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A YOUNG CLUBHOUSE

Geysir is a young Clubhouse in Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland, whose goal is to get an ICCD certification in the near future. We organized our Club House according to the ideological standards of Fountain House which inspired us in our search for means in aiding people with mental disabilities on their way to re-enter society. Our journey has been seven years in the making and we are still a growing organization. Geysir was the first Club of its kind in Iceland but presently two more Clubs are in the making following Geysir's example. Today we are an independent organization which comprises 170 members and 3 staff members. Together we are set on working towards a better future for people with mental illnesses, where their



abilities and talents are nurtured and to prepare them for active membership in society.

A Day in the Clubhouse

I have been an active member of the Clubhouse for about two years. I have been successful in the Clubhouse, made progress and maintained good mental health. My dreams have come true to a degree which I could not have imagined before. The Fountain House model is a good method which works excellently for me so I'm very grateful and happy to make use of it now and in the future.

It is Wednesday, the 27th. of August and I'm writing about a day in the Clubhouse Geysir in Iceland. This morning I arrived at nine o'clock. The staff has already arrived and a few members. They are discussing a survey to evaluate members' attitude to the Clubhouse. I go up to the second floor into the kitchen and make coffee. When the coffee is ready we all meet in the kitchen and talk about various things in life.

The staff and members are full of energy and a positive atmosphere is around us like most days.

The next thing we do is planning the day with the working units. One of my tasks today is to sit down in front of a computer in the office unit to write this article that you are reading now in the Geysir Chronicle.



In between writing I have taken a brake and had lunch, and also there was a housmeeting for fifty minutes. We have scheduled housemeetings on Mondays and Wednesdays every week. Time is passing by and it is incredible how fast it runs when I'm working on the computer. The most important thing for me in the Clubhouse is the positive human relationship between members and staff from day to day. That gives us all a lot. So you out there best of luck in the future. **Gudmundur Kristjansson**

A member of Geysir studying at the University

I've been a member of Club Geysir for the past two years, and have enjoyed it very much. At the clubhouse everyone has the opportunity to build up his or her self after struggling with a difficult illness. Those two years I have usually come to the clubhouse two or three times a week and worked in the kitchen unit. What I like the most is that the clubhouse is very encouraging, and everybody is ready to guide each other and learn at the same time. Getting help to find jobs or go to school is invaluable.

After almost one year in Geysir I decided to register at the University of Iceland, but at the time I hadn't been able to study for nine years. In this article I will discuss my studies, and the special solutions, which handicapped students are offered at the university.

When I discussed my studies with my doctor, we agreed that I would finish my secondary subject at a slow pace. We agreed upon that I would contact the educational advisor to find out my practical possibilities in future studies.



Because I both suffer from physical and mental disorder my need for special solutions and advice is very important.

At the University of Iceland there are very capable educational advisors and I was very pleased with their service. A friendly young woman welcomed me and informed me about all necessary issues concerning my studies. When I told her about the Club Geysir, she got very enthusiastic and said she eagerly wanted to have a staff member along in the interview. One afternoon I and Anna Valdemarsdóttir the club's director went to the advisor's office at the University and worked on a program for me to follow during my studies. The special solutions which the University offers handicapped/invalid students are very useful; among them are 25 percent longer examination time, a special room during exams, exams by computers, audio recorded lectures, resting time during exams

(including the exam's time), a secretary during exams, 100 percent longer examination time, supporting conversations/psychiatric support, seminars on examination phobia and educational techniques for students suffering from dyslexia, scanned educational subjects, supporting assistants, sign language interpreter, colored and enlarged examination subjects, and ones own choice of suitable examination surroundings.

In autumn 2002 I returned to my studies at the University. I have decided to finish my BA degree in Norwegian language as my major subject and Icelandic language as a secondary subject. I have been doing quite well and been treated with kindness by the professors and fellow students. My dream for the future is to work as a translator.

By writing this article my wish is to encourage all handicapped people who are thinking of studying at universities to fulfill their dreams. Contact the educational advisory office and make use of the special opportunities which the university offers.

Sigrún Jóhannsdóttir

Greetings from the President of Iceland Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson

For centuries fear and ignorance, prejudice and hostility dominated the attitudes towards mental illness and those who suffered were condemned to isolation.

