



A Message From Our CEO

Streettohome's strength is bringing together leaders from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors through book clubs, study trips and business cases to be inspired by best-practice models around the world with the hope of co-creating evidence-based solutions that address root causes of homelessness here in our own city. Therapeutic Communities (TC) are a small group-based approach to resolving long-term mental health issues and/or substance use challenges and a recent focus of ours.

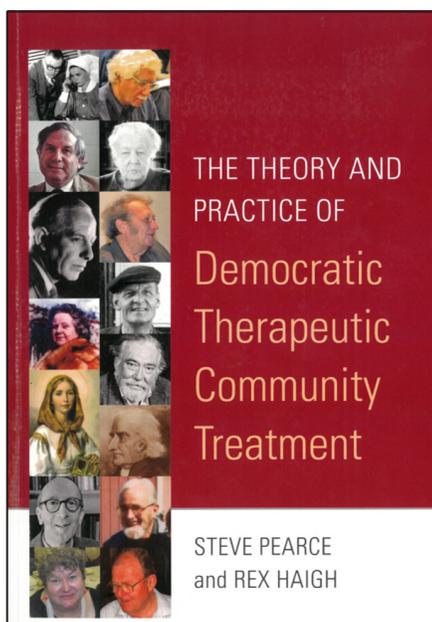
Our recent book club discussed TC innovations described in *The Theory and Practice of Democratic Therapeutic Community Treatment* by Dr. Steve Pearce and Dr. Rex Haigh.

The authors are two psychiatrists that have been leading TC innovations in the UK over the past 16 years. TC core principles and evidence-based practices can be incorporated into a variety of group settings to enhance supports for improved individual outcomes.

In this issue, we hope you enjoy meeting the authors and two book club members who were inspired and are exploring ways to adapt what they've learned to help their communities form meaningful connections that support each other in moving along their preferred life path.




Rob Turnbull, Ph.D., CHE
President & CEO



Meet the Authors

"I think when we have people in our therapeutic communities who are more chaotic, with frequent use of emergency services or police. One of the things that really helps them is the containment aspect of the TC – there are clear boundaries and a sense of accountability to one another," says Steve.

The TC is a flexible model with three basic principles: promoting personal-agency and a sense of belonging, ensuring everyone

has a voice (democracy), and developing mutual concern and accountability for one another.

"We're not looking after people, and thereby disempowering them or potentially promoting unhealthy dependencies. Rather, we're helping empower people to find the things that will be good for them," says Steve. Originally styled as full-time, live-in communities, the model has been adapted by Rex and Steve to be a visiting day

program. TC groups can range from spending five hours a day, three days per week to shorter engagements of a few hours one day a week. These modified TCs co-exist with longer-term, live-in treatment options and help meet the varying needs.

As the time spent in groups was reduced, the authors thought that members who had greater stability in their lives would do better with less time, and those with more difficulties would require more time in the group. To their surprise, the authors report that it's quite unpredictable.

“There are some people who are very chaotic and very at risk. And one day or even half a day in a TC can be like turning on a light – they suddenly pick themselves up, and they're up and running,” says Steve.

The authors explained that for some, live-in treatment doesn't suit them – it can be too intense or too much at once. Shortening

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the time spent in a TC allows for more flexibility to create a plan that works best for each individual and their needs.

No matter the length of time spent in groups, members create a sense of belonging, safety, and hope – by establishing expectations of how to behave with and learn from each other. The group supports every member's goals while holding each other accountable.

While the obvious advantage to having shorter TC treatment is the cost savings, the real gain comes with therapy happening alongside real life.

“Real life is incorporated into therapy every day. A member may go home and have a drink, binge, and come back the next morning wanting to talk about it, and they're able to understand that in its proper context,” says Rex.

On the other hand, Rex notes that, “in a live-in facility, members can be completely isolated in a bubble away from real life, and they don't have those experiences co-existing with their therapy.”

The principles of belongingness and co-creation can be incorporated into a variety

of settings – wherever small groups of people come together regularly. A supportive housing operator once asked the authors how to improve tenant outcomes in terms of reducing self-harm; getting on top of their drug use; and increasing a sense of happiness. Quite often people never get together, and the operator was left wondering why.

“The book isn't a slavish recipe to follow, but the principles for healthy functioning don't change. We told the provider to bring people together, assume that they're responsible for one another, and produce a feeling of belongingness between them. And they did. Gradually the living environment improved. As soon as people feel like they become a part of the relationships around them, they will feel like they have a stake in the fabric of the community. And they start to feel hopeful and that something better is possible,” says Steve.

