

RAP's Women's Program

Oxford Houses has given me the opportunity to be in a drug free environment with recovering women. I have two children: a 15 year old girl and 3 year old boy. My children spent their lives around drugs, alcohol and domestic violence. Today I am happy to say that with the help of Oxford House that is no longer the case. My children are always safe and happy. I know that at no time will my children be exposed to the drugs, alcohol or violence of our previous lives.

- Tallie

Trauma Informed Housing in Oxford

In August of 2009, RAP held a retreat for women living in Oxford houses to try to better understand the issues in its existing women's recovery housing. Women's houses have higher turnover, higher failure rates and generally more problems than men's houses. At the retreat, the women, themselves, identified violence-related trauma as a major source of the on-going problems. Surveys indicate that:

- 76.7% of the women living in Oregon Recovery Home housing are domestic violence (DV) survivors.
- 52.2% have a mental health diagnosis.

RAP's survey information clearly indicates that the women are more traumatized than the men.

Women at the retreat also identified areas in which they thought the Oxford House model better met their needs than other options. Comparing DV needs to addiction needs, they defined DV shelters as treatment centers and pointed out a total lack of long-term "recovery" opportunities for DV survivors. They listed the following advantages:

- RAP and the Oxford House model of recovery housing provided guaranteed, low cost housing for as long as they needed it.
- They liked the peer mentoring aspect of living in a group environment with the Oxford House model of structured self-help targeted towards teaching life skills (such as financial management and assertiveness training).
- The Oxford model focuses on learning how to rebuild relationships; and breaking down internal barriers to recovery.
- Finally, they found that living with other DV survivors reduced their feelings of isolation and provided high levels of security.

In response, RAP formed a women's committee named the HOW (Helping Oxford Women) committee to work on women's issues in Oxford housing. The committee agreed that RAP sees a need to provide additional support to its women's housing which addresses the specific needs of DV survivors.

To that end, RAP administration has:

- Developed a “women’s program” with its own administrator;
- RAP has designated a dedicated women’s outreach worker who is attending classes on DV and trauma issues. She, herself, is a recovering addict and a DV survivor.
- They applied for and received a grant to support a resource coordinator to identify and provide linkages for child care classes, employment assistance, legal assistance and education as well as mental health, domestic violence counseling, and parenting classes.

Non-addict Domestic Violence Housing

The other serious issue is the lack of available shelter space for any DV survivors.

Last year in Oregon:

- DV help lines answered 188,694 calls. 19,996 requests for shelter could not be met.
- In 2008, in the Tri-County Area, there were 53,784 calls to the help line. There were 784 units served in shelters in the same year.
- Due to the lack of affordable transitional housing, shelter stays are lengthening, having gone from an average of 16.6 days in 2000 to 51.32 days in 2009, reducing available shelters space accordingly.

The standard shelter stay is supposed to last no longer than 30 days. This is not long enough for a woman to find a job and acquire living space. There is virtually no available long term transitional housing available. In a recent meeting with the Multnomah County Domestic Violence Coordinator, the RAP women’s program outreach worker was told that lack of long term housing alternatives was their single biggest problem. And that is in Oregon’s major metropolitan area. In the rural communities around the state, there are no services at all.

RAP sees the Oxford model as an opportunity to provide long term, low cost, supportive housing to domestic violence (DV) survivors, addict and non-addict, across the state of Oregon by expanding its existing housing model for addiction recovery to meet the needs of DV survivors.

RAP has years of experience in teaching life skills, relationship development and self empowerment. RAP thinks that by adapting this program to domestic violence, long term, low cost housing can be provided for DV survivors at a very low cost to the community.

RAP’s goal is to open 20 women’s houses for domestic violence survivors, (160 new beds) over the next 3 years based on the Oxford model of democratically run, self-supporting, self-governing, low cost housing and supported by the Oxford system. Along with housing, RAP will provide linkages to other service providers to provide “in-house services.”

This proposal has been met with enthusiasm in the Tri-County area by existing domestic violence services.

