

A Second Set of Eyes

Gateshead Clubhouse Evaluation Report 2016 – 2018 Bill Scott

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1 Introduction

The Gateshead Clubhouse is a user-led community hub, situated in heart of the Bensham area of Gateshead. The Clubhouse vision is described as including the provision of venue where people are always welcome, on their own terms; to truly support people to build up their own resilience; and, in a suitable time-frame and to be able to move on with their lives.

This evaluation looks at the Clubhouse vision in detail, using feedback derived from:

- (a) A qualitative research study, undertaken with Clubhouse members
- (b) An observational study of the Clubhouse in action
- (c) Feedback obtained from an in-house survey

2 Overview of the Clubhouse Model

Gateshead Clubhouse can truly be described as a unique and inspirational model of operation. It is an entirely peer-led project, with no paid workers. It has managed to become an extremely valuable and well-managed resource within a relatively short space of time. It can be broadly described as having three main strands to the way it operates:

- (1) The daily management of the Clubhouse
- (2) groups & activities
- (3) external activities

2.1 Daily Management

- i. **Regular meetings** assist in the daily functioning of the project, providing informed directions for the steering of the work undertaken by the Clubhouse and to ensure that the aims of the organisation are fulfilled. These meetings include management committee meetings, member reps meetings, training sessions, members' forum meetings etc.
- ii. **General Administration and housekeeping** The daily use and maintenance of IT / office equipment, room bookings from other agencies, correspondence with GPs on behalf of members; meetings with Clubhouse reps; Members' forum.

- iii. **Cafe and kitchen:** ensuring supplies are bought in, catering, cleaning and members have access to meals and snacks. The cafe also brings in a significant amount of money which goes towards the upkeep of the Clubhouse. Members who do duties in the kitchen are trained in health & safety, cooking, hygiene. A daily range of nutritional meals are on the menu. On the odd occasion that kitchen members are experiencing mental health difficulties or are physically ill or simply exhausted, the cafe defaults to a fall-back “Cafe Light” position whereby members bring in a packed lunch or buy snacks locally and have meals together.

The practical / hands-on approach to the running of the Clubhouse was summarised quite simply by one of the member reps who referred to the fact that *“common sense is the best approach”*.

2.2 Groups and activities

Social activities lie at the heart of the Clubhouse, in the context of both the safe and relaxed environment it provides for members for opportunities to socialise on a daily basis; and, in the way that they provide an important safety net for members. In effect, this has created a genuinely inclusive community which embraces people who have experienced the corrosive effects of social-exclusion and a myriad of other negative life experiences which have contributed to / have amplified their mental health problems.

“I had gone years without anybody and it has been terrifying, I admit it. I don't like to think of anybody else in that position”

An ever-growing range of group meetings and activities take place at the Clubhouse which are organised by members, or facilitated by other organisations, in conjunction with Gateshead Clubhouse etc with further co-productions taking place and planned for the future. Gateshead Clubhouse actively encourages joint working with cross sector organisations on a range of different projects.

In addition to bullet points made below about some of the groups and activities that are currently taking place / have recently taken place, please refer to Appendix i for a list of groups and activities for the period 2016-17.

- Cooking skills, with members who have been trained in health & safety, food hygiene, safeguarding and other requirements. Not only does the cafe provide nutritious meals for its members, it also able to generate further income through the range of baked food it also produces.

- In conjunction with Gateshead Council Adults Learning; arts and crafts, cooking etc.
- Strong links have been forged with the Tyneside Recovery College (ReCoCo), with members attending various courses at ReCoCo or facilitated by ReCoCo at Gateshead Clubhouse e.g. WRAP.
- Developing singing, dancing and poetry, block printing, glass and clay designing and painting, Song-writing, drama and comedy, mask painting etc
- Digital Life Skills / IT and media awareness.
- In collaboration with Media Savvy: other courses in digital skills.
- Local history. Members of the Clubhouse have worked extensively with TWAM on the co-production of local history sessions in local museums and at key historic sites across Gateshead. This work has included the production of an animation, under the tutelage of a professional media teacher, which was shown at the art gallery. As a result of this work, Gateshead Clubhouse forged links with Gateshead library and members have recently formed their own history group which is developing new projects, in collaboration with staff at Gateshead Library.
- Health and well-being: various courses over a long period including mindfulness.
- In conjunction with Gateshead Housing Company: a range of on-going mental health, diabetes and other health related awareness sessions.
- Seasonal groups involving for example trips to various places around the region and elsewhere.
- Other groups that have become established which have been based on the interests shown by Clubhouse members. These include Clubhouse Chronicles which relates to the capturing of the views and rich life experiences of Clubhouse members. It is anticipated that this will lead to future publications, videos and other methods of giving members a channel for the sharing of their life stories.

