

Polaris House
Lands Committee, Concerning 9290 Hurlock Av

Oral Presentation

February 12, 2018

Polaris House became an independent entity in September of 2002. This was the result of more than a few members of the Juneau community coming together to establish a mental health service that focused on an innovative method to assist adults who are living with serious and persistent mental illness. Polaris House became a part of an international community of clubhouses in April of 2013. This organization, Clubhouse International Inc., has more than 300 hundred clubhouses in 30 countries on six continents. As Clubhouse International Inc. is global, Polaris House is locally owned and operated and will remain so. Clubhouse International provides accreditation services and training opportunities, but does not own any clubhouses.

Polaris House is the only accredited clubhouse in Alaska. Our services are not replicated anywhere in Juneau, or the rest of the State. In addition to this we are going to install psychiatric respite services. This is an unmet need in the community. The Alaska DHSS Division of Behavioral Health acknowledges this, and support our work to provide this much needed service. These respite services are designed to prevent homelessness, and prevent expensive inpatient acute stabilization. A person would be admitted through a formal process that includes an intake, treatment planning and discharge planning. Stays are short, usually no more than five days.

The services we provide alleviate pressure on other providers in the community. We are effective at reducing the number of inpatient days persons spend on the mental health unit. Our work increases the likely hood a person will take medications regularly. Our supports result in greater participation by the member in community activity. We assist the local community mental health center by working as partners to ensure persons served jointly have housing and access to recovery supports.

The services we provide are at no out of pocket costs to our members. Our members a guaranteed a safe place, a place to belong to, the right to meaningful relationships, and the right to meaningful work. Through the years our membership has swelled to almost 500 members. We currently serve 70 persons each month, and 20 members each day. We are overcrowded and need a larger space; such as the property we are talking about today.

Our members rely on Polaris House for housing needs and concerns. In keeping with our standards we prevent homelessness, assist to improve housing situations, and advocate with landlords to eliminate evictions.

Polaris House provides three distinct employment programs that are effective in assisting persons to achieve paid employment. Our employment supports are best practices. Currently, our members are investing \$400,000.00 each year of their earnings to support local businesses.

Through Polaris House members have access to attend education opportunities in the community. This ranges from DEC food worker cards to classes at UAS.

Polaris House focuses on providing support as our members complete Medicaid applications, Social Security claims, food stamps, housing vouchers, and all manner of public support.

Another unduplicated feature we would provide is a training center. We would host Clubhouse International Inc. training events. This would include clubhouses from around the world coming to Juneau. This training center will be made available to local organizations for their training needs and purposes. The training center will be available upon the installment of the teleconferencing service.

We believe the facility as it is would not require major upgrades or replacements. The floor plan suits our needs for operating the clubhouse, the psychiatric respite, and the training center. We would solicit funds to install an updated teleconferencing capacity within the "Lake Side", building.

The budget we submitted demonstrates our ability to afford operating costs, and building maintenance. This is a realistic budget based on current, and projected costs.

Polaris House has a number of sources of steady funding. The Trust Authority is dedicated to assisting us financially. Over the years the Trust has provided \$275,000.00 each year. Additionally, the Trust has indicated a willingness to provide a grant to purchase the property. A permanent home, owned by the Polaris House is the ultimate goal and preferred outcome to secure Trust funding, but grant funds to cover rental costs may also be another option.

The Alaska Division of Behavioral health is committed to the ongoing operation of Polaris House. This includes stable funding in the form of grants. Division leadership has stated support not only for the clubhouse, but for the psychiatric respite, too. Polaris House has over the past few years gained other supportive partners from the provide sector who regularly make significant financial donations.

We believe our timeline to be well organized and attainable. First, moving in entails moving physical equipment. We have vehicles, manpower and unrestricted funds that are ready. Second, the ground work to form the psychiatric respite will begin immediately upon moving in. The challenge in this area is contracting the appropriate licensed person for intakes, assessments and discharge plans, and the hiring of staff for evenings and weekends.

Polaris House will continue to maintain ADA accessibility requirements. We currently meet all ADA requirements and will continue to do so.

Polaris House is a locally owned and operated enterprise. We are a valuable community resource to persons living with mental illness diagnosis and the service provider community of Juneau.

Thank you for your time. Thank you for making this opportunity available to Juneau.