

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

Published as a community service by The Abell Foundation

Abell Salutes:

"SHARE"; Members Trade Hours of Service For Bags of Food. They Save Money, Enjoy Higher Quality Food and Serve the Community.

Fourteen thousand families in Central Maryland are saving roughly \$170,000 every month on food bills; our communities are getting the benefits of 20,000 hours of community service they never had before; individuals who had been isolated and indifferent say they are now bound together in camaraderie and common cause. SHARE is making it happen.

The program, at its simplest, provides an opportunity for participants to buy \$30 worth of top-quality food in return for \$13 plus two hours of community service. At a deeper level, SHARE (Self Help and Resource Exchange) is a creative arrangement for these same participants to meet new friends and become more involved in the helping experience.

Economies of Scale:

The program takes advantage of economies of scale, and delivers the benefits to participants. Because SHARE, USA, is a national organization (under locally sponsored auspices of the Associated Catholic Charities and the Knights of Malta) it can buy in 27 cities in bulk and at discount. The national office provides direct-from-supplier centralized food purchasing, accounting services and promotional assistance.

(continued on page 5)

Oxford Houses For Recovering Alcohol And Drug Addicts Establish Reputation For Success; "Believing In Themselves"

But Skeptics Say Selective Admissions Keeps Program Serving Small Numbers, and Distorts Success Results

The Power of Peer Pressure To Effect Positive Change

In Maryland, there are as many as 85,000 alcohol and drug addicts considered by the Maryland Alcohol and Drug Abuse Administration as "recovering". All of them are in need of recovery; but only about 370 are in the Oxford House program. These 370, in terms of outlook for recovery, have reason to be particularly optimistic: the record shows that one year from the day they leave Oxford House, up to 80 per cent will still be "clean," sober and dry, and functioning in the community. It is a record experts in the field term "highly successful." But Oxford House's recovering addicts do not credit this success to any breakthrough in professional caregiving; rather, they say, they have only themselves to thank.

And Paul Molloy.

The storybook saga of Paul Molloy and his founding of Oxford House is well known in alcohol and drug recovery circles. In the 1960's Molloy was a Washington establishment lawyer—former Republican counsel to the Senate Energy and Commerce Committee. At the same

time, he was a drinker of two fifths of Canadian Club a day, a wife-beater, mental patient, and street drunk. But since 1975, when he was one of a dozen other recovering addicts in a halfway house in Montgomery County closing for lack of money, there has been still another Paul Molloy. This Paul Molloy became a man with a mission: to convert the halfway house where he himself was attempting to recover into what would become the first Oxford House, and then to replicate the model around the country.

Putting their faith in themselves . . .

Of the three Paul Molloys, it is the third whose life and work has become a respected part of the body of knowledge surrounding the complex problem of alcohol and drug addiction.

That first Oxford House came into being because in 1975 six re-

covering addicts living in a halfway house on Fiddler Lane in downtown Silver Spring made an up-against-the-wall decision: since everyone else in their lives (including Montgomery County, which had just cut their funding) had apparently lost faith in them, they would put their faith in themselves. They recruited seven other recovering addicts and as a desperate alternative to being thrown out on the street, decided to rent the house and become tenants.

“Professionals did not take kindly to the idea.”

The very idea that recovering addicts could so reorder their lives, singly and collectively, to come up with rent money and a governance structure and a sharply disciplined lifestyle designed to help themselves, was new to the field of addiction recovery. What they did piqued the professionals, who according to the founder of the first Oxford House, did not take kindly to the idea that recovery program could work without them. But in this act of courage and controversy by this small and determined group of recovering addicts, the Oxford House movement was born. Molloy was its mid-wife.

The Oxford House recovery program turns on two caveats: Rule 1—tenant-members must work and pay rent; Rule 2—if one of them drinks or

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takes drugs—it’s out of here, out you go, goodbye, no ifs, ands or buts. There is some slight bending of the first rule, but absolutely none of the second. Mr. Molloy has absolute faith in the arrangement; when he is negotiating to rent a property for Oxford House he has a set piece he says to the wary owner: “I guarantee you it will work. It’s working in each and every case.”

And he knows that Rules 1 and 2 are why.

It is working right now for Travis, a recovering alcohol and drug addict currently living in an Oxford House.

Travis is a 37-year-old carpenter who has been living in Oxford House for seven months. (The average length of stay is 15 months.)

“The veterans are there for the newcomers to see how it’s done.”

Previously, he had been in treatment in Weitzman House on Maryland Avenue; prior to that, in Tuerke House on Greene Street, both in Baltimore. Though those particular treatment plans appeared to have failed for him, Travis regards them as, for him, necessary first and second steps for entering Oxford House. “Oxford House works,” he says, “when it’s the third step in an ongoing program. First, a guy has to be in rehab, then, a halfway house, then Oxford House. *Then,*” Travis says consistently, “Oxford House works.”