2.3 External activities

A comprehensive range of external activities are organised by the Clubhouse reps, sometimes in collaboration with cross-sector organisations which provide which have an emphasis on outdoor fitness and well-being. These include gardening, walking, football and cycling.

There are also regular trips to various geographical locations, local, regional and elsewhere e.g. Bill Quay Farm, Alnwick, Kendal & Bowness, Saltburn, Keswick and the North Lakes, Bury Market, York, Harrogate and Edinburgh.

3 Key observations & themes

3.1 Escaping ‘the 4 Walls’: the importance of Gateshead Clubhouse in relation to:

(a) Erosion of community centres during recent years

(b) Service users mental health needs that have been neglected or ignored by statutory services

The basic need for human beings to be part of a community for the benefit of their general health, mental health and well-being has often been underestimated by service providers who can often appear to view service users as a means to accrue profits for their own ends. As a result of this short-sightedness, there has been a steady erosion of community centres in many parts of the region (and across the UK), especially those relating to mental health services. South Tyneside, Sunderland, Newcastle and Gateshead have been particularly affected in recent years.

Gateshead Clubhouse appears to have provided a guiding light in terms of possibilities that exist for reversing this trend, using a model based on the provision of peer-support from a central community hub.

As the main part of the process of putting together this evaluation, it proved useful to undertake a survey of 45 of the members (see Appendix ii) and to capture the views of members of the Clubhouse who have benefited from the activities (see Appendix iii for a list of the comments that were collected); and, interspersed throughout this report, some of the comments garnered from recorded interviews with members who kindly agreed to share their views.

For example, in relation to mental health problems such as depression and suicidal thoughts:

“Without this place, I would be looking at the 4 walls, I would be isolated. I don't actually know if I would [still] be here ... there has been suicidal ideation ... if I wasn't coming here, I couldn't control them thoughts and the ideation, then you are giving power to that sort of train of thoughts and you're not a well chappy you know”.

In relation to local mental health services and the cut backs in provision: how peer support has acted as a safety valve:

“You're not going to get into any mental health services any time quick. The crisis team is only going to help you when you are absolutely in crisis. I have phoned them in the past year twice but I don't think I'll be ringing them again. I think I have lost 10 months of my life trying to go down the NHS route when really I should have been getting involved with my peers. It's my peers that's helped me, like my friends here and this place and just interacting with them”

“I get a lot out of helping people and if it wasn't for this place, I really would end up in mental health and then I would be costing the NHS money, I think this place is saving the NHS a bomb to tell you the truth. I shouldn't have to get that ill before I go to them. The prevention stuff should be there nowadays. There is a prevention team. ... you've got to be really bad, rock bottom, a knife to your throat, already overdosed, a threat to others and have a certain mental health problem before you get help. It shouldn't have to get to that because you might never come back from that and what has caused that is the lack of health and support. ...”

One of the most graphic examples of how a person's mental health needs had been ignored by statutory service providers were given by this member

“... I had said to one person that I have had enough of Gateshead NHS playing Russian Roulette with my health because they knew I was self-harming. They were sending the police and everything but they weren't doing anything”.

3.2 People's initial contact with the Clubhouse

Various members have described their initial contact with the Clubhouse as having been a welcoming, positive and gentle experience, for example:

“ ... my CPN introduced me to the clubhouse about two years ago, he told me about a mindfulness course and how it can help anxiety and depression and things. He didn't go much further except give me the name of the place so I pushed to know more ... Before that I was isolated, I'd cut myself off from everyone, I wasn't even speaking to my family ... I didn't go out with any friends, I

cut myself off from any social media for about 4 years, it was really unhealthy, I wasn't sleeping well, sometimes not sleeping at all. I didn't have any kind of way of talking to anyone. Coming to the clubhouse gently brought me back to life and gently getting back to normal”.

