celebrates successes. In response, members say that they “don’t feel like [their] job is on the line; it’s not a cutthroat market,” and that the experience “erased violent, negative memories of the workplace” at moments when they did not feel capable of working.

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*Social comfort, confidence and personal competence*

A core theme that emerged from the members’ focus groups is the impact that working has on them both personally and in their relationships with others. They report that they feel more positive and satisfied with life. In one member’s words, “I wake up and I like my life.” Members agreed that they feel better about themselves, which creates more confidence and self-esteem.

In addition, working has improved their organizational skills. Most members say that they now “prioritize [their] day” and “finish what [they] started.”

Others describe themselves as “more focused” and still others see themselves as “more results-oriented.” Members partly attribute these changes to taking responsibility for self-direction, including negotiating the “levels of support [that] fit” and “mak[ing their] own decisions.” As one member said, and several agreed, “I decide what [job and schedule] works for me.” In an extreme example, a member claimed, “Working at Houselink saved my life.”

Many other members describe feeling more hopeful. Hope is crucial to recovery; it motivates

and sustains personal growth and supports new relationships. Hope, self-esteem and self-respect contribute to the improved social comfort and competence that members describe.

Most members agree that they feel healthier since working. They have more energy and are more active. As one member stated, “I speak up for myself more.” Several other members agreed. Another member noted with satisfaction, “I feel like my work is appreciated.” The focus groups describe feeling more self-respect overall.

Social connection is another key element that supports recovery. Several members agreed that they go out more. They all indicate that they meet other people by working and have more things to talk about. Isolation is reduced and people feel more connected. Members enjoy the extra income noting that they are “not as short of cash.” Several members say they use their extra money to support social activities they might not otherwise be able to afford, such as going for a coffee or to a movie. One member described the importance of extra income in terms of being able to “get a gift for a friend.”

A positive experience noted in the focus groups was how members are able to “read” people and situations better. One member noted, “[I’m] more aware of myself in situations.” Members say that this skill allows them to respond to social interactions differently or, as noted by one participant, with “more respect.” A common response was, “I cope better with stress” and “I am less stressed.”

The theme that emerged during the conversations was members’ increased social maturity and personal comfort in new and difficult situations, which leads

to more confidence and “acceptance.” Staff also noticed developing social awareness, comfort and competence, including improved self-awareness, which in turn encouraged interpersonal respect and more work success and productivity. This cluster of skills and attitudes are often referred to in employment circles as “soft skills.”

Members also said, “Working is learning.” It enables them to increase their knowledge and skills and helps them gain practical experience. Participation in work training programs and work placements resulted in members saying they now “have more knowledge of resources.” Several members who had the opportunity to work in several fields state they can “do a variety of jobs.” These factors contribute to establishing a positive work history and resumé. Most members agreed that work provides a valuable structure and a sense of purpose.

In terms of the support provided by Houselink, members were impressed by how they could negotiate their schedules and level of support. Several members said their work is adjusted from day-to-day. They find the availability and flexibility of support important and effective. Members find the employment facilitators understand them, with one member noting, “They stick with me.”



The members clearly focus on keeping their job, too, as expressed in comments like there is “no cloud of fear” at work and “[making] mistakes [is] OK.” Members see the patience involved in workplace support as “bearing” with people as they learn to work. Nevertheless, members describe the support they receive as “caring and compassionate,” with a “focus on dignity.” Support

staff recognizes individual potential and are flexible; they negotiate with members over the level and type of support they need.

### *Social complexity*

Members described the many complications of “working where you live,” or public versus private information. There was lively discussion with member-workers on this topic, especially about personal information and what they term “gossip.” While they cite that work has increased their social networks and they enjoy more connection and comfort talking with others, they also note the complications of communal living. The dilemma about public versus private information is understandable given that members are working in close proximity to Houselink staff and are involved with other members in formal or work-related conditions. They are sometimes suspected of knowing more personal information than they do – and sometimes they know more personal information than they want to. The issue of boundaries is discussed in greater length below.

## **Review 2:**

### **Inclusive Employment strategy**

Houselink is committed to being an inclusive employer and there is strong agreement by employees that inclusive employment is correct and should continue. In the employee survey, thirty-two percent of respondents identify with a mental health or substance abuse history. According to one employee “it is very important that Houselink continues to hire people with lived experiences because it...gives people hope and credibility to our recovery approach.”

While employees appreciate that Houselink is

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tackling issues related to access, equity and discrimination, they also describe relational issues inherent in complex, inclusive workplaces. Two particular tensions arise related to these complexities: selection and management of employees and co-worker relationships. One

further tension also related to social relationships emerged involving employee relationships with members, particularly how employment alters these relationships.