And why is that? Travis provides his answer, born of hard experience. “Oxford House offers role

models, all along the way. As guys hang in the program successfully over the months, they become models for guys just coming in. The veterans are there for the newcomers to see how it’s done. It doesn’t work for everyone. We had to throw out 22 guys in eight months. They were drifting back into bad habits.”

And how do the residents know when a member is doing that, violating the basic rule against taking drugs and/or alcohol?

“By his behavior,” Travis snaps back, and smiles knowingly, “It takes one to know one.”

“Some see Oxford Houses as playing a much more limited role.”

Today, Oxford House has all the earmarks of a nationally recognized, well-funded, highly structured and sophisticated institution. It has come a long way from Fiddler Lane.

There are now 470 Oxford Houses in 35 states and the District of Columbia serving men, women, and children. In 1988, in what amounted to establishment recognition of the program, Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, including a section that required states to provide \$100,000 loans to start “self-supporting, self-run recovery houses.” Read, “Oxford Houses.” The Abell Foundation has awarded Maryland’s Oxford Houses \$93,000 over four years, beginning in 1989.

But some observers see Oxford House playing a much more limited role in the larger problem of alcohol and drug addiction recovery. Dr. Betsy McCaul, director of Johns

Hopkins Hospital For Alcoholism and Other Drug Dependencies, cautions against drawing too much optimism from Oxford House results. "The people who go into Oxford Houses are, by the stage of life and mind-set they are in at the time of entry, positioned to enjoy some measure of success in their recovery. They have all hit bottom and been through the programs that serve the group with a long history of addiction and unemployment. They come out of those basic recovery programs and they are—at least some are—ready for the next level up, and here is where Oxford House fits in. At this point, these recovering addicts have resources—in particular, they have jobs, in many cases family support, and a sense of commitment. People who go into a recovery program with that kind of experience can be expected to do better coming out. And in large measure thanks to the Oxford House program, they do."

"Responsibility creates responsibility."

Stephen Goldklang, Assistant Director, State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Administration, endorses that same view: "Their recovery numbers are good because the people they accept into the program in the first place are calculated to succeed. They are, relatively speaking, fairly stable people, and they are committed to recovery. But the numbers of addicts in need of recovery are far greater. Oxford House, for all its success among this limited population, does not help with the larger need."

Tyrone L. is a 35-year-old cus-

tomian and recovering alcohol and drug addict living in Oxford House. He has been a resident for nine months; prior to living in Oxford House he lived in Burgess House at North Avenue and Gay Street for several months. "I heard about it from a friend," he says. "It turned out to be exactly what I need at this point in my life," he says. "I need to be surrounded by recovering alcoholics who want to stay clean."

***The Sunday Night Meeting:
The Process At Work . . .***

Tyrone goes to AA twice a week, which is part of his life's routine. He works to pay his rent, does his daily chore for the house, and most important of all, he says—"I stay clean. And it's easier to stay clean in Oxford because you have these responsibilities. Responsibility actually creates responsibility—I see how that works here."

Tyrone expects to leave Oxford House in the usual 15 months. And does he think he'll be ready to leave then?"

I hope so," he says. "But I'm taking it one day at a time."

The heartbeat of Oxford House is the weekly evening meeting of the residents. Here, for two hours each week, the residents meet to work through the agenda that shapes their lives: Who has broken rules 1 and/or 2? What action precisely does the group, which has life-or-death power to dismiss a resident from residency, wish to take against the offender? How can the residents, singly and/or collectively, help a colleague in need? Who failed to do

his chore, who was careless about his housekeeping, who mishandled a telephone message? Who comes to Oxford House, who's leaving it? How much money do we have, what are our expenses? Before the meeting is over the power of peer pressure to affect recovery will make itself felt, singly and collectively. It is a very special dynamic.

On Sunday night, December 18, 1993, at precisely 8:00 o'clock, six men between the ages of 25 and 35 drift one-by-one into what was once the living room of this former suburban home at Pimlico Road and Northern Parkway in Baltimore City. The room now is spare, save for a few pieces of used furniture. Mark R., who is the treasurer, explains that there are eight men living in the house, but two have been excused (the penalty for not showing up without being excused is stiff—\$70, or one month's rent). The president, Tom G., calls the meeting to order promptly at 8:01 p.m. With his voice and manner he sets the tone for the meeting; low-key, orderly, civil. It turns out to be all of those things.

***"Running a meeting,
Running their lives."***

It is an experience that surprises an observer: these men, after all, have only recently been in treatment centers—Tuerke House, Burgess House, Baltimore Recovery Center, Shoemaker in Carroll County, Father Martin Ashley in Harford County. Yet here they are, just weeks later, running a fairly complex small business, bringing to the table a clear sense of responsibility and no small

amount of specialized skills (book-keeping, human relations, management and administration).