We have in recent years been blessed with a profound improvement in this field and in our country we have witnessed strong confirmation of such radical change.

The work of Club Geysir has gained national attention and the public has rallied to its cause. The inspiration and vision provided by Club Geysir has given many people hope and a new sense of achievement. It has helped to transform the general attitude towards mental health, giving a new confidence to



many and enabling them to become active and productive citizens.

The support which the nation has given to Club Geysir was manifested in a nationwide campaign to raise funds for its work and build up the financial strength to enable it to obtain a permanent residential centre.

Households all over the country, children and grandparents, the affluent but also the poor, farmers and fishermen, businessmen and officials all contributed to the success of this campaign, leaving us in no doubt about the strong democratic support that Club Geysir has earned.

We hope that the achievements of Club Geysir will inspire our friends in other countries and enable us to improve the opportunities open to those seeking to better their mental health.

The success of Club Geysir fills us with hope and inspiration.



President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar visiting Club Geysir the 4th of október 2001 and Anna director discuss matters of the club.

Photo by kind permission of Ásdís Ágústsdóttir

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson".



The first steps on an optimistic journey

In the year 1996, two occupational therapists went on a learning trip to Denmark and Sweden to seek information about resources in helping mentally ill people after treatment in hospitals. The reason for the trip was the need for new after-treatment resources, something that bridged the gap between institutions and society. They looked at many different places, amongst which was the Fountain House in Göteborg.

After returning home in January 1997, they held an open meeting where they presented the different options. At that meeting it was decided upon to form a preliminary group that would open a Fountain House in Iceland. The group consisted of professionals, patients and their relatives. Monthly meetings were held and the need to acquire information about Fountain House was emphasized. Preparations were made to send representatives to the world conference of Fountain House in Göteborg. Four representatives went from Iceland to Göteborg - two occupational therapists and two members.



Clubmembers on their way to the new clubhouse at Skipholti 29.

After the conference a decision was made to have weekly meetings at the facilities of Geðhjálp, The Icelandic Mental Health Alliance, an interest group for people who have or are presently coping with mental disorders and their relatives, at Hafnarbúðum, in downtown Reykjavík. The main task of the group was to translate the ICCD international standards and form an administration that would administrate the financing of the Club. Twelve influential individuals in Icelandic society were elected to the board of



The reception at Skipholti 29.

administration and in June their number was increased to 13.

A decision was made to establish a foundation to finance the management of the Club. It was very time-consuming to talk to members of parliament and members of municipal bodies about financing. It was also decided to send staff members of the Club and a member of the administration for training for 3 weeks to the Mosaic Clubhouse in London. There they learned about key points to administrate a club and the group worked in different work-units from 9 to 4 each work-day. This was a necessary preparation before starting Club activities.

In the two year preparation period, from 1997 to 1999, the Club was stationed at Geðhjálp. There we had opportunities to



A celebration in Geysi's clubhouse at Ægisgata 7.

hold our weekly meetings every Thursday. At the time Geðhjálp was stationed at Hafnarhúsið, near the Reykjavík harbor. Later they moved their operations to Túngata, also in the downtown area, where Geðhjálp is currently stationed. We went along in these removals, to secure the practices of the Club. But we were in dire need for our own accommodations, in accordance with our constantly expanding activities and to emphasize our detachment as an after-treatment resource for recovering mental patients following the ideology of Fountain House.

Employment:

Ralph Bilby's visit in January 2004



The Club Geysir has now been active for almost four years and we are very pleased with the success in employment for members during that time. From January 2000, twenty members have got employment through or with support from the Club Geysir.

Our aim is to improve our employment programme further and we are very optimistic and looking forward to Ralph Bilby's visit in January 2004.

The opening of Club Geysir



A member working in Hátún 10 where the club opened for the first time the 9th. of September 1999.

The management of the Club in its own housing started the 9th of September 1999. The facilities were confined to two small rooms in a little building at Hátún 10 in Reykjavík and with two staff members. This was the result of nearly 2 years of planning by a group of professionals, patients, and relatives. The group had weekly meetings, went to a conference and attended training in London.

