

Brief Summary

A study of Troy Club membership found the following key points:

- Troy Club members experienced enhanced feelings of **social connectedness**.
- Troy Club members **feel hopeful** about coping with their mental illness because by being a member they no longer feel they are alone trying to cope with what are sometimes very distressing symptoms.
- Being a member of the Troy Club is a **positive identity** for members and they see the Troy Club as a way through which they can work on the recovery goals.
- There is a culture of support and unconditional acceptance of others in the club and all participants reported being helped and giving help to other members at different times. Thus, the club offers a **meaningful role** for members as support people for each other who are all deeply aware that the issues that bring them together are very difficult for people to try to cope with on their own.
- The study found that being a member of the Troy Club instilled a strong sense of **empowerment** derived from making the effort to attend the club and to engage with it as part of their personal journey to recovery. The members are also central to keeping the club running and all members felt empowered by the fact that the club exists and that they are part of keeping it running.

Summary of Findings

The members of the Troy Club have participated in a study by two academic researchers regarding the benefits of membership of the club for club members.

The study explored the benefits of membership through a recovery lens with specific reference to key processes associated with the Recovery Model. These key processes are:

- Connectedness
- Hope
- Identity
- Meaningful Role
- Empowerment

The findings in relation to these processes are summarized below.

1. Connectedness

The study found that the Troy Club offers members were very positive about the social connectedness which membership offered, providing as it does an informal forum in which members can meet people who have similar life experiences to themselves, particularly in terms of experiences of mental illness or caring for a close family member who is experiencing mental illness. The Club typically meets one night per week but the sense of being connected to a friendly and supportive group went beyond that one night per week and membership created a general sense of social connectedness for all the members. Participants warmly described the friendships they had established through membership of the Club and how being a member afforded wider opportunities for social activity both on club nights. Furthermore, the participants reported experiencing social support from members particularly during periods of ill-health or at times of bereavement, etc. This connectedness, they suggested, helped boost their confidence in social engagement, not only in the club itself but in their wider lives.

2. Hope

The findings identify that membership of the club instilled a sense of hope on the part of many club members. This operated at a number of levels. At a practical level, members described looking forward to the weekly club activity night, seeing it as a positive social event in which they could comfortably take part. Beyond engagement in the club activities, participants also reported benefiting from seeing others coping and surviving serious mental illness as well as feeling that other members understood and could empathise with their personal experiences of mental illness. Members thus felt better equipped to face the challenges of their mental illness as they now had a network of people available to them who understood their situation and who had coped with similar experiences.

3. Identity

In addition to finding that members embraced the identity of a Troy Club member with pride, the study also found that members associated their club member status with being a person on the road to recovery. This association between club membership and being an active agent in one's personal recovery is an important and key finding of this study. It illuminates that being a member of the Troy Club is not only a symptom of recovery but it is part of the process of recovery. Some participants described feeling alone and hopeless prior to joining the club, but once they became members they saw themselves as doing something positive towards their recovery.

4. Meaningful Role

All participants spoke with pride about being a member and making a contribution to the support of other members. Participants explained how they gained confidence in social situations, how they found ways to talk about their illness and strategies of recovery and how they discovered that they had something very positive to offer to other members in their times of distress or upset. The process of altruism is well established as a therapeutic factor in group contexts and this study found it in abundance between members of the Troy Club.

5. Empowerment

Participants reported how difficult they have found it in their lives to stay motivated to work towards recovery but that the Troy Club has offered a positive way forward for them in terms of this motivation.

The data revealed that motivation happens within the Troy Club because of the shared experience of mental illness, and the club environment, which is accepting and non-judgemental. Participants highlighted the strong feeling of unconditional acceptance of each individual member within the club and the value that was placed on ensuring that everyone could comfortably participate in club activities to a level acceptable to each individual. It is through this unconditional acceptance and respect that members felt supported to get more involved in club activities, some of them assuming responsibility for organising aspects of the club if they wished to do so. Some participants reported how this feeling of being valued and able to organise things had translated into positive developments outside the club in other parts of their lives. There was also a clear indication in the data, that within the club, people felt supported to stay positive in terms of their ability to resolve difficulties they were having in any aspect of their lives. The Troy Club has many members but few resources. Members all expressed great pride that by working together they have so far kept the club running on a weekly basis, and that regularly new members are arriving and staying.

Concluding Comments

The study carried out with Troy Club members reveals this to be a vibrant and supportive environment for people who are coping with various forms of mental illness. Club membership offers an empowering

and hope-inspiring long-term experience for members. The social connectedness which members experience forges a sense of group cohesion through which members can access peer support and help at any time. This is especially valuable and motivating for members during times when they feel overburdened by their mental illness or related life experiences. Members of the Troy Club are proud of the success of their club because they know it is making challenging life experiences a little easier for their members to cope with, particularly in terms of helping people feel they are not facing their health challenges alone. The study concludes that across the 5 processes of recovery that membership of the Troy Club enhances the members' experience of Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Having a Meaningful Role in Life and Empowerment.