

How Oxford Houses Can Make Treatment More Effective

Concepts like Oxford House are absolutely critical in the rehabilitation area. –Herb Kleber, M.D.

Washington Conference, August 1989

Both residential and outpatient treatment providers recognize the value of time and support for the recovering drug addict and alcoholic to learn and become comfortable with new behavior. Historically, the halfway house was developed as a means to provide the kind of time and support for the recovering individual to develop a lifestyle free of alcohol and drug use. Unfortunately, neither society nor the health care system had the resources necessary to establish enough halfway houses to provide space for all who could benefit from living in an environment supportive of recovery.

Today, Oxford houses fill that void because they are self-run and financially self-supported *rented* houses. Started in 1975, Oxford Houses have developed a sound system of operations and a national movement of more than 1,200 individual homes.

Already many residential and outpatient treatment programs have discovered that Oxford Houses are relatively inexpensive to get started and assure better outcomes for their clients. The move toward Oxford House™ living – during or after treatment – has been accelerated, as insurance companies, employers, EAPs and society at large have demanded better outcomes from treatment providers. As the tolerance for chronic relapsing has decreased, the number of Oxford Houses has increased. Nearly 80% of the residents in Oxford Houses stay clean and sober.¹

The new trend in treatment includes renting a house, getting an Oxford House™ charter, and assembling recovering individuals to live in the house and learn the Oxford House™ system of operations. Since all Oxford Houses are rented, it is relatively easy to get clusters of Oxford Houses started in any geographic area.

Oxford House, Inc. Questions and Answers

Q. What is Oxford House™?

A. Oxford House™ is self-help supportive housing for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. Each house must be chartered by Oxford House, Inc. the non-profit umbrella organization for the network of Oxford Houses. Each House follows standardized operations developed through 33 years of Oxford House experience.

Q. How do Oxford Houses get started?

A. The World Services office, when funding is available, can help a new house get started by providing on-site outreach and then provides technical support after the house has started to keep it on the right track.

Q. What is the cost of getting a new house started?

A. In places where states, providers, drug courts, or foundations provide grants to get houses started, the average one-time cost for technical assistance to start a new house is less than \$40,000. It pays a trained, supervised outreach worker to rent a house, find suitable residents and teach them the system of operations.

Q. What are the conditions of a charter?

A. The three conditions of a charter are: [1] the group must be democratically run; [2] the group must be financially self-supported, and [3] the group must expel any resident who uses alcohol or drugs in or out of the house. There is no charge for the charter.

Q. How does a group get a charter?

A. An existing group, a potential group or a treatment provider helping to form a group can apply to Oxford House, Inc. – the umbrella non-profit organization – at the address listed below.

Oxford House, Inc.
1010 Wayne Ave., Suite 300
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Telephone (301) 587-2916
Facsimile (301) 589-0539
Internet: www.oxfordhouse.org

Oxford House™

Self-Help Recovery Housing Since 1975



*Oxford House
Comes of Age*

World Convention Wichita 2006

*Going back to where you came from after treatment
for alcoholism and drug addiction almost always
spells failure – a return to old behavior.*

Mark Spence, May 5, 1991
CBS Program “60 Minutes”

Oxford House, Inc. is the 501(c)(3) non-profit umbrella organization of the national network of individual Oxford Houses.

The primary purpose of Oxford House, Inc. is to establish enough self-run, self-supported recovery houses to provide an opportunity for every recovering individual to learn a clean and sober way of life – forever.

Contributions and grants are used to expand the network of Oxford Houses by providing trained outreach workers to establish new houses and to provide on-going organizational and technical support from a central services office.

This pamphlet “Self-Help Recovery Housing Since 1975” discusses how Oxford Houses can provide the missing link in the treatment protocol to assure recovery without relapse.

Internet Address: www.oxfordhouse.org

¹ See the De Paul University studies funded by NIDA and NIAAA grants. Reported in AP story August 18, 2005.

Recovering From Alcoholism and Drug Addiction

Alcoholism and drug addiction are chronic and progressive problems. The alcoholic and drug addict become “hooked” on their drug of choice and physically all cells in their bodies call out for a steady supply of the drug. This physical compulsion causes the mind to trigger any kind of behavior needed to get the next drink of alcohol or other drug “fix.” Once addicted the only “cure” is total abstinence -- stopping the use of the alcohol and drugs -- forever.