“The model is really a different way of looking at relationships. Members – including staff – are able to be themselves more, be playful, and have fun with the work. It gives you a different way of relating to others, to create that sense of belongingness and mutual concern for one another, and that's a big part of what makes it successful,” says Rex.



**Therapeutic
Community
Principles**

**promoting personal-agency
and a sense of belonging**

**ensuring everyone has a voice
(democracy)**

**developing mutual concern
and accountability**



Adapting To Promote Connection

‘The opposite of addiction is connection’ is a phrase commonly used in the recovery sector.

The TC model teaches people to work with, and socially learn from one another, contributing to self-awareness and the development of meaningful connections. While TC’s have been around for decades, providing a safe space for people with mental health and substance use issues, the UK adapted live-in TCs to part-time day programs. This ensures that members maintain their connections with the outside community and put their learnings to use in their real lives every day.

“With the pandemic, people have felt this sense of loss of community, so we’ve really started to think about how we can ensure that the connection between people and their community isn’t lost,” says Ron Lirette, CEO of Pacifica Treatment Centre and member of Streetohome’s book club. “How are we bringing people in – is it client-centred, and does it promote a sense of belonging? What are their goals and how do

we support them in achieving these and encourage them to support each other? And how are we supporting people going back out into the community?”

Rex and Steve emphasized the advantage of ensuring TC member’s therapy happens alongside real life, which helps them reconnect with, and build, relationships with others outside the community.

By forging healthy connections within the TC and their home community, people gain socialization opportunities and communal support from connections who really understand and accept them for who they are.

Ron acknowledges the importance of that and is working to incorporate the TC principles into the addiction treatment programming Pacifica offers.

“What are their goals and how do we support them in achieving these and encourage them to support each other?”

“Even though we’re a treatment centre and not a TC, we can still incorporate the TC principles of belonging, personal accountability, mutual concern and democracy into our programming – they apply to a wide range of contexts. I want to see us evolve to provide these next levels of support, which is really creating the environment for peers to congregate together and to learn from each other – to grow and evolve with each other and build their confidence,” says Ron.

Just ask us how

TC principles and practices can enhance current supports in small group settings where vulnerable individuals come together.

People Are Stronger Together

“People are the masters of their own destiny and health, but at times, they need support and help,” says Nancy Keough, Executive Director of The Kettle Society.

Streetohome and The Kettle have partnered to introduce a flagship Recovery Café in Vancouver – the 23rd in North America and first in Canada. The Recovery Café uses TC principles to provide a peer-led refuge for individuals seeking recovery from homelessness, trauma, poverty, isolation, stigma, substance use and/or mental health challenges.

Nancy says the TC approach in the UK has been successful in truly empowering people to develop skills and confidence to have more control in their lives – people are reconnecting with friends and family, taking charge of their health, and having a fulfilling life as active and contributing members of their community.

“People are stronger together. There’s this radical change that happens and gives people hope,” she says.

“There’s great value in incorporating the TC principles

and practices into the recovery system in Vancouver, and there can be really thoughtful ways to include these into new and existing services. Our members are really excited about the opportunity to be a part of the Recovery Café – something that’s more peer-driven, where they can grow together and support one another, where they can both co-create, and help someone else.”

“There’s this radical change that happens that gives people hope.”

The Living Learning Experience (LLE) demonstrates the TC model

LLE courses have been running for 25 years and are suitable for anybody interested in understanding what a ‘Therapeutic Community’ is, how it works, and what it feels like to be a part of one. They’re designed as an authentic, three-day TC experience taking place entirely in groups with a structured program of activities.

The experience incorporates TC principles and practices creating a powerful and effective environment for learning and personal development. Participants develop practical skills in the way they relate to, communicate with, and interact among others.

“We’ve had fantastic results showing how people’s specific competencies expand after taking part in the experiential learning offered. The Living Learning Experience makes a difference in the effectiveness of people’s practical work skills, regardless of your role,” says Rex.

Learn more about the TC model and keep up to date with discussions, webinars, virtual conferences, and events like the planned 2022 Living Learning Experience in Vancouver – on Streetohome’s TC Community of Practice. Chapter summaries, questions and discussion notes are available for those interested in organizing their own book club. To learn more, contact info@streetohome.org.

about us

Streetohome is changing lives and building better futures by working with the private sector to broker and leverage new funding, innovative ideas, and opportunities for collaboration between public and nonprofit sectors to implement sustainable solutions to homelessness in Vancouver. Through these collaborations, individuals are able to realize their housing, health & wellness, legal & advocacy, education, employment & volunteering, and community & belonging goals, empowering those at-risk or with lived experience of homelessness to move along their preferred life path.

Homelessness is a community challenge. Join us and become a part of the solution.

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