3.3. ‘There is never any pressure’

After an initial visit, some people feel they need to have some time to consider whether the Clubhouse is likely to be useful to them, especially if their experience of socialising with other people has been less than ideal. The fact that they have not felt pressurised in the first instance, often leads them back through the doors, this is one of several examples:

“I've been a member of GC for 2.5 years. I was introduced to it by someone from Evolve ... It was about 7 months later: I gave myself a telling off and was sick of being on my own and isolated, because as human beings, we aren't built to be alone. So I came in here and the more I came in, the more I realised ... the more I got to know people the more I liked them”.

A lack of pressure being put on members forms a key element in the Clubhouse philosophy:

“There is never any pressure to do anything and, as Tony rightly says that does work 'cos when you don't feel under pressure you end up doing more because of it”.

“ ... there was no pressure, you never felt that you were under pressure to get better, it just kind of happened because of the nature of the place. You would come in here and you would meet characters, and get to know them; and relationships happen. It was a lot healthier than where I was a helluva lot healthier”.

“It's good to know I've got options this time, there's not need to rush anything”

3.4 The Clubhouse: a non-hierarchical Model/Training/Policies

“We're all equals in here you know”

“Members first; reps second”

At the time of writing there are 420 registered members of Gateshead Clubhouse. Members come from the various Wards of Gateshead. Operating from a completely

anti-discriminatory perspective, the clubhouse member demographics cross all ages and aspects of gender, ethnicity, mental and physical differences.

It is important to note the vital role played by the Member reps with regards to the unique form of peer led model that the Clubhouse is based on. There are no paid members so the emphasis is on member reps that have been trained, fully committed to providing peer support in numerous ways.

“I attended the reps training, that's run every two months. I got a lot out of that”.

“The reps are all pivotal. Without reps this building doesn't run”

All the member reps are able to access the appropriate training according to the skills they need to hone (e.g. mediation).

There are specific policies developed by the committee which greatly assist the Clubhouse aims that ensure it remains a safe environment for all concerned. These include safeguarding policies, one of which ensures that no member rep is left alone without members or a second person nearby. This seemingly casual policy is both simple to implement and very effective in practice and ensures that the appropriate boundaries are always in place.

3.5 Provision of services for members

A lot of the groups and activities that take place at the Clubhouse have been noted above; their usefulness to members is obvious. In addition, there is a general ethos of not being afraid of necessary changes and incorporating the personal skills and expertise into the new ideas that many members bring to the clubhouse.

3.5.1 IT: Meeting hardware and Software requirements

With regards to the IT needs of the Clubhouse, it was found that the old system was in constant need of maintenance; it was also expensive to run and both hardware and software required a lot of updating. Thanks to the members who had previously worked in IT and financial sectors, it proved possible to source more appropriate equipment and to establish a more efficient system that was significantly cheaper to run and greatly lessened maintenance time and costs.

Software costs have greatly reduced by using on line services to replace the old and clunky bookkeeping software which had used complex spreadsheets and was generally difficult to deal with. The use of cloud software for room booking, invoicing, and receipts is said to have made a huge difference.

3.5.2 The Gateshead Clubhouse Website

<http://gatesheadclubhouse.com/>

The extremely attractive and highly functional website is another sterling example of a member drawing on their extensive skills and expertise. In this instance, a member brought to the Clubhouse coding and web design that had been developed as a professional level designer prior to having developed mental health problems. Their previous work also included the design of *high spec* databases for top level clients. This impressive combination of skills and expertise has resulted in a well-designed website capable of logging and monitoring Clubhouse activities and producing useful statistics and other data for administration purposes.

3.5.3 The provision of IT services for members in general

In turn, this expertise can be seen to have greatly enhanced the offer IT to meet needs of the members who required an easier way to get on the internet. A solution was found through the use of chrome-boxes which apparently require very little background expertise to use. This approach has been extremely useful in relation to the changes in way the benefit system is being implemented. For example:

Universal Credit on-line support for members to deal with this new diary based approach, in an era where there has been a steady erosion of welfare rights. In addition to member reps being able to assist each other with regards to on line forms etc., there is also the opportunity to create links with service providers who can produce in-house training to assist in this process. In the case of Universal Credit system, one member gave a great example of such potential for another form of 'co-production'.

"Today I have been on a universal credit course, which is run by Gateshead Housing Company Moving Forward courses. It was very informative but it was only 3 hours long, I think it should have been longer; so, at the end, I asked one of the trainers if they would be prepared to come here and talk to the rest of the members. They've agreed to that ... I'm going to arrange for the trainers to come and give a talk to the clubhouse members on Universal Credit".