- Multnomah County has already agreed to provide “in-house” mental health and domestic violence counseling services, Center for Family Success will provide parenting classes for a nominal cost, etc.
- Both Raphael House and the YWCA have volunteered to partner with RAP and provide support services to houses in their areas.
- Martha Strawn Morris of the Gateway Center has offered support and referrals.

- An advisory committee with representatives from the YWCA, Raphael House and Clackamas Women's Services are working on policies and procedures for this new type of domestic violence housing.

The first house opened in October in partnership with the Metro Alliance for the Common Good and Clackamas Women's Services.

The Advisory Group is continuing to meet. The last meeting discussed potential benchmarks for success. New members include a representative from the Washington County Domestic Resource Center and the Clackamas County's Domestic Violence Coordinator.

Oxford, An Affordable Housing Model

Can the Oxford Model become a means of providing low cost, affordable housing for at-risk populations that will enable the state to expand its housing support despite its major budget problems?

There is no question that there are significant needs for affordable, transitional housing to serve at-risk populations. These populations include people suffering from addiction, mental health problems, veterans with PTSD, domestic violence survivors, older addicts who need medication and those who are dual diagnosis patients. Unfortunately, the ability for state governments to support these populations is declining both because of restricted budgets and the impact of “small government” ideology.

The Recovery Association Project is proposing that the Oxford Housing Model may be an answer to this problem. Unlike other housing models, it does not depend on government

Rather it is a private/ public partnership based on the idea of renting houses from private landlords to provide group housing with internal mutual support mechanisms. It has the following strengths:

- It is very inexpensive to run, costing approximately \$2.50 per bed/night as opposed to \$24.00 - \$60.00.
- It is a model based on developing self-dependency in its membership. Members are required to pay their share of expenses and their rent. They need to be employed. Other members will help them find employment but it is expected that within two months, they will be employed.
- It puts money back into the private sector. Houses are rented from the private retail rental market. It is estimated that \$3.2 million a year goes into the rental market in Oregon.
- It is a tested model that has been working successfully in the addiction community for thirty years.
- It is flexible and responsive. If a community is identified as needing housing, houses can be opened quickly. Houses that don't work can be closed with little long term damage to the system.
- It provides a higher standard of living than single room occupancy units. People have living rooms, dining rooms, even hot tubs. They can share a large screen TV. Children can live with a single parent and have a yard to play in.
- Isolation issues are reduced. People living in SRO's are automatically isolated. In a house, it is very hard to isolate and people are surrounded by others who have experienced the same problems.
- It is a model which can be implemented in small and rural communities.

The Oxford System:

The Oxford House model is a system of affordable, self-supported, democratically operated homes that offers residents recovering from substance abuse peer support to develop long-term abstinence skills. Founded in 1975, Oxford House has refined a system of operations which, when followed, results in a financially viable house with acceptable standards of behavior. Parallel to this concept lies the organizational structure of Oxford House, Inc. It is the umbrella organization which provides the network connecting all Oxford Houses and allocates resources to duplicate the Oxford House concept where needs arise.

Self-Sustained Democratically Run Housing

The generic description for housing run on the Oxford House model is "self-sustained, democratically run" housing. 43 states contract with organizations (many with the national Oxford House, Inc. organization) to provide outreach workers to support and train new house members in the Oxford system of operations.

The model starts with a federally funded revolving loan fund that provides funds for starting houses including such expenses as construction, first and last month's rent, deposits, furniture, etc. The average loan to the house is \$4,000 which must be repaid over two years. Houses are leased on three to five year leases from local landlords. Landlords are willing to lease to Oxford housing because they are guaranteed that the house will be returned to them in good condition. This guarantee is possible due to the pyramid system of support provided by the system.

