

FINDINGS IN BRIEF: A STUDY OF SUBSTANCE-FREE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS IN WASHINGTON COUNTY, OREGON

The Washington County (Oregon) Community Corrections Department (WCCC) received federal funding to provide offenders with substance-free transitional housing through the use of Oxford Houses and other substance-free transitional housing programs. Oxford Houses offer a self-directed community setting where residents are under the supervisions of their peers rather than professional staff.

NPC Research, with funding from the National Institute of Justice, investigated the self-sufficiency, community adjustment, substance use, and criminal recidivism outcomes for substance abusing offenders served through WCCC to document the value added of providing substance-free transitional housing services. Specifically, the study addressed two research questions:



1. What is the value added of Oxford House and other transitional housing to the combination of services offenders receive?
2. What are the relative costs and benefits of substance-free transitional housing services to the taxpayer?

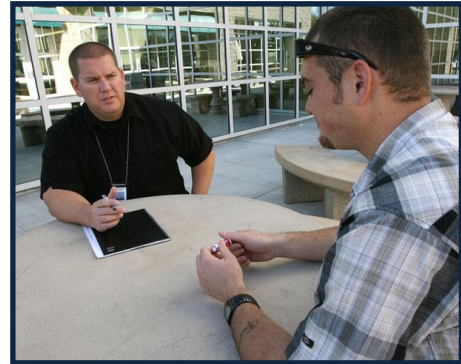
A total of 238 substance-abusing offenders were tracked for 12 months from the start of their WCCC supervision. Participants were interviewed at baseline (shortly after the start of their WCCC supervision), and at 6- and 12-month follow-up points. Information also was gathered on each participant from probation, criminal justice, and treatment records. Finally, financial and budgetary information was gathered from WCCC and transitional housing providers to measure the relative cost effectiveness of transitional housing options.

What is the value added of Oxford House and other transitional housing to the combination of services offenders receive?

- Longer lengths of stay in substance-free transitional housing, over and above the other services received, resulted in less alcohol and drug use at follow-up.
- Longer lengths of stay in Oxford Houses, in particular, over and above the other services received, resulted in decreased stress at follow-up.
- Overall, offenders served by WCCC, regardless of transitional housing receipt, showed significant improvements over time on a number of self-sufficiency and community adjustment indicators, including employment status. Thus, transitional housing receipt was related to additional improvements over and above the improvements associated with WCCC supervision.

What are the relative costs and benefits of substance-free transitional housing services to the taxpayer?

- Oxford Houses are a cheaper alternative to other transitional housing and may result in long-term cost savings, though the current study window was too short to measure these savings. Reduced substance use has been linked to a variety of societal cost-savings, including those associated with reduced crime, reduced hospitalizations and other medical expenses, and increases in employment and productivity.
- The investment in Oxford Houses consisted of a one-time expenditure of \$2,176 per bed, compared to between \$4,200 and \$5,700 per bed annually for the other transitional housing options.



Implications for policy and practice:

- **Oxford House should be used as a cost-effective use of public funds:** Given the link between transitional housing and substance-use reduction, it may be advantageous to invest public funds in substance-free transitional housing programs, and in particular, in Oxford House, which is a cheaper alternative to traditional substance-free transitional housing.
- **Programs should identify strategies for encouraging longer lengths of stay in substance-free transitional housing:** Results from this study indicate that longer lengths of stay in transitional housing predict greater reductions in substance use. Corrections departments, in addition to strategies for encouraging enrollment in transitional housing, should investigate strategies to provide support to encourage offenders to remain in transitional housing.
- **Substance-free transitional housing should be part of a constellation of services:** Study participants had access to a variety of services as part of their supervision, and as a result of this package of services, study participants, regardless of transitional housing receipt, exhibited increases in self-sufficiency and other indicators of well-being. While transitional housing receipt did contribute to positive outcomes over and above these other services, it is crucial that transitional housing services are situated within a package of services necessary to support offenders in their recovery.

To download the complete report, go to:

www.npcresearch.com/Files/Washington_County_Transitional_Housing_Report_Final_0109.pdf. For more information about the study, please contact Sonia Worcel, worcel@npcresearch.com.