3.6 Finding a Role | Giving Back

Finding a role that they can play, based on their natural skills, expertise and interests was shown to be clearly of great importance to many of the members. For example,

members have said that their lives have been turned around through the confidence they have gained or re-established:

"I've got a great deal out of the clubhouse, it has totally turned my life around. It gives me a reason to get up in the morning, which is very important. I participated with two other members in producing a CH brochure, which we are going to have printed for free and distribute around the area".

Many of the members talk of how the peer support provided by Clubhouse members has helped them to turn their lives around to the extent that they now, in turn, want to give back and help others in any way they can. This "Giving Back" can also lead to a strong determination to let the wider community know about the Clubhouse and make use of the open door policy to invite others, including GPs etc, to see how things work so effectively.

"I've found a lovely GP who has helped me with my sleep disorder. He hadn't heard of GC and asked me to take literature in. So, I went in last week for my appointment with him, I also took literature in. He brought the practice manager into my appointment ... I gave them a load of literature, told them as much information as I could about the clubhouse and the practice manager is coming in next week to meet with me, so I can show her around".

Hairdressers, taxi drivers and a myriad of other people all hear about the Clubhouse by word of mouth. Whilst chatting with a mental health worker from a local hospital at a recent training session, one member said:

"... I could bore you with the amount of information I've got! So I said go on line, look at it and I said we operate an open door policy so if you want to come in ring up .. She also wants to come in for a visit cos she had never heard of it".

"I'm always promoting it because it has done so much for me and I see changes in other people. I get a massive buzz out of helping people, I always have. So, to me, the possibilities are endless at the clubhouse".

I cannot promote the clubhouse enough and I cannot say enough good things from it... So, I think it's brilliant, I love it and I just want to be a part of this as long as I can and give as much back as I receive.

4 Lives moving forward

In addition to all the other positive changes members of the Clubhouse have gained, some members have been able to return to work or have found their life has been able to move in new directions.

*“People have moved on like *** he's doing really well. Work has been such a big thing in his life and now he's back into it. He'd had very bad panic attacks and things, he had been very affected by his mental health. The Clubhouse was the safety net and springboard that he needed” ...*

5 Conclusions

Gateshead Clubhouse:

- Clearly demonstrates that it is possible to create a well-functioning and self-sustaining mental health community model, based on peer support and a common sense approach. It is probably unique in the way it operates.
- The practical nature of the model has been shown to be relatively simple to sustain financially.
- Is managed and run in a very different dynamic to that of a staffed service. It puts the interests of its members at the centre of everything it does and values common sense. It is based on a non-hierarchical structural approach.
- Provides a safety net for the most vulnerable people who have often had harsh lives and experienced severe levels of social isolation. If the clubhouse was not there, many of its members said they would have nowhere to go except to look at their own 4 walls or spend their time looking around shops because they had no one to talk to.
- Provides an antidote to the institutionalism and stagnation which often exists in other building based mental health community services
- Cultivation of members' individual empowerment and responsibility has led to a significant increase in positive mental health and well-being and the avoidance of a 'blame culture' building up through misconceptions about the roles others are playing.
- Members are encouraged to participate in activities at a pace that can be customised to suit their own way of working, individual preferences and differences.

- Operation methods cross all barriers of age, gender, ethnicity, mental and physical impairments.
- Enable friendships to be built among people who have previously had tremendous difficulties in making and sustaining friendships
- Has developed an impressive foundational ethos of peer support ensures that there is always someone prepared to help if someone is ill and no one person is taking on all the pressure. For example, with regards to the kitchen the aforementioned (2.1.iii) the 'cafe light' fall back system.
- There is a fundamental ethos of encouraging members to try out new activities and skills, often by trial and error; and, emphasising the fact that it is OK to make a mistake as long as lessons are learned along the way.