President Tom moves the meeting smoothly through the reading of the minutes and their approval and into committee reports. The treasurer, Mark R., reports (the house has \$810.34 in cash and \$210 in money orders) that the water bills are running too high. Tom advises that the matter will be discussed under old business.

“There’s nothing we can’t do if we just talk it through.”

The coordinator, Len F., reports that the front door is not being locked at all times and urges members to take special care. On an upbeat note, he reports that all chores are being handled well and up to standard.

Under old business, Jack F. reports that two applicants have been approved for residence and will be admitted immediately after the holiday.

The matter of the higher water bills is reintroduced. It was agreed that certain residents are doing their laundry too often. One resident, Morton S., is singled out for the violation and confronted; he owns up to it willingly, and explains that he has been attempting to keep his uniforms fresh. The group is sympathetic and supportive, but at the same time, in discussion they take collective responsibility for helping to conserve water, in whatever way.

Under new business, Oxford House judgement comes into play. Herb R. has been cited for leaving

grease on the kitchen counter—unacceptable in Oxford House. In the discussion that follows, he admits his mistake, and says he is ready to accept the fine—\$25.

Jack raises the question of who the president, the officers or the group acting in concert—has the power to fine. Herb says, “It doesn’t matter. I was wrong. I accept the fine no matter who lays it on.”

The group works its way carefully through other issues critical to and typical of communal living: the need to keep phone conversations shorter; the need to refrain from resetting the thermostat to satisfy one’s own comfort level; the need to have all dishes cleaned and out of the way “no more than one half hour after use.” Tom says, “There’s nothing we can’t do if we just talk it through.”

The president then expresses concern that some rules are being violated because these same rules simply are not well enough known. He says, “I have been thinking about this problem and I have gotten hold of the Oxford House rules used by one of the Oxford Houses in Washington and I want to go over each and every one of them, and then vote on each, for or against adoption, for *this* Oxford House.”

He reviews 12 rules, including the key one—anyone caught using drugs or alcohol will be evicted that same day. (There had been an eviction only a few days prior. “It was Joseph,” Martin L. says. “He was asked to leave that same night. He did. He lives in a room in a boarding house somewhere.”)

An interesting rule put to the group was one calling for an 11 o’clock curfew Monday through Friday. “It’s a good idea,” Herb says.

“That’s the best way that we as a group can keep an eye on the new guys coming in.”

An observer at the meeting then raises a question. “Reviewing the 12 rules, you read one that called for each member to hold an office for six months. How can you know, when you admit applicants—all of whom are perfect strangers at the time of admission and most of whom have histories of social dysfunction—how can you know that each will be capable of holding office here? These officer positions—president, controller, treasurer and coordinator—they do require a certain level of competence, intelligence, even sophistication. How do you make this rule work out?”

Is something extraordinary at work in Oxford House?

To which Larry F. replies, “Good question. I’ve thought about this myself. The answer is, and it’s the only answer, we are all recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. We know by gut instinct who the guys are and what they’re capable of when we meet them. We feel the guys we pick have it in them to rise to the occasion. It’s just a feeling. But reliable. Our feelings almost never fail us.”

These feelings about one another—this sense that the group exists to support each individual within it; that the seasoned Oxford House peer is a model; that peers can influence the newly arrived residents in decisive ways—these feelings underscore the conclusion that something ex-

traordinary is at work in the Oxford House experience.

“It has not worked for everyone, to some its area of success at least in terms of numbers seems limited.”

Part of the explanation to whatever success Oxford House enjoys is that its members tend to admit applicants who like themselves are predisposed to a civil and reasoned approach to solving problems; who have at the same time, an overriding sense of the uniqueness of the individual; and who believe that left to his own basic instincts an individual will reach upwards on his own. This type of person, they are convinced, not only doesn't need a professional to teach him the way, he eschews the influences of the professional in favor of that of his peers. The members, then, by whom they choose to admit, perpetuate their successors and their success, in Oxford House.

Oxford House has its skeptics. It has not worked for everyone; to some its area of success at least in terms of numbers seems limited. But try conveying these doubts to Travis, Tyrone, Tom, Len, Morton, Larry, Jack and the rest of the men living in Oxford House. They know better. They feel that Oxford House does not need more doubters; rather, they feel the country needs more Oxford Houses.

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Abell Salutes: “SHARE”

(Continued from page 1)

The Abell Foundation provided start-up funding of \$20,000, and another \$40,000 towards the costs of a refrigeration unit.

Additional savings are realized because bagging is done by volunteers. (Time spent bagging is used by some participants to satisfy their two hours of community service requirement.)