Soon a core of 10 – 15 members became established at Hátún, who came every day to do the work necessary for further representation of the Club. The first web-site was made and the first introductory pamphlet and various information about the Club were published.

In January 2000 the Club was offered housing accommodation at Ægisgata 7 in Reykjavík, approximately 200 m² in size, rented from the city council. The Club members refur-

bished it and the Club bought the most necessary equipment for the lounge, office and kitchen. Shortly thereafter, the first issue of "Gosið" ('The Eruption'), our quarterly newsletter, was published.

One of the goals of the Club is to be an employment service. The service has had good results and the first member who got a job through the Club was hired in October 1999. There have been good results from our work program from the beginning. Today 17 members work in the regular job market and 4 attend studies in various schools.

In May 2001, the Club organized its first Nordic conference in Geysir, Haukadal, which was the high point in Geysir's clubhouse activities up to that point. We got a powerful group of supporters on the board and following our success Ms. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, our beloved former President, became the Club's patron.

A Hope of a better life by joining Geysir - a club member's story



Sigurjon Scheving has been a member of Geysir clubhouse for almost three years. He heard of the club when he was in occupational therapy the summer of 2002. In the occupational therapy he was informed of various possibilities for future treatment, but he was most interested in the program that The Fountain House Club Geysir had to offer, which he thought would be the most suitable for him. "I found that the occupational therapy was becoming rather monotonous. I think that I became acquainted with the Club Geysir at exactly the right time, and I don't regret having joined the club."

Sigurjon was born in Reykjavik but grew up in Reydarfjördur on the east coast of Iceland.

How was it growing up in Reydarfjördur?

"I enjoyed it very much and it never occurred to me that I would have to struggle with a

mental illness later in my life. I started fairly young working in fish factories and playing football, which was my favourite hobby."

Sigurjon says that what interested him the most in the clubhouse was the possibility of taking part in daily work, and also that he wasn't all the time looked upon as a mental patient,

but as an individual who had an opportunity of a better life.

Sigurjon had been struggling with his illness for many years before he went to see a doctor for help. "First I attended my family physician who advised to see a psychiatrist whom he recommended. Before I sought help I had been neglecting my job and been absent very often, but on the other hand my employer was very understanding. I didn't go out of my house, for maybe two or three weeks, and didn't answer the telephone nor receive visitors. I wasn't feeling well at all, but at the time I didn't realize that I was schizophrenic and suffering from anxiety and depression."

How did you come to grips with the psychiatrist's diagnosis?

"Of course I felt rather badly, but slowly I submitted to it. I had great support from my family and after the occupational therapy and joining the club Geysir I have

realized that one can live quite a good life despite struggling with this difficult illness. I have never been admitted to a psychiatric institution but was in occupational therapy for some time following my psychiatrist's advise."

Now Sigurjon has a part time job, as a telemarketing salesman, working in the afternoon and on weekends, and says he likes it very much. "Even though I'm doing alright I sometimes have my ups and downs, but my employer is very emphatic. Now I've been working as a salesman for almost two years, or as long as I have been member of Geysir."

How is your social situation at present?

"I get disability payments from The Social Health Insurance and some income from the telemarketing. Luckily I have my own appartement, which gives me a sense of independence, and therefore I find myself more capable of confronting daily life. My aunt has also been of great help, and sometimes I say that she is my protector of some sorts. I visit her regularly and she sees to it that I take my medicin on a regular basis. I also used to go over to her and have my meals, but now I'm doing my own cooking more or less. I cook various dishes and sometimes try to cook some exotic meals."

Sigurjon says that he manages quite well in his daily routine and is coping with his illness. "I'm more at ease and satisfied with myself, and that's why it is also good to be able to visit the clubhouse and be treated like a worthy person of society."



Styrmir Gunnarsson in the pulpit at a conference.

The silent heroes of our times by Styrmir Gunnarsson editor and member of the Geysi's club board

I am grateful for having had an opportunity to take part in starting the Geysir-club in Iceland but the club builds on the Fountain House-movement ideology. I think most people who have in some way or another got acquainted with mental diseases and the way they affect peoples lives consider it important to contribute something to help the sufferers. Even though it is a difficult experience for people to become mentally ill or be relatives of those affected one can also include in that experience a chance to become more mature and get a more profound insight into human life.