6 Recommendations

Gateshead Clubhouse should be supported to enable:

- Further development of Gateshead Clubhouse model of working
- Further development of monitoring to chart and further demonstrate the impact of this way of working on individuals
- To further promote widely with a view to be piloted elsewhere

Appendix i

Gateshead Clubhouse Activities /Groups held 2016-2018

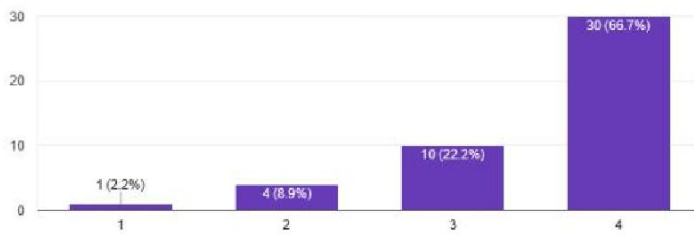
<u>2017-2018 Activities</u>	<u>2016-17 Activities</u>	<u>2017-18 Activities</u>	<u>2 Year Totals</u>
Mindfulness	3	7	
	0	9	109
Emotional Regulation	13	9	22
Art	16	11	27
Housing Company Media		3	3
Digital Media		2	2
health & nutrition		4	4
Yoga		29	29
History Group Trips	4	7	11
Women's Friendship Group Trips	15	16	31
Cooking Skills	22	23	45
Baking group	35	14	49
Health Champions	42	22	64
Craft Group	32	23	55
Spirituality& Recovery		4	4
Jewellery Making	5	28	33
Hearing Voices Group	16	23	39
Anxiety Management	8		8
Video & Camera Group		13	13
Glass Making	30		30
Totals:	268	310	578