Food for Maryland is trucked to a warehouse in Linthicum. Here, volunteers bag one week a month. On another weekend, volunteers pick up the food and distribute it—to their church, school, non-profit agency.

But SHARE is only in part about dollars and quality food. Participants are drawn to it, too, because it provides an opportunity to share in the experience of helping—friends, disadvantaged children, the sick and the aged. SHARE's goal, according to Peggy Cronyn, director, SHARE Baltimore, is two fold, “First, to distribute nutritious food at low cost, and second, to encourage community development.”

“I give my time but I find here that people are giving me their friendship.”

By 8:30 a.m. on a Monday morning in mid-September about half-a-dozen men and women are gathered in the Linthicum warehouse—most in their 70's. They are standing at tables, weighing and bagging onions.

Lucien Hurt and Virginia Meyers have come in from Pasadena from the Church of St. Paul the Apostle. Ms. Hurt says, “I give my time but I find here that people are giving me their friendship.”

Margaret Faya and Ellen Martin

cannot stand and work so they sit and work. They are turning strips of Nylon netting into bags that hold the onions. “They have to have bags,” Ms. Martin says, “and we have to have food. We save money, we meet new people. It all works.”

Clearly, SHARE--Self Help and Resource Exchange--is changing the way people shop for food, get their ideas, and choose their friends. It is a journey that starts with economics, leads its participants through improved quality of food at their dinner tables, and ends with fulfillment: for food and savings, for one of the oldest of human experiences—caring.

Elizabeth Merson and Rose Cannon are in their late 70's. They have come in from St. Bernadette's Parish in Anne Arundel County. They talk about why they are here. Ms. Cannon says, “I get to eat good food at savings I never had before, and I meet people I never met before.”

SHARE could not be described better.

The Knights of Malta and Associated Catholic Charities jointly sponsor the Baltimore SHARE program. The Maryland Food Committee provided a one-time, start-up contribution.

ACC has a long history of service to the needy of Maryland, strong financial management, experience and expertise in service to people in need. After a thorough study of the operation of World SHARE, an agreement was reached to become the Baltimore SHARE affiliate, and to manage the program as part of the Division of Community Services of ACC.

The Order of Malta is a religious organization, in existence over 900 years, and includes among its objectives service to the poor and needy throughout the world. Its Federal Association is committed to the success of the Baltimore SHARE project, and has provided over \$165,000 in start up funds (of which \$100,000 is an interest free loan) and the services of a group of dedicated volunteers.

The following back issues of
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are available.

Check request and send to:

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Some Recent Grants by The Abell Foundation

Adelphoi, Inc. \$20,000
A matching grant for renovation costs of a former school building to house a structured aftercare and educational program. It will offer a comprehensive community-based treatment program for 60 at-risk youths ages 14 to 18 who are in transition from residential facilities back into the community.

Advocates For Children and Youth/Ombudsman Program \$21,010
For expenses for 10 at-risk students placed in an alternative educational setting which will provide three hours a day of individualized attention. Centered around computerized learning modules, the accredited Ombudsman program seeks to meet each student's academic needs and attitudinal problems in a non-graded learning environment.

American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland \$30,000
For continued support of the Eastern Shore Race and Poverty Program seeking to address existing problems related to unconstitutional prison conditions, job and housing discrimination, police abuse and racial and social discrimination practices in public places.

Baltimore City Public Schools Resident Teachers Program \$107,500
In support of operational costs of the Resident Teachers Office. The program is designed to offer alternative approach to recruitment for training placement and job coaching of new teachers in Baltimore City Public School classrooms.

Chase-Brexton Clinic \$20,000
For capital improvements of a newly purchased facility providing home medical services for persons in Baltimore City who are infected with HIV disease.

Homeless Person Representation Project \$35,881
A combination of a grant and matching challenge towards program costs of pro bono legal outreach services for the homeless in local shelters and soup kitchens.

House of Ruth \$44,027
For a pilot program providing housing subsidies, mentoring and supportive services for five battered women and their families as they resettle back into the community.

Maryland Food Committee \$61,120
For costs related to local initiative to increase participation of eligible Baltimore City Public School children in the National School Breakfast Program.

Maryland Society to Prevent Blindness \$25,000
For purchase of a specially equipped mobile eye care van for the expansion of services to Maryland's underserved, disadvantaged and at-risk children and adults.

Traditional Acupuncture Institute \$21,020
For the planning phase of a community outreach program to provide acupuncture treatment as an alternative approach for substance abuse.

Trust For Public Lands \$40,000
For expenses related to a community outreach program, encouraging neighborhood stewardship of the six-mile Gwynns Falls Greenway project, linking Leakin Park with Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

National Museum of Ceramic Art \$5,000
For an expansion of a hands-on ceramic art program for middle school students from twenty Baltimore City Public Schools.