

# Job skills and hope for psychiatric patients



As you enter the Phoenix Clubhouse, the first impression is of busy people engaged in some activity – a few writing at their computers, others cleaning, serving food or watering plants on the terrace. Even those just sitting around the reception area seem totally absorbed in their lively conversation.

Members in the clubhouse are people with mental disorders enrolled in a psychiatric rehabilitation programme, a programme which certainly keeps members busy and productive.

The Phoenix Clubhouse, located at the David Trench Rehabilitation Centre on Bonham Road, is the first of its kind in Hong Kong. The clubhouse programme for psychiatric rehabilitation originated in the US with the aim of helping people with mental illness to achieve their potential and to integrate into society.

Membership is free to anyone with a history of mental illness, and voluntary – people can come at any day or time during opening hours, including evenings and Saturdays. Phoenix Clubhouse has 115 active members, with an average daily attendance of 44 people.

Ely, a member who also has a part time job as a general assistant in a financial company, conducts a tour of the facility.



Yau believes in rehabilitation

At the clerical unit, members are busy at their computers, producing the "Phoenix Daily News" and the bimonthly newsletter. "We have a web site that I've designed ([www.phoenixclubhouse.org](http://www.phoenixclubhouse.org)), and it's my job to update it," says Ely.

The tuck shop, selling drinks, snacks and handicrafts from the

occupational therapy units located in the same building, is also operated by members. The kitchen serves a low-cost lunch prepared and served by members under staff guidance.

"We also have a self-study corner and a library, but most important is the employment and education unit that provides job counselling and information on study opportunities and job vacancies," says Ely.

Three types of employment programmes are available: part-time transitional employment for a period of 6 to 9 months; supported employment by participating companies; and independent employment, explains Eva Yau, who is in charge of the clubhouse.

Yau is an occupational therapist who developed an interest in the clubhouse concept in psychiatric rehabilitation and became involved in the International Centre for Clubhouse Development (ICCD). She has also done research on the Hong Kong clubhouse model and helped establish the Phoenix Clubhouse. As of today, there are more than 370 clubhouses in 28 countries.

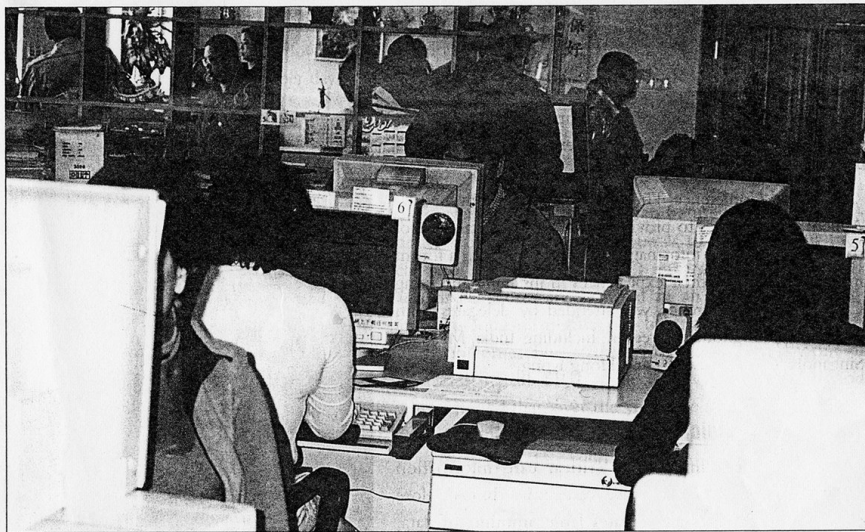
"Phoenix Clubhouse has just completed the certification process by ICCD," she notes.

"You might not notice it, but members here are people with schizophrenia and other severe mental diseases, who cannot concentrate without drugs," says Yau. "We have a close relationship with their doctors, so the rehabilitation process goes hand in hand with their medical treatment."

The clubhouse is run by members and staff together; the daily activities and policy issues are jointly discussed and decided.

Rowena, a long-time member, handles the reception and also helps Yau at the clubhouse office. Rowena is a part-time employee at the Hospital Authority's head office, working as a cashier in the staff coop. Another member, Eunice, is self-employed as a tutor for primary school children. "Working in the club allows members not only to develop job skills and regain their self-esteem but to perform real work that is valued by others," says Yau.

Phoenix Clubhouse has been very active in developing employment opportunities for its members. Participating employers are encouraged to recruit club members on a trial basis, and to retain them in permanent employment whenever possible. "The transitional employment programme



has worked out with great success in our company and our support for the programme will certainly continue," says Michael Webb, vice president of human resources at Morgan Stanley Dean Witter

Asia Ltd.

According to Yau, friendships and ties established at the clubhouse offer great support to members in their daily life. Members' relatives are also encouraged to

take part in weekend and holiday activities. "Families really appreciate what we're doing, helping their relatives to regain hope and become more open and positive," she says.

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\*References available on request

"I have joined the Phoenix Clubhouse for several months. During this period I have learned Chinese typewriting. Not only I can use the skill to serve the clubhouse in printing the Phoenix Daily News and Phoenix Newsletters, I can also use these skills to earn money to support my daily living. This is good for both me and others." **Robert**