### *Qualifications and skills*

In the employee survey, an underlying tension was revealed regarding perceived fairness in the selection and management of employees. It was reiterated in many responses that inclusive employment is appropriate when the person has the qualification and skills required to do the job as well as the lived experience that complements their skills. Countering these comments is the suggestion that personal lived experience is a skill in its own right, with one employee stating that “[personal lived experience] is indeed expertise and should be recognized as such.” Many of these tensions were acknowledged in less detail during the follow-up focus groups.

The tension regarding qualifications and skills affects how co-workers interact. Some employees with lived experience may not ask for advice or support regarding their work, fearing they may be seen as incapable. On the other hand, over-helpfulness can be intrusive and has been experienced as demeaning. Some employees choose not to correct or redirect the performance of co-workers with lived experience. The process of negotiating new relationships is seen as growing legitimate collegiality among co-workers.

Where workplace accommodation is an issue, it is a matter of co-workers not knowing or understanding the nature of the accommodation. This can lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding, especially related to skill or capacity. It was suggested that this dilemma might relate to being skillful in giving and receiving feedback. Unfortunately, the review did not ask how people feel in general about providing feedback to their co-workers regarding performance. It is very likely that the same discomfort exists for all parties.

The focus on qualifications and skills suggest, correctly or incorrectly, an underlying impression that personal lived experience is not valued in of itself. On the other hand, making lived experience a requirement, or applying it as an indicator for hiring, makes some employees without this experience feel as though they have nothing to contribute. Interestingly, on both sides there is evidence of a predominant either/or perception that seems to reduce the value of both professional and personal experiences. Nevertheless, there is openness to the tensions lurking within the staff group and a willingness to discuss and move forward with remedies.

Social and collegial relationships in the workplace  
Many employees with lived experience noted that they were treated “differently” and other co-workers corroborated this experience. More specifically, some employees with lived experience described exclusion from social and work activities and perceived inauthentic collegial relationships. Social exclusion primarily took the form of interrupted conversations, such as when employees with lived experience entered a room and all talking stopped, and the failure to invite them to group lunches and parties. When people feel excluded, resentment builds up.

Co-workers who do not identify as having mental health issues acknowledged these occurrences and they, too, expressed discomfort with them.

However, sensitivity to perceived confidentiality issues was identified as a potential alternate reason for interrupted conversations.

### *Relationship tensions*

Supporting recovery is primarily interpersonal. Effective co-worker relationships require a high degree of interpersonal comfort and skill and a trusting reciprocity that takes time and energy to build and nurture. There are two separate but related relationship tensions described by employees with lived experience: the experience of members and former members, and the experience of employees who disclose lived experience. In each instance, the employees’ relationships with co-workers and members are affected, albeit in varying ways. These tensions are unavoidable given the complex social relationships that exist in an environment where support and employment are intertwined.

When people who are, or have been, served by the organization, or people who have received similar services, are engaged in roles where they are colleagues to people with whom they have not historically held peer relationships, pre-existing power relations and information processes are upended, or should be upended. As one employee stated, the “goal in hiring people with lived experience [is a] commitment [that] speaks to the kind of community we always strive to create here at Houselink. As a health service provider, we are funded to provide ‘care’ to our members. That in itself creates a power differential...unpacking how that feels and how we can mitigate this power differential in our support role has to always be front and centre.”

This dilemma and the conversations related to it could be effectively approached with education, one which uses an anti-oppression lens that takes into account the following comment from the employee survey: “Who has power; how is it being used; and how are we treating people

differently [in ways] we may not be aware of?”

### *Transition from member to employee*

Employees who were previously Houselink members recall the difficult transition from member to employee. It is expected that over the course of about a year, from the time they become employed, members will begin the process of terminating supports provided by the organization. In part, this is a function of negotiating boundaries in relationships.

Members in transition especially noted a “loss of community” when Houselink housing and programs are withdrawn. Former members recommend introducing people to the normal and largely unavoidable tensions that are part of this transition at an early stage. Sharing the transition with peers, who have completed the shift from member-resident to employee, can also help people see their transition as common and navigable.

The transition to being a Houselink employee brings interpersonal tensions in their community circle. Misinterpretations about the nature of the relationships between former and current members may overcomplicate social relationships within the community. It is important for new member employees to realize they can keep their relationships with other members. This nuance regarding boundaries requires an open conversation to help people develop comfort and confidence, and dispel the black-and-white belief that pre-existing relationships must be severed.

Building this knowledge into member-to-employee transitions will reduce much social uncertainty. In most workplaces, people know more or less about their co-workers based on what they

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independently disclose. As noted by one respondent, “Policies and procedures provide due diligence[,] yet it is often easy to let bits of personal information slip in an innocent conversation.” In fact, during the review there was at least one such slip when an employee was referred to as having lived experience without prior independent disclosure.

Sharing information about co-workers, with or without their consent, is not uncommon in the workplace, but it clearly draws more attention in social service agencies where respect for privacy is at the forefront. In the following discussion, the idea of sharing or shielding information relates to interactions between co-workers and between employees and members. The relationships between employees who have personal lived experience — and especially those who are or have been members — is much more complex.