Such depth can be found in the works of people like dr. Kay Redfield Jamison and William Styron, who have described their experience in excellent

books and also Anthony Storr, who has written with great knowledge about these issues in Churchill's Black Dog and Kafkas Mice.

It impressed me much, when the Geysir-club was being established, to get to know the energy and optimism of young women who had started cooperating with a few persons, who had suffered from these diseases, in order to start the work. First among equals in the group was, without doubt, Anna Valdemarsdóttir who has been the leader of the Geysir-club from start and is an unequalled pioneer in this field. Seldom have I encountered such vitality as one could see in these young womens' work and therefore I will always have great respect for them.

One gets to see another

side of life in the Geysir-club than is usually the most apparent one in Iceland. In many ways it is a valuable personal lesson. Though Icelanders have now become one of the most affluent nations in the world there is a group of people there who must endure a harder life. Among them are the members of the Geysir-club who have, in spite of a sometimes difficult situation, fought a severe disease bravely, determined not to let it beat them. In my eyes, those who have suffered from a mental disease and fought it are among the silent heroes of our times. In my job as editor of a newspaper in Iceland I have been involved in a lot of various matters in Icelandic society during the last decades. One of the most memorable is to get an opportunity to take part in establishing the Geysir-club.

***Styrmir Gunnarsson,
chief editor
Morgunbladid
Iceland.***

Facts about Iceland

The country is an island of 103.000km² (39.756 sq.miles), with an average height of 500m above sea level. Its highest peak, Hvannadalshnúkur, rises to 2.119m and over 11 per cent and the country is covered by glaciers, including Vatnajökull, the largest in Europe.

Energy Situated on the Mid-Atlantic

Ridge: Iceland is a hot spot of volcanic and geothermal activity: 30 post-glacial volcanoes have erupted in the past two centuries, and natural hot water supplies much of the population with cheap, pollution-free heating. Rivers, too, are harnessed to provide inexpensive hydroelectric power.

Population: The people of the population number more than 280.000, half live in the capital Reykjavík and its neighboring towns in southwest. Keflavík international Airport is located about 50 km from the capital. The highland interior is uninhabited (and uninhabitable), and most centres and population are situated on the coast.

Language: Iceland was settled by Nordic people in the 9th century-tradition says the first permanent settler was Ingólfur Arnarson, a Norwegian Viking who made his home where Reykjavík now stands. The Icelanders still speak the language of the Vikings, although modern Icelandic has undergone changes of pronunciation and, of course, of vocabulary! Iceland is alone in upholding another Norse tradition, i.e. the custom of



using patronymics rather than surnames; an Icelander's Christian name is followed by his or her father's name and the suffix-son or dóttir, e.g. Guðrún Pétursdóttir (Guðrún, daughter of Pétur). Members of a family can therefore have many different "surnames", which sometimes causes confusion to foreigners!

History in 930: The Icelandic settlers founded one of the world's first republican governments; the Old Commonwealth Age, described in the classic Icelandic Sagas, lasted until 1262, when Iceland lost its independence, and in 1944 the present republic was founded. The country is governed by the Althing (parliament), whose 63 members are elected every four years. Four-yearly elections are also held for the presidency; President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson was elected in June 1996 to succeed Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, and was re-elected in June 2000. The head of state plays no part in day-to-day politics.

Economy: The economy is heavily dependent upon fishing. Despite effort to diversify, particularly into the travel

industry, seafood exports continue to account for nearly three-quarters of merchandise exports and approximately half of all foreign exchange earnings. Yet less than 10 per cent and the workforce is involved in fishing a fish processing. The travel industry makes up the second largest export industry in Iceland. The standard of living is high, with income per capita among the best in the world. The financial sector has been liberalized in recent years. The economy is service-oriented: two third of the working population are employed in the service sector, both public and private. Iceland is a member of the European Free Association (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEC).

Health Life expectancy is at 81, 3 years for women and 76, 4 for men, is one of the highest in the world, and a comprehensive state health care system aims keep it that way.

Ms. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the former president of Iceland, was the first woman in the world to become president of a nation in 1980.