

PULSE

Living Room offers tools — and hope — to individuals struggling with mental illness

The new Living Room and Community Wellness Center in La Grange promotes mental health recovery and wellness.

The single building is home to two programs. The Community Wellness Center is open to anyone seeking an inviting place to learn about mental health and to gain the necessary tools to strengthen overall wellness.

The Living Room is a nationally-recognized model and a proven alternative to a hospital emergency room for someone experiencing an increase in their mental health symptoms. It is staffed by recovery support specialists who use their own experience and are trained to help others. Talking and developing wellness plans are a big part of what happens at the Living Room. Although a clinician is on duty to screen guests, to ensure they are a good fit, the Living Room is not a mental health facility. The idea is to catch people before they are in crisis, before their symptoms are so

severe that they need an inpatient hospital stay.

The recovery support specialist works with guests to identify obstacles to their recovery, to develop wellness plans and to connect them to resources, including peer-run education and support.

Two examples demonstrate what happens at the Living Room.

Recently, a father brought his daughter into the Living Room. She had not been taking her medication and was experiencing early stages of psychosis. The recovery support specialist met with her and shared his personal story of mental illness and recovery.

During the visit, the specialist offered the daughter a bowl of soup, which she ate, but then pushed the bowl off the table.

The next day, her father called to say she wanted to take her medication and to come back to the Living



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On mental health

Room. She returned and sat again with the recovery support specialist, had soup and talked more about recovery tools and hope. This time, she didn't push the bowl off the table.

Another man came in experiencing severe depression, unable to contain his symptoms or maintain his sobriety. The man found that his recovery support specialist had a very similar story and experience. He meets weekly with his recovery support specialist and, with his help, is actively working on his sobriety and developing his own recovery wellness plan.

The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health describes recovery as a process in which people can live, work, learn and participate fully in their community. For some individuals, recovery is the ability to live

a fulfilling life despite symptoms. For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms. Science has shown that having hope plays an integral role in an individual's recovery.

Mental health conditions are different for everyone and so is recovery. Hope is part desire and part determination and connecting with someone who has already walked down the recovery path makes it easier for others. The recovery support specialist is a person who can show that recovery is possible for everyone and that hope is the first step.

The Living Room and Community Wellness Center is located at 4731 Willow Springs Road, La Grange. It is open from 2 to 10 p.m. 365 days a year. For more information, call (708) 582-6434 or visit thelivingroomlg.org or communitywellnessctr.org

— *Kimberly Knake is the executive director of NAMI Metro Suburban.*