Appendix ii

Feedback from 45 Clubhouse Members June-July 2018

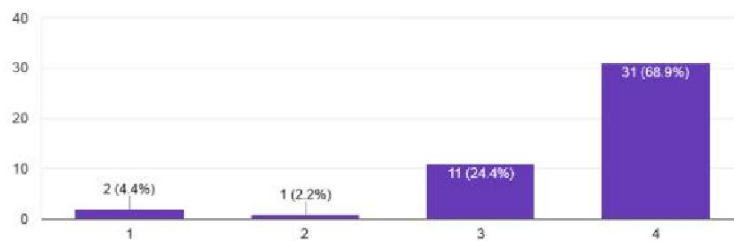
1. meet new people -

45 responses



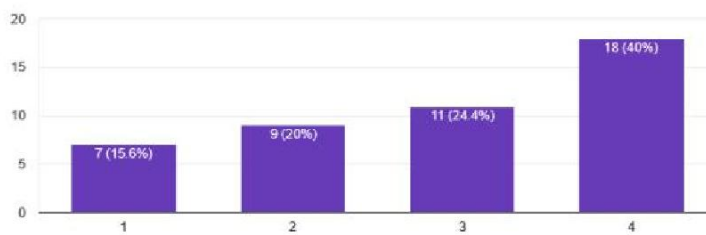
2. meet up with people you know -

45 responses



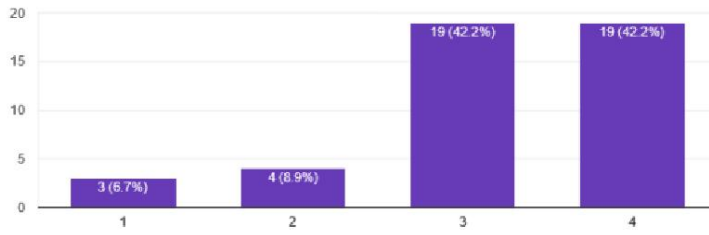
3. be more physically active -

45 responses



4. take time out -

45 responses



1



2



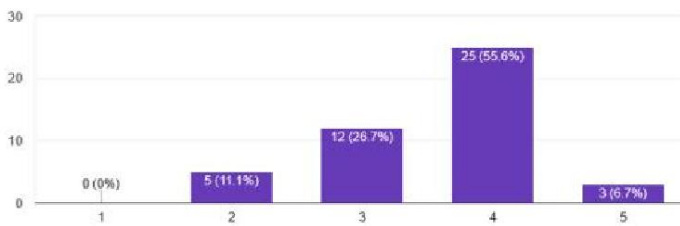
3



4

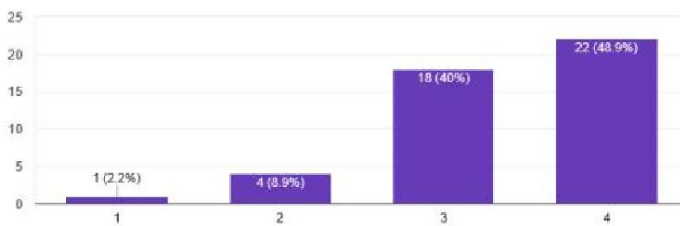
6. learn new things -

45 responses



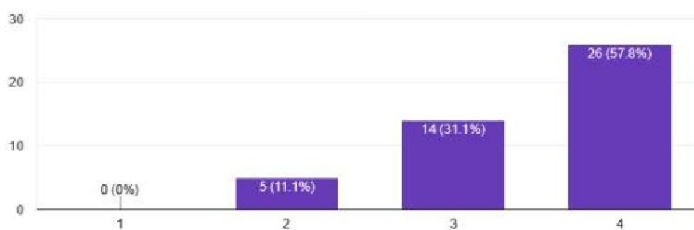
7. try new things -

45 responses



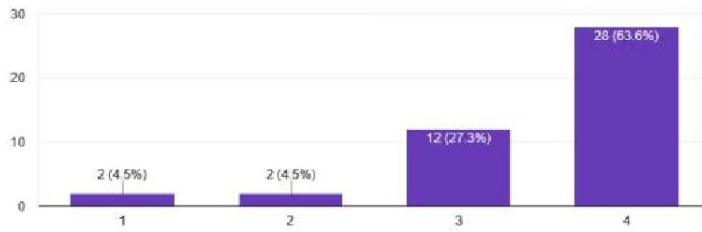
8. give your time to support others -

45 responses



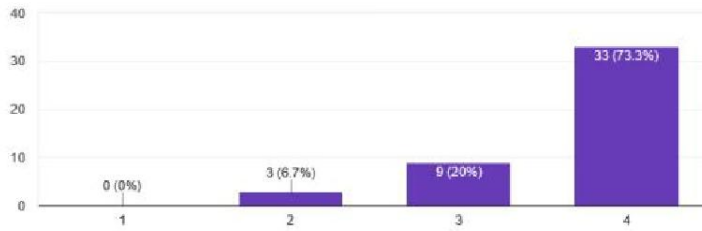
9. take steps to improve you mental well being -

44 responses



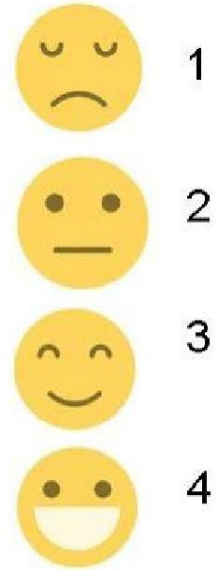
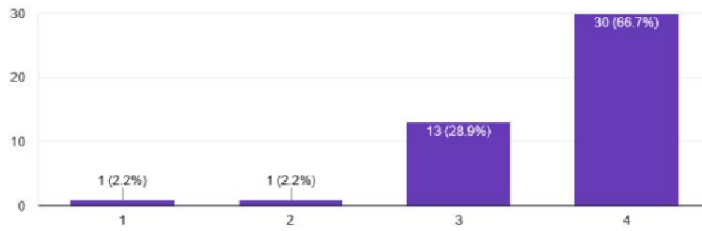
10. feel less isolated -

45 responses



11. improve your mood -

45 responses



Comments Received

- [The Clubhouse] keeps my mind active and meet new friends (2)
- Meet new friends, staying active, taking part in groups.
meet new friends
- A really good lifeline for people who', gives confidence to go out and meet people. nice people, been very supportive to me.
- A very positive experience, I was greatly helped following depression when my husband died. I've had a chance to do different sessions and therapy (mindfulness). I have also done history, walking football and social outings.
- The clubhouse gives me a reason to get up in the morning as well as the opportunity to improve myself/learn new things
- The Clubhouse is a good place to be, you meet new people everyday. Friendly environment, it is unique, there is no other service like it as far as I know.
- I feel safe
- Improved mental health
- the clubhouse is great, i love the support i get here helping me to get out of bed and meet people
- I love the clubhouse
- Stopping social isolation, helping look after myself socialising, helpful people
- The Clubhouse has helped me a lot with my illness. They could not do more
- Without the clubhouse i think i would have succumbed to paranoid thoughts and suicidal ideas

- The clubhouse gives me a routine and keeps me busy, i get to do new things and do new tasks just taking my time
- If it was not for Gateshead clubhouse i would not be as happy as i am. I would be doing nothing at the care home; you cannot get friends like the ones at the clubhouse