Stopping the use of drugs and alcohol use is difficult, but not impossible. Most addicts go through a number of periods where they stop use because they have run out of alcohol or their drug of choice. When an addict stops, he or she feels sick because of withdrawal; i.e., every cell in the body is calling out for the drug and the body shakes, sweats and produces great anxiety. The addict really “feels” he or she is going to die unless the drug of choice is obtained quickly. This is called detoxification and it usually ends within minutes after the addict has ingested his or her drug of choice. However, for a fortunate few -- who can go three to seven days without taking their drug of choice -- detoxification is the beginning of a whole new life.

Short-term custody -- in a hospital setting or a supervised detoxification facility -- is the usual way to stop an addict’s compulsive use of alcohol and drugs. Treatment can educate and motivate an individual to stay stopped and Oxford Houses can help to make treatment successful.

Finding a suitable house to rent, recruiting initial residents, teaching the system of operation to the residents and recovery community is often provided by trained outreach workers at very little cost. Once started it costs very little to keep houses on track because residents run the house and pay expenses. The residents pay the operating costs of the recovery homes and operations are maintained by following the disciplined, democratic, self-help system of operation used for more than 33 years.



Staying Stopped

Throughout its existence, Oxford House has combined the concepts of self-support and responsibility with a fellowship having the common purpose of continued and comfortable sobriety.”

From Tradition One
Oxford House Manual ©

Behavior change is never easy and it is especially difficult for the individual who is recovering from addiction. While the physical craving for drugs ends within a few days, the mind tries to trick an individual into returning to alcohol or drug use. When you think about it, the mind is doing what comes naturally -- forgetting pain and remembering pleasure.

Professionals speak often of “denial” when dealing with recovering addicts. The addict really does not believe that alcohol and drug use produces harm. The addict “remembers” the good feeling that came from the alcohol or drugs and wants to recapture it. At the same time, he or she forgets the violence, irrational behavior (fights, loss of job and family), and physical withdrawal that makes one feel sick (hang-overs).

Treatment plus Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) -- twelve-step self-help programs -- have helped millions of recovering addicts to change their behavior to adopt lifelong abstinence. Unfortunately, many recovering individuals need more support than AA and NA alone. Oxford Houses provide the additional support and the time to learn new behavior.

About 50% of Oxford House residents nationally continue aftercare counseling. Residents also go to an average of 5 AA or NA meetings a week -- even though there is no requirement to do so. No wonder 80% of the residents stay clean and sober.

Getting into an existing Oxford House™ requires an individual application and acceptance by 80% of the existing residents. If needed, a treatment provider or those in recovery can start a new Oxford House™ if the house can accommodate at least six individuals and a charter is granted by Oxford House, Inc.



How Oxford Houses Work

Oxford Houses are rented family houses where groups of recovering individuals rent to live together in an environment supportive of recovery from addiction. Each house is self-run and self-supported following a standardized system of democratic operation. Each group -- or treatment provider on behalf of a group -- obtains a charter from Oxford House, Inc., the umbrella organization for the national network of individual Oxford Houses. Get material at www.oxfordhouse.org

An Oxford House charter has three basic requirements for the group:

- it must be democratically self-run,
- it must be financially self-supported, and
- it must expel any resident who returns to using alcohol or drugs.

The standardized disciplined system of operations has evolved from the 31-year history of Oxford House and permits replication of Oxford Houses throughout the country. All Oxford Houses are tied together to assure mutual support and quality control.

Individuals living in an Oxford House™ learn or relearn values, responsible behavior and slowly, but surely, develop long-term behavior to assure comfortable sobriety -- forever. Some individuals live in Oxford Houses a few months, others for many years. Together, these individuals develop each Oxford House™ into a place to learn comfortable sobriety without relapse.

To get a client into an existing Oxford House™ call the house to find a vacancy or visit the web site. If there are no existing houses in your area, start one. For more information or to receive a proposal to help your treatment program develop a cluster of Oxford Houses contact:

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