

# Reach for the Stars!

Dear Putnam Clubhouse Friends,

With 2017 coming to an end, I'm listening to the CD from our recent fall event—So, Do You Think You Can Dance? Reach for the Stars!—and reflecting on how important Putnam Clubhouse is to me and to all the members.

**In 2017, the Clubhouse assisted members with housing, paid employment, and returning to school. Members have gained greater independence and stayed out of the hospital.** Our growing membership includes many young adults who contribute and participate in meaningful ways. All of this is possible because the Clubhouse gives us the opportunity to reach for the stars.

Reaching for opportunity, independence, and getting a helping hand is what the Clubhouse is all about. **Mental illness can strike at any time in a person's life.** Not only does it cause individual suffering, but it also affects the entire family causing hopelessness and a fear of stigma. But many people suffering don't know they CAN recover from the effects of mental illness and resume meaningful, productive lives. **Putnam Clubhouse provides an opportunity to find recovery through purposeful work that builds on strengths instead of illness.** Without this opportunity, even the most resilient people become isolated, leading to a loss of hope which has a devastating impact on the most basic aspects of living.

Before my journey started in 2011, I had always been active and adventurous. I taught English in Japan for two years, flew airplanes, and became the mother of a wonderful son. I taught first grade for 18 years, then had an episode of an acute stress disorder and had to take a year off of work. But when I returned to work things only got worse.

Then the hospitalizations began. In 2013 on Christmas Day, I tried to beat my floor with a coat rack (the floor won, the coat rack lost). I saw six different doctors and was initially diagnosed with major depressive disorder—and then ADHD, seasonal affective disorder, bipolar disorder, and PTSD. No one was sure of anything, other than my poor little amygdala was exhausted! Since then I've been on quite a cocktail of over 30 different medications as doctors tried to “fix” me. I had so many chemicals in my head, I felt like a zombie from the Walking Dead.

Starting in 2013, I've had multiple hospitalizations and was a resident at three clinics and four outpatient programs. Away from home and in and out of hospitals, my husband became an instant single parent with both our son and me to take care of. I finally returned home in 2015 on Christmas Eve, having missed a lot of ages 11 and 12 of my son's life. By February 2016, I had stabilized and was ready for something more.

I had been introduced to Putnam while a patient at John Muir Hospital and decided to check it out. At first I thought it had nothing for me and didn't feel that I fit in. But attending was better than sitting at home watching reruns, so I kept going. I had one main goal: to be one of the volunteers who brings flowers to patients at John Muir's Behavioral Health Unit the way someone brought them to me. I wanted to let other patients see who we are and teach them about Putnam Clubhouse.

At first I expected to only find somewhere to show up, a reason to get out of my house, and a way to stick to a schedule. But then our director, Tamara Hunter, engaged me in meaningful work. She started me on fundraising, something I'd never done, and soon I became the lead. **As I volunteered, I began to feel valued and recognized that my work really contributed to the Clubhouse and to other people.** I wanted to provide service, to do something worthwhile, and so I began to engage with others. I also started helping with new member orientation and met so many people, shared my story, and encouraged them to come for our Work Ordered Day.



Truthfully, I still get overwhelmed at times. That first year home I had a couple of slumps and wondered if I'd end up back at the hospital. But when I didn't show up at the Clubhouse, they called me. I was quickly back at the Work Ordered Day.

What have I learned since become a member? I've found that I need to work at Putnam Clubhouse. **Although I still have occasional bad days like we all do, thanks to the Clubhouse I now have tools to deal with my low times and a solid support system.** I have friends who understand me and a place to go. My bad days stay days and don't turn into bad weeks or months.

Today I'm again a partner in my marriage and an engaged parent to my son. I'm a responsible Clubhouse participant, a member driver, and a leader that others can count on. I'm building friendships for the first time in my life. And once again, after a long and painful struggle, I'm engaged with life! **Putnam Clubhouse has restored hope in my life—just as it has done for hundreds of other members ravaged by mental illness—which is why it's so invaluable.**

A recovery that leads to paid employment, education, independence, dignity, housing and much more is possible with support from the Clubhouse community. This holiday season, **your important gift of any amount enables the Clubhouse to give purpose, hope and confidence to all of our members, helping them reach for the stars and change their lives forever.**

The members, staff, and board of directors of Putnam Clubhouse thank you for your continued support and wish you a very happy holiday season.

*Paula Boyd*  
Clubhouse Member