



**Where Do We  
Belong?  
Finding Our Place in  
the Community**

**A Presentation of the Rochester Psychiatric Center Peer Services Department:**

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This workshop looks at the changing and expanding world of people who have a mental health diagnosis. It examines the choices now being offered to them and how these choices both improve and complicate our lives.

Thirty years ago the answer to “*Where do I belong?*” was *in an institution where we would be safe*. Ten years ago the answer would be *in a treatment facility with others like ourselves where we could get the treatment, help and services we needed*. Today the answer is much more complicated.

## What do you think?



It is much more convenient to depend on a mental health van system and/or a medical cab system to get to the places you want to go.	T-----F
Group homes are great places to learn skills that will help you in the community.	T-----F
People who receive social security benefits and also work in sheltered work programs tend to do well financially.	T-----F
Sheltered work environments teach skills useful to competitive work environments.	T-----F
Psychiatric Social Clubs are a good place to teach people with a mental health diagnosis how to present themselves and socialize.	T-----F

## Where do you spend your time?

	Mental Health Community	General Community	Other special community (Jewish community, gay community)
Where would you go to socialize?			
Where would you go to work?			
Where would you go if you wanted to learn to swim?			
If you wanted to lose weight, where would you go to get a support group?			
Where are the people whom you spend most of your time with from?			

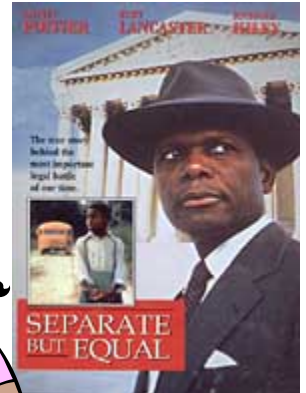
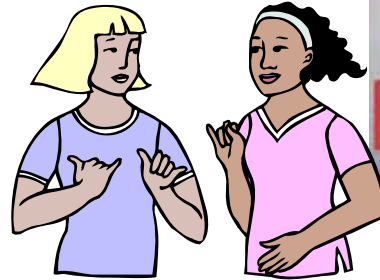
As people with a mental health diagnosis, we have often been segregated from the rest of society. We live in special housing designed for our special needs. We work in special sheltered environments that protect us from the stresses and challenges of regular work environments. We can socialize in special social clubs where we are supported but not pushed. We spend our time with people like ourselves and with staff members who understand our special challenges. These programs define us by our challenges.

- Could the programs that are aimed to protect and shelter us be harming us as well?
- Are these programs designed to protect us from society or society from us?
- Is there a place for mental health programs in our lives?
- Is there a place for us in the larger community?

This workshop will start looking at some of these questions.  
What other groups of people have been often separated in some way from the general community?

Has this separation been helpful or hurtful to these groups?

Has this separation been helpful or hurtful to the general community?



**What are the pros and cons of spending most of your time within the mental health community?** (Consider mental health housing, transportation, work, socialization, special programs, support groups).

Pros	Cons

**What are the things the general community can offer us that the mental health community cannot?**

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**What keeps people segregated in the mental health community?**

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**Are there people or institutions that might get in your way as you start to venture out?**

- Family members who wish you would stay safely in the mental health community.
- Friends who are not ready to venture out, who encourage you to stay back with them.
- Professional supports who believe you are better off in this segregated community, where they can more easily follow what you are doing.
- Systems that benefit financially from your dependence. (A group home van system gets paid well for every ride they provide to members of the group home. Might they discourage the consumer from getting places on his/her own?)
- Your own lack of finances and resources.

**How does a person start venturing out and expanding what s/he does and who s/he relates to?**

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In order to make any life changes, support is essential. Who supports a person who wants more independence and community presence? What kinds of support are helpful?

Who could (does) support you as you venture out into the community?

Who	Name	How might this person support you as you leave the safety of the mental health community?
PAID SUPPORTERS		
AFFILIATES		
FRIENDS		
FAMILY		

How might a person learn to get around? How might a person start to learn the useful, but often very complicated, public transportation system? Are there options for consumers living in smaller communities without adequate public transportation?

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Where does a person start? How does a person who has lived within the mental health community for years know where s/he might like to go and what s/he might want to get involved in?

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**What are your interests?**

- Animals
- Art/ crafts
- Astrology
- Biking
- Cars/ Motorcycles
- Cooking/ baking
- Dance
- Fishing
- Gardening
- Genealogy
- Hiking/ walking
- History
- Hunting
- Movies
- Music
- Nature
- Politics
- Reading
- Religion
- Running
- Sewing/ quilting/ knitting
- Sports
- Swimming
- Theatre
- Writing
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**Where in your community might a person with your set of interests go?**

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**What is your culture? Consider the important aspects of your own culture that might help you integrate into the community.**

Consider experiences related to:

- ◆ Ethnic/ racial background
- ◆ Spiritual/ religious background
- ◆ Age group
- ◆ Sexual preference
- ◆ Rural/ urban/ suburban community
- ◆ Places (eg: areas of the country) where you have lived.
- ◆ Challenges (deaf community, breast cancer survivor, poverty, survived a major disaster)
- ◆ Military experiences/ Educational Experiences

Consider how this affects your preferences for

- ◆ Music/ entertainment
- ◆ Food
- ◆ Celebrations
- ◆ Traditions
- ◆ Values

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- Are there sub-communities where you might start venturing out in a protected way? The gay community? A church community? The Italian community? The senior citizen community? Where else?
  
- Are there places in the mental health community that could be stepping stones to the greater community? Is there a way to first expand your presence in the mental health community?

**Is it OK NOT to venture out? Is it OK to make the choice to remain in your comfort zone and stay in programs?**

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**What about work?**

- Is it Ok to make the choice not to work, OR does every adult have a responsibility to make a contribution to his/her community?
  
- Is it Ok to choose to work in sheltered employment?
  
- Is a person with a mental illness better off working in a peer position or is s/he better off in a more general position?
  
- Should the qualification for peer positions be reduced as they have been in the past for other populations?

**What about you? Where do you belong? Where do you fit in?**