Each house is run under a system of elected house officers assigned specific responsibilities. Each house "member" pays "equal expense shared" on a monthly basis consisting of rent, shared house expenses such as utilities, coffee, etc., and a \$15.00 fee. 6-12 houses form a chapter and each house president is a chapter officer. Chapters keep \$8.00 of the \$15.00 fee and pass the rest on to the state board which is comprised of all the chapter presidents. Funds at the chapter and state level are saved in order to provide emergency loans to houses which have developed financial problems. Along with emergency loans, the state and chapter officers provide support and training to the houses. If a house closes, any remedial work that needs to be done on the house comes out of chapter or state funds.

This system requires that all house members be able to pay rent and shared expenses. For the most, that requires that members have jobs. Houses are "democratically run" in that they democratically impose standards of behavior on house members, elect new members and can ask members to leave.

As affordable housing and/ or transitional housing, this model is very inexpensive in terms of public funds. Unlike building housing units to provide affordable housing, there are no capital costs. Because houses are self-sufficient and depend on internal management, management costs are very low. It is estimated that a single outreach worker can support up to 30 houses. Women's houses, because of the higher trauma rate, tend to require a greater outreach to house ratio. Nonetheless, the estimated cost is \$2.50 per bed/night.

RAP

In the state of Oregon, the contracting agency is the Recovery Association Project (RAP.) In Oregon there is an Oxford House organization which is franchised by Oxford House, Inc., but Oxford Houses of Oregon is not an incorporated entity. Consequently the state contracts with RAP to run the revolving loan fund; hire and manage the outreach workers paid for by the state contract; provide training; open and close houses; and is the final point for issue resolution. RAP works very closely with Oxford Houses of Oregon to provide support for the Oxford pyramid structure.

RAP, under its contract with the state, also runs houses that are not franchised by Oxford House, Inc. but meet the definition of “self-sustained, democratically run.” This is usually because the house has chosen not to be associated with Oxford Houses of Oregon. It can also be because the house does not meet the charter definitions of an Oxford House. For example, there may be people in the house who, for one reason or another like pain control, may be legitimately using Class I narcotics. The Oxford House franchise does not allow for any addictive drug use in a house.

The Growth of the Model

RAP runs an annual survey on its membership. In reviewing the survey, RAP found that it was serving the following populations:

	Men	Women
Homeless before joining a house	191	65
Homeless at some point	890	208
No safe living option	914	286
Experience severe abuse	303	246
Mental Health Diagnosis	322	168
Re-entry from correctional system	252	47

In looking at these numbers, RAP realized that it was the largest provider of housing for domestic violence survivors in the state, a major supplier of affordable housing to the homeless, and a major source of stable housing for re-entry from the corrections system.

Then someone asked the question:

If a women is a domestic violence survivor, do we turn her away because she isn't an addict?

The question raises the issue of applicability of the Oxford housing model to other at-risk populations. Since these populations are already being served by Oxford Houses, RAP is convinced that the model can be productively adapted to meet the needs of non-addicted members of these communities.

REFERRALS INTO RAP'S "WOMEN IN SAFE HOUSING (WISH)" HOUSES:

Self Sufficiency Program

Transition Projects

- Jeans Place
- Women's Emergency Shelter

Native American Rehabilitation Association (NARA)

Native American Youth Family Center (NAYA)

Options in Counseling

Volunteers of America (VOA)

- Women's Residential Tx
- Home Free
- FIT for recovery

Depaul Treatment Centers

Project Network

LifeWorks NW

Bradley Angle

- Healing Roots

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)

Clackamas Women's Services (CWS)

Portland Women's Crisis Line

Human Solutions

Letty Owens

Central City Concern

Portland Metro Tx

CODA

· Tigard Recovery Center

Raphael House

Catholic Charities

Impact NW

Family Skill Builders

Rose Haven

Goose Hollow Shelter

Self Enhancement Inc

Salvation Army

- SAFES
- West Women's Shelter

Center for Family success

Multnomah County

- Aging and Disability Services
- DCJ
- Early Childhood Services

Gateway Center

Yolanda House (YWCA)

Cascadia BHC

Department of Human Services

Mercy Corp- Re-Entry program

Integrated Health Centers

Black Parent Initiative

Domestic Violence Resource Center (DVRC)