### *Boundaries*

Conventional boundaries are one of the social service and health care accountabilities that protect service users from harm. Boundaries are intended to protect privacy and ensure professionalism. Privacy legislation protects disclosures of personal information. In addition, many regulatory bodies require that professional service providers do not share personal information with their clients and prohibit personal relationships with clients or former clients. On the other hand, peer supporters must disclose their lived experience to varying degrees. The caveat for Houselink, since they do not provide clinical services, is that relationship boundaries can be developed to suit the environment as long as they adhere to privacy legislation and funding requirements. In this instance, reframing boundaries would prove

helpful. It is unavoidable that employees who are members or former members will be working alongside an employee who, at one point, had access to their personal information. Explaining this and normalizing it are important to building new relationships.

For some, drawing a firm line between the personal and the professional is important and not negotiable. “People have a range of comfort levels when it comes to how loose or tight boundaries are maintained,” one survey respondent said. For others, privacy is a moveable line that depends on situations and relationships. One respondent states, “It is vital that we be open to addressing boundary [crossings] with each other on a day-to-day, moment-to-moment basis.” In other words, if someone unwittingly crosses a boundary by sharing, say, a personal mental health struggle, they should be told as much by the other member or employee. Yet another respondent suggests that, while boundary issues should “be addressed on a case-by-case basis,” they can be actually eliminated if people only disclose about themselves, “not for or about others.” Thus employees believe that openness about boundaries makes it easier to define and navigate them.

Boundaries are seen, in some cases, as a place behind which people can “hide.” The amount of personal information that will support rapport and promote change for members is a question peer support workers face every day. They must establish their role as peers by communicating that they have similar lived experiences; in addition, personal experience is drawn upon and reiterated in many settings for the purpose of support. However, people with lived experience who are not peer supporters do not have the same obligation to talk openly about their own experience.

The decision to share or shield information



from people providing support should be made based on the grounds of what information is required to do the job right. Houselink plans to enhance familiarity with existing information-sharing or disclosure policies by using them to frame orientation and ongoing educational conversations. As noted by an employee, “It is hard to change human nature[...]or years of training. In school you are taught the ‘we and they’ information system[,] and after working for years using that style, it is hard to break away. [An] open forum with traditionally trained staff and lived experience staff would be an awesome start to break down these barriers.”

Balancing public and private information is a challenge and a risk in workplace relationships. One respondent notes that “we have to learn how all life experiences and learnings can be used as transferable skills,” which inevitably requires discussion of our lives. This same respondent suggests that “we need to learn about testing and declaring boundaries so that each of us can explore as well as protect boundaries.” Again, if we redefine boundaries as conditions and consequences that guide relationships, the issue becomes one less of territory or protection and more of comfort and effectiveness.

## Discussion:

### Advice to others considering supportive employment programs

The prevailing value of supporting work for members was strong among both members and Houselink staff. The focus groups recommended that, to be successful, a new program requires the following resources: dedicated leadership positions, adequate funding for community networking (including job development and partnerships), strong peer support and resources for peer networks, structures that support worker inclusion and decision-making, and paid training and education.

There was strong support for the current predictable weekly pay schedule that includes direct deposit. In addition, communication was seen as a key factor in promoting work as a component of recovery. As one member described it, the program made it possible to “[fall] into the work” and more people would be “thinking about [working] if they knew more.”

A shift to appreciating work not simply as a job or step toward employment, but as an activity that supports recovery, should underpin any new

program. A member described this as “having a long view.” Members stress that, in a new program, support must be flexible with staff who “listen and are sensitive.” In terms of addressing the private versus public issue, members suggest developing a “code of conduct” and providing training and regular reviews. Education should be provided to help members independently preempt and interrupt gossip by establishing what is public or private and why.

Investing in additional recovery programs, such as Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) groups, could integrate the transformative effects of working with personal recovery planning. Recovery education that focuses on the “soft skills” of personal awareness, personal responsibility, relationship building and self-advocacy is seen as an important component of any new program.

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# Summary

Houselink member-workers report more social comfort, confidence and social competence through work. Their social networks are enlarged and they feel healthier. Member-workers also say they have more knowledge, skills and practical experience. When describing what work provides them, members used the phrases “valuable structure” and “sense of purpose,” which enables them to maintain focus and responsibility.

Houselink demonstrates the importance of lived experience in its inclusive employment approach. Employees who are open about their mental health or addiction histories inform and enrich the services and supports Houselink offers to people who are like them.

Recovery is a meaningful process of connecting, reflecting and relating. Work is important to recovery because it adds structure, focus and growth — all of which build hope. Work relationships build social comfort, confidence and competence in ways that far exceed employment outcomes. Work supports recovery and recovery can be supported at work.



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